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March

Australia's magazine of the performing arts

Theatre Australia

Noel Ferrier on Musicals
Pram Factory Push
Robyn Nevin
Reviews

March, 1979 $1.50

DEATHTRAP
Robyn Nevin, Denise O'Hern, directed by Michael Phillips

Jim Sharman directs
Patrick White
Theatre Australia celebrates its third birthday in August this year with a party at the NIMROD THEATRE in Sydney on August 6 and celebrations will be held in all major cities throughout the month. All details will be published next month.

Trent Nathan has designed a jumper made from pure new wool as part of our celebrations. It will be a limited edition and a photo of the jumper will appear here next month.

Martin Sharp has designed a special birthday poster incorporating every cover since August 1976.

There will also be ... T-Shirts, Binders, Badges, Back issues and so on.

MORE DETAILS NEXT MONTH
The national magazine of the performing arts

Theatre Australia

March 1979

Volume 3 No. 8

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Regional Theatre Programme — Another federal setback

Well over a year ago the whole cause of decentralisation of theatre was argued in these pages. An editorial championed the importance of regional theatres. Tony Trench wrote of the background problems, local politicising and empty promises that caused the Hunter Valley Theatre Company's problems; and Terry Clarke valiantly claimed in the midst of a second recess that pro rata the company had been a success (a good argument but not coffee filler). For the more actually successful Riverina Trucking Company, Terry O'Connell spoke of '77's artistic director Ross McGregor, is rising out of depressing history and the likelihood of no more Wagga (Wells) and packing them in. Triumphs; and Marguerite Wells, more actually successful Riverina Trucking Company, valiantly claimed in the midst of a second recess that pro rata the company had been a success (a good argument but not coffee filler). For the more actually successful Riverina Trucking Company, Terry O'Connell spoke of '77's triumphant, and Terry Clarke for Wagga (Wells) and packing them in. Already a disturbing new Theatre Board (Australia Council) policy on regional theatre development has been passed. What it says is that the Board will only consider funding new provincial ventures (a) on the understanding of a three year cut off — ie become commercial, get local/state backing, or go bust in 36 months; (b) a maximum of 50%, and decreasing by 10% in each of the subsequent two years, of overall earnings; and (c) a new application each year, anyway, so that security is never assured.

Two points should be made. The obvious one is that this is a serious setback to anyone foolishly enough to begin on the long road to decentralisation of theatre in the provinces (a) on the understanding of a three year cut off — ie become commercial, get local/state backing, or go bust in 36 months; (b) a maximum of 50%, and decreasing by 10% in each of the subsequent two years, of overall earnings; and (c) a new application each year, anyway, so that security is never assured.

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my play I Love, You Love... at the Ensemble-at-the-Stables, prior to London production, is pleased to announce the following item — of particular interest to Australian playwrights.

Commencing in April, 1979, Studio Australia will begin a series of readings of new plays under the direction of Ron Ferrier to be held monthly on Sunday evenings at 7.30 pm at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16-18, Fitzroy Street, 1061. Playwrights are invited to submit full-length small-cast plays — preferably with a maximum of four characters — to Ron Ferrier, 3/12 Hastings Parade, Bondi, NSW 2026. (Note: Enclose stamped-addressed envelope for return of unused manuscripts).

The major purpose of the play-readings is to find a piece of sufficient merit to tour overseas under the aegis of Studio Australia, to venues in America and Britain. Australian artists cast in such a tour would receive Equity salary, travelling and living expenses, and the author would receive a negotiated royalty.

The secondary, and by no means less important, function of the readings is to present professional actors reading new plays which might otherwise escape the attention of producers, directors, and audiences.

The play-readings will be announced the previous week-end in the Sydney Morning Herald Amusement Columns, and there will be a nominal audience charge of $2.50. Coffee and light refreshment may also be purchased at the Neighbourhood Centre.

MTC'S MACBETH

TANYA McCALLIN, MTC guest designer.

"It's great to be back! I had gone to England to train as a designer in London and to work there. Having done exactly that over the past eight years I was given the fabulous opportunity to combine my return to Australia with a contract to work with the MTC. John Sumner and I met in London and started work on Macbeth in September 1978.

Designers in England work in many different kinds of theatres, with a huge range of directors, actors, budgets, conditions and staff — moving freely between the National Theatre and tiny pub theatres, while maintaining their own approach and attitudes to their art. This allows for experiment and demands inventiveness.

The designer's work develops directly from the text, through the director and actors and then into the practicalities of the environment of the particular theatre and its facilities. The text is the pivot, with the teamwork of director, designer, and actors, producing the 'Event of Theatre' with an audience. The particular theatre in this instance is the Athenaeum in Melbourne and the text Macbeth, John Sumner, MTC technical director Peter Roehlan and I talked in London about the nature of the stage and its relationship with an audience. I hope we have found a way of using it that will excite visually, but simply, maintaining an absolute clarity of text and performance.

The text is clear and fast — scenes following rapidly upon one another and Shakespeare tells us constantly who everybody is and where they are. We don't need to repeat these details visually — rather extend the text into the third dimension — discovering and exposing the backbones. The set becomes a statement of the world in which the play exists — the conscious and subconscious, the natural and unnatural, good and evil. The atmosphere, mood and beat of the play is given definition by the text and paced by light and sound.

The actors need to move with speed and agility, they need to feel at one with their clothes — additional garments worn as emblems to denote a hierarchy or family status, as an animal's colour and small denote is status.

These ideas are just the beginning. John Sumner, the actors, and I now have to compound them into production. The true discovery begins when rehearsals start and all departments combine their energy, and the text becomes alive on the stage.

FOR GENUINE INTEREST

JOHN LITTLE, AETT Marketing & Promotions Manager:

"What is happening at the Trust? It is a question often asked of me — sometimes with a genuine interest and other times accompanied by a smug grin.

The area most in the public eye is the entrepreneurial department and promotions. Both are currently involved in Bedroom Farce touring to Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Melbourne before May, plus Crown Matrimonial to Canberra, Tasmania and Melbourne before April. Statements, the Athol Fugard play, is still running at the Seymour Centre before taking off for Adelaide, Canberra and Perth in the next three months while a frantic search takes place for appropriate and available venues in Melbourne and Brisbane.

On 26 February Count Basie and full seventeen piece orchestra commences a national tour lasting all of ten days, to Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Townsville. Coming up in May is the Trust’s presentation of A Manual of Trench Warfare produced by the State Theatre Company of South Australia at the Seymour Centre.

Plans are under way to present an outstanding international drama company at the Theatre Royal in May. We were invited to take this on
only last week so at least six months work will have to be done in as many weeks). In August and September Ballet Theatre du Silence an exciting dance company from France will perform in every capital city in an eight week tour.

Of course there is also the NSW Theatre of the Deaf, two 57-musician orchestras, a costume hire department containing over 10,000 items, electrical and property hires and a scenery workshop and factory.

I won’t mention the mountains of work being done for 1980 confirmed attractions and feasibility studies being carried out on the dozens of local and overseas companies who want us to present them in Australia within the next two years. Every aspect of this side of the Trust is handled by a full time staff of six persons including three secretaries.

Some of the people at the Trust haven’t had a holiday for five years and with the work load briefly illustrated above it’s not surprising, because it’s the same year after year. So to those whose interest is genuine — thank you. For the smug grin types, I guess it’s just another sob story!”

AUS SUPPLEMENT

RAY STANLEY, Australian Representative, The Stage.

“To create a medium of communication between Australian/ British theatres, a special supplement will be published in The Stage on 3rd May.

Editorial coverage in the supplement will cover the wide spectrum of arts and entertainment which flourishes throughout Australia. Venues, managers, artists, agents and all those “on the scene” are invited to use this unique opportunity to take prestigious advertisement space.

The Stage is the foremost newspaper of the entertainment industry in the UK and is also read throughout many other countries. The average weekly circulation is 32,150. (Certified by the Audit Bureau of Circulations Limited). For advertising rates, and bookings please contact me at Box 1039H, GPO Melbourne.”

PROGRAM ’79 (for Children)

JAY McKEE, Co-ordinator, Brisbane Arts Children’s Theatre.

“This year being the International Year of the Child, we have made a special effort to present a season of four children’s musicals that hopefully will prove one of the most successful in the fourteen year history of our existence.

Playing Saturday matinees (except Easter and school holidays), the season begins on March 3rd and runs till December 22nd. To the best of my knowledge, Arts Children’s Theatre is unique in Australia in presenting year round live entertainment for young theatraegores. (I am aware of the splendid work being done by TIE teams, but our business is live theatre entertain-

ment, rather than education). Even in England I know of only one similar set-up — the Unicorn Theatre for Young People, and coincidentally, that is an adjunct to the Arts Theatre there.

PROGRAM ’79 begins with Peter Pinne and Don Battye’s Bilalabong Bil, playing March 3rd to May 5th. Raggedy-annie by Jan Bates and Jay McKeel follows playing June to early August. Ship Of Dreams by West Australians Mary Durack and June Fitzgerald (subject to confirmation of rights) will be mounted from 1st September to 20th October as our special contribution to the Warana festivities, and the year will end with a specially commissioned work from local writer Gordon Shaw, a new version of Aladdin. First rate entertainment for the whole family for forty weeks of 1979.

Next year will be even busier. We hope to commence by the end of January, with a season comprising new plays and remounts of some of the most popular successes from the past to celebrate our 15th year. As a climax to the year, the Mermaid Theatre musical version of Treasure Island will be mounted as a major production.

Our title often leads to misconceptions — we present musical shows for children, not necessarily performed by children unless required by the script. Many of today’s professional TV and stage actors worked in the Arts children’s productions in the late 60’s and early 70’s: Bunney Brooke, Brian Moll, John Domnett, Berys Marsh, Ian Austin, Terry Stewart. They set the standard of performance and today’s actors are determined to settle for nothing less.

Not a bad track record for a dedicated bunch of amateurs.

PHOTOGRAPHIC THEATRE EXHIBITION

PETER HOLDERNESS, Photographer.

“Following a submission for the need to photograph Australian theatre in colour, the Australian Council has awarded me a grant to cover colour film and travel. The aim of the project is to produce a photographic exhibition which will tour Australia in 1980 to promote theatre to a amateur audience. Theatre Companies staging Australian plays this year are urged to contact me by phoning Sydney 212 3144.

WA BALLET SCHOLARSHIP

SYLVIA BOX, Administrator WA Ballet Co.

“A $3,000 scholarship will be awarded to a teenage WA dancer, known as the Channel 7 Young Ballet Dancers’ Award and will entitle the winner to advanced training in classical and modern dancing, plus the opportunity to graduate to the professional Company at the end of the year’s tuition. Only teenage school-leavers born in WA or resident in the State for at least twelve months will qualify for the award. TVW Enterprises Ltd have generously donated the money for this first award. In doing so they are following their successful Young Film Makers and Young Artists awards. We hope that other local companies and ballet lovers will donate similar scholarships. Until now young WA dancers have been seriously disadvantaged because, however excellent their basic training may have been they have been forced to go to the Eastern States, or to Europe, for the advanced training necessary to fit themselves for careers as professional dancers. The winner of this award, and others like it, will work side by side with our professional company and receive special training from teachers who are the equal of the best in the world.

The award will be made after open auditions in Perth by a committee of three chaired by Robin Haig, the Company’s Artistic Director, and Garth Welch, her associate. Entries close one February 10th. The successful entrant will receive a living allowance of $40 a week and a trust fund of $920, which will be used to purchase leotards, tights, ballet shoes and other equipment. No fees of any sort will be payable and if the dancer qualifies for a permanent place in the senior company, he or she will at once receive the full Equity rate for public performances. As the idea expands, we hope that the State’s own ballet company will be able to

Continued on page 34.
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THE NEW
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CASTING ASPERSIONS

Faith Martin and Bill Shanahan are theatrical agents based in Sydney. They are known as Martin and Shanahan (the agents) and Martin and Shanahan (the casting consultants) are one and the same it would be a bit difficult for Martin and Shanahan (the agents) to keep confidential information away from Martin and Shanahan (the agents). Following me so far? ...

Good ... So, ... when an independent agent phoned Martin and Shanahan (the casting consultants) and asked for a break down of the cast they found that they were not allowed to have this information. However, Martin and Shanahan (the agents) already had this confidential information, but Martin and Shanahan (the casting consultants) had not broken this confidence with the producers by divulging this information to an agent (Martin and Shanahan as Martin and Shanahan (the agents) are the same people as Martin and Shanahan (the casting consultants).)

Now that I have cleared up this little problem, I hope you all understand that there are no theatrical agents in Sydney named Smith and Jones.

LITERALLY THOUSANDS

Congratulations are in order; the following Theatre Companies have received grants for playwrights in residence: State Theatre Company (S.A.), Ensemble (NSW), La Mama Theatre (Vic), Little Patch Theatre (SA), Riverina Trucking Company (NSW), Tom Ugly's Roaming Theatre (NSW), Salamanca Theatre Company (Tas), Theatre 62 TIE Team (SA), Australian Performing Group (Vic), and Nimrod Theatre (NSW). I asked the same question ... who the hell is Tom Ugly and where on earth is his theatre? Well ... Tom Ugly's Roaming Theatre can be found at the Sutherland Community Touring Theatre, which is care of the Cross Roads Community Care Centre. It's about time we started to hear from these Theatre Companies into which the Oz Literature Board pours plenty of our hard earned cash as I for one would like to start seeing some results.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION??

Recently I had the misfortune to see Demand at the Ensemble Stables in Nimrod Street, Sydney. The play itself wasn't so bad and the young actors (who use the Stables as a showcase for their talent) certainly showed some promise, however the direction or should I say lack of it was appalling. I enjoy attending any theatre whether it is good, bad or indifferent, but to be subjected to a fight scene in which a cup of luke warm tea is thrown in the face of one character, a table is overturned immediately followed by a chair which comes crashing through the top of the table and the two land on the floor of the Stable with bone shattering crash, is a bit much. You might say that the aforementioned series of events would not normally bother the average theatre goer ... I agree. But when you are sitting in the front row as I was and get splattered with tea and the bones that were shattering with the crash of the table were the ones in your feet you tend to get a little disillusioned. Theatre is getting a bit expensive when you have to include dry cleaning and shoe repairs.

THE IMMORTAL ED

I have always thought my middle name was William until I spent about ninety minutes inside the Village Cinema City, Theatre 1 at the Premiere of Bruce Beresford's Money Movers ... now I am certain it's Squeemish. Money Movers is a fine movie, it has everything you would ever want in a film; violence, sex, intrigue, sex, violence and lots of death and blood and colourful things like that. There is however, one scene that I find a bit hard to believe(?), in this scene Ed Devereaux receives more gun shot wounds that John Wayne did in The Cowboys and John Wayne didn't survive. Village Roadshow hosted the party after the film at which we enjoyed a glass or two or three of good South Australian white wine, but having just sat through a film full of bloody gun shot wounds and severed toes I felt the cocktail frankfurts and tomato sauce was a bad choice of supper.

ETCETERAS

Apologies to the Australian Gas Light Company (known as A.G.L) and to their General Manager, Mr Maurice J Williams for our blunder in the December issue of TA; we referred to the Company as AGC, printed Gas Light as one word and called them the oldest commercial company in the country. They are in fact the oldest existing industrial company in the country, known as A.G.L and Gas Light is two words. We sure made a mess of that didn't we.

Hancock's Last Half Hour runs for one hour(?) and is directed by Mr Graeme Blundell as the press release says ... best known as Alvin Purple ... I'm sure Mr Blundell has much better credits than this and must be getting a bit sick of the AP image.

Sir John Mills apologised to Mike Walsh on air for not being able to stay very long as he had to catch a cab to the Steve Raymond Show.

It was suggested to a Village Cinema City representative that it would be a good idea to purchase an air conditioning system for their complex ... we've got one' the official explained ... An even better idea ... turn it on.
Ray Stanley's

WHISPERS
RUMOURS & FACTS

Something of a record for a play was created when nearly 300 people applied to be auditioned for roles in *Deathtrap*. Possibly the fact director is Michael Blakemore was the attraction ... However, this has been topped by applications from more than 500 to play the orphans in the Sydney season of *Annie*, which opens at Her Majesty's at the end of May.

Hear Frank Hauser is coming out later in the year to direct again for the MTC — and the whisper is this time it will be Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* ... After her tour in *Crown Matrimonial*, will June Salter be playing the title role in *Filumena*? ... Universal in Hollywood has been putting out feelers to sign up Angela Punch ... Apparently the proposed tour of *Privates on Parade* has been cancelled. It presented too many problems.

They say Lionel Bart is to write the score for a new stage show entitled *Superman: The Musical*. Wonder what happened to that musical version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* he was supposed to be working on ... Vivian Davies, who made such an impact playing the lead in the MTC's *Once a Catholic*, opens the Last Laugh's Upstairs Bar. And Vivian worked at the Last Laugh for a year as a waitress! ... So Bette Midler starts another Australian tour March 1980.

Did you hear that story about Oliver Reed passing through the Immigration Department in South Africa, where he was to make a film, and an immigration officer saying to him: "You film people had better watch yourselves. Remember that if you are caught making love to a black girl you will be given fifty lashes!" To which Reed replied: "Can't I be given fifty lashes while I'm actually doing it?"

Vivacious publicist Suzie Howie is to desert the Edgley office in Melbourne for at least a year to operate the Edgley publicity machine in Sydney. Come back soon Suzie ... And, talking of publicity people, Lynette Thorburn, who has been in charge of publicity for Melbourne's GTV-9 for the past two years, has just left to free-lance. Her first assignment is on Tony Ginnane's vampire film *Thirst*. Anyone wishing to use Lynette's services can contact her on 51-8340.

Top marks to Cliff Hocking Enterprises for one of the most attractive and informative programmes seen for some time for the tour of Cleo Laine and John Dankworth. A true souvenir which most people are likely to want to keep ... Whilst the MTC production of *Journey's End* is in the news, it's interesting to note that Sydney based actor Alexander Archdale played Hibbert in the London 1934 revival. And the Raleigh in that was Lewis Shaw who had first played the role in Australia.

More news on New Zealand actor Sam Neill. Following the male lead role in *My Brilliant Career* he was cast for parts in the pictures *The Journalist* and *Breaker Morant*, and in May goes into *The Sullivans* for a few months. Also understand a commercial management was interested in him for a play ... Over to another film discovery: Chris Milne. If he is as good on stage as he appears to be in John Lamond's sexy pic *Felicity*, then someone ought to snap him up. His personality seems to leap right out of the big screen.

Joyce Grenfell, hearing her friend of many years, Bettina Welch, was playing in *Butterflies Are Free* (as well as *Norman Is That You?* and *The Mind With The Dirty Man*) on the Fairfair cruises, wrote to Bettina telling her its author, Leonard Gersh, is another of her friends. One day she happened to relate to him a conversation she once had about entertaining with Noel Coward. "I would not pay good money to see nudity or obscenity", she had said, to which Sir Noel had retorted: "Joyce darling, that is entertainment". "So is diarrhoea — but I wouldn't classify it as entertainment", replied Joyce. Gersh immediately incorporated the lines in the play he was writing. "So, when you say those lines as Mrs Baker, remember I wrote them!" Joyce Grenfell told Bettina.

Rumour has it that L.O. Shaw's *Three Black and Three White Jubilee Minstrels*, which only played at the Last Laugh in Melbourne, could be coming back to play other cities ... Is it just coincidence the Australian Ballet is planning a production of *Anna Karenina*? The ABC TV serialisation of the Tolstoy novel should be good pre-publicity ... See the new performing arts centre in Brisbane is advertising overseas for a director. Surely there's the talent already in this country.

A record likely to stand in Adelaide for some time is the recent back-to-back seasons there for JCWs and the AFTC of *Dracula* and Derek Nimmo in *Why Not Stay For Breakfast?*, which together took over half a million dollars. By the season's end the Nimmo piece was playing three extra performances a week, but still people were turned away ... And who holds the record for takings for one night at the Opera House? It seems Ella Fitzgerald does for her second concert there, presented by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Box office takings totalled $35,902 which was $3,800 more than the previous record set for a Sammy Davis Jr Concert back in 1977.

Seems likely that Ron Haddrick and Ruth Cracknell, teamed together in *Bedroom Farce*, will play the Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy roles in *The Gin Game* for Peter Williams ... At a recent first night in one Australian capital city, the audience was surprised in an interval to see the actor who had opened the play, out of stage attire and mingling with patrons in the foyer! What would Marie Tempest have said? ... Is Newcastle's late night TV show *Review* likely to go national? Locally it's being referred to as 'The Loose and Low Show', as it's co-hosted by Lucy Wagner and Lowan Partridge ... The seasons of The Two Ronnies in Sydney and Melbourne should be utter sell outs.

I only saw the late Diana Perryman on stage twice; even so, the impact her acting made on me was enormous. The first time was in the JCW production of *Two For The Seesaw*, for which she gained the Best Actress Erik Award for 1960, then later in Iris Murdoch's *A Severed Head* ... Another recent death was that of London theatre critic, biographer and writer Alan Dent, the 'Jock' in James Agate's Ego books. Dent's only connection with Australia was that he arranged the Shakespearean anthology *The First 400 Years*, with which Googie Withers and Keith Michell toured here in 1964.
Dear Sir,

Was looking forward to reading David Williamson's My Life and Times in The Big Apple (TA, January, 1979) but blow me down in the first sentence we find the piece not to be that at all. It's yet another outburst of this obsession about critics.

Only two of his 24-ish paragraphs dealt with other matters: sex in Manhattan and the new title for The Club. Both could have been most interesting if expanded upon.

Welcome home DW nice to see that travel hasn't altered your outlook.

Best wishes,
Frances Kelly,
Balmain, NSW

PS I realise this letter may seem critical but it's just to make him feel he's back among friends.

Dear Myself,

I am engaged in researching the history of tent shows in Australia and would be pleased to hear from anyone who worked with the shows or people who have reminiscences of them.

If any readers have photographs, manuscripts, playbills or any other records of this form, I would be pleased to cover registered postal costs both ways to have the opportunity to look over such material, and assure of its safe handling and return.

Yours sincerely,
Robert Page
TA Editorial Office

Dear Sir,

I refer to January '79 edition of Theatre Australia and the Theatre WA section.

Collin O'Brien in his critique of No No Nanette states that Perth audiences have not seen John O'May live before the thinks).

Surely if a person is a theatre annotator, then he should have his theatrical facts correct when writing such statements, or do we believe only 50% of what he attempts to say.

John O'May was last in Perth while appearing in Twenties and All That Jazz at the Regal Theatre.

If that does not jog his memory, perhaps he should watch television and the Lipton jiggers tea advertisement.

G.L. Plummer
Dianella, W.A.

Sir:

May I, a proud member of the theatrical profession for nearly forty years as actor, manager, director and oft times critic in the Old Country, who has for the last twelve months had the great pleasure of residing "down under", write to say how very impressed I am with the unexpected standard of theatre in this country.

Thespi has grown older by a year since I arrived, and, from a foreigner's unbiased point of view I should like to take this opportunity of joining with your theatrical men of letters in listing those who have given me the most pleasure during my theatregoing year. Space, alas, does not permit me to name all, so I have selected for publication here those whose performances shall remain forever etched in my memory.

One must commence with the ladies, and especially with those two grandes dames of Australian Theatre, Miss Patricia Kennedy and Miss Shirley Cameron for their unforgettable performances in Hay Fever and The Glass Menagerie respectively. The many contenders amongst the younger ladies must yield place to that Actress for All Seasons, Miss Robyn Nevin: The desperation of Miss Julie; the casual flippancy of Clea in Black Comedy; and the sweetness of her Ethel Malley in Pandora's Cross — what an artiste! Nor can we forget Miss Kate Fitzpatrick: Her indolent Celemene in The Misanthrope; the glimmering sophistication of her performance in Visions surely after this she is the perfect choice for Evita!; capped by the sparkling comedy of Bedroom Farce.

Next, the gentleman. First must come Mr. Michael Pate, whose subtle and witty performance in The Bear I consider the most under-rated of the year. But he is not the cardinal Jester to grace the Sydney stage. This accolade must be awarded to that Prince of Comedy, Mr. Peter Rowley, for his mirth-including performances in The Cat and The Canary, Bedroom Farce and, not least, for his — dare I say — show stealing cameo in The Misanthrope.

The most promising young actor of the year? For me it is Mr. Neil Redfern, that young Brando of Australian Theatre, for his charismatic contribution to Pandora's Cross.

One must not, however, in his enthusiasm for these and many other magnetic performances, deny the directors the laurels that are their due. Perhaps it is because I, too, have tried the same path that I feel Mr. Peter Williams, Impresario and Director par excellence, must be my theatrical Samson of the year. Surely with luck and encouragement he will become Australia's own Binkie Beaumont! And how delightful to see The Comedy of Errors through Australian eyes; as buoyant as the recent Trevor Nunn production, but oh, so different! Bravo, Mr. Bell!

Lastly, but by no means least, come the playwrights — the stones and foundations of the theatre, who show "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure". The largest bouquet to Miss Hewitt for her nostalgic and rollicking piece, Pandora's Cross — as earthy as Rabelais, but with the lyric tenderness of an Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Onward to 1979! And what an exciting year this promises to be! The varied and internationally flavoured new Sydney Theatre Company — the resurrection of the exciting innovative Paris Theatre Company and the promise of future increased subsidies for those deserving little theatres like the 'Q' Theatre and Nimrod. So, for the old year, "our revels now are ended". But these pageants are not so insubstantial. They have amused and enthralled us all. Must they "leave not a rack behind"?

Assuredly not!

Yours faithfully,
Walter Plinge Esq.,
Woollahra, N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

State theatre companies are quite often upon the receiving end of criticism from many sections of the community.

I would like to reverse that trend by offering through your columns congratulations to the Queensland Theatre Company TIE teams.

These groups — one primary, one secondary and one for remote areas — worked throughout the State of Queensland in a touring period in 1978 from May to the end of November, travelling in excess of 38,000 km.

They reached no fewer than 77,500 children at 478 performances and, what is more to the point, in all of that activity, distance, heat and dust, not one scheduled performance was missed ... a remarkable achievement in the tradition of professional theatre.

Bravo, QTC!

Yours faithfully,
Peter Dent
Administrator
Queensland Arts Council
Brisbane, Qld.

Sir,

I owe Joan Sydney a profound apology.

In my profile of her (Theatre Australia December, 1978) I quoted her as saying that her maternal grandmother worked with Edith Evans in the first production of Shaw's Saint Joan. Of course any dummy knows that the first actress to play Joan was Sybil Thorndike. A check on the taped interview I had with Ms Sydney confirms that she named the correct actress, the error in the text being therefore entirely my fault. My abject and public apology to Joan for my giving the impression that she did not know her theatre history.

Collin O'Brien
Nedlands, W.A.

Continued on page 38.
Thoughts of an Uncultured Philistine

NOEL FERRIER

For the record this philistine does not want to see the end or the decline of straight-play/drama presentation in Sydney. Further I do not want to see the lessening of government support for the already established drama, opera or ballet companies.

What this philistine would like to see is a fair-go for that much denigrated and much ignored theatrical art-form — the MUSICAL. Along with some consideration for that great mass audience which never goes to the ballet, the opera and only occasionally to the drama, but turn up in their thousands for the latest popular musical offering. (And, it must be said, stay away in their thousands for the latest unpopular musical offering, a sad fact which can be argued equally for the ballet/opera and drama areas).

Judging by the mail I have received after some coverage I have had in the press and radio on this subject this seems to be the reaction:-

GENERAL PUBLIC — Just about 100 per cent in favour.

MEDIA — Generally regard my arguments with some form of indulgence even though one gentel interviewer referred to me as an 'uncultured philistine' and to be treated like 'the poor demented buffoon we all know him to be'.

MY PEERS — Seem fairly divided on the issue, depending of course on whether they can sing and act or just act(!).

But one amazing fact has revealed itself — EVERYONE, but EVERYONE, has thought of the idea first, and some months ago at that, and was just about to make a public announcement to the effect, so there!

I did in fact put the idea up a couple of years ago to several deaf ears when J C Williamsons were busy giving out with the death rattles but to no avail — even though here was one of the most unique theatrical set-ups in the world — workshops, wardrobes, scenery going back to Struck Oil, first-class staff and a chain of theatres. Nevertheless gentle reader, second-hand rose though I may be, here are my proposals:

(a) The establishment of the First Australian Musical Theatre Co, jointly GUARANTEED by commercial and Fed/State Govt. funding.

(b) the total aim of the company to be self-supporting — to aim for a profit — the entire structure to be run on a completely COMMERCIAL basis — to promote its productions into every revenue making area available, always providing standard and were not jeopardised.

(c) The company to operate on a repertoire basis, performing four or five musicals annually in all capital cities.

(d) If based in Sydney the company could be called the Sydney Music Theatre Co — thereby providing Sydney with a highly exportable promotional vehicle when the company visits the other states.

(e) The company to operate on a 50/50 guarantee against loss, split between government and commercial enterprise.

(f) Each production to have a commercial sponsor who would receive in return for his 50 per cent guarantee full promotional, marketing and identification tie-ups with the production he was sponsoring.

(g) The Federal or State governments to take up the remaining 50 per cent guarantee against loss for which they would receive the acclaim of the may thousands currently being denied any continuous musical production policy.

This way I see the financial responsibility being evenly shared by both parties and EACH GETTING their pound of flesh in return for little or no pay out. Initial setting up costs would be the responsibility of the government body which would be refundable once the company got into a profit making situation.

(h) The board of management to comprise only the heads of departments in the company with a tough money man type as chairman. The usual band of professional board-sitters, blue-rinse and pearls brigade and the notorious gong-seeking fraternity who turn up on many of these 'arts' affairs should be avoided.

There is a sea of excellent, hard-working, creative talent who genuinely love the theatre and in particular the musical and whose experience goes back many years, from whom we could establish a brilliantly efficient and innovative management.
To attract the FAMILY back to the theatre by keeping admission prices to a minimum, because we would not be seeking a huge profit margin.

The amount of musical material is almost limitless — just about every famous composer and lyricist has at least one immortal piece waiting to be done again — our musicians, singers, dancers, choreographers, set designers, lighting, sound, back-stage and front of house people, wardrobe and set-builders are equal to the best in the world and we have the STARS. 

Here are a few suggestions that readily spring to mind:

THE KING AND I Starring KAMAHL
SOUTH PACIFIC — NANCYE HAYES, NEIL WARRENSMITH
HALF A SIXPENCE — JOHNNY FARNHAM
THE MUSIC MAN — GRAHAM KENNEDY
HELLO DOLLY, FUNNY GIRL — or a musical version of the phone directory — JILL PERRYMAN
SHOWBOAT — SUZANNE STEELE, BRUCE BARRY
KISMET — BARTHOLOMEW JOHN, PAMELA GIBBONS, GERALDINE MORROW
SOUND OF MUSIC — JULIE ANTHONY, FREDERICK PARSLOW
THE MERRY WIDOW — JUNE BRONHILL, IRMA LA DOUCE — NANCYE HAYES, BARTHOLOMEW JOHN
WHITE HORSE INN — EVERYBODY
CHU CHIN CHOW — the inimitable NOEL FERRIER
MY FAIR LADY — STUART WAGSTAFF, KAREN HENDERSON, DAVID GILCHRIST
BRIGADOON — BART JOHN
ANNIE GET YOUR GUN — JILL PERRYMAN, BRUCE BARRY
Along with revivals of HAIR, JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR, CHORUS LINE, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF ETC, ETC, ETC, ETC (which was a great show).

Philistine and uncultured though I may be, I and many thousands like me would pack out a twenty week season to see any four or five of those attractions — I would even go and see myself in Chu Chin Chow. Philistines Unite. The Age of the Musical is Here.

STATE THEATRE CO. ADELAIDE. Programming and Policy: Guthrie Worby

This article is to be the first in a series which will investigate the programming policies, ideas and ideals which characterize Adelaide's theatres. Hopefully by the end of the year it will be possible to look at the proposed drama content of the 1980 Festival Of Arts in the light of the community's preparedness for it — in the light of the community's exposure to a spectrum of philosophies and practices.

I propose, here, to look at the State Theatre Company's policy and programming rationale and relate these to prevalent notions of interpretations and standards.

The State Company is faced with a number of inherited and inherent obligations. It must continue to serve its subscriber audience; establish an identity in and for the longest of the city's three regular theatres and programme accordingly, it must build a company of actors — especially young actors — who can cope with the responsibility and pressure of constant press and public attention, and still develop their craft; it must deploy its resources equitably so that city and country are served; it must make the most of its money; it must avoid incarnation in the Playhouse, yet be an identifiable focus for the theatre arts; it must be well defined in order to give definition to other ventures.

The obvious outward manifestation of any attempt to satisfy these needs comes in the company's programming. Naturally, the State Company cannot be all things to all people — though its privileged position often prompts the public to demand this. In order to combat the tendency, Colin George, the Artistic Director had adduced a basic policy of presenting classics and new plays. This allows The Festival Centre Trust to provide middle of the road entertainment and the semi-professional alternative, and amateurs, to extend the boundaries of theatre definition.

"Classics", in this context is a loose, rather than limiting, term. According to George it embraces School for Scandal, All My Sons, The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll and the current Hamlet.

"New Plays" is intended to mean contemporary work from anywhere, but especially Australia. When, however, the company has a "scoop", as it believes it has with Mamet's, American Buffalo, this becomes the priority criterion. The local play obligation is accounted for, this season, in tours of Clem Gorman's Manual of Trench Warfare ("an important play") — George, and The Doll. The trade-off between obligation and the desire for innovation results in what might be called "pendulum programming".

From season to season the company's work oscillates, theoretically in an ever widening arc, between "classics" and contemporary works.
Michael Siberry
— An actor to watch

John Edge

At 22, and with just over two years of fully professional work behind him, Michael Siberry is already an actor to watch. Which is exactly what many of us will be doing later this month, when Colin George's production of *Hamlet* for the State Theatre Company of South Australia opens in The Playhouse. For Michael Siberry is to play Hamlet.

His involvement in theatre goes back to his childhood, when he worked regularly with the Tasmanian Youth Theatre during summer vacations. In his Matriculation year, he secured a part with the Tasmanian Theatre Company in a production of David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones*. The experience of working with professional actors so excited him that his decision about a career, until then uncertain, was made. He went on to NIDA, graduating in November, 1976.

There followed a tour to a Children's Theatre Festival in Wales, with the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association; and then, in January, 1977, he joined the State Theatre Company of South Australia, to which he is under contract until June this year. His credits with the company include *School for Scandal, Macbeth, The Cherry Orchard, Annie Get Your Gun, Oedipus (The King and At Colonus), They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (an impressive performance here as Robert Syverton), *Marx, and A Manual of Trench Warfare*.

Colin George's casting of Michael Siberry is bound to prove an interesting choice, but was hardly a surprising one. Several of the roles he undertook in 1978 — Hal in *Henry IV, Posthumus in Cymbeline, and Young Peer in Peer Gint* — can be said, on hindsight, almost to have been grooming him for the part of Hamlet. They revealed a young actor with the voice, presence, and intelligence to do justice to the part.

He admits that he's glad to have laid the foundation for this part with Hal and Posthumus. Although he has had varied work with the company, and claims an eclectic taste, it's clear that he has found his work in classical roles most rewarding, because most demanding. "That early play (Sticks and Bones) was easy for me — I was always confident. But the minute I began to do classical parts, especially Shakespeare, I found myself at a loss, for so long. Hal and Posthumus taught me so much about the disciplines involved in classical theatre. Especially what to do with the language, how to bring it alive, make sense of it for an audience. I had to struggle with almost everything I did last year."

The struggling has obviously helped him, because he appears very little daunted by the part of Hamlet. In some respects, at least, it is less difficult than Posthumus. "Posthumus isn't the best written part, and the play's such a mixture of styles. I was never really sure of myself there. With *Hamlet*, everything is in the text, and you can make such perfect sense of it, in its own terms, and in terms of today. Hamlet himself is so lucid, so intelligent. The language is wonderful — you feel it's such a privilege to be able to speak it. It plays itself."

What sort of Hamlet will Michael Siberry produce? Talking to him about it, I felt that he was unwilling to intellectualise about the character too much, or come up with pat, easy definitions. At this stage of production, too, the pressure isn't fully on, and much of his real work of discovery is still to come. He's read Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, and is impressed with Kott's arguments about the relevance of the play, and believes that there is much in the
part that can speak to contemporary audiences. He's excited about Colin George's transposition of the play to a Victorian Setting. "It's going to be a very formal court, lots of protocol. The sort of court where you have to watch everything you say, where it's difficult to act freely, be honest." The transposition of setting will help underline Hamlet's dilemma — that of a young man, from the relatively free and questioning atmosphere of the university, who is forced to understand himself, his powers and limitations, learn to rely on his own judgment, in an environment where guile and dishonesty pervade. "But I couldn't bear to watch a film of the play, or read too much about the character. I'm afraid it would take away the freshness of what I can bring to the part."

Trusting his own judgment and discovering what is unique to himself are important to Michael Siberry. The desire for sincerity, honesty and self-certainty has its analogues, for him, in the character of Hamlet. He's wary of self-conscious, insincere work, and worries about mannerisms in his own performances — "doing the things that come easily to me, that I tend to repeat and indulge in, so that every part becomes a bit the same." He's candid, too, about his shortcomings. "I don't think I'm courageous enough, don't use every part of me. Sometimes I think I just stand around waiting for inspiration to strike; and while I'm waiting I just mouth the words."

Talking to him, I was struck by two things in particular. He obviously enjoys what he does, and is excited by the continual discovery that each new part brings. When he speaks of Shakespeare — especially the language, the poetry — you sense that this dramatist at least is a constant eye-opener to him. He can't help growing a little lyrical over the eloquence and vitality of the language in Hamlet. Along with this enjoyment, there is open-mindedness, awareness of what he doesn't know, eagerness to learn and listen from the work of other actors. "I think if you're responsive enough, you can learn from almost anyone. Even a bad performance will contain something, only a moment perhaps, that is unique to that actor, that makes you sit up, that you can learn from."

His contract expires in June, and he's thinking of new fields — perhaps overseas. He's enjoyed his time with this company, and talks warmly about the positive feeling within it, much of which he attributes to Colin George. "Although it's actually a very large company, he's managed to create a relaxed feeling within it. As a director, he brings so much experience. But he's open to suggestion, not dogmatic, very generous. And I'm very lucky that he has such faith in me. He couldn't do more for me."

There will be many, I think, who will hope to see Colin George's faith justified on opening night. If his past work and general approach to his profession are anything to go by, this much is certain: whatever else it might be, Michael Siberry's Hamlet should prove lucid, intelligent, and honest.

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**Brisbane Actors' Company**

**Richard Fotheringham**

1979 is shaping up as the make or break year for the Brisbane Actors' Company, for three reasons. The first is that what started in late 1977 as a group of actors putting on their own production of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, because other work was not available, has become a registered co-operative company hoping to employ a permanent team of professionals. The second reason is that the Actors' Company began with superlative reviews for that first production, and has since undertaken artistically less demanding and sometimes less successful productions. In 1979 they are going to have to provide us with at least one major production that is very good indeed.

The third factor that will help to make or break them is that they hit the political spotlight last year when the Queensland Government was casing about for an alternative to the fast sinking Twelfth Night Company. This year suddenly there is a totally new Twelfth Night under the artistic direction of John Milson (ex Hole in the Wall which has reitled the vacuum it created and made the battle for subsidy, publicity, venues and audiences very tough indeed. One of the arguments against Twelfth Night continuing was that the QTC had cornered the general public market, and there wasn't room for another company catering to similar audiences. Can a third professional company, without major subsidy, even think of surviving?

The philosophy behind the Brisbane Actors' Company, that is of its founder and artistic director, a senior actor with major Australian companies for some years, David Clendinning, has clearly not found satisfaction within such institutions. One reason — shown by his choice of plays and his productions — is that he is a former French lecturer who has worked in the theatre in Paris, and his philosophy of theatre derives from classical French drama. Four of the six Actors' Company productions so far have been of plays by French authors (Moliere, Ionesco, Cocteau, Feydeau). The productions I have seen were all presented with meticulous attention to detail, and all adopted an extremely conservative approach to the texts. Phrases like "there is only one right way to do a play" and "the star is the play itself" recur in discussion and in their manifestos. In the Moliere (1 didn't see theory and practice apparently combined superbly, in the more recent Feydeau, *Madam's Late Mother*, it was muddled, marred by very raw supporting actors, and awkwardly staged with Clendinning as director, designer, and leading actor standing intermittently centre stage while his fellow actors flittered round the edges. The company aim to "encourage all the various talents of the members of the company" and to operate as a co-operative seems oddly at variance with this one man handsomanship.

The other factor which makes this company odd is that some very good actors who make a living outside the profession have offered their services to the Actors' Company without requiring a salary. Their leading lady, Jennifer Flowers, is one such amateur/professional, a teacher of deaf children who is committed to her work but who is also able to take on a major role in most Actors' Company productions. This system (or am/am perhaps?) is currently causing headaches for Actors' Equity, according to the company administrator, Bruce Parr. Obviously Equity wants to encourage the growth of new groups; equally it doesn't want to see an employer of its members and the Actors' Company has been holding public auditions operating on such an ad hoc, and possibly coercive, way. "If Equity insists that we pay everyone full salaries then we will," says Bruce Parr blandly, and has written in the group's prospectus "the company hopes to be able to wean itself off Government subsidy", which was only $9,000 for this financial year. One wonders how much hard thought and how much wishful thinking have gone into statements like those.

Even so, a happy new year and goodwill to all is the general feeling in Brisbane theatre circles towards the Actors' Company. They have done good work, and are young, determined and enthusiastic. Their plans for 1979 — Scapino directed by but not starring David Clendinning, and Macbeth to be guest directed by Jane Atkins from Twelfth Night — suggest that the company is aware of the need for change and growth. It's an institution now, and the future is all uphill. But they're enjoying the climb.
Robyn Nevin has just finished playing Miss Docker in *A Cheery Soul* to almost unanimous accolades for the devastating virtuosity she brought to the part. On March 14th *Deathtrap* (J C Williamson's) opens at Sydney's Theatre Royal, prior to a national tour, with Robyn in the role of Myra, a rich Newport American. Her stage husband, a middle-aged playwright, is played by Dennis Olsen; Michael Blakemore is coming out from London to direct.

On stage Robyn Nevin is a rivetting figure — in the part of Miss Docker (*A Cheery Soul*) hugely cutting a swathe through all she does good too. Decked out in smeared ripe red lipstick, wrinkling stockings, amorphously spreading torso, and an indulgent laugh which swallows in the audience, she is, for all, except the energy the part demands, a sexagenarian.

Earlier last year we have seen her as the young Miss Julie, her aristocratic breeding brought low by the common denominator of sexual activity on a brooding midsummer eve. And the year before, Shaw's adolescent Cleopatra, posed, but a creature of youthful whimsy; affecting the maturity of a powerful position, which, it seemed, a too immature mind and body was continually at odds with.

Actually Robyn Nevin is between the two extremes of age, slightly beyond mid thirties. Off stage the rivetting figure is left behind like the characters themselves. In the flesh she is diminutive, personable, warm, concerned; only the tresses of thick black hair, flashing dark eyes and those expressive, yet childishly proportioned, hands suggest an actress. She is self-effacing about her looks but it actually a handsome woman.

For four years she moved back to the Hobart of her school days (she was born in Melbourne) as an on-camera presenter for the ABC. Her characteristically meticulous attention to her work is marked by two Logie awards in that period. She was "beautiful — but in miniature," according to John Gaden, "like a bonsai", at the Parade in 1972, the Perth Playhouse through 1973 and playing Shakespeare’s Cleopatra in the 1974 Adelaide Festival, then back to the Eastern States for roles at Nimrod and Jane St for the remainder of that year. 1975 saw her in *The Legend of (and legendary) King O’ Malley* (1970).

That was the starting point for the second phase of Robyn Nevin’s career — and the road to the full public recognition that *Deathtrap* will inevitably bring. The intervening years saw her working in *The Crucible* (1971), when she was "beautiful — but in miniature", according to John Gaden, "like a bonsai", at the Parade in 1972, the Perth Playhouse through 1973 and playing Shakespeare’s Cleopatra in the 1974 Adelaide Festival, then back to the Eastern States for roles at Nimrod and Jane St for the remainder of that year. 1975 saw her in the controversial *You Want It Don’t You Billy?* (her only previous experience of thrillers) and the films *The Fourth Wish* and *Caddie*.

The journey has taken her through two marriages and a difficult personal life. Has this had its effect on her career? She begins by consider. It was back in Tasmania that she met Rex Cramphorn, "the first person I had ever known who seemed to be doing things the right way — presenting plays truthfully and clearly".

Influenced by the discovery of the kind of like-minded soul that had been missing for the first ten years of her professional career, she went back to NIDA and a part in *The Legend of (and legendary) King O’ Malley* (1970).
"theatre should always be a devastating experience for both actors and audience"

Robyn Nevin as Miss Docker in A Cheery Soul. Photo: Branco Gaica.

answering that her approach is more technical and intellectual; that she starts with an overall impression then through rehearsal finds ways to realise it. Never having been typecast she has always, the extreme is Miss Docker, played roles very different from her own personality. She reflects again on the suffering and concedes that personal experiences lodged in her brain will surface and be used in a technical sense. It is not Stanislavskian, she never abandons herself to a role, but her tremendous powers of observation and memory allow her to remember a gesture or facial expression made in life and then use it in the creation of a role.

There are few regrets in that long journey to being not just on top, but one of the best there is. She believes it takes many years and hard work to develop the actor's craft; and for her to open up those detailed, but "miniature", performances of five years ago. If she feels something between pity and annoyance at the inexperienced young things who are given instant stardom by the voracious media, it is because they have no opportunity to explore their art, serve their apprenticeship, and are consequently often straitjacketed into typecast roles which may never be shaken off.

Her attitude is that of one of the most committed actors in Australian theatre. That commitment puts her on the committee of the Playwrights' Conference, will at some stage take her to the infant Hunter Valley Theatre Company, because she believes in its importance and did last year cause her to be involved with the star-crossed Paris Company: "It showed that there were people involved in the theatre who were angry and bored with the way things stood".

That anger and boredom was directed in large measure against the Old Tote. Yet many who heard her cri de coeur against the collapsed company which had once kept her centre stage, thought her ungenerous. Her reply, given firmly but without a trace of self-glorification, is that the reverse is true, that she did an immense amount for the Tote. At the time, as she points out, she always auditioned with the rest for the parts, and that (here she bristles against the attitudes prevalent in subsidised theatre), she was made always to feel beholden for the chance of work.

She believes, soundly, that at a certain stage in an actor's career a point of acceptance should be reached and that the publicity theatres put out, regardless of their subsidised or commercial basis, should reflect that. Again it is not a matter of self-promotion; "if actors could be raised to a proper status in the eyes of the public, that would do a hell of a lot for the theatre". Her response is one of incredulity when people still ask what she does for a living, and when told think of acting as some kind of hobby practiced to fill up empty evenings. She does not want the "furs, first night and what-do-you-do-for-hobbies of stardom — it's more a kind of regard". One joy of working with Williamson's is that this comes automatically from them as part of their modus operandi.

Her main hope for the NSW State Theatre is that it will put major emphasis on assembling an ensemble of the best actors possible, with even a system of associates on the lines of the Royal Shakespeare Company in England. The benefits, she is convinced, would be enormous. First and foremost an identity and style — something not fully established at the Nimrod without an ensemble. The quality of work could only improve the longer people worked together and the necessary apprenticeship of younger actors would be served in the best possible circumstances. The public would identify with the actors and feel involved in the development of the company.

If the new company manages to escape falling into the old ways of the Tote, Robyn Nevin will be keen to play her part in its establishment. What else does the future hold? A TV series is being written for her later this year, and at the moment she is in rehearsal for Deathtrap, her first engagement with a commercial management.

Given her commitment and views about the theatre — that it should be a devastating experience for audience and actors — why this? For her technique is again the major factor — this play can be devastating in its excellence, and should be with Michael Blakemore directing and Denis Olsen in the male lead.
ANTHONY BARCLAY reports

Saturday First Preview

Robyn Nevin, in good spirits if a little anxious, follows Jim Sharman through the labyrinth backstage of the Drama Theatre. It is Second Act intermission. "We should be allowed to have some doubts, Jim! It's not human not to...
They disappear, then as though swivelling on his soles while leading Robyn a merry chase, Jim immediately reappears, smiling somewhat gleefully.

At after preview drinks Robyn, in a more relaxed mood, explains the "doubts". She was not angry but admits she was serious — "We all need to have doubts and I was concerned about Act One but Jim said there was no need to worry..." Jim Sharman, one quickly learns, gives to his cast a positive calm, an unflappable confidence, that can at times prove to be unnerving. Robyn's doubts deal specifically with her portrayal of White's most stunningly difficult dramatic creation: Miss Docker. And to her, of course, such doubts are a way of wrestling with the role.

Mind you, it is difficult to portray a character that "has a terrible gift for destruction but is also a victim and a victim of her own passion for goodness and love." (Axel Kruse). White calls for a complex and eccentric humanity that must avoid the pitfalls of easy caricature or grotesque sentimentality. Robyn knows this and four nights before opening she has her worries. But then maybe she ought not be too concerned...

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Friday Before the Preview

I am lunching with Jim in the Greenroom and he seems quietly confident. The previous evening friends of the cast had been invited in to make up the first (small) audience. "It was about time", Jim tells me, "rehearsals were getting a bit stale — especially the comic stuff with which the cast were over-familiar." We agree that the run was successful. My reservations were that Act One was too slow and lost much of its comedy; Act Three, particularly the Church Scene, lacked pacing and thematic clarity. Act Two, though, I found stunning. It had moments unmatched in Sydney theatre for years. Yet a number of people had left after Act Two and the...
thought crossed my mind that to many this mixture of realism and symbolism would prove unpalatable; and critics might see the work as disjunctive, fragmented. The obvious question, then: why take on A Cheery Soul (originally proposed for the Toke's York Theatre '78 Season and then by the Paris Company)?

The answer: "I've always wanted to do it and it is the logical follow on from Season". Certainly The Season at Sarsparilla was very successful and could be seen as a way of preparing audiences for A Cheery Soul — a more obviously fragmented and poetic theatre if immensely comic and ironic in vision. The play is for Jim unquestionably a finest dramatic piece and it is not long before one senses a kind of obsession, a shared obsession, with White's vision ... there is Jim openly admits a "vicarious fulfilment" being instrumental in the resurgence of interest in White's drama.

That obsession deals with the problem of locating an alternative theatre to the 'hearty all-in-together' back-slapping, song and dance rituals that Jim sees as the "staple fare of our theatre from the gold-rush to the present day." The stance is affirmative and idealistic in confronting a society marked by a tragic-pathos sense of its own community. Yet its odd too, because one wonders whether very many of this "insecure society are really in search" of themselves. Maybe that tradition of theatre Jim sees as "staple" is reflected in the security of its audiences ... so I press the point again. "Was this a wise choice for the first play of the Sydney Theatre Company's Interim Season?"

Jim seems unconcerned. He evades by answering that the idea of a 'World Season' of six plays produced by the major Sydney companies is excellent, everyone gets a go and audiences will be exposed to a wider sense of the "vicarious fulfilment" in being instrumental in the emergence of interest in White's drama. A Cheery Soul

The collaboration has been so successful that the critical response to Brian Thomson's rotary pre-recorded Winifred Atwell piano that bashes out the '20's, '30's songs that the cheery souls were reared on. Sharman and Allan have removed nearly all of the scripted sound cues and Sharon Calcraft sits on stage at the grand to score notes for the choral work, to provide scenic links and to play Cameron's superbly haunting melody that opens Act Two. Sharman and Allan have interlocked into a totality, gestures, actions, sound. The music was directed to remain uncluttered; and walk from Peter Carroll's swaggie

Music, Design and Acting

Cameron Allan has worked with Jim on two productions — most recently on the film The Night of the Prowler based on White's first screen play, this is Cameron's first live stage work and he finds it to be more challenging than the cut and dry of television or film. The music for A Cheery Soul includes the interval pieces — jovial, pre recorded Winifred Atwell piano that bashs out the '20's, '30's songs that the cheery souls were reared on. Sharman and Allan have removed nearly all of the scripted sound cues and Sharon Calcraft sits on stage at the grand to score notes for the choral work, to provide scenic links and to play Cameron's superbly haunting melody that opens Act Two. The music functions like the use of mime in the play; for example, Miss Docker turns, back hunched to audience, that comes down to a nakedness for Miss Docker's over the play's three acts. The actors wanted to re define their role and the level of their contribution to the production. It didn't work then but with A Cheery Soul the actors were able to contribute "their viewpoints not only to their performances but to the overall understanding of the play." To Jim this meant the style of playing "presumed the actor to be intelligent, articulate and able to reveal their observations of the society around them. Indeed the only work outside the text was directed towards a more perceptive observation of detail in human behaviour." I thought this to be very true of the Sundown Home scenes where the actors avoided stereotyped work on the old ladies. Jim is very definitely against the actor working too close to self and is pleased about the ordinary, the mystery and poetry which alone makes bearable the lives of such people and incidentally my own ... " Contentious or not, it is a tall order for director and actors.

Jim mentions that he does not draw ideas from the theatre in the sense of scrutinising other productions. He draws ideas from as many areas as possible and gives them to the stage as representations of life ... hence the humanity. The idea sounds perhaps a little Gil at first but when one looks at A Cheery Soul it begins to make a lot of sense. Jim wanted his actors to work against type and aim at an objective, representational performance. This evolved out of a lot of discussion during the Paris season. The actors wanted to re define their role and the level of their contribution to the production.

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"Everyone to his own poison", it was one of the electrifying moments. Brian tells me that Patrick White's descriptive writing is so literal as not to be interfered with and here the set, contra the reaction of many critics, is representational rather than 'symbolic'.

Three rotary hoists are back stage ("Australia's greatest sculpture" says Brian) and Christo like curtains on clothes lines serve as fences or wind. The furniture is grey blue, stark, and serves for many functions; the actors move it about during blackouts. One of the earlier ideas — to have the actors making up and walking onstage — was scrapped and now they sit left or right of stage, serving as observers or towards the end as chorus, or wind sound effects. Simply, there is no attempt at illusion.

Brian has worked with Jim on many occasions over eight years now (including Superstar, Threepenny Opera and Big Toys) and it is clear that the evolution of director/designer relationship is one of deep trust. "One has complete freedom working with Jim", says Brian.

Peter Carroll is working with Jim Sharman for the first time; it is also his first experience of the somewhat impersonal Drama Theatre. He finds the sheer administrative and technical scale of things somewhat overwhelming compared, say, with Nimrod where "it was all one big family".

Added to this Peter found the large stage and distance from the audience involved necessary adjustments in his acting. But these potential insecurities to his performance have been overcome and Peter has found working with Jim "a marvellous experience". He stresses that Jim is never negative and tolerates all moods — and that during a rehearsal period involves keeping a cool eye on many things. Jim sustains the early rehearsal good mood as the production nears opening ... this can be the acid test for young or inexperienced directors.

Peter’s sense of actor/director relationship is clear enough: he wants to know exactly where he should take the part. "Jim Sharman", he adds, "knows, more than most directors, exactly what he wants." He suggests what had earlier occurred to me — that Jim shares with Patrick something of an obsession, a unique vision of Australian drama.

Robyn Nevin’s main fear after the Saturday preview is that in Act One Miss Docker is too close to ("I hate to say it, but who else") Dame Edna. I thought that to be true of moments during the Thursday run but she seems to be moving in the right direction now. She is worried though that if the part is seen initially in these terms the audience will not allow it to develop in Acts Two and Three.

Robyn has worked with Jim on many occasions and it is fitting that she play Miss Docker some two years after she stole the show with her Girlie Pogson in Jim’s Season. The development of character from Girle to Miss Docker is as ambitious as it is complex but one feels it will be one of Robyn’s great roles. Peter

Continued on page 34.
1979: The Year of The Thaw — or motels in China and Shakespeare at the Pram.


The January 1 issue of *The Perambulator* celebrates ten years of theatre by The Australian Performing Group and announces a new line in seventy-nine. It consists of a 'new economic policy' and a thematic cum ideologically based programming criteria for the coming year. Whether it is — as Len Radic diagnosed in his *Age* article summing up the year in Melbourne theatre that "old recipes no longer work" — the consensus from within and without is that 1978 was not one of the APG's best years. However the most productive approach to the successes and demises of last year is to reflect upon the contradictions, problems and new directions which became evident.

Of the stable of writers whose names have been associated with past APG successes d'estimes, Barry Oakley's *Ship's Whistle* was the only production emanating from that formerly fecund seed bed. However audiences 'stayed away in droves', whereas five years ago it may have drawn in equal droves those same people. Indeed it was an old recipe and one which the APG pioneered — a nationalist, historical subject given a fond, naturalistic warts-and-all interpretation, replete with broad physical comedy and lively vernacular expression. Leaving aside the merits of it as a piece of writing, why didn't it grab the APG audience of today? Largely I think because the APG has carried out its original brief and has had a profound if unquantifiable effect on local theatre.

The new Australian play is no longer their embattled province — David Williamson has moved up if not on. Local directors and actors have broken the former subservience to Anglophile models and everywhere they speak in the round and not in the voice of Eric Pearce. Where does this leave the group — impaled on their own rusty spearhead? Not at all, rather back to their fundamentalist role as innovators and disseminators of radical theatre in form and content. Having hacked their way through the bourgeois debris the march can begin in earnest.

*Ship's Whistle* was staged in the Front Theatre and in Pram Factory terms had high pre-production costs, so the fact that it generated small audiences exacerbated the end of year financial ailments. On the other hand two smaller scale, and hence more cost-effective, productions directed by women in the Back Theatre — Kerry Dwyer's *The Bitter Tears Of Petra Von Kant* and Fay Mokotow's *Voices* attracted capacity audiences and considerable critical acclaim. Similarly Richard Murphet's excellent, shoestring production of *A Light Shining In Buckinghamshire* did well in the Back Theatre. All three productions could have sustained the move to the larger capacity Front Theatre as *Back To Bourke Street* had done earlier in the year. Clearly there were lessons to be learnt from these experiences.

1978 also saw the emergence of two new writers — Barry Dickins and Philip Motherwell. Dickins could be described as an outsider when he won the first Literature Board sponsored APG playwriting competition with *Foolshoe Hotel*, while Motherwell is a collective member who has worked with Nightshift. Both writers had a number of shorter works produced at La Mama (Dickins' marvellous *Rotten Teeth* was put on independently in the Back Theatre earlier in the year) an indication of the role played by the APG vis a vis La Mama.

Lindzee Smith's Nightshift group produced Motherwell's *Dreamers Of The Absolute* and Fassbinder's chilling *Pre-Paradise Sorry Now* in the Pram Factory as well as other readings and events outside the enivrons of the Pram. Nightshift is one of the many sub-groups which the APG has spawned over the last few years. Of these Stasis is still operating but independently of the APG; and the Circus Oz recently joined forces with students from the Victorian College of The Arts in a mammoth Big Top event in the grounds of the National Gallery. In addition there are autonomous groups operating under the umbrella of the APG in film (Pram Factory Productions — *Dimboola*) and radio (3CR and 3RRR) all of which attests to the vitality and diversity of the group as a whole.

Well that was seventy eight — a year that got better by fits and starts, and in August with *Bitter Tears* in the Back and *Foolshoe Hotel* in the Front really looked as if it was going to take off but finally founded at the end of the year with *Ship's Whistle*.
What then of seventy nine? A commercial company faced with the same situation could easily have decided that the only rationalisation possible would be to prune the excess at the expense of the actual and potential diversity. Fortunately for all of us the APG is not a commercial company and while finance or the lack of it absorbs a lot of the group's time and energy, real viability for them resides in political and aesthetic considerations as well as financial survival. Their solution is to spread the available funds as widely as possible to encourage and maintain diversity while simultaneously ensuring that the economic failure of one project cannot jeopardise the chances of others.

Fay Mokotow explained that the New Economic Policy (NEP) entails a strategic decision that no show whether in the Back or Front will exceed a specified deficit. She said that the choice was between a small number of fully subsidised shows or a larger number of partially subsidised — fully funded shows or a larger number that the choice was between a small number of partially subsidised shows or a larger number partially subsidised.

Even within that parameter we've decided to subsidise some shows to a lesser extent and some to an even lesser extent, which correlates with the use of the Back and Front Theatres, but means that there is unlikely to be as great a gap in resources — people, sets, advertising etc between the shows in these places.

This means that there will be two categories of shows — fully-funded and semi-autonomous. John Hawkes added that the policy is about reducing the risk that the group as a whole takes and the real difference will be in terms of people's personal incomes. Funding in effect will only cover the cost of a show to get it in progress. This means that once any show is put into motion and the project group sees that it is going to cost more than the amount allocated or stands to lose more than that, then the risk will be taken by the people actually working on it rather than by the APG itself.

The difference between the fully-funded shows and the semi-autonomous projects is that the APG is providing greater setting up costs in return for which they place a ceiling on the amount of money anyone working on them can earn — Equity minimum. Whereas in the semi-autonomous projects where the APG has provided less money, there is in theory no limit on what people can earn. This scheme not only suits the self-management goals of the collective but is common practice in Fringe and Experimental groups. Richard Murphet added:

The project groups themselves take the larger responsibility — choosing the shows and selling it to an audience, which gives them more control over their work and a greater interest in the outcome of that work.

When the APG began it necessarily worked in this way because the collective was small, but in recent years it has grown to the potentially unmanageable size of between fifty and sixty members so the only practicable solution is the cell structure. Max Gillies added that since the collective became so large it has taken the group a long time to find a centre. How ever Bill Garner explained that the APG still maintains the overall control and the power to decide which shows get the go-ahead. "For example this year the collective has decided to provide more employment opportunities to women and we are in a position to do what we can to enforce it."

Richard and Fay explained that this year women's consciousness would be the criteria informing the choice of scripts. While this may at first seem a limitation on programming, Richard added that the very circumscribing of a theme has led in fact, to more creative choices being made: "You find you look deeper and further for material, and equally, once confronted with a number of possible scripts it is both easier to choose and makes for more imaginative choices". Wilfred Last explained that the bias or positive discrimination criteria means that there not only has to be ample opportunities for women as directors and actresses but also that the writers must not present women in a sexist or stereotypical way. Fay added:

It is a positive and creative step as well as a real ideological step. Suddenly it brings a lot of plays to the forefront of our consciousness which weren't there before. For instance to be able to give our visiting director Aarne Neeme that brief has meant that he has unearthed a number of exciting possibilities — and one thing which he may direct is Edward Bond's The Women.

Among the plays the APG has accepted for presentation in 1979 are Stephen Sewall's Traitors and John Romeril's Mickey's Moomba. Traitors is about Stalinist Russia and Mickey's Moomba is a musical about US cultural imperialism and while both deal with universal political experience they also explore the consciousness of women within these themes.
Bill Garner contended that the choice of programmes for 1979 make it one of the least comic years, reflecting the seriousness of the current economic and social situation. The group recognises that in the past the public has had some cause to see the APG as insular and aesthetically and ideologically monolithic and this year they intend to use The Perambulator as a vehicle to raise a public and conscious level, internal and group criticism of one another's productions. This is an idea which they say they have often supported and sometimes done something about which but they believe should be pushed "because if it is not brought out into the open and discussed and seen as a productive artistic dialectic, it is repressed into resentment, suspicion and mutual hostility which has in the past been an aspect of some of the internal politics of the APG."

This trend toward an opening up of the practise of the collective is also reflected in their desire to provide opportunities for outside actors to work on APG productions. Richard and Bill said that until the recent auditions for Mickey's Moomba it was rare for down-town actors to attend unless they were specifically invited — "the fact that they now feel the doors are open can only be a good thing". Unfortunately this year's stringent cost cutting may mean that it will be difficult to attract actors from outside who are currently working successfully, since coming to the APG would mean a considerable drop in salary.

Though John Hawkes added that there are some people in the industry who are prepared "to work in an industrially idiosyncratic way and who have the desire to work here even to the extent of taking Equity minimum. The push toward working more with outside actors comes from people within the Pram", added Bill Garner, and went on to say that the group thought that there was so much they could learn from an actor of the calibre of Jonathon Hardy, that they would have been happy to work with him on virtually anything.

A further indication of the group's desire to become more publically visible is their plans to initiate a series of theatre seminars early this year. Bill Garner said that at present — there is no forum in Melbourne for theatre companies to discuss artistic policy — and the Ministry adopts the attitude that it shouldn't interfere with the artistic decisions of the companies it supports, which means that the theatre companies go ahead programming often competitively. The play readings that the APG, Hoopla and the MTC put on separately on a shoestring could be, if co-ordinated, made far more effective for everybody. We need to get rid of artificial competition, particularly in our case in relation to Hoopla, as we're probably competing for the same miniscule audience.

John Hawkes disagreed that it was a matter of competing for the same audience but rather that it was competition for the same miniscule funds.
An exultant debut

A CHEERY SOUL

KATHARINE BRISBANE

A Cheery Soul by Patrick White. The Sydney Theatre Company, Drama Theatre, Sydney, NSW. Opened, 17 January 1979. Director, Jim Sharman; Designer, Brian Thomason; Music, Cameron Allan; Lighting Designer, John Hoering; Choreography, Keith Raint; Stage Manager, Jadi Pethell.

Miss Docker, Robyn Nevin; Mr Custance/Mrs. JobbSwaggie, Peter Carroll; Mrs Custance/Miss Perry/Little Girf, Pat Bishop; Mrs Lillie/Mr Licklite/Mrs. Bleeker, Maggie Kirkpatrick; Mr Wakeman/Furniture Man, John Parameter; Mrs Wakeman/Mrs Wainmufl, Annie Byron; Mrs Hibble/Mrs. Futz, Claire Crowther; Maroon/Mrs. Pink/dil little Boy, Deborah Kennedy; Miss/Violet Pornehead/Little Boy, Linden Wilkinson; Tom Lillie/Furniture Man/Mr. Futz, Paul Johnstone; Miss Donko/Baby Pornehead/Little Girf, Jan Hamilton; Her Car Man/Mrs. Tole/Mr. Bleeker, Paul Childe; Pannett/Little Girf, Sharon Catherall.

The World Play Season of the Sydney Theatre Company which this year replaces the Old Tote Theatre Company at the Sydney Opera House, has had an exultant debut with Jim Sharman's production of Patrick White's A Cheery Soul.

It brings a fresh sense of occasion and of stature to the drama theatre; it projects, not a familiar assertion of "world standards" but the relaxed confidence of work which takes its quality for granted. The kind of evening which makes one wonder, unkindly, why we tolerated the Old Tote for so long.

There is no question that A Cheery Soul is a difficult play — a confronting one, as Sharman says. Its structure is picaresque, literary and in places over-explains without clarifying. In this production some of the performances do not make the grade. But at no point does it fall from the level of extraordinary. With all its sins on its head it is the most serious and commanding production Sydney has seen since Ciulei's The Lower Depths in 1977; and for my money the finest production Jim Sharman has ever done.

Firstly let us talk about the play. It opens upon the warm, homely kitchen of Mr and Mrs Custance, a contented middle-aged couple who take life for granted and rub along without much imagination. In a kind of assuaging gesture ("I wonder if it's right to be always happy"), she remarks, innocently, in the wake of tales of careless death and destruction the couple invite Miss Docker, a homeless pensioner, to share their all. She arrives — launches herself, one should say, upon the unprepared innocents. Like the tallboy and the rocking chair that accompany her, her huge impertinence strains their accommodation.

Miss Docker does good. No one in Sarsaparilla does so much good as Miss Docker. People are beneficiaries of Miss Docker's goodness whether they like it or not. In no time her presence invades every corner of the Custances' lives and the old fiend is bundled off to the Sundown Home for Old People. So much for the first act.

When the curtain rises on Act II we have left the cozy fireside and the play opens out into an expressionist universe where old women in black dresses, like the relatives in The Ham Funeral, nurse their memories and form a chorus of silhouettes against our heroine's journey towards the light.

Miss Docker has already invaded Sundown Home. She is omnipresent as she was in the Custance household: as Mrs Hibble says: "She's only been here a couple of days and her name beats in my head like a gong." She encounters Millie Lillie, a statuesque tragedy queen whose seductive but spendthrift husband Miss Docker nursed ruthlessly into the grave. Memories revive — we see his death, his funeral and the awful incident when Miss Docker, after momentarily descending from the cortege, is swallowed by the train of those to whom she has done good in her time, leave her in the dust.

This is the turning point of her indomitable spirit. It is followed by a poignant short scene in which the old woman with her shoe box of photographs asks: "Will anybody recognize the true portrait of Little Me?"

Mrs Hibble: I never saw such an enormous baby.

Miss Perry: Lovely rug.

Mrs Hibble: You look as though you'd swallowed the world.

Sharman captures this appalling image in the high point of his production as the astonishing Robyn Nevin, who has stamped through two acts like an omnivorous Raggedy Ann, cracks open the case of her bitter candy heart in a raucous revelation of her beginnings. As the curtail falls we are left with the caricature, legs and arms flailing, of a vulnerable old woman turned baby, braying for love.

The third act is occupied with a recognition of that need for love. The chorus's vision of spring is followed by Miss Docker's confessions of girlish passion, firstly for the butcher and then for the Rev Wakeman. Her devotion to Mr Wakeman leads to a heart-to-heart about his shortcomings as a preacher; and he reproves her: "The truth we know already is always the hardest to bear."

Mr Wakeman brings his condemnation of militant virtue to his Sunday sermon. The...
message drives Miss Docker to attack, to strike down the Rev Wakeman with her lightning. She takes on the role of God and pulls her armour of prayer around her like a warm cardie. But her message is for herself alone: "Oh, I could tell, if I could tell! All of you! But failure is not failure if it is sent to humble. The only failure is not to realise..."

There are echoes of King Lear in these words of impotent rage:
I will do such things —
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.
The scene ends with the exalted old woman, confronted with the body of the dead minister, crying: "My thoughts could light a fire! I could breathe love into the dead ... if only they was willing..."

The play leaves her on her storm-tossed heath, in the company of jeering children, a swaggie and a mangy dog who pisses on her leg. In her last words she draws dejectedly upon her lost faith. For her there is neither death nor love and what she says are the last words she will ever say.

The beauty of Sharman's production and Brian Thomson's design which works in harmony with it, is that it takes on unflinchingly the problems of interpretation imposed by the mixture of realism and caricature. From the curtain rise on the characters, planted motionless about the stage like puppets until Miss Docker twists in our direction, emitting a silent scream; from the moment Robyn Nevin explodes down the aisle in all too audible laughter, one knows that this is a production the like of which one may never see again.

The play is a comedy, though a black one, and Miss Docker is a comic character. The Custances are funny in their suburban complacency, the old women in their second childhood. But the production never oversteps the hard truth. Miss Docker may be a cruel figure of fun but White opens her up like a fresh wound as an object of pity and warning.

Robyn Nevin's performance, as I have said, is extraordinary. This tiny actress, still in her thirties, is transformed into a shapeless ball of ancient but indomitable flesh, all too capable of mowing the minister's lawn on Thursdays. Flat-footed, enveloped in cardigans and drooping lyle stockings, she contains a voice that booms like thunder. She is formidable and indestructible. Miss Nevin's gait, her limbs spread as though her body were too big for her, is both cartoon-like and touching, denying at each moment the indestructibility her voice commands. Her shuffling feet and swinging arms as she telephones her admired butcher, will remain for me one of the true comic moments in the theatre.

Finally I think Harry Kippax was right when he called the performance an impersonation rather than a characterisation. Miss Nevin is still too young an actress to bring off the Lear-like pain of spirit which transforms the last act. In the attempt, however, she was in part prevented by the cruel miscasting of John Paramor as the Rev Wakeman on whom the building of Miss Docker's tragic stature at this point depends. Paramor, unable to cope with prayer, replaced simplicity with emotionalism; the result was disastrous to the final scenes.

There were other faults. Thomson's attempt to unify the domestic style of the first act with the grandeur of the rest diminished that sense of a cosy nest being split open by its gigantic cuckoo. (Mr Custance really needs his tomato plants). Nevertheless, Peter Carroll and Pat Bishop make a touching pair — Miss Bishop's careful kindness is masterly. It is a good cast — in the second act the brooding figure of Maggie Kirkpatrick as Mrs Lillie is splendid.

A confronting evening, certainly. It marks a new level in the work of Jim Sharman and Robyn Nevin — and in the contribution of Patrick White to our theatre. Let us hope it sets the standard for the Sydney Theatre Company.

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Buzo’s triumph...
Nimrod’s failure

MAKASSAR REEF

DOROTHY HEWETT


Alex Buzo’s Makassar Reef is a modern romantic comedy of great relevance and wit, a deceptively “plotted” play with a subtle and tender sub-plot. As often happens with Buzo’s plays the danger is that, unless we are aware of the nuances, we will tend to miss the tenderness and the subtleties for the surface pyrotechnics. But then there is something for everybody: comedy, violence, exotic location, trendy conversations, so if you miss the roundabout there’s always the swings.

But in the Nimrod production the hapless playgoer could be forgiven for picking up neither plot nor wit, let alone tenderness and subtlety. This production sent me back for a second reading of the text, in case I had been mistaken, but no, it is a hopelessly clumsy and cynical production of a wise and deeply perceptive play. Yet this is Alex Buzo writing at his best, looking beautiful in a cover-up caftan and a wide-brimmed red straw hat, can produce just the right balance of neurotic sexuality to offset the soap opera he senses all around him.

Sean Scully is an interesting performer with just the right balance of neurotic sexuality to pull off the central character of Weeks Brown, but here the balance is all out of killer. Jeanie Drynan, looking beautiful in a cover-up caftan and a wide brimmed red straw hat, can produce the astringent, desperate toughness that should have made Beth Fleetwood, that “gutsy little number”, both horrifying and tragic. Instead she keeps exculpating her words as if she was a refugee from S.C.E.G.G.S. And who chose those baggy knickers for the strip off scene under the mosquito net?

The only actor who really comes out of it with any honour is George Shevtsov in his dirty tropical suit and mysteriously grotesque frogman’s outfit, playing a longer ... the marvellously seedy Silver, a manic con man and Dutch double-dealer, the symbol of Makassar.

Heavy handedness is fatal in a Buzo play. The surface slides and glitters with a kind of icy brilliance, but this doesn’t mean that there are no depths, or that he is light on compassion. Some Sydney critics have been talking about this play as if all it had going for it is a clutch of witty one-liners. When will we have Australian critics that can distinguish between the play and the production? Makassar Reef at the Nimrod is a lot like an afternoon telly episode of The Restless Years. The heartbreaking ending of the Weeks Wendy affair with its haunting refrain:

Wendy: Do you think being happy is all it’s cracked up to be?

Weeks: Yes.

And Week’s despairing cry “I had it. I had it”, as if happiness had slipped from his grip under the jetty into the water before he even had a chance to savour it ... is all lost in soap opera.

Yet Buzo has a lot to tell Australians about themselves, and I hope some people are out there listening.
Only a light comedy of situations

LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS

ROBERT PAGE


In the social comedies of this country, adultery and its consequences are faced as a fact, square on; failures of sexual prowess are mapped, if anything, with the satirist's pen. If Neil Simon's plays, and countless other dramas and films, are anything to go by, sexual problems are the neuroses of Middle America. Agonising over sex seems to be a major pastime — with potential girlfriends, business associates and, of course, the analyst — the more so when also infected with the Jewish Oedipus-schmoedipus syndrome.

The ironically titled Last Of The Red Hot Lovers tills this unyielding soil yet again. Barney Cashman (Len Kaserman) has had forty seven years of a pleasant, though reasonably hard working existence; so unremarkable has it been for this fish-restaurateur that he believes Life has given him much more ironic, satiric and hence truthful

The entertainment world and, truly, sleeping (though nothing else, she claims) with her female Nazi vocal teacher. The whole salacious barrage is in fact a cop-out from life's nitty gritty realities. Barney is left giggling on pot and frustrated again.

Thirteen months later, with him now as ready for the straight physical pleasure as the lady of his first encounter, an assignation is made with his wife's great friend after a distinct come-on from her. However all she wants to do is wallow in how depraved such a liaison is without actually getting down to anything. Her melancholic view of the world is backed by statistics of adultery (87%) and her enjoyment percentage (8.7). But all the rantings over the lack of decent, loving and gentle human beings turn out to be triggered by the discovery of her husband's affair with her best friend.

In the only surprise of the play, Barney appears finally to snap. He rushes her, flings open the sofa/bed and hurls her onto it, in a fit of masculine dominance. If the world is depraved, he screams, let us have some depravity: decency, love and gentility are the very stumbling blocks that have scotched his previous encounters. Of course no rape ensues; it is all therapy for friend Jeanette who leaves with a new vision of how to handle hubby. Barney lies back on the bed... and phones his wife.

The resolution reflects a coy morality which ignores the adultery statistics the play throws up, and the audience are left with the ironic gratification of smugly seeing themselves as decent, loving and gentle human beings. Such side stepping of issues allows the play to be viewed only as a light comedy of situations. As such it is a delicious souffle with the punchlines and witticisms coming rapid fire — and with sickeningly regular precision.

Neil Simon's work demands cordon bleu production for the recipe to work and John Ewing rises with mastery to the task of direction. The timing is faultless, the detail meticulous and the casting superb. Len Kaserman is the quintessential Barney, playing the role with engaging understatement to allow the audience to the final outburst. And the ladies are well discriminated, each fleshing out their cameo characters; Maggie Dence strikingly elegant as the rapacious lady, Liz Harris ebullient! as the frenetic fantasist and Benita Collins suitably manic as the sourly jealous friend.

If Simon's plays are just light comedies — and Broadway solid gold hits — one wonders quite what the Ensemble (subsidised) theatre is doing presenting them, and so many at that. Must audiences be subjected to such (false) neopausal American navel-watching just because Simon is capable of corrosating entertainment? Williamson, God bless him, is much more ironic, satiric and hence truthful in his perceptions; as a structuralist he is more complex. his vision is more embracing and as a comic writer he is almost as funny.

Tactics of evangelism

STATEMENTS

LUCY WAGNER


In the wake of the rapturous reception that Statements has generally received, it seems almost sacrilegious to be less than reverential to it. And the response to the production of Fugard's seventy five minute play, in the crypt of the Seymour Centre, appears to have been predominantly one which would befit a religious experience; an emotional commitment to the message with little consideration of the form, or approach of its creators. Fugard's intention is propagandist, but his method is to present one face of moral coin without explanation or exploration, relying on conditioned responses to bring about unquestioning acceptance — the tactics of evangelism.

In Statements Fugard's subject is black/white sexual apartheid in South Africa. He shows broadly the effect of this law on a white librarian and half-caste school teacher who have become lovers. In the half light of the bare area we see them naked, simulating love-making, arguing, carressing, soliloquising; then, under a flashing strobe to the sound of barking dogs, arrested, imprisoned, justifying in flashbacks; and then castration for him, loss and ostracism for her. Between sequences a policeman, side-stage, reads dead pan his court report of their offence.

In South Africa it is more than likely that this political statement could have the effect of confronting people with a new vision of the status quo, even of challenging them to action. In small ""liberal"" Australia it is catering to the preconceived notions of its audiences; it evokes a gut response, the self-righteousness of which negates the point of the reaction. But that is not to say that such a political play could not be relevant and instructive to us. Statements holds little in the writing and, in this context, relies almost completely on an assumed response to a known position.

Fugard has made the mistake of many propagandist writers, in presenting exclusively his own point of view, which promotes no understanding of the situation in toto, of how it came about, or even of how it could be bettered. It might have been more powerful had the faceless, characterless agent of the law been allowed equal revelation of his viewpoint. The play's stance seemed increasingly simplistic as the host of nagging questions remained unanswered; perhaps unasked.

Just as the ambience of a church ensures a respectful attitude to what occurs within it, so the close proximity of two naked people evoked an atmosphere of shock and discomfort in the audience, which was then heightened by the
(hackneyed) repetition of stroboscopic panic and self-revealing, supposedly poetic, monologues of the couple. Olive Bodill and Anthony Wheeler made the most of these effects by portraying the characters with a shining sincerity, and it is not to dismiss their competence to point out that such emotive roles readily induce an uncritical gut response (viz every actor who played Ivan in Inner Voices in 1977 was nominated for an award).

Fugard himself has stated in Plays and Players that he would not be a playwright were it not for the South African situation. Statements as a drama has little to recommend it; certainly its style and structure are poor. There is no reason to suspect the writer's motives for wishing to alert people to the horror of apartheid, but whereas this simplistic portrayal may have an active effect on the spot, to play it in a 'free' country is merely to stir up a gratuitous response. Whatever the intention, the result could be seen as profiteering on liberal humanitarianism. Though audiences leave in devout silence, one wonders whether such an emotional appeal can generate the proper intellectual concern for the issues which might precipitate action.

emotional sincerity to Clive the husband whose alcoholism and grotesque fantasy (he keeps a full sized mannequin doll for comfort and dancing) are rapidly destroying him. But Nixon's rich imagination needs to come more to terms with his material. This piece is over indulgent and while one is pre pared to accept the possible verisimilitude of Clive and Anne (his queen bitch wife) one can only wonder how such a couple managed to produce two children? The children though were finely portrayed by Lesley atm and Matthew Larkum. The second piece Animal Vegetable & Mineral was an unsubtle spoof on the robot mentality of suburbia and television addiction. Its redeeming feature was the tele talk supplied by David Webb and James C Steel. Apart from that it was overdone but the audience loved it.

How Sleep the Brave, by Philip Mann, opened the first week of the season. It is written in an intriguing manner in which what might have been ordinary events become larger, more extraordinary events. Mann explores a specific situation — the strange disappearance of an Australian naval vessel during the second world war — and seeks to universalise this into, I suppose, a treatment of good versus hidden evil. The attempts to universalise do not always work but through the well-delineated characters Mann is able to focus sharp conflicts. The first act is more soundly written: it has some fine dialogue and well shaped dramatic tensions. The second act needs more work. Ross Hohnen and Don Carter provided some fine acting.

Syndrome, the second week's offering, was written by Ken Hayles. It deals in an interesting way with an identity crisis between father and son following the likely suicide of wife (and mother). The resolution — son takes after father — is fairly predictable, not that this implies any inherent flaw in the writing, and the play's dramatic tensions are neatly structured around decreasing the gap between these seemingly opposed personalities. All became crystal clear when son, Bruce, barters blackmails father Royston's secretary into bed with $20 and threats of scandal... Royston one guesses merely bartered years ago when the desert sighed in the marital bed. The script has much going for it: it was witty and had some very perceptive moments. But much of its potential had to be gauged by ear due to some pretty wooden performance. Though audiences leave in devout silence, one wonders whether such an emotional appeal can generate the proper intellectual concern for the issues which might precipitate action.

Apart from their contribution to the Sydney Theatre Company's Interim World Season later this year, Ensemble have made a very handsome contribution to theatre-goers with their Festival of Sydney Playwrights season at the Stables. Some of the production was necessarily flawed, but the concept was excellent and the season a success. It was great to see the Stables with some of the finest actors of the year and a cast of hundreds carried the festive mood through January. One certainly hopes that it is a feature of next year's Festival of Sydney. But down to business.

FESTIVAL OF SYDNEY PLAYWRIGHTS

ANTHONY BARCLAY

Festival of Sydney Playwrights. Ensemble at the Stables, Sydney NSW. Producer: Megan Fry; Director: Doug Anderson. Throughout January.

How Sleep the Brave by Philip Mann, Director: Stanley Walsh; Production Assistant: Roslyn Forrest.

The Actors: Gary Malcom; Don Carter; Frank Haines; Damien Corrigan; Ross Hohnen; Gary Daniels; George Leppard; Craig Lambert.

Syndrome by Ken Hayles, Director, Anthony Ingersent. Production Assistant, Mark Reid. The Actors: Sonja Tadic; Jyoti Mukherjee; Jenifa Dwyer; Allen Penny; Gillian Levet. Dancing Partners & Animal Vegetable & Mineral by Graeme Nixon, Director, Fred Simmons; Production Assistant, Grace Said. The Actors: (Dancing Partners) Michael Ross, Lesley Larkum, Matthew Larkum, Sharron Flanagan. (Animal Vegetable & Mineral) Julie Herbert; Shauna O'Grady; James Mon; David Webb; James C Steel; Terry Byrne; Ann E Morgan; Harold Jones; Michael Ross; Michael O'Brien; Richard Hughes. Demand by Derek Mortimer, Director, Gary Baxter; Production Assistant, Jolita Peters. The Actors: Andrew Inglis; Michael Pentecost; Damien Corrigan; Craig Lambert; James Mon; Richard Hughes; Tony Auckland; Gary Daniels; Julie Balder; Gary Malcom; Rod McNeil; Graeme Rudd. (Provisional)

Apart from their contribution to the Sydney Theatre Company's Interim World Season later this year, Ensemble have made a very handsome contribution to theatre-goers with their Festival of Sydney Playwrights season at the Stables. Some of the production was necessarily flawed, but the concept was excellent and the season a great success. The concept, of course, is applied by Ensemble throughout the year, the Stables providing an 'alternative theatre where developing actors, designers, technicians and directors could present their work...' For January the Ensemble applied that specifically to five new plays by four local playwrights, each writer occupying one week of a four week season. It was great to see the Stables with consistently full houses for the first time since the old Nimrod days. The choice of material telephone: Patrick Carr [02] 233 1658

THE PERFORMING ARTS
BOOKSHOP

THEATRE AUSTRALIA MARCH 1979
THEATRE AUSTRALIA MARCH 1979

Will it succeed

THE CLUB

BRUCE KNAPPET


J.A.: John Meillon; Lauris: Terry Donovan; Ted: Phillip Rose; Danny: Tom Richards; Geoff: William Glenn; Gerry: John Doyle. (Professional)

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I vowed I wouldn't, but here I go again — flattered into arrogance. (ESTRAGON: Critic! ... VLADIMIR: wilts vanquished.) I went so eagerly to The Club's opening night in the vast Civic Theatre; this one must work, let's wish it to work.

Newcastle needs its re-emergent HVTC to thrive and to attract and please a mainstream audience. Now, more than before, the time seems ripe. Not only is the city full of those who want to be part of it, but there are scores of others actively wanting to do things differently. So the whole symbiosis of establishment and alternative theatre (each city of course invests with its own definition) now seems excitingly possible. So this night was important.

The play is a delight. (By now I presume its known: a club — a society in flux: power, battles.) This was the third production I'd seen and still enjoyed in Collingwood FC and David Williamson's wryly cocky accuracy and wit. It's an easy, big, popular play where you can confirm all sorts of smug or harrowing conclusions about the Magpies, or mankind. Go forth to the theatre: laugh and be safe. Williamson has managed outstandingly well both to draw his form out of his material yet also to exploit stock gag structures and situations.

It was a fine choice by new director Ross McGregor, with the HVTC right on the line. And the production was enjoyed by the first night audience. They could have done so much more however. Its overriding flaw was that McGregor seemed simply to let the play work, without bothering to find out and exploit how it works. Too often gags were reduced to the last and obvious line or action, where savouring the build up to the gag could and should have had the audience bubbling and erupting. Too often actors were static, posing lonelily, where a more fluid blocking would have drawn the audience more easily and often into the prowling conflicts — creating also thereby both more of an ensemble and bigger, more credible individual characters.

The prize example came with the pot-smoking scene (Jock smokes a joint thinking it just a roylie). With Ron Haddrick at Nimrod and Bob Baines at Wagga this scene was non stop laughs; here, it was beginning and end laughs. The two characters were rooted to one spot. John Meillon as Jock played the trip monotonously ... as if it were one tired Scotch too many.

Ah, John Meillon, John Meillon what a frustrating actor you are ... a frustrated actor you seem! Meillon's Jock was off on a tangent of his own. Of course up to a point so is Williamson's, therefore much credit to the actor here. But so often it felt precarious waiting for his cue ... where is he? ...

What came over was an almost tragic figure.

Meillon got little out of Jock's blind ludicrousness — the stuff of comedy. And Jock's surely much more a survivor. The vulnerability was certainly affecting and lines got laughs, so credit to Meillon for that; but ...

One odd aspect of sympathising with Jock was that when Phillip Ross's Ted (the pie-maker President snookered by an episode with a stripper) built to his defeated exit, it came as a surprise. Our hearts hadn't been pointing there. Yet Ross was so dignified and worthy growing to his demise — like a chunky Malvolio.

Another performance I delighted to see was Terry Donovan as the coach Laurie. Last time I'd seen him on stage was at Wal Cherry's Emerald Hill Theatre; Donovan then as now was clear and strong.

Mixed feelings, therefore. Time will tell whether this administration will make mainstream live pro theatre work in Newcastle. Not so long ago Terry Clarke's nervously aggressive programme of varied provocation delivered from the outskirts didn't take on. Ross McGregor has been given a more central status: he has a new soon-to-open theatre in the city centre (next door to the Civic which is really too big for The Club to be seen to best advantage anyway), and lots of press and public goodwill. All of which is an advantage.

I seem to recall Clarke, like Macgregor this time, opted for Melbourne comedy, a musical, then a Tennessee Williams to get him under way. So the public must accept what they didn't seem too keen to before. One thing that will help that happen is if standards are red hot. I fear they were something short of that at the Civic.

comes down with a thud

THE BED BEFORE YESTERDAY

LUCY WAGNER

The Bed Before Yesterday by Ben Travers. MLC Theatre Royal Company, Theatre Royal, Sydney NSW. Opened 11 January 1979. Director: Lindsay Anderson; Original design: Allan Tegg; Victor Keene: Wallas Eaton; Alma: Rachel Roberts; Mrs Holley: Connie Hobbs; Audrey: John Howard; Eliza: Barbara Stephens; Lolly Tucker: Gwen Plumb; Felix: Barry Otto; Fred Castle; James Condon; Taxi Driver: Alex Kovacs. (Professional)

Dr Johnson's impolite statement regarding sermonising women and performing dogs seems quite appropriate when applied to this latter-day Aldwych farce; "It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all". The "doing" in this application refers, though, not to the skillful production of The Bed Before Yesterday by Lindsay Anderson, but rather to the writing of it by nonomographer Ben Travers. Mr Travers' stated reason for adding this play to his canon is a late-coming desire to compete in a licentious arena unfettered by the Lord Chamberlain's Office; but perhaps he should have sought a new programme of varied provocation delivered from the outskirts didn't take on. Ross McGregor has been given a more central status: he has a new soon-to-open theatre in the city centre (next door to the Civic which is really too big for The Club to be seen to best advantage anyway), and lots of press and public goodwill. All of which is an advantage.

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There cannot be many fifty-year old plays around still capable of thoroughly gripping audiences of the late seventies. And when the one in question is set in a dug-out in the trenches in France during World War I, and concerns a group of British officers, it is all the more remarkable. But then R C Sherriff's *Journey's End* is a remarkable play.

There are many who have seen it before, including the writer: that many a well known actor had cut his teeth on either the role of Stanhope or Raleigh... that for many years it was a good old stand-by for rep companies throughout England... that Olivier had played Stanhope in the original Sunday night production... that Coward once played Stanhope to John Mills' Raleigh in Singapore... that Colin Clive who played the role in the long London stage run went to Hollywood for the film, which was directed by James Whale who had done the same for the play, and that both starred in *Frankenstein*... that...!

Admiring Tony Tripp's very realistic setting and waiting for the lights to dim, I wondered how the play would stand up today. Well, that first act certainly has a rather old-fashioned air about it. Some of the lines John Stanton as Hardy has could bring laughs if they were less well delivered. There is far too much explanatory dialogue, setting up the characters and situations, much of which now seems long-winded. It is not the fault of the play; today we are geared too much to television and used to everything happening quickly, not to having...
things spelt out so thoroughly.

With the second and third acts this no longer bothered me. Characters and situations are just so gripping, quite obviously a craftsman is at work, cleverly mingling pathos with comedy. And, unusually for a play of this vintage, the comedy does not appear weak or dated, but natural and extremely funny.

As we know, Sherriff was writing about people and events he had first hand experience of. The characters are very very real and the semblance of cliches drawn from films; then one sometimes lines and situations take on the comedy does not appear weak or dated, but roles must be heaven-sent joy to most actors. The characters are very very real and the semblance of cliches drawn from films; then one sometimes lines and situations take on the comedy does not appear weak or dated, but roles must be heaven-sent joy to most actors. Sometimes lines and situations take on the semblance of cliches drawn from films; then one remembers Sherriff created them in the first place in this play, and they have been copied countless times since.

I just about count Mick Rodger as one of the three Australian directors whose work I have admired most (the other two have never worked for the MTC) Imaginative and exciting as his previous work has been, a few flaws have always been noticeable. Here he has probably had to discipline himself with the script. But at the end comes a marvellous shear Mick Rodger effect: one hears the scream of that last dreadful bomb getting nearer...and nearer...and nearer. And then, when it finally explodes with a gigantic bang, for a few brief moments it is utter daylight outside, and one sees the dug-out in an entirely new light, with all its cracks.

Instead of the actors taking bows, a screen drop down above the stage upon which appear individual photographs of each actor in character. It is most effective.

For me the cast could hardly be bettered, and probably it is unfair to single out individual performances. Robbie McGregor, who plays Stanhope, I know nothing about, except that as Edgar, he was for me the only satisfying performer in the David Williamson version of King Lear staged last year by the Alexander Theatre Company. Let us hope we shall see more of him at the MTC. Malcolm Keith, after being outstanding in Under Milk Wood, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui and Arsenic And Old Lace, displays further amazing versatility as the older, awkward and bluff Trotter. And the Osborne (affectionately called 'Uncle') of Anthony Hawkins again, and again reminds me of one of the screen's foremost Dr Wassons, Nigel Bruce.

There is one really superb moment in the play. Just before Osborne and Raleigh leave on their raid the much older Osborne, knowing it means almost certain death, is desperately trying to talk about the past in England, and the young Raleigh, eager, gushing with excitement, wants only to discuss the raid which he can see solely in a glorious light. Beautifully written, it is supremely played by Hawkins as Osborne and Ian Sudjards as Raleigh. I shall long long remember this scene.

Also I shall remember the way Sudjards manages to convey the extreme youth of Raleigh by the gauche manner in which he lights and holds a cigarette, and his general stance.

EQUUS without the horses

### BODIES

Bodies by James Saunders. Melbourne Theatre Company, Ranelle Street Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened 23 January, 1979. Director, Bruce Myles; Designer, Steve Nolan; Anne, Anne Haddy, Mervyn, Simon Chivers; Helen, Jennifer Hagan; David, Peter Curtin. (Professional)

Platonic argument, like platonic love, has gone out of fashion a little these past 3,000 years. You'd have to say that sitting at the feet of gurus (or philosophers) and arguing more or less as equals in the search of truth is not where it's now at. These days students have become devotees, given to worship not discourse, blind faith not open-eyed questioning. For substantial portions of the population even St Augustine is too clinical and logical. To Jim Jones, and his innumerable conferees, the Devils of London is state of the art faith.

Unhappily even the most ardent classicist knows that the Greek ideal is a figment of the humanist imagination. Ever since it was first conceived it has been chewed at and mangled by fanatics of various kinds. Scientists and Divines. And, worse, the Divine Scientist, who can cure the body by curing the mind, cure the mind by curing the spirit: the best selling psychiatrist, the West's answer to gurus, swamis and the five year plan towards spiritual regeneration.

So any event in the theatre that asks you to listen to argument between equals, that reasserts the humanists/sceptical tradition, that comes out on the side of life's complications has to be supported. Indeed that is what the theatre has always been about. If there were two words that encompassed the message of Western theatre, they would be 'Life's complicated'. A play that promises to be the argument we've been waiting for between Rabelais and the Rev Moon, between Plato and Janov, between Shakespeare and Mukunda, between Voltaire and Lenin, a play that lays those cards on the table would be a memorable one.

Unfortunately it's not quite like that. It's English, and middle class and beats around the bush a lot. It's an argument between a lobotomised product of some Californian Therapy, and a drunken Headmaster with intimations of poetry (and mortality). Significantly both of these gents are out and out oppressors of their wives, and both had 'their minds blown' by the Book of the Therapy. One to conversion, like St Paul, and one to a troubled conscience and the bottle.

Here's the situation. Mervyn and Anne are husband and wife. So are David and Helen. Each has had an affair with the other's wife and husband, but it is all over now. David and Helen partly because of this indiscretion and partly because of the general malaise of their lives go to America to give their marriage another go. There they come across The Book which contains The Therapy and are now happy in body and soul. They live, now, for the present only. They accept the limits of their bodies and minds. They consider that the past is 'separate' from the present and whilst they can remember it, it has no effect. Thus the prospect or having dinner, some years later, with their former lovers holds no terrors. They have excuses for personalities.

For Mervyn and Anne the contrary applies. The inviting of their former lovers also invites the prospect of a calling up of the demons of the past. How can they cope? What will they think? For Mervyn is a shambling figure, given to Life, Love, Poetry, The Infinite, Mortality and so on. He is a Joyce Caryish character who talks a lot about what he would love to have experienced. Unfortunately for him his education and social class don't allow it. He is a headmaster, and the closest he has come so far to mortality is the
Consummation skill, magical artistry.

FUKIEN PUPPETS

SUZANNE SPUNNER


In China the art of puppetry goes back some two thousand years whereas in the West we have only three hundred years of experience to call upon; compared to the Chinese we are relative primitives in the field. After seeing the Fukien Puppet Theatre I can only say it shows. In China today there are three schools — puppets or marionettes manipulated by wire, by stick and by the hand, and the Fukien Theatre are exponents of the "palm play". The puppets have exquisitely carved and painted faces and in the traditional mandarin plays they are sumptuously attired in embroidered silks and brocades. A puppeteer can manipulate two characters with entirely different dispositions with his or her two hands.

Although the puppeteer's hand fits directly into the cloth doll like a glove, the technique assimilates the best features of wire and stick manipulation as well. The Fukien Hand Puppet Theatre was established under the patronage of the Communist Party in 1949 and is the living practice of Mao's policy enunciated at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and weeding through the old to let the new emerge".

The repertoire for this tour consists of five plays, four of which are drawn from the Ming, Tang and Sung dynasties and deal with the traditional themes of virtue and courage triumphing over cunning and evil, the fifth play deals with similar themes in a commune setting. But even in the historical plays it is the common people, scholars, hunters and peasant rebels who vanish or outright members of the ruling class.

However, it is the consummate skill and seemingly magical artistry that commands our attention and excites the imagination as puppets fly through the air, turn somersaults, leap onto prancing steeds, toss off their clothes and perform feats of balance and juggling. The six young men and women who manipulate the puppets are referred to in the programme as actors, a significant distinction which points to the high degree of characterisation and the grafting onto each doll of a richly detailed and acutely observed personality.

The precision with which individual characters are rendered was most apparent in those plays which centred on two or three protagonists rather than those that relied on the martial pageantry of busy battle scenes. - fights between puppet gladiators seem to be the universal sine qua non. Yet it is the moments of repose that draw us into a character and make them memorable; the moment when the murderous innkeeper in Lei Wan Chun Fights The Tiger sits outside his premises and sensuously rubs the souls of his feet, or the delineation of the vain and pompous bailiff of The Ta Ming Prefecture preening himself before his lackeys and the delicately drawn reluctance of Lo Ta peng, "a man of courage fallen into adverse straits" to sell his priceless steed. All of this is to lay stress on the naturalism of the illusions created, but the finest moments come out of an insoluble mix of representation and art. For instance in The Ta Ming Prefecture we are treated to the antics of a splendid mane-tossing lion which is superb enough, but later it is revealed to be mere costume and underneath are two coy and panting puppets — art upon art.

The Fukien Hand Puppet Theatre is a lively example of the ability of a traditional art form to revitalise and transform itself in the light of new times.

I liked Simon Chilvers as Mervyn — he gave the role a passionate, whole hearted performance that was appropriately undercut by a touch of irony every now and then. Peter Curtin too was correctly unhassled, unemotional — sweet conviction itself. One wished that his character, and the women, had a bit more going for them. Bruce Myles has directed the show at a steady pace with a sense of respect for the text that I'm not sure it altogether deserves. A bit of expressionist breaking out here and there might have livened up proceedings. As it exists, James Saunders' play is like Equus without the horses.
Enterprising and mature approach

THE HUMAN VOICE

MADAM'S LATE MOTHER

JEREMY RIDGMAN

The Human Voice by Jean Cocteau. Brisbane Actors’ Company, Conservatorium Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened January 1979. Director, Bruce Parr; design, David Clendinning. The Woman, Jennifer Flowers. Madam’s Late Mother by Jean Cocteau. Queensland Conservatorium Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Translator, Director, David Clendinning; Lucien, David Clendinning; Joseph, Brett Davidson; Yvonne, Jennifer Flowers; Annette, Kate Richter. (Programme)

As Brisbane wallowed in the traditional post-festivity doldrums, with the established theatres heaving to, as if exhausted by the strain of providing us with a fun-filled Yuletide, it was gratifying to see the Brisbane Actors’ Company, only recently formed into a permanent co-operative, taking the plunge and filling the gap. Having committed themselves to providing a substantial portion of Brisbane’s theatrical diet, operative, taking the plunge and filling the gap. Having committed themselves to providing a substantial portion of Brisbane’s theatrical diet, the B A C obviously intend to show that they mean business: their offering augers well for the forthcoming season.

Double bills are notoriously precarious affairs and this, French connection apart, seemed a dubious alliance, the passionate introspection of Cocteau’s ‘monodialoge’ marrying uneasily with the antics of one of Feydeau’s less brilliant farces. Coincidentally, Liv Ullman’s recent performance had had some of the punch knocked out of it. Equally haunting, and a real tour de force, is Jennifer Flowers’ rendering of The Human Voice. The play is tantalisingly unsatisfactory; no doubt Cocteau envisaged an intricate set of circumstances lying behind the tortured telephone call, but it is impossible, apart from some tentative superelevation, to piece the picture together. It seems too easy to pin the character down as a covent male talking to his lover. Throughout his work, Cocteau’s homosexuality gives rise to a generally fatalistic attitude to the fragility of relationships at the hands of a hostile universe.

Jennifer Flowers eschews the temptation to allot any hampering social identity to the woman; she is neither demi-mondaine, mistress or jilted older woman. Instead, with a fine vocal range and a subtle control of inflexion she homes in on a soul tormented both by its own vulnerability and the guilt of playing on the vulnerability of others. Except possibly for a tentative start, where perhaps the receptivity of the audience has to be gauged, it is a well measured performance, demonstrating that Jennifer Flowers is an actress of intelligence and great resourcefulness. One looks forward to her Lady Macbeth later this year.

Indicative of the enterprising and mature approach of the B A C is that both plays have been imaginatively translated for the occasion by David Clendinning, whose linguistic credentials are impressive. It is encouraging to find that translations can be formulated in this way, combining erudition with a practical awareness of how the words will behave once they get up on the stage.
Raise the flags boys and out with the B.V.D.'s

THE HIGH AND THE MITEY

BRUCE MCKENDRY


Whether it is a peculiarity of Adelaide or perhaps it's nationwide but audiences seem refreshed and at ease when treated to a product wholly Australian. Raise the flag boys and out with the B.V.D.'s. The High and the Mitey is a musical mad cap collage put together by Margret Roadknight and Bob Hudson with assistance from Sandy Kogan and Richard Wherrett while in Adelaide Peter 'Fingers' Bealey played piano.

The combination of Roadknight-Hudson blended, often through their very difference, for an evening full of sparkle and dash. From the opening 'Hoy's matinee' music to the final recitation of the knockout ballad 'Libel', written in aid of Dorothy Hewett's legal battles, the audience were with both performers; wanting to laugh, eager to be amazed and honestly enjoying themselves. The balance between Margret Roadknight's realism and Bob Hudson's absurdity moved gently in sway, at times the tempo was intimate like when the really excellent ballad 'Girl in our Town' was rendered by Ms. Roadknight. At other times you were consumed in laughter as was the audience during Bob Hudson's circuitous 'Newcastle Song'. The song to the town where Bob Hudson spent part of his youth was in fact written in 1966 but received little airplay till 1975; which says something for the dawning of the Australian consciousness. You listen to the words and think 'how many times have I heard that before', is it not the great Aussie stoic with his four letter gun shots. Norm from Newcastle is a legend; his ilk is immortalized in the black fish net and ripple sole shoe set of today.

But there's more to it, there's more to it, there's more! There's an indigenous style of humour and entertainment. Those present delighted at Richard Burton's description of Sir Laurence Olivier's performance prior to feigning the chopping off of his hand, were moved by the tale of an elderly Russian actor's desperate behaviour on forgetting his lines and applauded the familiar strains of Doreen 'At the Play'. Tales of the theatre for the initiated bring a sense of confirmation and reaffirm just why they endure the traumas of putting on a show.

The High and the Mitey is a one time fairly straight folk performer merging the world of cabaret and comedy. Her choice of material and her at-ease delivery form a natural buff to Bob Hudson's style of humour. The comic tunes such as 'Love at First Sight' and 'Dancer with Bruised Knees' display a sincerity not afraid to poke fun at oneself. At times she created an atmosphere of music-hall, at other moments you found yourself in a European cabaret, she took us to the folk clubs, the jazz bars and the rock and roll gospel halls.

With so many shows being devised for the cafe-cabaret type setting it is a wonder there is not a regular circuit existing outside of the theatre world to display such wares eg Kold Komfort Kaffee and Shirazz Cabaret. Melbourne has its 'La dis Laugh' but alas Adelaide has little equivalent perhaps the closest would be the 'Creole Room' whose accent is entirely music. Certainly entering the 'Space' with its array of tables for four you sensed a certain emptiness for although the production was staged immaculately there was still missing some of that 'at home' atmosphere. The backdrop of Australian flags lends to the High and the Mitey a touch of the sunburnt country in a time when we need to be reminded that we do have an identity.

A show well worth seeing for many reasons not least being to witness the further growth of a theatre of cabaret and comedy. Her love of what she is doing and puts into it are a wonder there is not a regular circuit existing outside of the theatre world to display such wares eg Kold Komfort Kaffee and Shirazz Cabaret. Melbourne has its 'La dis Laugh' but alas Adelaide has little equivalent perhaps the closest would be the 'Creole Room' whose accent is entirely music. Certainly entering the 'Space' with its array of tables for four you sensed a certain emptiness for although the production was staged immaculately there was still missing some of that 'at home' atmosphere. The backdrop of Australian flags lends to the High and the Mitey a touch of the sunburnt country in a time when we need to be reminded that we do have an identity.

A show well worth seeing for many reasons not least being to witness the further growth of an indigenous style of humour and entertainment.

MERELY PLAYERS

BRUCE MCKENDRY


Further information from A.N.U. Arts Centre, P.O. Box 4, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600.
Pervasive geniality

NO W.A.Y.

CLIFF GILLAM

NO W.A.Y. The Hole In The Wall, Perth, WA. Opened 4 Jan, 1979. Director, Edgar Metcalfe; Designer & Stage Manager, Jake Newby; Musical Director, Daun Eastman; Rosemary Barr, Joan Sydney, Alan Cassell, Edgar Metcalfe.

Being Western Australian in 1979 is no easy thing, the whole state having succumbed to a severe bout of sesquicentennial “celebrations” which leaves even hardy individuals well inured to media barrage wilting under the strain. It was a stroke of excellent timing thus that saw NO W.A.Y. open 1979 for the Hole-in-the-Wall. Not that any mighty smiting of the manifest absurdities of our celebrating excesses was really done. The revue was fuelled by material parodic of our collective self-inflation but few of the sketches took us as severely to task as we perhaps deserve. A spirit of geniality pervaded the whole show, which was not much diminished by the discomfort of the excellent cast on the night I saw it. In the moments before the opening number a tumbler containing a clear liquid (which one supposed to be water) crashed to the floor, creating for the first half some very slippery conditions under foot. As Alan Cassell ad libbed with some ire, “NO W.A.Y. on Ice!”

As is seemingly inevitable with revues, some sketches were better than others. An hilarious encounter of Australians abroad done in enthusiastically broken French vied with a marvellously executed series of theatrical parodies titled Play Right? for the highlight of the night’s entertainment. A musical sketch apparently inspired by the fact that 1979 is International Year of the Child was on the other hand slightly less disastrous than a piece of misplaced conscience-stirring which forced Alan Cassell to sing “Nobody”. On the whole things were much better than this and on some of the material (what did writers of revue sketches do before they were able to parody television commercials I wonder?) sheer quality of performance saved the day. Edgar Metcalfe and Joan Sydney do most things well, and revue is no exception Metcalfe’s delivery, as borrowed from Coward, of Cole Porter’s “Let’s do it” with suitable and moderately funny amendments to the lyric was delightful in itself. As with this, Joan Sydney’s “Festival PR Lady” sketch was a bit thin on real bite so far as satire goes, but very strong on performance style. Alan Cassell chimed in with an excellent Ocker super-patriot and Rosemary Barr completed an accomplished cast and sang excellently.

And there’s not much more to be said. A good night out for those not so splenetically disposed toward our little self-congratulatory orgy that NO W.A.Y. includes even such a mildly barbed irritant offshoot as NO W.A.Y. itself.

Diane Cilento will be touring New Zealand and Australia showing her two films Turning, made in Turkey and The Human Race, made at the first New Age Congress in Florence.

CHRISTCHURCH — March 2nd at the Ngaio Marsh Theatre, 48-7069.
AUCKLAND — March 6th at the Kenneth Maidment Theatre, 30789.
NEWCASTLE — March 9th at the Town Hall, (049) 26-2333.
CANBERRA — March 13, 14 at the Playhouse, (062) 49-8211.
SYDNEY — March 27, 28 at the Union Theatre, (02) 660-1355.
ADELAIDE — To be Advised.

For information contact Sydney 922-4494.
Segments remained isolated

**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM**

ROGER PULVERS


Why was there a lack of excitement and mystery in this production? There seemed to be little revelling, and a sparse festive mood.

Director Michael Lanchberry has given us a rather orthodox production in all. Or rather, the production is essentially an operatic one, with rhetorical stances, lovely costumes quietly blended in mood, and a certain stiffness of presentation. This stiffness was especially apparent in the acting done by the young lovers, the Duke, and his lady. In fact, it was the kind of acting that is all too obviously amateur Shakespeare: arms straight against the sides; the occasional outstretched hand; the eyes that look not at a partner or an audience but inward, into the memory of lines; and body gesturing which communicates little. The lovers, Lysander and Hermia, for instance, were far too reticent, holding hands like kids in a square dance.

Then, one might say, that this was the intended effect, to highlight the humanity of the actors and the awesomeness of the fairies. But all it did is underscore the drabness of this segment of the production.

It was in the presentation of the fairies that the play had its most “operatic” tone. Both Paul Corcoran and Robyn Lawson, playing Oberon and Titania, are excellent actors. Their voices alone commanded attention. But the direction had Oberon pontificating from on high, and again the festival atmosphere was lost. This segment needs to evoke some spirituality, or mysteriousness. Titania’s body movements made us all too conscious of the stagey stances.

The troupe of hambone actors is always the easiest thing to carry off in this play. It was the most entertaining segment, for sure, led by Hec McMillan as the Bottom. Yet it did not fit well into the piece.

What I mean to say is that the three segments of the play — the noble lovers, the fairies, and the actors — remained just that: isolated segments. The production didn’t integrate them well enough, so that what was left was a discontinuity of various images. Some of these images were effective, as the wonderful comic cameo of Bruce Hudson as the Master of the Revels; but they led to no visual or plotted entirety. The final spoof on the Babylonian trysters Pyramus and Thisbe, was performed in admirable slapstick manner. But the nobles were set off to the other side, and barely reacted to the show. The relevance of this gaudy satire to them was largely lost. The relevance would have been enhanced, from the production’s standpoint, if the troupe of actors had mimicked the acting style of the lovers themselves. The message of the spoof, then, would not be missed.

A luxury of amateur theatre is the live orchestra behind the stage. Simon Wade’s music was quite good, if a bit too heavy on the whole — it should have lightened the stage. The playing of the music, however, was very fine, under the direction of Judith Clingan.

All in all, a mild version of the play, at times visually striking in the grand sense, and at others melodramatic and rather faunishly histrionic. Sadly, it just wasn’t enough fun!
Q & Q  Continued from page 4
to recruit the majority of its dancers from young people trained by the many excellent teachers in this State, who will then complete their advanced training with us on a scholarship basis.”

KAIROS AND CHRONOS

DREW LELEAN, La Mama Theatre.

“Kairos and Chronos are two Greek words of great antiquity. Each may be literally translated into English as ‘Time’; however, the literal translation loses the tremendous wealth of distinction that the ancients made in their understanding of time as it relates to life. While modern man has made great strides in the art of measuring ‘chronos’—time by the clock—and the ancients’ measurements were crude, ancient man was expert and sophisticated in his thinking and understanding of ‘time’, ‘kairos’ (Hebrew ‘eth’), and did not fall into the trap of measuring the great processes of life by elapsed seconds.”

In the pre-Christian Jewish tradition in Australia, that not just classics, but modern theatre does not have an immediate application. Colin George has also articulated the basis.”

A significant point of destiny demands a creative cast to permit the tours to take place without delay. The theatre should demand of its public an engaged response, not locked-in, but ready to tackle works on their own terms and on those terms which determine ‘real’ life, when and if the two differ. If such an approach precludes the ‘nice sport. If for argument’s sake, teachers want to see works from ‘overseas’, done as they might have been ‘overseas’. We must be imaginatively engaged at the source if we are to make any kind of impression at the periphery. If this means doing away with the ubiquitous Received Standard as the starting point for evaluation, then so be it. Why should we not begin with the proposition: Before the theatre problems. Peter Carroll in her approach to rehearsal. She has injected into that problematic Act One. “I’m very pleased to have been offered the chance to do a David Williamson play; he’s really the man who’s put Australian drama on the map. I feel honoured to have been asked to play the part of Jock, which has been played in Melbourne by Frank Wilson and in Sydney by Ron Haddrick — so I’m third cab off the rank. 1972 was the last time I appeared on the stage, and so there has been a break of seven years. Many of my colleagues say that doing live theatre work is a necessity, but I don’t feel the need to do it, like eating or having a shower; simply if an offer comes of a good play then I’ll say yes.

I think regional theatre is tremendous, and if we can be instrumental in helping this company succeed, then I’m very grateful to have had the chance to do so. I’ve never done any theatre work in Newcastle before, though I’ve been up here for Picture Show Man and The Fourth Wish. I’ve never worked with Ross McGregor but I have every respect for him as a director.”

TERRY DONOVAN

“I came to Newcastle because I was offered the part of the coach, which I played in the Melbourne production — it’s a short season and fitted in perfectly for me. I like The Club very much as a play, I don’t think people realise just how good it is. Though we played in packed houses in Melbourne, the tour to Tasmania did quite badly, because, I think, people didn’t realise what it was. Those who did come thought it was marvellous, of course.”

It’s my first time in Newcastle, and I think regional theatre in Australia has to be looked at in a very different way from the English or US model, because of the far smaller population. Here there just aren’t that many people to call on, and so it depends a lot on who’s putting on the shows. It has to be done with much more imagination to get people in. And we have been fed for so long, especially outside the capital cities, on a diet of things like Doctor at Large, which can lead to very provincial attitudes. We have to keep pioneering and educating people if we want to keep theatre alive.”

THEATRE AUSTRALIA MARCH 1979
Artistic Directors steal the scene in Canada

Barry O'Connor

The 1979 theatre season in Canada is now well under way, but looking back over the events of the last few months one wonders how it was managed. "Cutbacks" was the rallying cry of the nation's artistic community, and it takes a lot to get the disjointed body together. October 26, 1978 was declared National Arts Day, and Canada's performers contemplated withholding their services while provincial and federal money was denied them. The commonplace phrase "the show must go on" became a challenge to the shows have indeed gone on, with the national nation's artistic community, and it takes a lot to managed. "Cutbacks" was the rallying cry of the events of under way, but looking back over the events of the last few months one wonders how it was collapse in some undisclosed part of artistic belligerents. It was very much Bedford's season Stratford bug and were planning more Canadian Ballet and Opera companies as well.

These lists were legend, pointing out to the astute observer that most theatres had caught the Stratford bug and were planning more productions than they could handle.

In 1978 Stratford had proposed twenty offerings, including six Shakespeares, Macbeth, Julius Caesar and The Winter's Tale among them, and a "Gala Shakespeare Revel" with the National Ballet for openers; Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, John Whiting's The Devils, an evening of four Becketts, in addition to especially commissioned new Canadian plays from Larry Fineberg and Tom Cone, and sundries like Holbein and Abelard, "love letters from the Middle Ages", and the Bernstein Wilbur musical of Voltaire's Candide. Stratford, the flagship of theatre in Canada, whether the nationalists like it or not, was also flying the pennants of the Canadian Ballet and Opera companies as well. However, even that richly endowed, three stage Festival complex couldn't cope. Not through any failure of financial resources, but because of a collapse in some undisclosed part of artistic director Robin Phillips' anatomy, two shows had to be dropped. We lost Beverley Cross's Haworth: A Portrait of the Brontes and Larry Fineberg's Devotion, but gained, thankfully, extra performances of Private Lives with Maggie Smith and Brian Bedford as the balcony belligerents. It was very much Bedford's season last year, and his debut as a director produced a marvelous Titus Andronicus, which had as a production all the qualities Bedford has as an actor; power through containment.

Bedford and Smith won't be at Stratford this year, nor was Robin Phillips to have been there. Last summer Phillips removed to England to take to his sick bed, leaving in his wake his resignation from Stratford. But Robin will be back in 1979, even though in how large a profile is still not clear. Whatever happened to that well earned sabbatical with "world class directors" notice the plural subbing for Robin in his absence? It was just a rumour that Phillips wasn't ill at all, and that his trip to England had been to dislodge Peter Hall from his footfall on the South bank. It is true, however, that Phillips will join the directorate of the Lincoln Centre in New York, in company with Edward Albee and Woody Allen, among others. It is also true that Phillips is taking on more and more work next year at Stratford, in addition to directing King Lear and The Importance of Being Earnest (admittedly a revival), Robin Phillips is to co-direct, in Stratford euphemism, Love's Labour's Lost. Stratford news is so changeable of late, it's all rather like an afternoon soaper. Will Zoe Caldwell come and direct Richard III? Not bloody likely. Will Peter Ustinov really be coming to play Lear? Well, stay tuned to find out.

Phillips obviously won't give up custody of his baby, and this is perfectly understandable because so much remains to be done that can only be done at his hands. Reduced finances for next year have occasioned letting actors go, and changing plans for filming productions. I can't help feeling, however, that 1979 will be a lost year at Stratford and that this was intended, especially when you consider that the 1980 season was announced before the 1979, 1980 was to have been the year of Robin's triumphal return.

Artistic directors have had a way of grabbing the news during the year just gone. John Neville left Edmonton for Halifax where he has just opened in Othello. Peter Cole has just gone up to take over in Edmonton. Christopher Newton is hiding his time in Vancouver before coming to inject some much needed life into the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-lake.

Leon Major, artistic director for Toronto Arts Productions at the St. Lawrence Centre, seems to fare as unfavourably with the press and public as Phillips does favourably. Bumper stickers have demanded Major's impeachment, but Leon is still there, taking the blame for shows he does as much as for shows he doesn't direct. He is really a scapegoat for Toronto's inability to know how to use a civic theatre to advantage. In Sydney, the answer seems to have been found spontaneously with the demise of the Tote. But Major is still with us, and, as his last season of Shoemaker's Holiday, The Sea, Szwe Banzi is Dead, Mother Courage and Scapin, shows, he is not without vision and imagination.

Fortunately, in this season the St. Lawrence has already had two successes. The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca, a Sherlock Holmes tale spun from Conan Doyle by Maritimers Alden Nowlan and Walter Learning; and the Moss Hart and George S Kaufman collaboration The Man Who Came to Dinner, which Major directed with wit and style. There was also a new version of The Trojan Women, by Canadian poet Gwendolyn MacEwan, which tautly focused on love and war, but was wrongly underestimated by most critics.

The Man Who Came to Dinner splendidly recaptured the flavour of old-ball comedies from the 30's cinema, and showed, together with the Tarragon's production of Lillian Hellman's Toys in the Attic, in the high southern style, the Canadians are better at period Americana than at contemporary American plays. This may seem strange to most Australians who classify Yanks and Canucks in the one breath, when it comes to accents and manners. But when one compares stateside and Canadian productions of Thomas
Focus on Canada

Babe, David Mamet and Sam Shepard, it soon becomes apparent that something is lost in the transmigration from New York to Toronto. Perhaps it's the softness and safeness of Toronto in opposition to the hard world of New York city.

But whatever it is it shows up in the plays. The Curse of the Starving Class, Sam Shepard's latest to hit town following on his Cowboy Mouth and Action, now in a New Theatre presentation, sentimentalizes and hyperventilates a text which cries out for hard-edged playing, even a brutality towards the material. This is Shepard after the style of Tennessee Williams in the fifties, not as it should be. The same may be said of Thomas Babe's A Prayer for My Daughter which needs actors who will draw a cold and harsh light on the cops and hoods who are morally as bad as each other. It's our scrutiny not our sympathy that the playwright is after. Ray Whelan's production of John Vanbrugh's The Relapse at his Phoenix Theatre. This was a Relapse without the traditional camp and custom of Restoration productions, "with not a fan in sight" to quote Harley. So successful has the play been that it will be extended into the next slot at the Phoenix, which was to have given us The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin. Harley went for the reality of the relationships and characterizations. Even, or should I say especially, the fop, Lord Foppington, is, in Robert Benson's tour de force in the role, entirely credible.

Canadian playwright and novelist Robertson Davies once called out for Canadian actors, the was speaking in the context of the early Stratford Festival, to develop their own acting style, which, Davies hoped, would be a lyrical one. Lyrical is the word I would apply to Bill Glassco's productions at his Tarragon Theatre, where new Canadian plays are predominant in the repertory. If there is a truly uniquely Canadian style it is in a play like Le Temps D'Une Vie by Roland Lepage. This play chronicles a Quebec woman's life and the urbanization of her land and family. Maybe the Quebecois thought a French-Canadian play should not be given an English version, but Glassco's magical rendition of the piece must surely disarm their objection. There is much to look forward to in the 1979 season, and I hope to report on that in another Theatre Australia. Of particular interest will be the National Arts Centre's presentation of John Romeril's SA Floating World. How will Canadian actors fare with an Australian play? I hear they're bringing over an Australian actor for Les Harding, but it should be an interesting experiment in any case. Vancouver had little success with their Elocution of Benjamin Franklin. The problems weren't just cultural. After all, most English-speaking cities have a Double Bay but few have a Gordon Charter.

Canadians know about as much about Australian theatre as we know about Canadian theatre (which isn't much). And that's regrettable. Both countries seem to have progressed to a very similar point with little reference to each other. There is the same burgeoning nationalism, more and more Canadian plays are finding their way to the stage and being printed. There is the enormous distance across the country and the corresponding isolation some of our theatre companies feel - Vancouver is nearly as far away from Ottawa, headquarters of the Canada Council as Perth is from Sydney. As well the Canadian theatre scene is reeling under the proposed cuts of grants by the Canada Council.

Of course, there are great dissimilarities. Canada's population is close to 25 million and that population is more evenly spread across the country than is the Australian population. At the moment, the country is possibly about to be torn in two by the separatist movement in Quebec and there have always been the two cultures running side by side. Canada suffers an understandable paranoia regarding the US across the border. It is easy to gain the impression that that border between the two countries, is seen as a large perculator through which some of the best talent in Canada has been lost. Certainly now in both New York and Los Angeles a large number of writers, directors and technical personnel in films and television are Canadian. Our isolation, which we, in Australia, have so consistently regretted appears in contrast to Canada as a godsend.

I feel that all the performing arts in this country are more vigorous and more healthy than in Canada. The Australian Opera would give more performances in Sydney alone than the sum total of performances of opera in Canada. The recent showing of Australian films at the Toronto Film Festival was quite literally a bombshell to those involved in film in Canada. Canadian television has a bit of locally made drama but again I feel the quality and quantity is greater in Canada.

With such a lengthy visit, it would be impossible to summarise everything I learnt in a couple of thousand words. Rather than tackle all...
aspects of Canadian theatre, I think it better in this article to confine myself to the Canadian playwrights.

An enormous and envious degree of help is offered to new and established playwrights throughout Canada. In Vancouver, there is an energetic organisation, The New Play Centre, which starting from scratch on $500 a few years ago, now has a grant of approximately $80,000. New play scripts are read and from these readings some are chosen to be workshopped and from these workshops a small number are chosen to be put into full scale production. All these activities involve professional actors.

A great number of theatres throughout the country offer workshops, play readings and annual writer in residence programmes. Some theatres now have full time dramatists whose essential activity is to read new play scripts and assist playwrights. Remarkably, there are twenty publishing houses which print Canadian play scripts. Some of these are very small operations but a number are large publishing concerns.

The Playwrights’ Co-operative in Toronto is possibly the largest publisher of new Canadian plays, although most runs are small and are printed by Gestetner or offset. Talonbooks in Vancouver print fiction, children’s books, poetry as well as drama but they have under their imprint the largest number of important playwrights in Canada.

Certainly, this augers well for the playwright - the assistance given and also the ability to make his plays accessible in script form. I suspect however, that the situation runs somewhat similar to that in Australia at the present time where new playwrights who established themselves in the early 70's have more chance of having their plays performed than newcomers.

Bernard Slade, the author of Same Time Next Year and a new play Tribute, playing on Broadway, is possibly the wealthiest playwright ever to come out of Canada. He has returned recently to Edmondton, having originally left Canada in the early 60's when he said “the people in charge do not care what got put on as long as attendance was good. The theatres were mainly run by non Canadians who did not take my work, or any Canadian work seriously. I had to get out or give up writing.” “Things have not changed basically for the playwright up here”, Slade observed on his recent visit. “Canadian plays are getting done, but always in little theatres, with little budgets, to little audiences because they can only afford a little advertising. If I had submitted Same Time Next Year to a Canadian Regional Theatre, the play would still be sitting in somebody's drawer”.

I believe that Bernard Slade is being unduly pessimistic and negative about the situation. Certainly no Canadian playwright resident in Canada can earn the money he now commands.

Certainly he is correct that most Canadian plays seem to be performed in theatres whose size prohibits them from being profitable. A large number of professional companies throughout Canada seem to play in houses seating between 150-250 - but as in Australia, Canadian plays find an enthusiastic audience. Most of the larger companies, the equivalent of our State Regional Companies make only token gestures to Canadian plays and often these are only to be seen in the small auditoriums connected to these regional companies, a situation not unknown in Australia.

So despite my comparatively lengthy visit to Canada of more than thirty days which took me to seven major cities, there were few Canadian plays to be seen. Some companies had yet to begin their season and others had not scheduled a Canadian play at the time I was there. From around twenty four visits to the theatre, I would have seen six Canadian works, all of which were interesting, but none were by Canadian playwrights I wanted to see in performance.

To give you some idea of the variety of Canadian playwriting, let me list a few of them.

Michel Tremblay, at 36, is the most important playwright in Quebec, where he is regarded by some as a cultural hero. To date he has written ten plays nearly all of them translated into English. His plays have been performed across Canada and the US and one, Les belles Soeurs was performed in Paris, France. Tremblay's impact is partly due to his compassionate characterisation and partly because he introduced 'joual' to the stage. 'Joual' is the rural and street language of Quebec and Tremblay's use of this language was intended to mean the rejection of French cultural domination of literature and theatre. Tremblay has said ‘I know what I want in the theatre. I want real political theatre, but I know political theatre is dull, so I write fables’.

David Fennario has just topped 30, and in my reckoning has written only four plays of which On The Job strikes me as the most important. Set in the shipping room of a Montreal dress factory, the workers get drunk and decide to go on strike. Books In Canada has described his dialogue as “rough, sweaty, prickly” and Globe and Mail has written “Fennario's books are like he is, fists up, full of fighting back and street fights against the law, against the boss”.

While these two playwrights contrast well with each other, three other playwrights amply demonstrate the breadth of subject matter the Canadian playwright is now tackling.

George F Walker, 30, has turned out many plays, a number of them set far from Canada, and far from reality. Baghdad Saloon numbers amongst its characters Gerrtrude Stein, Doc Holiday, Henry Miller and Aladdin, while Beyond Mozambique is set on the porch of a decaying, colonial house in the midst of Mozambique. The characters - an ex Nazi doctor, his murderous assistant, a porno movie star, a Royal Canadian Mountie, a junkie priest and a Chekov-obsessed Russian, act out real and imagined roles as the chaos of the surrounding jungle gradually engulfs them. One of Walker's essential themes, certainly in both these plays, is the mythology of time as it affects the legends and heroes of a dying culture.

Also far removed from any realistic form is Hrant Alianak. Less than 30, he was born in Khartoum, Sudan, of Armenian parents. He has been in Canada since the late 60's and has written a number of plays. A movie fan for most of his life, he describes his plays as 'shorts' or 'full length features'. I was fortunate to see one of his plays Lucky Strike, which had the working title of Violence at the Alhambra. Imagine a B Grade movie about a man and his girl on the run in Algiers, as well imagine every take of every shot has been edited into this film. Actions are repeated, what conversation there is is remarkable for its banality - true B Grade stuff - and the entire work performed with split second timing to excruciatingly loud B Grade movie music. I do not think that we will be seeing this play, or any of Alianak's, until he can be persuaded to come to Australia to stage one of his works. Lucky Strike was two years in preparation.

Lastly, amongst those Canadian playwrights we should see in Australia, is George Riga, whose play, The Ecstasy of Rita Joe written in 1967, is considered as basic to the theatre revolution in Canada as Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll is to Australia. Rita Joe deals with a native Indian girl, who leaves the reservation for the city, where she dies young as a prostitute, victim of white man's violence and his paternalistic attitude towards native people. The Ecstasy of Rita Joe had a major influence in awakening consciousness of the 'native problem' both for whites and the native people themselves. Riga has a number of plays to his credit.

What seems especially popular in Canada, certainly in comparison with Australia, are documentary style plays created by a Company.

These were, in the first instance, made popular by Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille. A piece which has been well received in a number of centres in Canada is The Farm Show. The Passe Muraille Company spent a summer in a farming region near Clinton, Ontario, collecting material for this play which, as the title suggests, portrays rural people and their lives.

Alberta's Theatre Network has been especially active in this field. Hard Hats and Stolen Hearts, an examination of the economic boom in the oil rich Tar Sands of Alberta, had a successful season in New York. Two Miles Off, another of their works, shows the decline of the traditional rural economy.

Paper Wheat was the only one of these collective pieces that I saw. It was having a box office success at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. Paper Wheat tells of the early settlers and the formation of Wheat Co-operatives by the farmers to oppose brokers who had grown rich playing the wheat market. Paper Wheat was a joyous evening in the theatre. Well played by a small group of actors, in fact the original actors who had conceived the show a year ago, it told its story in short scenes with songs, dancing and even a remarkable piece of juggling - the most apt demonstration I have ever seen of stock market
operations.

Before I left, Currency Press asked me to check on play publishing in Canada. Already, Currency has an agreement with New Zealand where Currency are represented in New Zealand and handles New Zealand plays in Australia. Currency were considering a similar reciprocal arrangement with a Canadian publisher. I don’t think it’s for me to make any announcements about this but negotiations are in progress and it is possible that Currency play scripts will be widely available throughout North America, and Australia will be able to read the texts of some of the fine plays coming out of Canada and hopefully see some of them produced. Wherever I went in Canada, I broached with directors and administrators and playwrights the idea that there should be an exchange scheme between Australia and Canada. The basis of my suggestion was that, should Canadian companies want to include a particular Australian play in their season, the playwright and an Australian director could be made available to them and of course, the same would operate in Australia with a Canadian director and playwright coming out to an Australian theatre. This idea was enthusiastically received without hesitation by all in Canada as well as by those Australian directors I have been able to speak to in the short time I was back in Sydney. It is not a scheme which I can see becoming operational immediately. A source of funds in Australia will have to be secured and although the Canada Council and Canadian External Affairs applaud the idea, we will have to be sure that funds will also be available in Canada. It will take time but it certainly is a more economical way of exchanging our theatre heritage than transporting large companies backwards and forwards across the Pacific.

In the next five years I am sure we will see an increasing exchange between Canada and Australia. I am only one of several Australians who have recently been over there. John Romeril and Leonard Radic were also in Canada in 1978 and the year before, John Cameron of the Australia Council visited that country. Several copies of Theatre Australia which I took with me were decidedly ‘dog eared’ by the end of the tour. They had passed through so many hands eager to learn further of what’s happening in Australia. In fact, Australian plays are already beginning to penetrate Canada. The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin was performed by the Vancouver Playhouse towards the end of 1978. John Romeril’s The Floating World is due for a production by the National Art Centre, Canada’s national theatre company, in Ottawa in the first half of 1979.

Dear Sir,

In the Theatre Australia review of The Stage Company’s production of Pino Bosi’s Windows, during the Adelaide Italian Festival, you allowed a very serious error to occur: your critic wrote of it as “an amateur production”.

The Stage Company is a fully-professional alternative theatre force in Adelaide, and is recognised as such throughout Australian theatre. Our performers are all members of Equity.

We have been praised in many quarters for our continual struggle to survive in the difficult area of alternative theatre. Please do not make the battle harder by allowing Theatre Australia to review that we are less than professional in either our philosophies, our practices or our staffing.

Mr Mekendry, the critic concerned, without wishing to suggest are less than professional in either their philosophies or practices that to his knowledge no one in the Stage Company is in fact receiving any salary for productions up to this time.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Pullan
Hon. Secretary
The Stage Company
Adelaide

Dear Sir,

May I make it clear that Mr L.L. Davies’ reference to an attack upon a handicapped child in his letter published in your February issue has no connection with any work ever published by my company, including the plays The Tatty Hollow Story and The Chapel Perilous by Dorothy Hewett.

Yours,

Philip Parsons
Chairman
Currency Press

Dear Sir,

As a professional journalist I dissociate myself from the last two paragraphs of a report in your column “Quotes and Queries” (January, 1979) headed “Queensland Query”.

Although the paragraphs appear with my report under my name, I did not write them and have no knowledge who did. I therefore accept no responsibility for the validity and accuracy of those last two paragraphs. I do not base my reporting on rumours and unsourced and unconfirmed accusations as I find both an amateur and dangerous practice.

Yours sincerely,

Mona Brand
Potts Point

Perhaps the editors of this publication should rename the column “Misquotes and Queries” to match the dubious nature of its content.

Yours truly

Geoff Spencer
Newmarket, Qld.

Dear Sir,

I have read with interest Alanna Maclean’s letter disagreeing with some details of my account of the events associated with Sydney New Theatre’s 22nd July 1936 performance at the Savoy Theatre of the anti-Nazi play, Till the Day I Die.

Not having been present myself I cannot vouch for the exact nature of the police participation in the incident. The main sources for my October and November 1978 articles were documents from the New Theatre annals written some years ago and based on eye witness accounts. As is well known, there are often several versions of emotionally charged events, especially after the passage of some years. I welcome Alanna Maclean’s letter and thank her for providing another view.

Yet another was the Workers’ Weekly report that at the end of Scene I the audience was told that the presentation was being constantly interrupted by the police behind the stage, and the question was put, “Shall we continue and face the consequences?” whereupon the answer was given in shouts of “Yes, carry on!” Jerome Levy who was in the audience says today that he definitely remembers seeing police on the stage but can’t now recall the nature of their “entrance.”

Only a wide sample of all the reminiscences would help to recreate the actual scene. If I had been writing a longer, fuller work with more time to spare I could have sought personal interviews with people involved in this and other events mentioned in my articles.

However, in the Savoy case the essence of the matter is that under pressure from the Nazi German consul of the day, the N.S.W. Attorney General gave New Theatre only three hours notice that the performance must not take place and warned of the serious penalties involved. Alanna Maclean’s interesting story about her mother replacing a nervous actress at the last minute is not only further testimony of the tense atmosphere in the theatre engendered by the ban and the presence of the police, but also serves to emphasise the courage of the whole company whose members were risking prosecution in their stand against political censorship and their defence of an anti-Nazi play.

Yours sincerely,

Mona Brand
Potts Point

TA aplogises to Geoff Spencer for the unfortunate error of printing his article without distinguishing it from the editorial comment which followed.
Despite the occasional example of outstanding children's theatre in Australia, the general impression people have is that it is: "shallow", "sugary", "too earnest", "unadventurous", "poorly executed", "didactic", "low status", "aesthetically unsatisfying".¹

I believe there are explicable social and historical reasons for this, and that because of the kind of social changes which have occurred over the past forty years, we can expect to see a considerable metamorphosis in the near future.

A marked characteristic of children's theatre — notable for its absence in "adult" theatre — is the domination by women and educationists. (This is not only an Australian feature but obvious in other countries.)² The clustering of women, children and educationists in the one field has produced the kind of work which elicits the responses above. A brief look backwards might explain, to a certain extent, why children's theatre has developed in the way it has; and therefore where it might go in the future.

Political, social and economic changes in the means of production — advanced by the onset of the Industrial Revolution and more or less crystallised by the end of the 19th Century — led to the creation of a new social category: "youth". The introduction of mass education outside the house meant, amongst other things, that children and formal or organised education were irrevocably bound together (in place, time and ideology)

- middle class women were freed to work outside the house
- money was made available for the moral, social and aesthetic welfare of children
- men moved right away from the domestic sphere, including child-rearing, leaving it almost entirely to women
- scientific research began to examine human development, with "child psychology" becoming a recognised discipline by 1880.³

As a result of these changes, some middle-class women were able to move from the traditional domestic sphere into the ("real") world of work. Nevertheless, they moved into areas which were congruent with their so-called 'natural' role of nurturing, service, minding, child-care. Many moved into teaching, because they themselves had a reasonable education for the times. This socialisation of women's domestic function has had profound effects which are being felt now, and are particularly obvious in children's theatre. For as long as women were, and men weren't, working in a traditional yet public sphere (such as education, welfare, arts, health), that sphere would be determined by a 'female' approach.

"It is not so much a matter of a particular gender dominating a particular field, but rather how that gender sees its function. For when women moved into paid education and the arts, they carried on their traditional roles as guardians and transmitters of moral and cultural values. This role requires and propagates a certain conservatism and passivity (not found in the male-dominated 'adult' arts world, as befits their conditioning). As Elizabeth Janeway points out, "the self-sustaining momentum of a role makes it a conservative force, but as long as it contains any social utility it will also be a shaping force"."⁴ As creators of children's theatre, women will portray their view of the world, using it as they use all other media within the "child-care" role for the teaching of moral and social values. Why women, as a general rule, should fit into this role is, of course, dependent upon the social and economic structures of western society. Patricia Spacks⁵ gives a fine summary of the attitudes of 19th Century educated women towards the problems and limitations of their sex, which in turn, determined their creative imagination (and it is easy to trace these characteristics in woman-created children's theatre pieces). Spacks says, that such women "perceive some of the injustices of women's position yet nonetheless voluntarily relinquish their claim to a life of independence ... the demands of society become less real than the needs of other people ... they demonstrate that loving is a vocation more demanding than mill owning ... Laboring in her vocation, she transforms limitation into moral opportunity, transcending indignation at her lot". Women who are taught to believe in the, primacy of feeling and their dependency on men teach that to children, and traditionally any form of tale telling (such as children's theatre) becomes a good vehicle. Having let high hopes and ambitions go, women teach by a code which is assumed to be "typically feminine": propriety, obedience, decorum, cleanliness, physical, and often, mental passivity. Men generally abrogate that role to women for several reasons — the chief of which is that women are supposed to be better creators for children, are supposed to know what children want, need or like, because of their close observation and long association with them. This is not a determining factor in male creativity, which draws inspiration from the world around (the social world) and not exclusively from the domestic sphere. Children's literature has some of the same traits and it is chastening, if divergent, to note that of writers for adults most women have written at least one children's book; most men have never done so.

Bearing in mind women's role, which is essentially powerless, and noting that children are equally powerless, explains in part why few men find children's theatre an attractive field of work. If the creators, presenters and producers of theatre for young people are predominantly female, then it is no wonder that the area in which they work is accorded the same status that they are, particularly when that low status is coupled with the low status of children contingent also upon their lack of earning
Children’s Theatre

power. After all, it is by money that our society assesses power. Men, particularly, do not willingly flock to areas that are powerless unless they are really dedicated (and more of that later, too). Complicating the whole thing, and related to traditional women’s role, is the fact that so many women for so long have been denied the training and experience in (‘adult’) theatre that men have had, particularly in key areas such as directing and designing. Is it any wonder then that people describe woman-dominated children’s theatre as “amateur” (thus blaming the victims)?

Accepting, then, that women as creators of arts for children are most likely to work in “education”, it is important to look at the confluence of education and young people’s performing arts. It would seem that “education” has compounded some of the conservatism, passiveness and moral tone brought to children’s theatre but added a new element to it: that of blindness. Education is perceived by its practitioners as much of a tool of social control as women have been seen. Stories, playlets, dramatisations and eventually full scale productions for or by children, have normally been seen as part of children’s “education” (either formal or informal), and stories, playlets, dramatisations either inside or outside the school have had a didactism, a moral use, incorporated in them. Increasingly, education has become the prime axis for the development of young people’s arts. The ramifications of that are significant, particularly if one examines the contradictions in educational change and change in children’s theatre. For example, on the one hand, it has been the progressives in education (particularly those educated in the late 60s), rather than the theatre world, who have drawn attention to sexism, racism and classism in cultural products for young people. On the other hand, the necessity of the economically powerless children’s theatre to attract education funds to keep themselves alive has had some disastrous effects. The progressive educationists in the arts (or vice versa) have led to the creation of “youth theatre” and “theatre in education”. Though originally born in Britain by a world of dissatisfaction theatre people, in Australia TIE work is clearly the property of education as much as education is TIE’s market. The dissatisfaction of the originators of TIE work could be put down to a justifiable rage at the pointlessness of mindless theatre productions and the notions such productions reinforce. However, it can be argued that the wholesale ditching of tales, fables and some classics also means the wholesale ditching of imagery and symbolism (that mythopoeic element that makes art “art”). If one refuses to put witches into a children’s play and the argument with all the adjectives listed at the beginning of this article.

So where’s the great hope for the future? The seeds are in several things. Firstly, the changing role of women might mean all kinds of reforms: sexists practices slowly die away, women will be better trained (in both theatre and education), they will take their rightful place in the social world as men might in the domestic one. Old myths will die out in consequence, but new symbols and images serving some of the old function (of reducing the unintelligible to the intelligible; of displaying, as Pierre Maranda puts it, “the structured, predominantly culture-specific, and shared, semantic systems which enable the members of a culture area to understand each other”). The “progressive” influence might sharpen people’s consciousness of the intolerability of some aspects of bourgeois culture, which can only lead to an intellectually provocative approach to art as a way of interpreting and appreciating the world. I take specific encouragement from perhaps Australia’s greatest youth director, Helmut Bakaitis, when he talks of the need for “a process which aims to remythologise the material of experience”, with an awareness of the politics of culture. Or from the new children’s literature, where people like Tomi Ungerer, William Mayne, Alan Garner are producing significant work. Thus, in the causes of the problems of children’s theatre the hope for the future can be perceived.

FOOTNOTES:
1. These descriptions were gathered in a random sampling of people who work in various jobs, including theatre.
2. The international children’s theatre association, ASSITEJ, is dominated by women, as is the American Children’s Theatre Association. In no significant history treatise (except perhaps one on nursing) would there be such an oligarchy of women as appears in Nellie McCaslin’s History of Children’s Theatre In The US. Furthermore, I believe this is because English-speaking countries led the vanguard of capitalism.
3. Pestalozzi, Tiedemann, Froebel, Tain, Darwin, Preyer and Hall published between 1787-1882 a great deal of work in which child development is presented as a significant phase of human survival, forming the basis of modern child psychology.
5. Spacks, Patricia: The Female Imagination (Discus/Avon, 1975)
6. Children’s theatre, unlike Broadway, was not affected by the Depression — but in fact thrived in the US. This surely proves the isolation of women and children from primary economic movements.
7. The recent Australia Council/ Schools Commission Study of Education In The Arts is a manifestation of the now highly formalised links between children’s arts and education.
Dance Umbrella's and Dance Festivals can often be very unpredictable ventures, for an audience especially. One can keep on going to them and being continually disappointed by the legions of half talents and non talents that insist on parading their wares, and then, very occasionally, one can discover something that is fresh, alive and original, something that makes all the disappointment worthwhile.

Ballet '78 last year and the Dance Umbrella at the Seymour Centre that followed it were almost devoid of originality, style or real choreographic invention.

However the Dance Week presented at the Sydney Town Hall as part of the Festival of Sydney was such an eye opener that personally I think serious consideration should be given to including such companies or groups as the One Extra Dance Company, the Dance Exchange and the Contemporary Dance Theatre (from Queensland) in the next Ballet Festival, so as not only to cover a wider spectrum of dance and introduce a more or less captive audience into the divergent strains of the art form, but to inject some new blood into the venture as a whole.

State and National companies at Ballet Festivals, by their very structure, tend to be terribly careful about what they put on at these junctures, but these smaller groups have less to lose by disapproval and can therefore just be their uncompromising selves.

Each of these groups have a definite character, each, however democratic their structure, reflect the personalities of their directors and prime movers.

Tai Kai Chan, as director of the One Extra Dance Company is a man of both the dance and the theatre. Dance has always been theatre of course, but for him and his company the dance as such is subservient to the theme, the story and the drama. For Russell Dumas and Nanette Hassall, directors and core members of the Dance Exchange, the emphasis is uncompromisingly on the structure, form and methodology of dance as such and in isolation.

These two groups are poles apart and for the Dance Week, at least, stood as the two main streams of choreographic thinking, the other companies including the Melbourne State Dance Theatre and the Dance company took their stand within those parameters accordingly.

Chan's most fascinating and engrossing work to date as far as I am concerned is Family Portrait. In more ways than one it is similar to John Hopkins' famous TV series Talking to a Stranger. As the work progresses, one gradually sees and senses the predicament and the tangle from all viewpoints, that of the daughter, the father and finally, the mother. Family Portrait could be said to be an encapsulation of the difficulties of a migrant family adjusting to the different social mores of a new society, it could also be a discreet look at the problems of age, youth, alienation, lack of communication and the systematic breakup of a marriage or the gradual and painful process of maturation.

There is no “dancing” in Family Portrait, it is all gesture, but gesture pared down to the essentials as in Kabuki or Noh, pared down so that you are caught up in a single movement of an arm, the spacial deployment of bodies and the different qualities of a walk or a look.

There are small things that strike you like a hammer blow. The repeated way in which the mother repulses the daughter when she tries to interrupt the beating of a cake mixture; the way the mother allows her husband his tantrums but stops him short of smashing the furniture; the abrupt shift to another chair when he tries to make it up to her; or how he is allowed to go into a slow collapse to the floor, ignored by everyone else at the party.

There is some vigorous movement for the young boys and the daughter, and a lovely duet that presumably leads to the marriage, where gradually the bottom falls out of the movement and the girl is left alone, to be comforted by her mother who has been through it all herself.

It's a pretty despairing piece of work but it remains in the mind hauntingly, not merely for the economy and force of its language and construction but for the gripping portrayal it gets from its performers.

There were other works on the programme that had their dancers devouring the space around them but which added up to very little, whereas Family Portrait with its carefully considered and calculated sips of movement far outshone them. It shows a keen analytical intelligence at work, an intelligence that knows what not to use as well of what to employ.

The rest of the pieces in the One Extra's

Peter Lucas, Lyn Hurst and Janet Goldsmith in the Contemporary Dance Theatre's Fitters and Turners.
Theatre Australia March 1979

Dance performance were not as gripping or as harrowing as Family Portrait and God knows, no one would want them to be, but somehow even the different emotional states and choreographic landscapes of the other works seemed forced and overly "invented".

2 Women, using traditional Chinese music and a couple of females dressed in what looked like black silk pyjamas, just fell apart after an interesting beginning, and degenerated into what looked like a victory dance of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Khymier Rouge. Disjointed, and bumpy, its oriental inflections sat uneasily on top of a very run of the mill concept of athletic dance.

Christine Kohtgi gave us that ballet of hers again set to yet another piece of Michael Carlos music. Doodie had a lot of promise but it just exhausted itself by its own length and by too many bits and pieces shoved into it, unprepared for and undeveloped, just to pad the thing out. In the end it just seemed to forget what it was it was trying to say.

The Melbourne State Dance Theatre, directed by Ron Bekker and minimally supported by the funding bodies, showed a great deal of enterprise in its repertoire, garnering a fascinating collection of early works by Bekker, Don Askar and Graeme Murphy among others.

Mr Bekker’s works, despite the long spell about them given by the choreographer before their performance, never rose above apprentic level. Song for Joy, for example had its two protagonists wending and swinging their way through some basic classical ballet formulations, and Eden showed us the floor-ridden, grooping side of “modern dance” so beloved of John Butler, who once upon a time created a ballet called After Eden.

Graeme Murphy’s early piece Tableaux was interesting in that it showed the early thumbprints of his style without the fussiness and affectation that sometimes mars his work these days. It had all the folding, undulating and odd configurations that we have come to know and sometimes love, but early on it was apparent that Murphy seemed trapped by a habit of finding new forms just for their own sake, probably symptomatic of a choreographer trying his hand at anything and discovering for himself just what can be done. Be that as it may, Tableaux is at times more lapidary and manipulative than necessary.

The other work presented by the Melbourne State Dance Theatre was Don Askers’ Between the Stairs. This is yet another (or I should say earlier) foray into the ideas and concepts of trendy anthropologist Levi Strauss. It is stuffed full of ideas about social makeup and the role, place, significance and meaning of the individual within that society. All of which is not to say that such questions are not ripe for theatrical analysis, they are, but I doubt that dance as a medium can be very penetrating or cogent in dealing with such questions.

For all its intentions, Between the Stairs falls into cliches of mass movement with people down on all fours to simulate Early Man (there go those capitalis again), a small dutet to mitigate the general havoc with a moment of love and caring that looks terribly old fashioned despite its surroundings and a general melée at the end with the Individual left alone. For all the invention of the choreography (and it is quite estimable) it is all put at the service of a bland, simple minded and superficial theme so that the total effect comes close to nothing at all.

Something very likely could be said about nearly all of the works presented by the ad hoc Sydney based dance group known as Busy Bodies.

There was something called Vegetables created by one Zelda Zucchini that even a mentality deft child of four would find derive and a momentarily monotonous piece of “dance theatre” called Savage Summer based on Tennessee Williams’ Suddenly Last Summer and choreographed by Geoffrey Chichero.

Now, given the fact that even acted performances of the play have seldom made any sense of it, to present the play in terms of dance is a total non starter. The play is for all intents and purposes about varying states of mind, almost impossible to transpose into dance terms unless one is an Ashton or Robbins. But to go even further and try some Martha Graham type grandiosity on the world, surrounding it with suits, costumes, mood music and angushed glances looks to me perniciously close to a theatrical death wish. Well, Savage Summer died very early on in the piece. It can be taken almost as a rule in dance that the more grand the staging, the more emotive the music and the more obscure the presentation the less interesting or inventive will be the choreographer as such. There was just too much in it, most of it unconnected and too much of it “felt” than thought about. As I have said before, it just doesn’t work to chuck a packet of Rinso into a cake mixture just because you “feel” it, there has to be some concern over the recipe as a whole and the final product. There was very little thought in Savage Summer and it emerged a turgid mess accordingly.

One work by Busy Bodies that came near to saving their reputation was Primavera by Norman Hall and set to the first part of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring.

Despite some hoary old mannerisms in construction, the work flowed easily and dramatically. It was also refreshing in that it showed that the Rite doesn’t necessarily need huge masses of thrashing dancers to make it work; in Hall’s version it was merely a love duet cum battle between two women. Knife-edged, cumulative and mesmerising Primavera was danced with excellent association and sensible pacing by Belinda Mitchell and Sandra Griffin.

It was gradually swamped by Stravinsky’s epoch making score, of course, but then nearly all versions of the ballet always have been.

However, there was one highlight in the season (apart from the Dance Company and Dance Exchange, more of which next issue) and that was the appearance of the Contemporary Dance Theatre (from Queensland). Peter Lucas, the solitary male in the company and something of a guiding light instances the role of Russell Dumas that sometimes laboratory ridden man of the New Dance in showing the CDT new ways and forms in which to move, and this could be said to be the raison d’etre of the company, it is concerned with “moving” not “dancing”.

This little concept is a dangerous one in untutored hands because if one follows its reasoning to the very end, one would see the abolition of all dance companies and the upsurge in the entire society of a deeper comprehension of moving. Dance would cease to be an art form and more a basic component of life. As it is the New Dance throws audiences uncomfortably back on themselves forcing them to associate objects, spaces and movements in their own mind.

It is a trend in art that eschews theatres and establishments and is more comfortable in barns, church halls and city squares. It is also a trend that dares people to dislike it. A lot of them do and consequently the New Dance is very much a minority interest, but is apparently very happy being such. Its myriad splinter groups and solitary prophets view their efforts with a zealotry approaching that of the lunatic fringe religious groups. Anyway, more of this deep stuff into the next issue.

The CDT attitude is not as total as that of the Dance Exchange but is very close, there is however an unburnt hole hidden away there in the reeds. Probably the most representative piece in the CDT repertoire (that I know of at present) is Shift Work, formulated for the company by Russell Dumas with the assistance of seven American New Dance choreographers.

Each of these contributed a short phrase of five “counts” each, a count being an approximation of a dance phrase or enchainment within a certain time span in the old classical sense. These counts are mutated and permuted throughout the dance and between the dancers not in the “indeterminate” manner of Cunningham but in an almost severely straited way, each dancer having to be aware of and dependant on the other.

What it all amounts to, for the sake of argument, is an exercise in serial or aleatoric choreography. Such quantities as speed, direction, flow and relation being created by the dancers at the time, changing and shifting within itself and within each progressive performance. It is all danced in silence and takes a careful and sustained concentration from the audience to follow the idea. In the end it has the effect of a Cartesian Algebra applied to the human body in space, a theatrical X-ray applied to the very skeleton of gesture, placement and form.

It is almost beyond the ken of literary analysis of course, what can probably be supplied is a bit of background information, a navigation chart if you will, but with this form of dance, probably more than any other form of theatre, it is the audience that does the work.
Exciting Bolshoi, mixed Fidelio, well matured Herring

This year’s summer holiday season at the Sydney Opera House was a very low key affair all round, with four revivals out of the six programmes presented, and only one semi-new production, a concert hall version of Beethoven’s Fidelio. The most exciting and off-beat operatic experience of the first half of the season was provided by the four concerts, in part semi-staged, by seven singing stars of the Bolshoi Opera performing excerpts from a fascinating array of Russian operas, most of them all but unknown outside the Soviet Union.

This was a genuinely exciting, genuinely offbeat evening in largely unfamiliar operatic company. Many of the voices were far from great, as was much of the music; and there was a rather dour, humourless sameness of mood about it all which could only reinforce the popular image of the somewhat drab and colourless Slav. But there was a skilful mixture of evening-gown or white-tie-and-tails concertising with semi-staged scenes — in costume, that is, with appropriate stage action and a modicum of easily portable props, and sometimes a projection on an overhanging screen to reinforce the mood of the moment.

Russian, understandably, being a closed book to most Western opera singers, the demands of learning passable Italian, French and German stretching them to the limit, it is not impossible to read even what was there without the aid of a torch or the naked flame of a cigarette lighter.

The highlight of the semi-staged scenes in these concerts came right before interval, with an extensive excerpt from Act II of Borodin’s Prince Igor. Baritone Mikhail Maslov played the title role, bass Boris Morozov Igor’s captor, the Khan Koutchak, and tenor Lev Kuznetsov the smarthy tartar traitor Ovlur; all were excellent, and the music and drama flowed with sufficient clarity so the language barrier didn’t matter.

There was a mad fascination in the scene from Dargomizhsky’s The Stone Guest (a Russian setting of the Don Juan story, of course) set in a graveyard dominated by the statue of the Commendatore, where the redoubtable Don (disguised as a monk, no less) woos Donna Anna when she arrives to put flowers on her father’s grave. The music was unmemorable; probably the whole opus would be more than a little tedious, but the particular excerpt combined the allure of the exotic with the charm of the recognition of an old friend.

Inevitably, there were excerpts from Boris Godunov and Eugen Onegin, nice to hear live in their original tongue; though I found Morozov’s performance of Kutuzov’s aria from War and Peace less powerful and melodious than Neil Warren-Smith’s in the production which opened the Sydney Opera House in 1973.

I suspect the part of Kutuzov is too high for a true bass like Morozov. The young baritone Alexander Voroshilo, who sang Onegin in the two excerpts from that opera included in the first half, came back in the second to dazzle with his vocal skill and sheer showmanship in a solo bracket of three arias; in my book he, and Morozov and the mezzo-soprano Nina Terentieva, who sang a marvellous pair of arias by Glinka and Mussorgsky near the end of the evening, were the most consistently rewarding of these Russians to listen to.

Appropriately, perhaps, the concert concluded with a hauntingly beautiful duet from Tchaikovsky’s Iolanta, sung by Kuznetsov and soprano Nina Fomina. Excerpts from no less than six of Tchaikovsky’s ten operas were heard in this concert, collectively presenting an important side of his musical personality much more effectively than it is usually heard in the West.

One must also give a good deal of the credit for the success of this evening to the producer, Oleg Moralev, who kept things moving

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Russian also being one of the most intricately musical of languages, full of marvellously liquid vowels and muted, non-percussive consonants, it was a singularly melodic if slightly unnerving experience to sit through an entire evening of glimpses, as it were, into slightly exotic musical terrain rendered all but surreal because of one’s utter incompetence to fathom their precise meaning. Even totally monolingual opera-lovers must come, over a few years of performance-going, to comprehend (if only subliminally) a good many snippets of German, French and Italian; and it is a particular pity that those who attended these concerts, deprived even of such rudimentary aids to understanding, were not given more adequate explanatory material in the printed programme.

Ideally, of course, they should have had bilingual texts of each excerpt; as it was, they got only at best a brief summary of the situation and stage action, and sometimes they didn’t even get that. And to make it worse, the house lighting level was so low between items it was impossible to read even what was there without the aid of a torch or the naked flame of a cigarette lighter.

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Rhonda Bruce (Miss Wordswort), John German (Vicar) and Elizabeth Fretwell (Lady Billows) in the AO’s Albert Herring.

Photo: Branco Gaica.

Galina Kalinina and Lev Kuznetsov in “Stars of the Bolshoi Opera”.

Photo: Branco Gaica.
smoothly and efficiently so that what was indeed a long night in the theatre seldom seemed so. And of course conductor Fuat Mansurov, who coaxed some very authentic seeming Russian sounds from the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, and the orchestra itself for responding to him and the Bolshoi singers with evident enthusiasm.

The concert hall Fidelio, produced by Bernd Benthaak and designed by Allan Lees, was a very mixed bag indeed; one of those disconcerting nights in the theatre when one is alternatively ecstatic and despondent, appalled and electrified. The opening performance was exceedingly untidy as to orchestral detail; things were musically worlds better by the time I returned to hear the next last one.

I still have a nagging worry about Carlo Felice Cillario as a conductor of such a deeply Germanic work as Fidelio, just as I have considerable reservations about the work itself. Seen as a blatantly political tract about freedom and tyranny, it makes perfect sense; as a dramatic entity, or a story about the triumph of marital devotion and fidelity over evil, it is a good deal more worrying. The emotions and the music are remote and heroic, and almost sexless.

Properly, according to Beethoven’s original Fidelio, the entire first act in this production takes place in the prison courtyard (it was Mahler who divided it into the two scenes which are more customarily seen on stage today). Soldiers ominously pace the bulwarks of the concert hall set throughout the domestic comings and goings which monopolise the first scene; the domestic warmth of Rocco’s kitchen is replaced by a vast, forbidding place adorned by what are apparently whipping posts equipped with dangling blood stained manacles which Marzelline is required to scrub with a stiff brush at one particularly ludicrous stage of the proceedings.

The emergence of the prisoners has less dramatic effect than I would have thought possible: one of the great dramatic moments in all opera is bumbled away, with some of the prisoners shambling out of a gawping hole in the steps centre stage as if attending a stagehands’ picnic and others letting themselves out through two obviously unsecured manhole covers further downstage. Surely the Pizarro of the opera would have had the scalp, if not the very head itself, of any jailer irresponsible enough to be so lax on security.

The dungeon scene is more effective as to staging, though Rocco really should not be required to dig a hole with a pick in an obviously wooden stage floor in full view of the audience; far better to put him behind some kind of...
barrier, as was done in the last production, so he can credibly appear to be actually digging a grave.

But the musical rewards of the final scene swept away just about all one's reservations about this Fidelio. Even on opening night, it was very good; by the end of the season, it was spine-tingling. Both the chorus and the orchestra, reveling in the open acoustic of the concert hall, were making super-abundance of sound of an unswerving musicality; never before have I heard them perform better as a musical team.

The soloists were largely new, this season, to Australian Opera Fidelio performances. Except for Donald Shanks! Rocco (even more magnificent than before), John Shaw's Pizarro (in good form) and Robert Allman's Don Fernando (in superb form), I had not seen any of them in the relevant roles before.

Anson Austin was an excellent Jacquino, and Glenys Fowles an equally excellent Marzelline. It is hard to accept such a deeply feminine woman as Marilyn Richardson in a pants role such as Fidelio's Leonore, and the part does not really suit her vocally either, but she forced me into a willing suspension of disbelief as the evening progressed and she gradually revealed the remarkable inner strength of the character she was portraying.

And Donald Smith, making his debut as Florestan, was rather too Italianate at opening; though the improvement in his performance during the run was quite dramatic. It was finally a far better performance than I had dared except from a tenor so rightly renowned for and steeped into a willing suspension of disbelief as the evening progressed and she gradually revealed the remarkable inner strength of the character she was portraying.

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Smith suffered heavily, in this Fidelio, from just about the only lapse in the effectiveness of William Akers' lighting: lying flat on his back with a tight-fitting costume to start with, his obviously well-fed figure could hardly pretend to be emaciated, and he looked uncannily like the stranded lobster on the beach to boot. Elsewhere the lighting, from a complex grid suspended over the performing area, was excellent — from the blood-red pools at the beginning, representing just that, to the diagonal shaft of light down the stairs to the dungeon to the final moments of celebration when the house lights came nearly up to full strength, visually drawing the audience itself right into the proceedings on stage.

This year's Albert Herring, which opened the summer season on a very low-key note, was a well-matured version of the Herring that has been in the Australian Opera repertory since the 1976 summer season, always with Graeme Ewer in the title role. Oddly enough, perhaps, the great improvement in this year's resurrection was in Ewer's performance itself.

Albert is a fiendish part, one all but impossible to cast effectively because he must have the vocal maturity to sing a big, not always easy, role, yet he be able to portray convincingly an adolescent innocent who suddenly, during the course of the opera, develops into much much more. He is all but silly to start off with, and has to survive the even sillier ordeal of his crowning as King of the May and the party which follows before he can turn into a sensible young man. He is lumbered with a particularly silly attack of the hiccups as a final indignity even after he has drunk the lemonade laced with rum that is to release his inhibitions and lead directly to his emancipation.

It takes great skill to maintain any sort of credibility of character through all this, and Ewer managed it beautifully this time round. In it, he helped no end by John Pringle's Sid; this character, and his slightly precocious girlfriend Nancy (played this year by Jennifer Smith), emerged from Ewer's performance itself.

Pringle, who was making his debut in the role, seemed to revel slightly more in the larkiness inherent in the party than Lyndon Terracini, who created the role in this production; and thus lent greater impact to the party scene by flashing the rum flask and swigging from it before lacing Albert's drink. His performance, perhaps, coupled with the greater depth of Ewer's penetration into the character of Albert, finally brought this Herring to the definite peak of its performance form to date.

Several of the caricatures were played by the same performers as before, with refinements in detail here and there. Rhonda Bruce was again Miss Wordsworth the school teacher, twitting her way through the proceedings more often than not accompanied by a fluttering flote. John Germain was a well meaning but slightly naive vicar, Robert Gard an offensive pompous mayor, Neil Warren-Smith a suitably self inflated and slightly dim policeman, Rosina Rasbeek a little more hysterical Mum Herring than before - presumably intentionally so under the guiding hand of resident producer Elke Neidhardt than under the original producer, John Cox.

Alexander McAdam was an excellent new Harry; and Heather Begg an equally effective housekeeper as Lesley Stender, if in a slightly less authoritarian way. Elizabeth Fretwell worked very hard at being an effective Lady Billows, but lacked something of the aristocratic condescension literally oozed by Nance Grant in the same role previously.

Still, it was an excellent revival of a piece whose merits grow on one with repetition, as is the case with all good works of art, and particularly opera in a slightly unfamiliar idiom such as Britten still is to many opera-goers even today. For bringing it all together once again, conductor William Reid and his small band of instrumentalists from the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra deserve the highest credit — even if Herring was a rather too low-key curtain-raiser for this year's summer holiday season at the Sydney Opera House.
A clutch of short films by Australian film makers on the subject of unemployment and the dole as they affect young people started public viewing at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative Ltd in Sydney, and I saw four of them there. They are Doled Out, Pretty Vacant Collective, colour, 23 minutes; Pay Role, Brendon Stretch, colour, 20 mins; Doledrums, Ian Allen, b and w, 13 mins; Island Shunters, Tim Woolmer, colour, 13 mins; Waiting’s Not Enough, Emmil Priebe, b and w, 20 mins and A Touch of the Terminals, Phil Bull, colour, 10 mins. The two last were not available.

I hope they all get a showing, either in cinemas or on the television screen, because they have something to say, and they say it in various tones of voice. One of the more noticeable shared qualities is the light touch, the half expressed thought, the wry comment, the glancing blow and the unfamiliar faces that may become famous. The film that comes closest to pounding a fist on the table is Doled Out, but it also has the most amateur.”

Doled Out was started as a youth project, a phrase that can cover everything from communal gardening to guitar playing. Halfway through last year a youth worker (or worker with youth) employed by the Leichhardt (a suburb of Sydney) Council and funded by the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services initiated an examination of unemployment in the area.

With the help of a subsidy offered by the Commonwealth Employment Services and a recent graduate of the Film and Television School, Gill Leahy, ten young unemployed people set about teaching other young unemployed people how to use film and cameras, sound equipment etc. Three young filmmakers came in to help and the film, as far as I can make out, was a spin off. Whether the film made by the Pretty Vacant Collective became more important than the Collective’s examination (the game taking over the serious business) is anybody’s guess. In any case it is an engaging, cheerful film which also happens to say a lot of things about what it is like to be young and out of work. Though, not it hardly seems necessary to say, able to offer solutions.

Pay Role is about the kind of young people who in the end, debilitated by lack of identifiable purpose, don’t mind being out of work as long as they can live fairly well and keep out of range of the police. They are operators, not quite criminal. They cannibalise each other. They are dopey, easy-going but nevertheless alert to danger from outsiders. They live on the fringe, doing a day’s modelling here and there, stealing whiskey, sitting endlessly stoned in front of a television set. Pay Role is well made, looks very good, and is a clear delineation of a certain sort of life which entails being attractive, if only in the most superficial way, and fast on your feet. As with Island Shunters, the sound recording falls off when it comes to dialogue.

Doledrums is a good, tight little story unpretentiously told in black and white with three totally believable people. The principal character is Rob, a long-haired, strongly-built youth with an acne-pitted skin who comes from the country to the city to try for a job. He turns up at a mate’s flat to the evident displeasure of the mate’s girlfriend, sleeps on the sofa, spends hours in telephone boxes applying for jobs, imagines himself with a motor bike good enough to race at Amaroo, overhears the girlfriend complaining of his presence, and takes off, when his dole cheque at last turns up on the road again. A one-track, serious, sad but not hopeless story, very well acted.

Island Shunters is a very lively, splendidly photographed film about a handful of young men working at the Darling Island railway yards in Sydney, and the truck-hauling locomotives which have to be moved, as fast as possible, over a maze of tracks. To do this the young men have to become their masters, working them as stockmen work cattle. The locos are big and dangerous. The new chum who takes the job gets a short lesson in what to do and how to do it, then joins a gang.

“Congratulations, you’re a shunter”, says the boss. “Here’s your gloves.” One of the boys remarks, “You don’t know what you’re doing, but you do it. They’ll let you break the rules to get the trains out and take no notice until something goes wrong. Then your life is on the line.”

The film conveys very well the split second timing and the risks that have to be taken on wet days as well as fine, and the musical sound track from Terry Wilson sounds fine for action that is always exciting and often funny.
Money Movers — Bloody but worthy.

The Money Movers has a lot going for it — a good well-knit story, accurate casting, pace, authentic humour of the wry, destructive kind practised so expertly by Australians, several notable performances from unexpected sources and an evocative soundtrack.

It also has too much blood. The sight of the first almost eviscerated human carcass is usefully shocking. But as the film nears its conclusion in a welter of battling bodies so much blood is spurtting across the screen and offered in close-up as to induce first repugnance, then boredom and then a kind of reluctant amusement. This is the artistically damaging result of, no pun intended, overkill.

You have only to sit in an audience splitting its sides at a kung fu film, because the action is such a parody of aggression and defence, to realise that audiences may do the same during the final third of The Money Movers. When the blood is not actually being spilt (or the bones being crunched together) the film, scripted and directed by Bruce Beresford and produced by Matt Carroll for the South Australian Film Corporation with additional financial support from the NSW Film Corporation, is consistently interesting. It is about the planning, development and carrying out of a $20 million bank robbery by people most qualified to do it — the staff of a security organisation.

The plot is based on a novel of the same name by Devon Minchin, who was for a long time head of his own industrial security company. So the detail is right, and it is the detail of the lifting of $20 million in notes which makes the film so fascinating. The other plus, and a remarkable plus it is, is the director's control of these details. The action is necessarily carried out in claustrophobic, cluttered surroundings, and the actors hardly ever get out of this low-ceilinged, steel-doored set. Even when the company drivers are out on the road the feeling of large, strong bodies confined in tight uniforms garnished with guns and bunches of keys and further encased in mobile hot metal persists, effectively rasping the nerves.

Bruce Beresford is a director who has proved he can do many things well. He may not always like what he has to put his hand to, but the record is extraordinary — two Bazza Mackenzie films, Don's Party, The Getting of Wisdom, now The Money Movers, with Breaker Morant said to be next up. His special talent seems to be for handling packs, either packs of ockers, packs of boozy guests, packs of schoolgirls with the killer instinct or packs of amateur and professional criminals as in The Money Movers. He has a great ear for the language of special groups and a great eye for their movement. For instance, the union meetings in The Money Movers have splendid authenticity.

He is less adept with the intimate scene. In fact the relationship between Eric Jackson (Terence Donovan) and his wife (Jeanie Drinan) is only half defined and the scene in their country cottage which is meant to encapsulate this relationship is interposed arbitrarily as if the director wanted to get it out of the way as soon as possible and get on with the tomato sauce. As Mr Waterbrook said in David Copperfield, "Other things are all very well in their way, but give me blood."

He does better with an amorous encounter between Candy Raymond, a company spy, and Tony Bonner, an insurance spy.

Bruce Beresford has drawn performances from some of his veteran actors that addicts of the Crawford crime series will find it hard to believe. It must be that the talent is always there, just struggling to get out by means of a literate script and direction. Among those who astonish are Charles Tingwell (who perhaps should be allowed to forget the appellation "Bad"), Ed Devereaux and Lucky Grills, in the roles respectively of Mister Henderson the smooth crime king, Martin the ex-cop who drives for Darcy's Security, and Conway the manager of the counting house where millions of dollars are shoveled into pay envelopes before being shipped to the industrial clients.

Brian Brown, with his peculiar quality of stillness, conveying emotion and thought process without making the usual faces, and Terence Donovan occupy key roles. Others who are bloody, bold and resolute (well, certainly bloody) in a faultless cast are Ray Marshall, who calls stopwork meetings to facilitate robbery arrangements, Alan Cassell as Sammy the bent policeman with good connections in the force and out of it, and Hu Pryce as Griffiths, whose police career in Britain was clouded, we are given a couple of hints, by a touch of queerness.

As with almost all local films today, everything is technically perfect, not least the imaginative camera work and lighting of the ubiquitous Don McAlpine.

Ed Devereaux lands a punch on robber James Elliott in The Money Movers.
The Myth of the Troubadour

Roger Covell

Theatre people are as likely as anyone else, perhaps likelier, to mistake the significance and circumstances of the genre of musical art that we call troubadour song. The notion that there was a being called a troubadour who looked like a wandering minstrel and set off along the dusty roads of medieval Europe with his lute strung over his shoulder is so widespread that it may be hopeless to urge its revision. There were, no doubt, wandering minstrels and, indeed, wandering entertainers of all kinds in this period. Students of the subject assure us, however, that they were not troubadours. For that matter, the use of the word troubadour to denote a professional calling or status (as in the imaginary phrase, 'I am a troubadour') seems to have been unknown.

There was a genre of troubadour song and, later, of trouvère song. But these words were by no means used universally or consistently. We are probably more accurate in historical terms if we simply refer to the songs normally described as modern troubadour songs: merely that they must be distinguished from the makers of those songs. There is some evidence, in fact, that to call a person who was admitted to the honourable company of those who wrote troubadour songs a minstrel, a joglar or a jongleur, was as nasty an insult as could be employed.

I must say that if anyone had asked me a few years ago which professional musician of our time was likely to get this state of affairs confused I would have named Martin Best as a likely candidate. Best seemed to be trying to live the myth of the troubadour, travelling with a lute, writing songs, presenting long programmes of songs of all types and periods and talking of himself and his acquaintances as modern troubadours. Someone must have been telling him a thing or two in the meantime or, more likely, his own lively curiosity and natural musicianship have been complemented by a deeper exploration of tradition.

For whatever reason, Best's new record The Dawn of Romance (HMV CSD 3785) is one of the most satisfying and balanced introductions to troubadour and trouvère song on a single disc. I am inclined to think it may be univalued in this regard at the moment. Best has absorbed recent practice in decking out the unadorned melodies in their surviving form with instrumental preludes and interludes and in using parallel and drone harmonies. No one is in a position to say that this is exactly how the songs would have been performed; but the historical evidence, such as it is, seems to favour some such sort of bold and lively reconstruction rather than a tame settling for unaccompanied monophonic performance. Best does not go beyond the practice currently employed by the most highly regarded performers of early music.

His own solo singing has character and bite without exaggerations; and the vocal instrumental result is not only musically pleasing, a product of the natural musical good sense I mentioned earlier, but also as plausible as any other performance of this music now available. Best includes some of the better-known songmakers and songs (very few of them, however, recorded as satisfactorily as they are here) and provides excellent notes which prove, if proof is needed, that the virtues of this disc are not only musical but also a valuable mine for three centuries of European history.

The second record of the set is devoted to music from late 14th century French culture; music which reminds us in its elaboration and daring not to make the mistake of supposing that music has been proceeding on any constant evolutionary plan in the last thousand years or that the music of people in earlier centuries was necessarily simple and slow because they lived a long time ago. Quite a deal of this music was written in metrical form and using parallel and drone harmonies. Best has absorbed the recent practice in decking out the unadorned melodies in their surviving form with instrumental preludes and interludes and in using parallel and drone harmonies. No one is in a position to say that this is exactly how the songs would have been performed; but the historical evidence, such as it is, seems to favour some such sort of bold and lively reconstruction rather than a tame settling for unaccompanied monophonic performance. Best does not go beyond the practice currently employed by the most highly regarded performers of early music.

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The third disc brings us into a haven of relative order, the classical style, as it now seems, of the music written by two of the greatest masters of music. Machaut is represented here by the works of the most influential, of the subjects chosen by the writers of troubadour and trouvère song. A set of records originally produced by the late David Munrow and his Early Music Consort of London for EMI and now reissued by the World Record Club. The Art of Courtly Love, to be dealing with much the same repertory as Best has on his disc. The Munrow disc is, in fact, complementary and take up the story of courtly song in the centuries immediately following the troubadour and trouvère periods.

The set begins with a disc almost entirely devoted to the work of the 14th century composer and poet Guillaume de Machaut, who was not only a composer in the intricately wrought polyphonic style of *ars nova* but also a person who sought consciously to revive or continue the tradition of the troubadour song by writing monophonic songs in medieval forms. As if it happens, Machaut is represented here by the polyphonic pieces which seem to us now to represent 14th century room music at its most exquisite.

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(Details on page 4 )
A.C.T.

CANBERRA OPERA (47-0249)
Opera in the Schools Series

Syd. The Serpent Who Wanted To Sing by Malcolm Fox. Touring ACT primary schools March to July.

CANBERRA THEATRE (49-7600)
Canberra Theatre Trust/Adelaide Festival Centre Trust

Why Not Stay For Breakfast? by Gene Stone and Ray Cooney with Derek Nimmo and Helen Gift. 8 to 17 March.

Prospect Theatre Company/Clifford Hocking Enterprises

The English Eccentrics
The Grand Tour 20 March (plus matinee 21 March)

Smith and Smith 21 March
The Lunatic Lover and Poet 22 March (plus matinee 22 March)

PLAYHOUSE (49-7600)
Canberra Philharmonic Society

The Sound of Music by Rogers and Hammerstein. Return Season 1 to 10 March.

THEATRE 3 (47-4222)
Canberra Repertory

Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi by Pam Gems. Director, Anne Godfrey-Smith. 7 to 31 March, Wednesdays to Saturdays.

For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 49-3192.

NEW SOUTH WALES

ACTORS COMPANY (692-0689)

Othello by William Shakespeare. Phone theatre for production details.

ARTS COUNCIL OF NSW (357-6611)

The Bastard from the Bush based on Moliere; director, David Clendinning; with Michael McCaffrey, Rod Wissler, Beryl Whyte and Ray Cooney with Dereck Nimmo and Helen Gift.

ROCKS PLAYERS (531-1761)

The Kingfisher by Kenneth Ross; director, George Ogilvie with George Withers, John McCallum and Frank Thring.

Everest: Prospect at the Old Vic: Great English Eccentrics. Presented by Prospect Theatre Company with Derek Jacobi, Timothy West, Isla Blair and Julian Glover. 10-17 March.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY INTERIM PROGRAMME (699-9322)

Drama Theatre, Opera House: The Lady of the Camellias by Dumas Fils, adapted by Louis Nowra and Rex Cramphurst, with Kate Fitzpatrick, Ivar Kants, Arthur Dignam. To 24 March.

THEATRE ROYAL (231-6111)

The Bed Before Yesterday by Ben Travers; director, Linda with Rachel Roberts and Wallace Eaton. To 4 March.

An Evening with Dave Allen 5-17 March.

DEATHTRAP by Ira Levin; director Michael Blakemore; with Robyn Nevin and Denis Olsen. From 19 March.

269 PLAYHOUSE (929-6804)

Berlin to the Black Stump. John Howitt with the 680 Players. Fri and Sat only.

Belong Along Alonga. 680 Players in assoc with the 680 Drama School. Children's play Sat only 12 noon from 3 March.

For entries contact Candy Baker on 357-1200.

QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36-2344)

Anastasia by Marcelle Maurette; director, John McCallum. To 24 March.

Nightwatch by Lucille Fletcher, director, Jason Whiting. Opens 29 March.

BILLABONG BILL (Children's Theatre) by Peter Pinne and Don Battye; director, Eric Hauff. Opens 3 March.

BRISBANE ACTORS' COMPANY at Twelfth Night Theatre (52-7843)

Scapino based on Moliere; director, David Clendinning; with Michael McCaffrey, Rod Wissler, Beryl Whyte and Bony Creyton.

Prospect at the Old Vic: Great English Eccentrics. Presented by Prospect Theatre Company with Derek Jacobi, Timothy West, Isla Blair and Julian Glover. 10-17 March.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221-2777)

The Father by August Strindberg; director, Fred Wessley; with Brian Rigg and Beverley Wood. From 1 March.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212-3411)


KIRKIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92-1415)

The Jungle Show by Paul Clibb, Patrick Ward and Richmond Young.

LES CURRIE PRESENTATIONS (358-5676)

Mike Jackson, Traditional bush balladeer, infants, primary and secondary schools in NW, Hunter, W and Riverina districts.

Modern Mime Theatre: touring infants, primary and secondary schools in Sydney metropolitan area. To 23 March.

MARIAN STRENGTH THEATRE (498-3166)

The Murder Room by Jack Sharkey; director, Peter Whifflord; with Joan Bruce, Philip Hinton, Brandon Burke, Tom McCarthy, Louise Le Nay and Elaine Lee. To 24 March.

Ten Times Table by Alan Ayckbourn. From 30 March.

MARIOTTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (357-1638)

Feminine Plural: Leila Blake, Statewide tour throughout Feb. School Tours: Bandels, Alex Raymond Ainsworth, James Whiting. To 10 March.

How the Other Half Loves by Alan Ayckbourn; director, Fred Wissler and Wallace Eaton. To 4 March.

THEATRE ROYAL (221-2777)

Bedfire by Alan Ayckbourn; director, Peter Williams; with Bony Creyton, Pat McDonald, Kerry Maguire, Belinda Giblin and Gaye Poole. To 17 March.

Australian Opera: Norma by Bellini starring Joan Sutherland; producer, Sandro Sequi; conductor, Barnaby Reilly; designer, Fiorella Marani. From 31 March.

SHOPEFRT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (388-3948)

Free drama workshops on Sats and Suns (10-5).

Including playbuilding, mime, dance, sculpture, puppetry, radio and video.

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692-0555)

York Theatre: The Kingfisher by William Douglas Home; director, George Ogilvie; with George Withers, John McCallum and Frank Thring.

Everest: Prospect at the Old Vic: Great English Eccentrics. Presented by Prospect Theatre Company with Derek Jacobi, Timothy West, Isla Blair and Julian Glover. 10-17 March.

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LA BOITE (56-1622)
Irish Slew by John Bradley; director, Sean Mee. To 3 March.
Falling Angels by Noel Coward; director, Eileen Beaton; designer, David Bell; with Kay Perry, Danielle Eden. To 9 March.

QUEENSLAND ARTS COUNCIL (221-5900)
The Twenties and All That Jazz; director, Douglas Hedge, with John Paramor, Deirdre Robinsen and Greg Radford. Touring from 21 March.
For entries contact Don Batchelor on 269-3018.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

AUDS at Theatre 62
The Police Commissioner's Grandmother by John Stapleton; director, Bill Rough. 21-31 March.

LITTLE PATCH THEATRE at Balcony Theatre
A Splash of Yellow. For entries contact Don Batchelor on 269-3018.

ST JUDES PLAYERS
Goodwood Institute: Theatrescope by Edward Albee. Designed and directed by Peter Tulloch.
St Judes Hall: Fallen Angels — He Who Would Say 'Yes' or 'No' based on ideas of Bertolt Brecht. Designed and directed by Peter Charlton.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51-5151)
American Buffalo by William Shakespeare; director, Colin George; designer, Hugh Colman; with Michael Shiberry. Complete text to 3 March; cut version at Buffin's Restaurant, Battery Point (23-7531) Rubenstein and Greg Radford. Touring from 21 March.

STATE OPERA OF SA (51-6161)
Die Fledermaus by Johann Strauss (in English). 12-13 March.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51-5151)
Hamlet by William Shakespeare; director, Colin George; designer, Hugh Colman; with Michael Shiberry. Complete text to 3 March; cut version 4-24 March.
American Buffalo by David Mamet; director, Nick Enright. 29 March - 12 April.
For entries contact Chris Johns on 223-8610.

TASMANIA

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (23-6959)
at Buffin's Restaurant, Battery Point (23-7531)
Old World Banquet featuring Tom Jones, a light-hearted musical version of the Fielding novel. Designed and directed by Don Gay; musical director, Bruce Cornelius. From 16 March.

TASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE (23-7996)
Playbox Theatre, Melbourne: Rub a dub dub. Director, Peter Wilson. 5 March. The North Wind and the Sun (Outdoor show), written and directed by Peter Wilson. 10-12 March.

THEATRE ROYAL (34-6266)
Crown Matrimonial by Royce Ryton; director, Peter Williams; with June Salter. To 3 March.
While the Billy Boils with Leonard Teale. Light Opera Company: New Moon. From 24 March.
For entries contact the editorial office on (049) 67-4470.

VICTORIA

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543-2828)
Nola Raye, English mime artist. 17-20 March; on tour throughout Victoria. Presented by the Arts Council of Victoria in conjunction with the Festival of Perth.
Measure for Measure, by Shakespeare; Alexander Theatre Co, director, Malcolm Robertson. Late March.

ARENA CHILDREN'S THEATRE (24-9667)
Company One: Upper Secondary — Sea Cape by Edward Albee. Designed and directed by Peter Tulloch.
Lower Secondary — He Who Would Say 'Yes' or 'No' based on ideas of Bertolt Brecht. Designed and directed by Peter Charlton.
Company Two: Upper Secondary — Winners by Brian Friel. Designed and directed by Peter Tulloch.
Lower Secondary — Paul Palmer and his Fight Against the Universals by Ernie Gray. Designed and directed by Peter Charlton.

LA BOITE (36-1622)
Irish Slew by John Bradley; director, Sean Mee. To 3 March.
Falling Angels by Noel Coward; designer, Eileen Beaton; designer, David Bell; with Kay Perry, Danielle Eden. To 9 March.

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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CIVIC THEATRE RESTAURANT (272-1595)
Five Post '79. Director, Max Kay. Continuing.

DOLPHIN THEATRE (325-3399)
Some Great Fools from History, mime by Nola Rae. To 10 March.

HAYMAN THEATRE (350-7026)
The Way of the World by Congreve; director, Raymond Omodei. To 10 March.

HOLE IN THE WALL (381-2403)
Makassar Reef by Alexander Buzo; with Robert van Macklenberg; director, Edgar Metcalf; designer, Bill Dowd. To 10 March.

Gone With Hardy by Tom Stoppard; with Robert van Macklenberg; director, Edgar Metcalf; designer, Bill Dowd. To 3 March.

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WA BALLET COMPANY (335-6188)
Sunday Club Production at Karinjup Cultural Centre, 18 March.

WA OPERA COMPANY (328-4311)
Opera in Concert at Perth Concert Hall. Conductor, Alan Abbott. 15 March.

For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299-6839.

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Last month's answers.

Last month's winner was Mrs Marie Willis, Ryde, NSW.

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THE SPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD No.9

Name..........................................................
Address..................................................

Across:
7. Navigate round the North to find gastropod (5)
8. Not at home in the season for growing (9)
9. "Childe Alfred" is complete! (5)
10. Dear peris slip into loose clothing (9)
12. Harvest brew, and include right to redistribute (11)
16. Mail sent out to Peruvian city (4)
17. "... that suggestion/Whose horrid - - - doth unfix
my hair" (Macbeth) (5)
18. Cupid gives us a nasty weal (4)
19. Girl and knight meet a fish — with no hesitation
—, it's a performer (5,6)
22. Users trick Roman returning to the South (9)
23. "If ever any beauty I did see,/Which I desired,
and got, 'twas but a - - -  of thee." (Donne) (5)
25. Parent has a laugh with the ruler, a prince (9)
26. Can Shane be pale? (5)

Down:
1. See Sonia dine in 21 country (9)
2. Hide, for Diana's a very quiet listener (9)
3. Seek encouragement in the cat's purr (4)
4. Burning estate is well worth having! (3,8)
5. An explorer to trust in? (5)
6. One French and the German below (5)
11. Actor dressin'sheep, say (5,6)
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