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There are no more than a handful of our own first rate playwrights and this month sees world premieres of the work of two of them: David Williamson's Travelling North by Nimrod and Dorothy Hewett's Man From Muckinupin, by the National, Perth.

The worrisome thing is that despite the fanfares that always sound for premieres by distinguished writers, neither play looks set to break any significant new ground (though let the prophet beware). Williamson is writing as brilliantly as ever but presently in mellow mood — with the best will in the world I find it hard to work up much of a sweat over geriatric love affairs. Hewett is on top form, but even if the play is instantly given a world tour (and Kenn Brodziak might well be advised to read the script of this one, or urge Michael Edgley, who's on the spot, to go along) it will only confirm to the establishment stays on its bum, not its toes.

Both writers are good friends and these remarks are made not to embarrass or be hurtful except where specified. The cover price is instantly given a world tour (and Kenn Brodziak might well be advised to read the script of this one, or urge Michael Edgley, who's on the spot, to go along) it will only confirm to the establishment stays on its bum, not its toes.

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We are urged to “have a go — we can do it”, a plea which only confirms the lethargy of a nation. Some attempt must be made to stand against the tide before we all desultorily disappear down our own navels ... (yawn) And so to bed.

COMEDY

(compare the lack of comment in Melba with the acerbity of Marvellous Melbourne).

The well known tactic of our Fuehrer is to douse any burning issue in an ocean of boredom; the problem is that it is causing a wet-rot right through the nation’s spirit. There are issues — a constitutional crisis occurred for far less heinous crimes than are presently being perpetrated. It just seems that now the response is not to enter into animated debate — let alone take to the streets — but to greet everything with a yawn. (And the opposition sadly looks no more scintillating.)

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FRANK WILSON

"It is a story and also a study of human emotions, which is what David does extremely well. It's a man in his early seventies who has done pretty well as he pleased all his life, has been a success or a failure, depending pretty well on which way you look at his character. I like to think he has been successful even though he's failed at certain things — like he stood three times in a row as a communist candidate in a by-election. He has a son who couldn't care less because he hasn't spoken to me for 15 years, and I have a daughter who's very understanding, but also very aware of my faults, but she plays along with me without rocking the boat. We're not getting married — so what's new. But our daughter, that's another kettle of fish. They really get into Mum because she's only someone to wipe their feet on. I'm not going to say any more."  

(See article on page 11)

GIN GAME

RUTH CRACKNELL, actress.

"What are my feelings about Gin Game? Two people come together at a time of mutual need because they are old, because they are alone — even with many others surrounding them. A device is needed to develop their relationship. It is a card game. Fonsia's exploration and growing understanding of the game is paralleled by the discoveries each is making about the other and finally about himself. It is not without pain and always with an honest and at times quite outrageous humour.

It is a play about old people but I feel the young, the middle aged and those most concerned, the old, will immediately relate to — and above all it is supremely entertaining."

PLAYWRIGHTS — TAKE NOTE...

ELAINE LINDSAY, Senior Project Officer, Literature Board.

"The Literature Board of the Australia Council is now calling for joint applications from playwrights and theatre companies for assistance under the Board's playwright in residence scheme for 1980.

A playwright in residence is understood to be a playwright who is attached to a particular theatrical group for a specified period so that he/she can work on his/her script(s) in liaison with actors and directors.

Two different types of playwright in residence grants are offered, one for professional theatre companies for the employment of established playwrights and the other for TIE groups for the employment of scriptwriters whose names and work may not be widely known.

In the past year the Board contributed towards the salaries of ten playwrights in residence, grants usually being determined on a 3:1 basis and ranging from $1,000 to $3,000 for periods of one to six months.

Guidelines and application forms are available from the Literature Board, P.O. Box 302, North Sydney, 2060. Applications on the appropriate forms must be received by the Board by the closing date of 30 September, 1979."

FISH WITH A BICYCLE

JOHN ANTHONY KING, recently playwright in residence with Nimrod, sponsored by the Literature Board.

"Steven Berkoff dresses like a warring samurai and has a mole in the middle of his forehead that resembles a third eye; Ken Horler collates scripts in his socks, and Tom Stoppard does for a fact, look like Mick Jagger. Trivial information? Not any better to an audience — even if they do sound like Shakespeare in your own ears. And with other plays and writers. All of which not only stimulates but helps in breaking down the sense of isolation that, from observation, afflicts many a writer.

Ultimately however the play is the thing. Your baby's out in the hard cruel world and no one is going to pamper his defects. The word for it is surgery — usually emergency radical resection — so find a bullet to bite on. Chances are the operation will not transform you into Chekhov but it well might give you the more important thing: yourself as a writer. Isolation gets you nowhere, involve yourself in a company — amateur, semi-pro or professional, anything where the words can be heard. Don't sit up in your garret imagining how it all might sound on stage, or worse still that any play is finished when you've typed up Blackout — Final Curtain or whatever. There's no loss of integrity involved in listening to someone else's opinions — and even less involved in taking
advice, if it’s good advice. After all, how objective is your eye when it comes to focusing on your own work — and wouldn’t you just love to see the original draft of Hamlet? It’s a masochistic life in the performing arts. A playwright without a theatre, to paraphrase a very odd piece of recent graffiti, is like a fish without a bicycle. And vice versa too, I hasten to add. All the same, if angst could kill I can think of a few audiences who’d be pushing up daisies right now..."

PINTER ON PINTER

ANTHONY BARCLAY, Director, Rocks Players.

“I must admit I was sceptical when someone asked to see me after The Homecoming in March and said he was a close friend of Pinter’s — but he really was, and after his visit to London, he came again and saw The Birthday Party and Old Times and talked a lot about Pinter. Harold Pinter in fact wrote to me after this:

‘I am very impressed by the range of material contained in the programme and delighted that this venture has been so successful. An old friend of mine, who lives in Sydney, was passing through London the other day and told me that he thought the standard of your productions was very high indeed. A pity I can’t see them myself.’

The festival really was a great success and it is nice to know it was thought of so well.”

ADELAIDE NEW WAVE FESTIVAL

STEPHEN PARTINGTON, Co-ordinator, Australian Drama Festival.

“The Festival, the first of its kind held here, is, appropriately in the year of the 150th anniversary of the first play about Australia written from first hand experience. Also appropriately it is to be held in Adelaide which is now widely held to be the centre of Australian playwriting activity, producing Steve J Spears, Kevin Ross, Dave Allen and Rob George in the past four years.

I feel that it is important that the new wave of writers which started ten years ago in Sydney and Melbourne with Hiber, Romeril, Williamson and Buzo is kept flowing and feel a drama festival focusing exclusively on Australian works should do this.

Special efforts are being made to include Greek Australian, Italo-Australian and women’s theatre, and possibly film, radio and television also.

The festival is interested in hearing from any performers and playwrights wishing to present, workshop, read or perform their own or other Australian shows. Any groups or performers interested in taking part should contact me at the office of the Australian Drama Festival, Adelaide College of Arts and Education, Kintore Avenue, Adelaide. Phone 223-8286 or 223-8610.”

BEYOND CRITICISM

RON ELISHA

“In Duty Bound, which is being performed by the MTC in September, is a play which I did, in fact, feel duty bound to write. In it I have passed comment on the behaviour (or should I say misbehaviour) of Jews in the Dias Dora.

The truth, or otherwise, of this comment, is of course a matter of opinion. Truth always is. That there was a need of such a comment to be made remains a matter of contention. For me such a need arose out of the fact that Jews, as a group, have been a people beyond ‘informed’ criticism ever since the Nazi Holocaust. It is my belief that no people — no matter who they are or what they have suffered — should ever be beyond criticism.

Immunity from criticism is, after all, the stuff of which holocausts are born.”

A WONDERFUL FUNNY NIGHT

JOHN TASKER, Director.

“It is a coincidence, but a very happy one, that the two most popular Australian plays from the first half of the century have appeared within weeks of each other in Sydney. On Our Selection, 1912, at Jane Street, and from 11 August, Rusty Bugles at the New Theatre. Both plays, despite the 36 years between them, have strong similarities for, mixed with the great comedy, both plays draw an accurate picture of the times and the characters’ ability to cope and survive.

Rusty Bugles was premiered in 1948 at the Independent Theatre. Despite its great success then it has only had one production since, in 1962. For most Australian theatre goers it is only a name, though for those who saw it in ‘48 or ‘62 it is a legend — a wonderful, funny night at the theatre is how Frank Harris remembers it.

Rusty Bugles is about Australian diggers in 1944 stationed in an Ordinance Depot in the NT. The story line is very slight, Sumner Locke Elliott thought he was writing possibly a documentary, but in concentrating on characterisation and the characters’ relationships to each other, it is in my opinion the first modern Australian play, written eighty years before Summer of the Seventeenth Doll.”

CALL ME MADAM

VERA BURKE, Swop Shop Co-ordinator.

“I’m one of the old school so I don’t like being called Ms so I asked the Arts Council to call me Madam — and they did!

The Arts Council are behind the swop shop project. I was with J C Williamson’s for about a quarter of a century, in secretarial positions mainly, but just before they folded I was in charge of licencing amateur musicals all over Australia, Oliver!, Hello Dolly! — all of the ones that the schools or amateur companies wanted to do, so of course I had contacts all over the country.

So when JCW’s folded, the Arts Council came to me and said would I like to stay in contact and set up a swop shop. So I wrote to all the amateur people that I knew and also the ones on the Arts Council list, and from the information that they gave me I made up a diary for NSW of Who was doing What.

You see there is no affiliated body of amateur societies and therefore the people in Burke may not know that the people in Albury, say, are just about to do, or have done the same play. But now when they get the diary they can see who else is doing the same sort of thing, so, maybe, that way they will be able to swap or exchange ideas, and things. I am just the co-ordinator. I could have covered all Australia but the Arts Council only deal with NSW and they pay and print and circulate the diary, so at the moment it is just NSW.

This has only just begun. I think I first started at the end of last year or just before Christmas. I’ve just got a second newsletter out and so far I have had quite a response from people, particularly with scripts and scores. I’ve also been to a meeting in Sydney where some of the companies were talking about sets, so maybe if people get together something can be done there too. I hope this will be a means of ensuring that amateurs can know of other amateur performances.

I’m wrapped in this as an interest and it is just the thing for me after JCW’s — Vera Burke, Swop Shop Co-ordinator, 18 Stewart Street, Randwick, 2031. Tel: (02) 398-6622.”

EARTHWATCH

NANCY HAYES, Choreographer.

“Each week, apart from all the information given in the programme, we shall have a guest. The programme on the whole is done on an information basis with film clips etc., and each segment has a subject theme; for instance Zoos, or Pollution, or Colonial History, or Health and Energy.

I have the children in the programme for about 4 hours for rehearsal. And at the auditions they were picked mainly for their personality so not all of them are singers and dancers — some are just beaut little personalities. I have to work with those who don’t dance as well as those who do, so in fact I choreograph the group.

Earthwatch is on a Monday at 5 pm on ABC and national. It will run for about 13 weeks and it includes an earthwatchers’ club so that the children watching can write in and share their experiences with other people.”
Ray Stanley's
WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS

Following the spate of Dracula attractions, are we now likely to have a Sweeney Todd trend, triggered by the new Sondheim musical? Already in the US a 1936 British movie, Sweeney Todd, The Bloodthirsty Barber starring Tod Slaughter, is being re-issued.

Murmurs that the Chichester Festival Company could be making a return visit to these shores ... I hope that talk about Robert Morley touring here in The Old Country is incorrect. People have come to look upon him as a “funny” man and might have difficulty in accepting him in a serious role ... And surely that rumour can't be true about the Trust actually ousting one of our subsidised companies for rights to a certain American play!

Toni Vernon (Caroline in The Sullivans) was recently in the Victorian Music Theatre's initial production Red, White & Boogie at Melbourne's Arena. It was full circle for this Pinne-Battye musical, which started life 10 years ago at It Happened in Tanjablanca at the same venue, then known as the Viaduct ... An ambition of the State Theatre Company of SA is to stage a female version of Beckett's Waiting For Godot with Patricia Kennedy and Ruth Cracknell.

Remember Charles West, who on several occasions played the lead here in productions of Man of La Mancha? Well, he has now taken over the role of Daddy Warbucks from Stratford Johns in the London production of Annie ... Wonder if a Melbourne management will take up George Whaley's highly rated production of On Our Selection. Will be a shame if it's not seen in the Victorian capital ... There's whisper of a musical version of Seven Little Australians.

Story going around London that the night before veteran film director Victor Saville died, a friend phoned and asked what he thought of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. Chuckling, Saville said: "Well, when I'm watching her on TV, I can't help thinking that it's really Anna Neagle playing the part!" Which could have been Saville's last words ... Is it true Harry M Miller is planning to get back into the live theatre scene? Does it need him?

Broadway critic Clive Barnes apparently has been ousted from that new magazine he was founding — American Stage. Now it will be edited by Leonard Harris of WCBS-TV Network. And the New York Times' Richard Evers has been replaced by - Walter Kerr! ... Geoff Hooke, a drama graduate of Rusden State College, has been awarded a grant from the Australian Council to mount a production of the Alfred Jarry play Ubu — The King, running for four weeks from September 12 at Melbourne's Universal.

Hear Reg Livermore is going to make his first trip to New York — and will be the house guest of Hal Prince. His next one-man show (to premiere in Melbourne) will be Son of Betty, and after that he apparently intends to concentrate upon Gilbert and Sullivan ... And by the time this column is published it will probably be known whether John Diedrich obtained his work permit from English Equity to play the title role.

The Trust's Jeff Kowell and John Little are off to New York and Washington in October to finalise tour details etc, for next year's tours of Australia by The Dance Theatre of Harlem and The Acting Company from New York ... Something Deborah Kerr and Patricia Kennedy (both in the cast of The Day After The Fair) have in common: the role of Miss Madrigal in The Chalk Garden. The former was in the film version, the latter in the Australian-New Zealand tour.

Who is the King of the TV Commercials? Jonathon Hardy must surely qualify for the title. He tells me that he has done 40 already and has 15 more lined up within the next year ... Some interesting entertainers who will be touring the country in the near future include the legendary Frances Faye (wasn't she fantastic in the film Pretty Baby?), Phyllis Diller, Burl Ives, Trini Lopez, Frank Ifield, Julie Anthony and Jerry Lee Lewis.

During a performance of The King and I at London's Palladium Virginia McKenna (playing Anna) threw her hairbrush on the bed, but it fell off and rolled down the footlights, remaining there during the next scene when Yul Brynner entered and stumbled over it. Picking it up Brynner smiled and ad-libbed: "I don't think I'll be needing that!"
Dear Sir,

While I commend Theatre Australia for the "special" on Youth and Children's Theatre (July 1979), I think it is unfortunate that Ardyne Reid's article on Theatre-in-Education did not appear to have been written in the Year of the Child. The only two of our productions mentioned, Goethe and Gum and Goo, finished their runs in May 1978.

There was no reference made to what we regard as our far more significant achievements — our own plays Red Earth and The Real Mr J, and our production of Kullark, the play we commissioned from Aboriginal writer Jack Davis. Kullark, incidentally, has never been reviewed in Theatre Australia, despite the enormous success of its public performances. Is the review perhaps being held over for another special on "Current Trends in Black Theatre" to appear in 1980?

TIE is certainly not in a more static state than any other form of theatre, and an article written without up-to-date information is bound to be misleading. May I suggest that in future you encourage your reviewers to accept invitations to see Children's Theatre and TIE productions, and to review them just as they would any other professional performances.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Tulloch,
TIE Director,
National Theatre, Perth.

Ms Reid points out that the article was a Survey of Theatre in Education and not intended as a state by state review of TIE achievements.

Ed.

Dear Sir,

I wonder if I may follow up my June letter with another detailing further infamous conduct by some theatre companies?

It seems that not only do theatre companies have a deplorable habit of losing new scripts, but many refuse to pay royalties to the authors of the plays they produce.

Betty Roland, whose play A Touch Of Silk is suddenly a warm property, has received very little in the way of royalties. First, a company working in association with a State Arts Council requested permission to produce A Touch Of Silk, and they asked for her recently re-written version. They promised to get in touch with her regarding royalties.

But not a word has she heard from the company that produced her play over a season of 15 performances. The company concerned, the state company, and the State Arts Council have all ignored her letters. It is ironical that this particular company prides itself in paying full Equity rates to directors, and presumably to actors and actresses, according to what it said about itself in the May issue of Theatre Australia. Presumably living Australian writers are not to be taken into account.

Second, Betty received a letter from a student in a drama department of a University, "majoring in Drama, engaged in an Australian Playwrights course"; asking for a copy of the latest version of A Touch Of Silk. The play, Betty was advised, was to be "workshopped, but not at this stage, for public performance".

Betty says that she sent a typescript of the revised version which has neither been acknowledged nor returned. She has heard of her play being produced at several other places recently, but has been unable to do anything about it.

I know this sort of thing is quite common in Australia: perhaps it has something to do with our convict background. Writers may care to relate their experiences at the careless hands of the "rogues and vagabonds engaged in this most unholy trade".

Yours sincerely,
Monte Miller,
Elsternwick, Vic.

Dear Sir,

In an effort to be concise, the "handicapped" Mr Price has unfortunately glossed over several factors contributing to the box-office failure of David Allen's Gone With Hardy. The situation was not as simple as he attempts to argue.

I refer to his accusation that "the Perth production of Hardy was a guinea pig for director and theatre-manager alike, they didn't have their act together at all."

Both Colin McColl and I commenced our duties as Director and Administrator in mid-January. Colin had the disadvantage of having to select and cast a programme of plays for the next six months within four months of his arrival in Perth, then plunge immediately into the consecutive direction of three of them. (Hardy commenced rehearsals on February 19 and opened on March 14.)

I was somewhat better placed by being a recently returned) West Australian who knew the local ropes a little more. But greater knowledge was little use in publicity terms with the media who not unreasonably focused their attentions on the much more immediate Festival of Perth, rather than assist promoting a production at a theatre which operates all year round anyway. Publicity angles — new Australian play, new actor, new director, new management, good fun, human interest about a famous film star etc, — cut little ice with a media which was up to its eyeballs in the performing arts for a month and then wanted to lay low and recuperate.

Both of us also discovered (after our appointments) that we had inherited a debt of some $30,000, all of it incurred during the previous two years. This has affected our approach to 1979's programmes and we make no apology for it.

I dispute the claim that I was "more concerned with last year's debt than coming up with a good publicity angle". We deny the contention that we saw the production as rarely as Mr Price claims.

Hardy failed at the box-office because theatre-goers had just spent a lot of money on Festival tickets and were either reducing their overdrafts or putting their feet up to recover from their recent cultural glutonaty. It opened a week after the Festival but was unable to carry over any publicity. By contrast the Playhouse, with a star — Warren Mitchell — opened in the last week of the Festival and attracted a lot of publicity. It is interesting to note that the Playhouse production of Death of a Salesman relied enormously on school parties to make up its audiences, ie much of the audience who went to see Salesman did so for reasons other than being entertained. The main reason for programming Hardy in March was to bring in audiences who wanted to get over the intellectual binge the Festival provides.

And finally, sadly, despite the two favourable reviews of his work quoted by Mr Price, his performance in the central role of Stan Laurel failed to impress many of those who did see the show — and Hole audiences are strongly influenced by word-of-mouth reports.

Yours sincerely,
Jake Newby,
Administrator,
Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth.

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Dear Sirs,

Pub theatre has existed in Sydney since mid-1976, when Bryan Brown and others crammed 200-odd people into the virtually-disused lounge at the White Horse Hotel to witness the performance of a co-operative of professional actors in a revue entitled TV or not TV.

It is now mid-1979 and the White Horse lounge is crammed with two billiard tables and a juke box. Pub theatre no longer exists there.

But pub theatre exists.

The Civic Hotel housed one production early last year but eventually went where the money was and is now a leading punk rock venue.

But pub theatre exists.

In October 1978 I directed a co-operative of professional actors in The Over-the-Rainbow Show which opened the Kirribilli Hotel as a

Continued on page 30.
Robert Lewis’ Long Journey to O’Neil

A TA Interview

One of America’s top directors, Robert Lewis, is out in Australia to direct Long Day’s Journey Into Night — the Ensemble’s contribution to the Sydney Theatre Company’s World Theatre Season. He came at the behest of Hayes Gordon, who, unable to direct a play because of his involvement in Annie, thought to invite to take his place the man who had directed him in Brigadoon on Broadway in 1947.

Lewis has not been to Australia before, and discussed with Hayes Gordon at some length the involvement in Long Day’s Journey finally seemed most representative of America because “it was by our best playwright, and I think his best play — and I haven’t directed it before.” He wanted to cast the play as early as possible — certainly before his arrival — so as not to lose rehearsal time, and so that good actors would not be otherwise engaged, but not knowing the country or the actors was a problem. Hayes solved it by hitting on the idea of long-distance auditions by video-tape.

“He video-taped about 4 or 5 candidates for each part, and did really marvellous tests because he knows me and knows exactly the sorts of things I’d ask them to do if I were there. He just had them sitting at a table and doing some very simple things, and not covering themselves with a lot of acting, which can fool you in auditions. If he thought they weren’t responding well he’d step into the scene and give some direction, and that was good for me because it allowed me to see how they took direction, and what difference there was, if any, after he spoke.”

The results of the long-distance auditions were Patricia Connelly to play the mother, with Kevin Myles as the father; their maid is Shauna Tosa, having worked in the Drama Theatre. Max Phipps has been cast as Jamie, after impressing Lewis on tape in a pilot show which never made it to air, while Max Phipps will play the O’Neill part of Edmund Tyrone. Max Phipps has been cast as Jamie, after impressing Lewis on tape in a pilot show which never made it to air, where he played an embittered school teacher, “very close to the character of the elder brother. I thought I’d just have a quick look at it, but it was so good I watched the whole thing — it lasted an hour. My comment to Hayes was ‘grab him’.

Even the set and costume designs were finalised before Robert Lewis arrived. Yoshi Tosa, having worked in the Drama Theatre before, knew the stage and the theatre; he started with set and costume sketches which were mailed to Lewis and checked, and finally sent photographs of the set model, “and so again when I got here there were no surprises. So all we have to do now is do it.”

There are five weeks for rehearsal — a week longer than he would take in the States, but it works out as the same amount of time because in America they rehearse for more hours each day. For the first readings Lewis tries to keep his actors from “acting too much, so they don’t leap in with instant faked-up emotions — the truth behind that can only come later. First I want them to talk, talk and listen and explore the material of the text”. But he doesn’t apply any set method to his rehearsals, least of all “the method” of the Actors’ Studio he co-founded: “I don’t apply anybody’s method to my rehearsal — they’re my rehearsals. I study everything, I’ll steal from anybody, but I’m not a proponent of anyone except Bobby Lewis. I’m an amalgam of people, hopefully all coming out as my own thing. We’re all influenced by someone and I’m sure I’ve been, but not by Stanislavski more than others.”

As to the play itself, Robert Lewis is making it a slightly shorter journey for the audience. He is cutting two of the three intervals, saving half an hour at a stroke, and playing it in two acts rather than four. He has also done some judicious pruning, but “it’s awfully hard to cut because you can so easily destroy — the repetition is part of its nature and if you cut it you ruin it, but I have taken out some of the recitation at the end. It will seem long or short depending on the performance; length is a relative thing, we can be restless in 10 minutes if it’s boring, or not at all.”

To elicit the right performance, Lewis feels he is helped by having been an actor himself, he knows what is encouraging and what hurts from a director. Directors who haven’t acted, like Tyrone Guthrie, may still be good, original, imaginative, as is Elia Kazan who did act, but some directors “don’t understand why, when they tell an actor to do something, they don’t just go and do it.”

“Total acting” — a phrase which comes up in his book Method — or Madness — is the objective, by which Bobby Lewis means “the completest inside truth that has found its completest outside manifestation”. The theatre is plagued, he feels, by actors who find a truthful characterisation within themselves but won’t use the discipline to express it appropriately within the language of the play (and he cites Shakespearean verse here), and by the opposite, those who declaim the beauty of the language without the true meaning. But one can have both: “Laurence Olivier was a total actor at his peak, as was Michael Chekhov, grandson of Anton; he was absolutely burning inside, with always such a passionate sense of life, but always completely controlled outside.”

Lewis has taught acting at universities and colleges concurrently with his theatrical career, and claims that his best students are the ones who most gracefully forget everything he has taught them — “that ensures that it is not imitation; if you forget it then it’s in you.” His students have included such notables as Marlon Brando — apparently a delightful, if unwilling light comic actor, and Montgomery Clift, both in one class in the first and only year he taught at the Actors’ Studio, before falling out with his co-founder Kazan.

With the prevalent fashion for so-called Brechtian technique and staging, as opposed to the falling off of naturalism, Lewis, having met Brecht, repudiates any real difference in acting styles. “I saw the Berliner Ensemble in Gallileo, Mother Courage, The Mother and Arturo Ui, and the acting was the same as great acting anywhere; it’s a difference of degree only. There’s no lack of feeling, they just make unsentimental choices. Bert Brecht had interesting theories, but when he directed he just wanted good theatre too.”
Another Carlton collective? — but this one two years old and off to Hoopla.

Everyman’s Theatre Collective

Margaret McClusky

In the wake of La Mama and the Pram Factory — almost long enough ago now to require the putting on of a cranky voice and fierce focus — evolved those hybrids “community” and “ensemble” theatre, collective, democratic groups. Unfortunately this “new” theatre became bastardised by too many people with plenty of enthusiasm, a medium of talent and too little expertise. Theatre critics were required to gird their loins, read their Marcuse/Marx/Freud and brace themselves for an evening in a draughty factory resounding with die young esoterica.

Lest the notion of yet another collective chills your bones and makes you wish you’d never heard of Carlton, be of good faith. Everyman’s embodies the best of Ensemble theatre with some old fashioned virtues. Such as talent. Such as polish. A writer and director with flair. A company of artists who believe — and prove — that there is more to theatre than treading squeaky boards. More to a theatre group than one or two shakily performances of one or two rough cut plays.

After two years Everyman’s Collective is still alive, well and looking for...an audience! It’s been a long hard haul, and the pressure, the leg work, the false starts aren’t letting up. A glazed look comes into the Collective eye when you talk about publicity. Publicity! They feel it’s what might have — and be — the answer. His hair

It was a success — of sorts. It excited interest.approaches are being made to Auckland’s Theatre Corporate about a production of The Spalding Family Album. (Review, TA, Nov 1978).

The Spalding Family Album is Everyman’s trump card. Their first production Curtains at Grant Street Theatre in 1977 was followed by Colin Ryan’s Polish Girl Downstairs at the Playbox. Polish Girl won some critical acclaim but the Playbox had little cachet as far as that elusive beast, the theatre going public, went. The Collective was almost as anonymous as any other small time theatre group.

Then came Esther and The Spalding Family Album. Rob Chuter and playwright Colin Ryan sat chatting about family skeletons, and life in the Edwardian era. Chuter recounted tales told to his grandmother by an elderly female companion in hospital in 1939. Colin Ryan hurried off, wrote Esther and it was performed at the Guild Theatre, University of Melbourne. Tales told by an elderly companion are not much to build a play on. Nor are grandmothers notorious wells for Thespians to plum. In fact it all sounds a little ludicrous — until you see Esther and The Spalding Family Album. Esther lost money — to the tune of $200. For many theatre groups operating on a slender budget, that would have been it. Everyman’s persevered and put Esther on at La Mama. While La Mama is not the place to put on a play if you’re looking for big box office, it does have status Off-Off Russell Street.

The La Mama season was more successful. Colin Ryan went off and wrote another play Forget Me Not, made some changes to Esther, and tandem, they went on at La Mama in October.

SFA is an unusual play. It has the patina of late Victorian without cloying nostalgia. And it works. Forget Me Not, the first part, shows members and neighbours of the Spalding Carter family. It is feather light, funny, and prophetic; showing the middle class gentility going about their turn-of-the-century business. And its sets the stage for Esther full focus on the thoughts of a reputed murderer.

It was a success — of sorts. It excite interest. Critics took off their glasses of academic interest and noticed. Determined to strike while the iron was somewhere near hot, a number of thrusts and counter thrusts were made. The ABC was approached about a TV film and a radio play. An application was made to the Australian Film Commission for script development funds. Colin set about writing a treatment. The Ministry for the Arts was broached — money for a regional tour of SFA, to take it to Perth, to the Adelaide Festival. Overtures were made to the Hoopla Foundation. Perhaps if the plays were presented at the Playbox, they would get some recognition? Just publicity? No. But it would help.

Anna Gilford looks hunted. She has been negotiating for six months. With no theatre space of their own, the Collective must rely on an established theatre to take the play — and them — on. She suggests that this is one of the great drawbacks of SFA. A commercial theatre might jump at the opportunity of putting it into their repertoire. But it is the Collective’s play and they want to perform it themselves. It is an understandable but unpragmatic ambition.

But there is the possibility of it being performed in New Zealand. And the possibility of the tours, the film. The machinations of bureaucracy are slow.

Few people know of their existence. Most of those do regard them as a small amateur company. Small they are. Amateur they’re not. All are members of Equity. All have a sound theatre background...NIDA, St Martin’s Theatre School, Melbourne State College. But those credentials would be little enough without the commitment they all feel to the Collective.

They hack it out. Peter Jago, set and costume designer, looks dreary as they talk of the film. He chatters about the wonderful “objet” he has found which will make the set unique. Rob Chuter, head against the window, talks of his new male cast may spring some surprises.

Stop Press: Billed as “a superbly crafted piece of Edwardian Australia” by Hoopla Publicity, the Spalding Family Album opens on 29 September 1979, upstairs at the Playbox, Melbourne. The excellent female cast from the La Mama season remains unchanged. The all new male cast may spring some surprises.
Rob George talks of the long road to the MTC and Edinburgh Festival.

The Writer Behind Errol Flynn

TA Interview

It was while I was teaching that I wrote a short play — and it won first prize at a drama festival; it was beautiful! It scooped the lot — best actor, best actress, best director, best play. Prompt of course is very popular still and keeps turning up in festivals. I was at a party one day not long ago and one lady came up to me and asked if I had any plays that they could do and I said “Well I've one called Prompt”, and she said “Oh we've just done that”.

Actually I suppose really I first started writing revues with Steve Spears — we spent about three years as a writing partnership and even tried a play together. I think it was called Last Men Left On Earth, not long ago and one lady came up to me and asked if I had any plays that they could do and I said yes. We started with a pianist, Peter Begley, who had a lot of songs he had written for a group in Adelaide, and Tony Strachan who was a choreographer, and, since this was to be a people's event, we added a full rock band and then a theatre and an Arts Council grant. It was terrific — the show was big and brassy, and a terrific sound, and we had a set from rough cut timber in the shape of Mount Lofty, and the ending — the ending was spectacular — there was this great galah made of palm tree leaves which came down out of the flies and carried our hero away — it really sent people out of their minds — incredible. But the critics came down hard on us; no one even mentioned the music or the set, the ending, and that was Circle's last production.

Well, afterwards I went to Sydney and did some writing for Gary McDonald and then Steve and I worked out a plot for a movie Rusty Walker's Final Ride about a country and western singer touring the back blocks — a mix of Slim Dusty and Smokey Dawson — in fact it was really about Circle and touring! And we got enough money to complete that. And then — well that brings us up to Errol Flynn's Great Big Adventure Book for Boys. Errol opened in December 1977 at the Sheridan Theatre, produced by the Stage Company. The week it opened I was 'Robin' in the premier production of There Were Giants In Those Days by Steve J Spears. After Errol, the Stage Company's next production, which was for the 1978 Festival was my Let's Twist Again which had originally been commissioned by the SATC but not produced.

Since then? Well I have completed the screenplay of Rusty Walker and tried unsuccessfully to sell it. I also wrote a couple of short plays Pumpkin and The Swamp which were read by the Stage Company but need rewriting and I haven't had the impetus to do that. Similarly unsuccessful was a TV pilot called Cab & Co written with Dave Flanagan, but somewhere during 1978 I did write a couple of TV scripts for the ABC Education and a short film for the SAFC.

It was towards the end of last year that I heard that the MTC was planning to do Errol. My confidence received a considerable boost. I had spent an afternoon getting drunk with Bruce Myles several months prior to this; at that stage Bruce was quite optimistic, but I feared he was just being kind. Also, as time dragged on, I became increasingly pessimistic, but for once the reject notice did not arrive.

Also towards the end of the year I was commissioned by the State Theatre Company to write a play for the Magpie team. Out of that, and after a lot of work, came Grabbing It which was performed during the Come Out Festival this year. It proved a big hit in Port Augusta but was not so successful in Adelaide. Perhaps I should take the hint?

1979 began with a six week stint in Mildura directing Let's Twist Again for the Redcliff Players. The play was produced for the Moomba Festival Drama Competition. I was delighted with the standard of the amateur cast. Barry Shepherd, the lead, won the Best Actor award — but I don't think the adjudicator was impressed with my directing — another hint?

The last few months I have been mainly involved with Errol again. First was a workshop period of one week with the MTC during which time I got quite a lot of ideas for rehearsals and additions which I then spent a couple of months agonising over. The rehearsals have taken longer than the original script! I have also been very busy arranging a group of local actors to take the play to this year's Edinburgh Festival. We leave for Europe in a fortnight's time. I am producing, directing and acting in it. So, currently, I have two productions of one play in rehearsal and also Let's Twist Again being produced in Melbourne.

Is that enough? I have to complete another screenplay for the SATC before I leave for Edinburgh!

The future? More TV work is in the tunnel — also a play — any offers? And an idea for a TV series.
After their recent season at the Stables Theatre JOHN SMYTHE interviews ...

Buttercup and Gladys

I make no claims for objectivity here. As an actor I feel the work I have done with Heather and Jan in mask and clowning workshops has been invaluable. Their clown performance work (Jan is Gladys, Heather is Buttercup) has, for me, rediscovered true comedy and pathos in a commercial - slickness dominated world. Clowning, from Shakespeare’s fools through Chaplin and Keaton to Norman Gunston, involves an emotionally honest, innocent, childlike, instinctive, creative process which is the vital essence of all “playmaking”. That is why I feel what Jan and Heather have to offer is of fundamental importance to our theatrical community.

Their company, Comma, is currently based at Pilgrim House in Sydney. That’s where we talked, over a cassette and cuppa, in the wake of their latest Buttercup and Gladys clown show for adults. Ready For Men.

JOHN: How did Gladys and Buttercup evolve?

JAN: Finding your clown is a process of self-discovery. For me it happened over a period of about two years, while I was at the E15 school in London. “Lecoqian” or “personal” clowning is part of the course there because it parallels their philosophy about acting. Once Gladys had become strong in her own right I wanted to go further with her, as a clown in performance. There is always more to explore. As you change, so does your clown.

HEATHER: I studied at the Lecoq school in Paris, where the emphasis is on a very physical form of theatre. I’d been living in France for some years when I came to do it. I went through a crisis of identity. It wasn’t until I came back here and worked with Jan that I found Buttercup, accepted she was Australian and learned to laugh about it. Your clown is inextricably linked to your cultural heritage.

JAN: It’s a bit like when women try to be male clowns: they’re not being themselves.

HEATHER: The imitating Charlie Chaplin thing can apply to men as well. Then there’s the tricksy circus clown syndrome ... Lecoq feels the original role of the clown has been lost. He sees clowns as an expression of the weakness in humanity.

JAN: So many people in Australia still think it’s just painting your face and tumbling and doing tricks. It goes much deeper than that.

HEATHER: It’s more to do with what you can’t do than what you can do.

JOHN: Do you find audiences here recognise and respond to your clowns?

JAN: Very much so, though some “trendy” theatre people expect “tightness” and “slickness” — devices which are so often used to cover a lack of feeling. But the main aim of our scenarios is to explore the “moment of feeling”, so the pace in performance has to be natural, not theatrical. Because clowning is about real life, childlike experience, ordinary people relate to it instinctively.

JOHN: Your material in “Ready For Men” could be called political: a satirical exploration of women’s experience under certain social pressures. And yet clowns by their very nature cannot be politically astute or didactic.

HEATHER: I think a basic thing about clowns can be a desire to want to fit in and be like others. And that’s what our show was about — Gladys and Buttercup wanting to “grow up” and become “real women”. They never comment directly but their behaviour is a comment in itself.

JOHN: To me that’s the best sort of political theatre: the audience makes its own discoveries instead of being told. How did “Ready For Men” develop, from basic idea to performable show?

JAN: We wanted to do a show about women. And it was clear from what we knew of our clowns already that Gladys could head in a militant feminist direction and Buttercup could enslave herself to the myths of femininity. So we knew there was potential “dramatic conflict” there from the start. And that’s all we started with. The rest emerged from active experiment: improvisations, where we found things instinctively. (Laughter) After two weeks of experiencing amazing things under the noses then trying to remember it all at the end of the day, the adults in us told our clowns a tape-recorder might help. And it did.

JOHN: But what you arrived at was a distillation of almost half a lifetime’s experience, let alone weeks of improvisation. You must have had to be selective somehow.

JAN: We did decide to concentrate on three main areas: the hair removal thing, which we hoped would represent a lot more than just that; the “niceness” thing and the sex thing.

HEATHER: Finding a way to explore the sex area without just making statements was really difficult. I think the breakthrough came when we hit on an “Emperor’s new clothes” approach.

JOHN: I found that sequence especially interesting, perhaps because you left it so open. So in the audience remained free to relate to it in terms of our own personal experience of, and feelings about, the “new sexuality” mythology. To me that’s audience participation at its best. Have you ever felt the need for a sort of “director” or “seeing eye” figure, to give you feedback?

JAN: No. I’m very strong on this-one. We couldn’t combine it with our working process. We, as performers, know when something is “right” or not because we’re in there feeling it. We also know there are problem areas with this show and given time we’ll resolve them. But I’d much rather our shows were ugly and rough but honest, than cute and slick but empty.

JOHN: I feel the work Jan and Heather are doing is essential, in all senses. It would be tragic if Comma were reduced to a fools stop.

The Marionette Theatre of Australia Ltd

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

The Marionette Theatre of Australia would like to hear from writers who are interested in working as its playwright-in-residence for up to four months in 1990.

Under the direction of Richard Bradshaw, this national company is based in Sydney, and plans to apply jointly with a writer to the Literature Board of the Australia Council for a grant to support the residency.

Past experience in writing for puppetry is not necessary and the script or scripts developed during the residency (for performance in 1981) may be for either adult or children’s audiences. An appreciation of the visual elements of puppet theatre is essential, as is the ability to collaborate closely with members of the company.

Please write by 14 September, with samples of previous work, to

Richard Bradshaw,
The Marionette Theatre of Australia Ltd.
PO Box 137, Kings Cross 2011.
Telephone (02) 357-1200
Travelling North shows David Williamson in mellow mood. The writer of this love affair between a septuagenarian and a 55-year old woman seems to have galloped to menopause since he “smashed Australian theatre censorship in the early 70’s ... with a plethora of fucks cunts and turds”.

Given that the hero dies it could be a tragedy — but the lack of an individual caught in a lonely lock step to untimely death is compromised not least by the age of the hero. What raises it from a genial nocturne to l’amour is Williamson’s unfaltering perception of humanity mapped with Chekhovian detail, and, yes, succinctness.

The concerns are those of the central character, of taking stock, of musing on what it involves for Williamson “something that hasn’t been utilised before in Australian drama. It highlights the vast landscape and climate differences available in the country”. These climatic differences are to be created using a new “stereophonic” technique in the production.

“Rather like radio”, explained Wilson. “We’re creating a different acoustic — though here with sound and lighting, so that with each setting you will know where you are without being told. Each will have its own created atmosphere”.

The technique appears to be affording added realism to a work by a writer concerned at being dubbed as “stuck with burnt toast motivation” (by Roger Pulvers). When probed on the naturalism issue Williamson began with the reflexive admission, but then went on to challenge it.

“I alternate between a unified structure, like The Club, where events happen over a couple of hours of real time, to a fragmented one like Stork ... Travelling North is the most fragmented structure yet — 37 scenes. The formal structure was chosen to fit the material because it is about the last three years of Frank’s life, so the obvious formal structure to choose is one that picks out the crucial moments of those last three years scene by scene ... It is not unusual for me, my first play Stork was nine scenes.”

Actually, of course, this does nothing to answer the argument — naturalism is not transcended by such quantitative factors as the number of slices life is cut into, and, as Williamson remarked himself in the introduction to the published version of Stork: “My career was greatly helped by the unrelenting and faultlessly naturalistic production given to The Coming of Stork ... my plays ... all demand a meticulously naturalistic acting style ...”

Instead of attempting to disavow the naturalism, or realism (to be more precise) of his work, why does he not boldly champion what he patently does so well?

Were he to do so, the next question might well be why not write solely for the cinema ( — which, as Ray Stanley points out elsewhere in this issue, is sorely in need of such talents)? Naturalism was, after all, a late 19th century phenomenon which had all the fruits plucked
from its tree by the recording of actual reality which the roving camera could supply. Increasing the number of scenes as in Travelling North, supports rather than diminishes the view; Frank Wilson again: “Actually what David has written here is a film script ... he has taken a film script and put it on the stage.”

Williamson answers this point without hesitation, “the stage can cope with more language than film ... you can let the words do something interesting. Theatre is still about how actors speak words ... whereas in film a basic mythic structure is taken, the actors improvise and the director shoots 100 hours of film which he then cuts down to 2½. Australian films are criticised because of bad scripts, but I’m tempted to ask what scripts? ... the director can write all that is needed. I feel at home in theatre. I can write words and people speak them.”

Elsewhere he has written “live theatre can still work when it deals with real people in an ongoing situation. Audiences can then recognise characters and compare and test their own reactions to situations against those of the stage characters in a setting more truly intimate than the cinema.”

Language and intimacy, then, anchor David Williamson as a playwright — and one concerned with realism. Rodney Fisher reviewed his work when it dealt with real people in an intimate, though, in his introduction to The Department, that Williamson might, like Ibsen before him, be moving towards symbolism with “the maze of endless pipes” as a “metaphor for the dehumanised void of bureaucratised education.” Perhaps a continued association with Fisher could help Williamson discover a more theatrical form of drama should he want one: “a production of Don’s Party with Artaudian marionquets — with raised shoes, huge bobbing heads and enlarged swaying puppet bodies ... would discover a shocking surreality... similar to ... (the) images of violence and insanity in America Hurrah.”

In the case of Travelling North rumour hath it that the writer insisted on Fisher as director to pursue what was becoming a John Dexter/Peter Shaffer type relationship. Nimrod’s desire for John Bell (no slight to him), however, apparently proved insurmountable.

Whether Williamson accepts being an exponent of naturalism or not, there is no question of his success. He is one of the few indigenous writers Kenn Brodziak would snap up. Why, then, when his plays are now box office magic before they open, does he continue in subsidised theatre?

“You see straight plays are fairly risky things. Plays that are anything other than bedroom farces are dicey. When I was in New York there were only something like four straight plays on Broadway to seventeen musicals. I think play-writing with any depth of characterisation or seriousness just has to be subsidised anywhere in the world ... I don’t see my work as typical commercial fluff, but if my plays do have an integrity and do work in commercial theatre then I’m all in favour of a transfer.”

Williamson resents what for most would be a flattering comparison — being likened to Alan Ayckbourn and Neil Simon. “No, I think Alan Ayckbourn is a marvellous craftsman, and Simon is too, but I think they take an overly optimistic and saccharine view of life. They never grapple with people with real problems, whereas Travelling North is about someone dying for god’s sake — actually going through the process of dying...”

Some have said that for all Williamson has immense appeal now, the topical social comment of his plays will date them prematurely. Frank Wilson staunchly repudiates this: “Not when you’re dealing with human emotion and you are dealing with human emotion in David’s plays. He hangs them on a story like an incident in a football club, and then expands them out, and once you do that they become timeless. Human beings don’t really change. When Harry Truman wanted to know about people he went to his history books.”

As David himself pointed out, one of his most topical plays, Don’s Party, though now 10 years old, has just opened in the film version in London to good reviews. The general, as Stanislaski said, only properly arises out of the particular.

*Rodney Fisher: Introduction to The Department, Currency 1975.


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Sydney has lost dozens of theatres over the past 180 years. Here the acknowledged authority on Aus. theatre buildings concludes his look at Sydney.

Ross Thorne: The Past One Hundred Years

SYDNEY'S LOST THEATRES

PART TWO

Gaiety Theatre, Castlereagh St. c. 1880.

1880 saw the sudden need for more theatrical accommodation so the Catholic Guild Hall in Castlereagh Street was pressed into service. It became the Gaiety behind a suitably theatrical hybrid Venetian Gothic facade. The long hall was subdivided into stage and auditorium complete with proscenium boxes, a dress circle and sloping stalls laid over the old flat floor. In the nineties it was no longer required, there then being, in Sydney, five substantial theatres.

Another theatre which led a rather nondescript life through the last years of the 19th and early years of the 20th centuries was the Gaiety Theatre.

Royal Standard in the next block towards Central Railway. It was the Royal Foresters' Hall minimally converted to a playhouse, occasionally presenting drama but more frequently it saw variety, boxing, or nothing at all. In 1913 it became Hugh Buckler's and Violet Paget's Little Theatre, where after savouring the new (highly non-commercial) drama of Shaw, Wilde or Arnold Bennett at matinees, the audience was invited to partake of a cup of tea.

Criterion Theatre, Pitt & Park Sts. 1886.

In the same year of the inauguration of the Royal Standard (1886) the much admired Criterion opened. It was according to the Sydney Morning Herald "a great advance on Sydney theatres, and makes the spectator feel far nearer London than usual". Although the audience was on three levels it was probably similar to, although larger than Hobart's Theatre Royal for its feeling of intimacy. It was particularly suitable for plays; Sydneysiders saw, among other performers, Dion Boucicault and Marie Tempest as well as the spectacular productions of Oscar Asche on its stage. It was purchased by the City Council in 1933 for the widening of Park Street.

If 1886 saw the opening of this handsome theatre, 1887 witnessed the opening of Sydney's greatest theatre: Her Majesty's Theatre and Grand Opera House in Pitt Street. It was the first theatre to have accommodation consonant with what we expect today in front of and behind the curtain. It contained a full fly tower, a relatively new facility, having a height of 109 feet from stage basement to grid, and the new method of shifting scenes laterally on trucks was also able to be operated.

Her Majesty's, Pitt St, after rebuilding in 1902.

Her Majesty's opened with George Rignold in a spectacular Henry V and was gutted by fire during the J.C.W. production of Ben Hur in 1902. (The chariot race with live horses took place on a moving floor with the scenery being rolled in the opposite direction.) The theatre was rebuilt in 1903 to continue seeing the greatest names in theatre, names such as Sarah Bernhardt, Anna Pavlova, Melba, John McCormack, Nellie Stewart, until 1933 when Gladys Moncrief as The Maid of the Mountains sang a special farewell on behalf of J.C. Williamson Theatres Ltd.

It was not until 1960 that Sydney would again see a new Her Majesty's, a revamped Empire which had originally opened in 1927 as a musical comedy house.

Near the original Her Majesty's there were to
Sydney’s Lost Theatres

be two more theatres built before the end of the century: The Lyceum in 1891/2 and the Palace opposite, in 1896. The Lyceum was a comfortable three level theatre (behind another hotel), with a stage almost 60 feet square; however, it became a film house as early as 1905. New owners, the Methodist Church commenced using it as a Sunday meeting hall in 1908 after delicensing the hotel.

Within recent living memory there have disappeared the lavish St. James originally built by Ben and John Fuller, and opening with No No Nanette in 1926. There was the Savoy which, for around ten years before 1939, housed live theatre companies, particularly Doris Fitton’s Independent Theatre. Then there was the Phillip Street Theatre in the St. James Hall, where Bill Orr received his reputation as producer of those fabulous Phillip Street Revues.

Gone too is the Tivoli near Central Railway. This large theatre had commenced as the Adelphi in 1911 but was altered in 1915, becoming firstly the Grand Opera House (to be used frequently for melodrama), then the Tivoli from 1923 to 1970. The tradition of “Tivoli” Vaudeville shows began its state of permanency under Harry Rickards in 1893, at what originally opened as the Garrick theatre in 1891 on the site of the Academy of Music. After a fire it was rebuilt for Rickards in 1900. His successors closed it in 1929 but the tradition was revived at the other end of town until 1966 when the last Tivoli show was seen.

The Alhambra was another variety theatre — music hall, but commencing its existence as an auction room. Known first as the Haymarket Academy it was the Alhambra from 1886 until it finished up as a picture house in the 1920’s.

One seldom-remembered vaudeville theatre which may soon disappear is the National. Opened in 1906 as Brennans National Amphitheatre it was converted by the Fuller’s management into a two level theatre in 1919 and continued until “talkie” films forced its conversion to a cinema (The Roxy) in 1930. Shortly after it was renovated as the Mayfair; the rather shallow fly-tower stage with multi-level dressing rooms on the northern side are still in existence.

Fuller’s had another vaudeville city theatre for a number of years before it was bought for an extension to Marcus Clarke’s department store in 1925. It was the Princess which commenced life as the Bijou Picture Palace in 1908.

Of all the variety theatres the most charming and intimate was the Palace. Built originally in 1896 as a Palace of Varieties its interior was a strange mixture — a kind of Moorish tinged with Gothic containing a forest of cast-iron posts. In 1924 the auditorium was rebuilt to provide an excellent house without columns, for drama. After being a second run cinema through most of the 1930’s and World War II its traditional renaissance style of plasterwork was redecorated by Hoyts in antique cream, while the wall panels had their fabric replaced with crimson damask. Then for a short time it was a first-run English film house before returning to being a live theatre for such shows as Present Laughter and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf. It was much loved by audience and performers alike, although it was a fire hazard and the cooking smells wafted in from the kitchens of Adams Hotel next door. It closed; its fittings were auctioned off in January 1970 before demolition made way for the ubiquitous redevelopment.
The world premiere of Dorothy Hewett’s MAN FROM MUCKINUPIN is on this month at the National Theatre in her home State of WA. She is one of our greatest writers — though the uncompromising nature of her genius has often led to controversy and less exposure in the theatre than is her right. Her major works include Chapel Perilous, Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly and Golden Oldies.

Dorothy Hewett

I feel that in 1979 things are looking up for me in the theatre. I have been giving a lot of thought to my position, my ideas, the past and the future, and I feel I have come up with a few ambivalent answers. I stopped thinking I had any straight answers at least ten years ago.

But in 1979 I have a new commissioned play at the National Theatre in Perth (my old hometown), a first Sydney production of “The Golden Oldies” directed by John Tasker at Jane Street, a new collection of poems, and I do feel that I know in which direction I am moving.

I suppose my Sydney career might be called "from Jane Street to Jane Street", and my critics might be forgiven for remarking that I don’t seem to have moved far, in the career sense in seven years, when Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly had a short season in that same little theatre. I’ve had some heady moments along the way: The Chapel Perilous was the second Australian play to be performed by the Old Tote at the still new venue of the Opera House, and, with fanfares and dreams, the new Paris Theatre Company opened "Pandora’s Cross", especially commissioned by Jim Sharman.

So what went wrong? Why didn’t the playwright go from strength to strength, why aren’t my plays being performed in venues throughout the country, and bringing me in a modest living, and, sometimes, the accolades of the press and the great GP? If I was to accept what many of the critics say about me I would have to agree that I am “soft in the head” (at least sometimes), that I can’t write dialogue (and a playwright who can’t write dialogue should surely take up some other profession), that my plays are all poorly constructed with no beginning, middle or end, that actors and actresses can’t speak my lines because they are unspeakable (although poetic), and that I am only understood and supported by a handful of academics. Theatre critics call me a poet, poetry critics often refer to me as a playwright.

I see no contradiction in the two roles. In fact writing poetry has been one way to teach myself precision, economy, style, language and its multiple fascinations and web of correspondences. It has made me sensitive to the power of image and symbol and the cadence of the spoken word.

I am at present also embarked on a critical work on modern Romantic Australian Poetry, and I see no contradiction in this either. My academic training, and the critical writing I’ve done for years in the lit mags, the newspapers and, yes, Theatre Australia, has helped to develop my critical sense, and the language of criticism.

I find the multiple role of playwright, poet and critic marvellously challenging and satisfying, and although there have been periods when I thought, after particularly heartbreaking experiences and savage onslaughts, that I would dramatically “give up the theatre”, it was never really on, since I began to write plays seriously in about 1966/67.

The theatre is of all writing the most brutal and the most exciting. Nothing else matches that confrontation in public between the playwright and the audience. Nothing else matches the heady excitement of having actually created three dimensional people who move through a recognisable landscape of one’s own imagining.

Nothing else for me matches the delight of working with other dedicated professionals in a co-operative enterprise. Sometimes this experience is magnificent, sometimes alarming, sometimes destructive, sometimes so-so, but it is never boring for one instant, and I always learn something new from it as both a writer and a
human being.

I had, until recently, I now realise, accepted what seemed to be a fact; I would never have a really popular success in the Australian theatre, audiences and critics would always be sharply divided, and there would always be periods of extraordinary hostility and downright failure.

It's true in the theatre that you are always only as good as your last play, and my last play had bombed rather spectacularly. It's not really much comfort to reflect that you could be appreciated as a geriatric or a corpse. Some still small voice keeps saying "How will you ever go?"

After the terrifying experience of Pandora's Cross where so much depended on that first production for the viability of the Paris Company, and where I felt I had not only gone down in flames myself but virtually taken the Paris with me, there was a period of despair. I felt for a long time that I didn't even want to go to the theatre. Everything connected with it was too painful.

But when I received the commission from the Perth Playhouse I knew that I had to come to terms with the Paris experience, learn from it perhaps, and start another play. It could have been a tragic one, God knows I felt despondent enough, but then this was to be a play for the tragic, so I sat down to write a play for a serious company, and where I felt I had not only gone down in flames myself but virtually taken the Paris with me, there was a period of despair. I felt for a long time that I didn't even want to go to the theatre. Everything connected with it was too painful.

I commemorated my own delight in Wirths' Circus who visited the wheatbelt every two years, The Desert Song and The Boy Friend, produced by J C Williamson, at Her Majesty's, when I was five.

Probably too there is the happy shadow of all those 1930's musicals dreamed over at my grandfather's cinema, The Regal, in Subiaco, where Barry Humphries now performs legit.

There has also been the delight of working with Jim Cotter, a composer I respect and admire, for his originality and versatility.

Ever since our plan to work together at Canberra Rep fell through some years ago we've promised ourselves this "happy and holy occasion". So all the omens seem good in Mukinupin: the director Stephen Barry is delighted with the script, I've long admired the work of his designer Tony Tripp. With only a few natural trepidations I can honestly say I'm looking forward to working again at the Playhouse.

Apart from everything else I do feel that now I know what I'm doing in the theatre, what I want to achieve, and I won't be deflected from its aims. My plans for future plays will always include totally new directions. I like to risk and grow, I love solving new stylistic, technical and language problems. For me it's part of the fascination of the whole exercise.

I don't feel like a failure or an outsider in the Australian theatre anymore, and for that I have to thank many audiences, directors, actors, publishers, friends and supporters, and yes, the groves of academe themselves. I will always be grateful for the interest and perceptions of the quite considerable number of tertiary students and lecturers who study and teach my plays.

My plans for the future are pretty varied. They include finishing the stage adaptation of Robert Adamson's novel, Zimmer's Essay, (with perhaps a screen play), solving the problems of writing my two volume autobiography, completing another collection of poetry, finishing my critical book on the Australian Romantics, and writing a new play set in WA again, but this time in the far north, title Beyondie.

There are a few big dreams thrown in ... write a Chekhovian play about a pioneering family who live on the banks of a fabulous river, a film script with the power and poetry of a Bergman, a one woman show for Australia's greatest actress, Robyn Nevin, and I'd like to resurrect the reality and throw out the didacticism in my old working-class Sydney novel Bobbin Up, and adapt it into a TV serial.

I'm delighted that the Literature Board of the Australia Council are supporting the concept of playwrights in residence with a particular theatre. I'd love to have the experience of being a working dramatist attached to a company. It almost happened last year with Hoopla, but we couldn't get it together.

But the biggest task of all is to work hard to become more accessible and thus more popular, without for one moment abdicating from my overall mythic vision of Australian theatre.
CANBERRA SURVEY

ROGER PULVERS

_The Floating World_ by John Romeril. The Australian Theatre Workshop at the ANU Arts Centre, Canberra. Opened 4 July, 1979. Director, Warwick Baxter; Les Harding, Pat Galvin; Irene Harding. Mary Vincent; Herbert Robinson; Terry Hornby; Connie, Brian O'Brien; Harry, Robert Stephen; McLeod, Geoff Edwards; Walker, Lenore Manderson; Loudspeaker, Barbara Sekules. (Amateur)

Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov. Fortune Theatre Company at the Playhouse, Canberra. Opened 11 July, 1979. Director, Marina Cuffe; Designer, Tony Lowery Jones and Joyce Macfarlane; Stage Manager, Val McKelvey; Serebrayakov, John Paisley; Yelena, Margaret de Mestre; Sonya, Tatura Rose; Maria Vassilyeva, Pat Heathcote; Vanya, John Caffe; Astrov, Matthew O'Sullivan; Waffles, Julian Owen; Marina, Liz Ferguson; Labourer, Chris Pigott. (Professional)

_The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui_ by Bertolt Brecht. Canberra Repertory Theatre Three, Canberra. Opened 25 July, 1979. Director, Ralph Wilson; Designer, Francis Rhodes; Stage Manager, Glenn Shipley; Arturo Ui, Ralph Goldstein; Roma, Gary Prichard; Gin, Bill Goman; Fiske, Tony Pratt; Canaster, Desmondt Lyttle; Butcher, Michael McCarthy; Mulberry, Rolf Driver; Clerk, John Howe; Sheet, John Smull; Old Dogborough, Jan Smith; Young Dogborough, Michael Campbell; Dockday, Louise Fraser. (Amateur)

Three Canberra groups have presented plays recently at ATW, John Romeril's _The Floating World_. Fortune Theatre, Chekhov's _Uncle Vanya_. Rep, Brecht's _The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui_. Very unfortunately, all three productions were disappointing, although there were some fine isolated performances.

What deadened them all? It was an impractical and poorly figured staging, for one thing. For another, it was a general failure to link text with character. For the most part, actors spoke their lines as if off the page, without demonstrating each and every time that the particular personality they were playing _had_ to be saying those things. But there were places of interest as well.

Hearing and seeing John Romeril's play after five years have elapsed reminds one of just how excellent _The Floating World_ is. In this play, Romeril combines a highly dramatic and compact language with superb theatrical and visual effect. The ATW productions at the ANU Arts Centre hardly did the script justice, but there were some great performances. These came from Pat Galvin and Lenore Manderson. Galvin's Les Harding had an intensity and concentration. It apparently hadn't been decided where the main action was going to take place. The set itself was more gaps than dramatic spaces. And there was no feeling that we were on a ship, or, more important, a confined space. A confinement is necessary both for the realistic parts on the ship and the inner dynamics of Les's conscience. The production didn't come to terms with the conditions of the Arts Centre at this early stage in its development. The dialogue couldn't be heard at times. Why, for instance, was Les's prolonged last monologue placed in the far corner of the stage? Its message was weakened. Thanks to Pat Galvin's performance, some of the bold humour and grotesque truth of the play reached us.

John Caffe is probably the best actor working in Canberra over the years. His work always has intelligence and clear intentions. He allows his character a chance to speak for himself.

This was no less true with his portrayal of Vanya in Fortune Theatre's _Uncle Vanya_. His entire performance was based on a through-line, and he played the man who is destined to waste away in a mute interior landscape with the greatest sympathy. There were fine subtle points to his performance, as, in the beginning, when he slowly slid across a bench while speaking and pausing; or when he rocked on his feet in dismay having caught Astrov and Yelena embracing. But once this performance is accounted for, the production doesn't come to grips with the play. Both Matthew O'Sullivan and John Paisley, for instance, are very good actors. But, because of the direction, they only managed to evoke a single dimension out of their characters. Not only a stiffness throughout, but a vocal monotony. The women were very weak, especially Margaret De Mestre, who was, I believe, miscast for the role of Yelena. In general the stage movements and poses were cliched, pre-war naturalism. The long monologues of the play, which are beautiful, weren't tied to the inner needs of the characters. The result was that the comments that one character made about another were largely not credible as demonstrated dramatic facts.

The opening of the play was excellent, with only a large photo of autumn as backdrop. The pace was unhurried, subdued. But this feeling was lost in subsequent acts when the set had to be carried in detail by tedious detail, during blackouts that seemed to last ages. It crushed the theatrical mood.

Fortune Theatre's productions always produce some good acting, and thoughtfulness. But why, I wonder, are those productions so lacking in imagination?

Ralph Wilson's production of _Arturo Ui_, for Rep, was also a disappointment. The staging was austere and undervalued, but the effect was not one of starkness but of dull tone. Not much of the play's humour came out. In an attempt to dislocate the play from any comparison with the Nazis — which is a desirable thing to do — the message of the criminality of politics was all but lost. In the end it just looked like the story of a bunch of petty crims.

If the large stage area of Theatre 3 is to be used in its entirety, then much more sense of focus is necessary through effective lighting. There were some good performances, from Ralph Goldstein as Ui, and especially from Bill Ginnane as Giri.

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Dorothy Hewett

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WAITING FOR GODOT

ANTHONY BARCLAY


Director, George Whaley; Designer, Lyn Ford; Assistant Director, Jenny Laing-Peach.

Vladimir, Geoffrey Rush; Estragon, Mel Gibson; Pozzo, John Clayton; Lucky, Robert Menzies; The Boy, Vivienne Garrett.

(Professional)


Director, Hayes Gordon; Designer, Larry Eastwood.

George Schneider, Len Kaserman; Leo Schneider, Greg Radford; Jennie Malone, Sharon Flanagan; Faye Medwick, Suzanne Hawley.

(Professional)

Under the watchful direction of George Whaley, assisted by Jenny Laing-Peach, the NIDA at Jane Street annual season was again successful. Whaley's exceptionally fine adaptation of the Steele Rudd/Bert Bailey On Our Selection was so successful that it will return for audiences at Nimrod later this year. Five of the cast stayed on for the second production, Waiting for Godot, Beckett's classic essay that explores a world of stalemate, of impasse.

Godot is a difficult play but George Whaley has mastered its inherent difficulties superbly. The casting of Geoffrey Rush (Vladimir) and Mel Gibson (Estragon) was perfect. Rush the tall, thin, pale, sensitive clown; Gibson, shorter, rounder, fleshier, droller. Here the clowning base of the play — the pairing of routines, the patter, the gags — was carried with consumate skill. Gibson's Burtonesque delivery added moments of delicious subtlety and the two shared many moments of excellent contrasts. This was particularly true in the gloomy silence of the last part of Act One where the singularly apt description of the play, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" took on awesome dimensions. John Clayton's Pozzo was delightful with moments of detachment, of power with Faye, she and Radford carried off the Leo-Jennie scene to perfection.

The production itself was virtually flawless. Larry Eastwood's set must be the Ensemble's best set in memory, its symmetry perfectly balancing the play, truly organic with the text. Hayes Gordon's direction works with great skill to allow the play to develop its correct pace and flow. Sharon Flanagan took the acting honours with a sustained and rich performance as Jennie. Len Kaserman seemed more at ease with the witty, alive George than the self-pitying side of the character but that is at most a minor criticism. Greg Radford was a delightful Leo, full of fun, and most impressive in the Leo-Jennie scene where we learn of George's breakdown after Barbara's death. Suzanne Hawley was at ease with Faye, she and Radford carried off the lighter comedy with great timing and flair.

Not always hone in on target. I do not find, like some Sydney critics, George's "sudden" reversal from Jennie's warm, witty lover to cruel, self-pitying husband following their honeymoon, an unconvincing dramatic device. On the contrary, Simon's psychological accuracy here has been consistently pointed dramatically throughout the first act... George's dreams, his near collapse at a restaurant when memories of Barbara nearly blot out Jennie's presence, his comic yet moving indecision on the morning of the wedding. What misses is the playwright's inability to detach himself from the self-indulgence of his characters.

The other quibble with Simon is with his often praised "sparkling humour". There is no doubt that his works abound with laughs but so often he invests his characters with his own sense of humour bouncing off things American. Humour does not necessarily lead one out of the morass, or as one English wit put it: "Only window shopping...strictly no sale."

The whirlwind courtship and marriage of George Schneider, a 42 year old writer, and Jennie Malone, an actress in her thirties. The other characters are Leo, George's younger brother, a theatre PR man, and Faye Medwick, Jennie's actress friend, who is contemplating adultery with the amorous Leo.

But Chapter Two cannot be understood without "Chapter One". This concerns the past, especially the recent past of death (Barbara, George's wife) and divorce (Gus, Jennie's husband). By the end of the play we have a composite picture of these two: Barbara, the perfect mate ("If you meet them once in life, God has been good to you") and Gus, the failed football-careersman-husband. George's Chapter One ends in deep trauma, a refusal to admit to Barbara's death, to give away her memory or, as time goes by, to give up "self-pity". Jennie's Chapter One ends with her keen to forget the world of men and hurl herself into her career. But God is twice kind to George when Jennie come into his life; and Jennie finds that George puts her "on her toes... after years of standing on my heels". Intervened into this is the simple (even simplistic) comedy of Leo and Faye, their respective Chapter Ones being: Leo married but incapable of monogomy and Faye, marriage in the blues or perhaps the dreaded seven year itch ("he's lost his sense of balance, he keeps rolling away from me in bed.

The George-Jennie story is potentially poignant and serious dramatic stuff. A man deeply torn and divided by his wife's death adjusting to a new love uneasily. A woman disillusioned by several years of wasted marriage meeting a man whom she deeply loves but also having to adjust as well as endure his erratic transference of emotions. OK. But Simon does not always hone in on target. I do not find, like some Sydney critics, George's "sudden" reversal from Jennie's warm, witty lover to cruel, self-pitying husband following their honeymoon, an unconvincing dramatic device. On the contrary, Simon's psychological accuracy here has been consistently pointed dramatically throughout the first act... George's dreams, his near collapse at a restaurant when memories of Barbara nearly blot out Jennie's presence, his comic yet moving indecision on the morning of the wedding. What misses is the playwright's inability to detach himself from the self-indulgence of his characters.

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McBeth, bludgers and whipping boys. It is back to school yesterday's surfie hedonists are today's dole-head Prefect lords it in Canberra and audience to concern themselves with the rotten personal dilemma: it was not for Hamlet or her devoted to the resolution of this agonising sports-mad Horatio meant no more to him than change she had undergone for the sake of her elbow on knee, head and hand, chewing gum and centre and marvellous image was Kate—even more so, I think, celebrated the Oz hedonist at a loose end. Its where an end-of-year production of recognised not-so-Great Public School for boys, Kirk Gallery, Sydney, is Dunsinane, a hideously outrageous pantomime rort since get the blame—we've seen nothing like this while the bad boys muck up and the good boys (Professional)

Boy's Own McBeth by Graham Bond and Jim Burnett. The Kirk Gallery, Cleveland St., Surry Hills, Sydney. Opened 11 July, 1979. Director, Graham Bond and Mark Gould; Musical Direction, Rory O'Donoghue; Costume, Melody Cooper. Mr Sean Tobin, Nick Lathouris; Mr Geoffrey Elston, Rory O'Donoghue; Charles Hunt, Paul Johnstone; Terry Shakespeare, Graham Bond; Dopey Shakespeare, Nicholas Lyon; S S Shakespeare, Bjorne Ohlin; Morrie McBeth, and Miss Graymalakin, Elizabeth Wilder.

School Assembly—the brass band blasting, the headmaster threatening, the English master camping; oaths of fealty to Queen and School while the bad boys muck up and the good boys get the blame—we've seen nothing like this outrageous pantomime rort since Hamlet on Ice. The setting for this new happening by that inimitable partnership of madness and music, Graham Bond and Rory O'Donoghue, at the Kirk Gallery, Sydney, is Dunsinane, a hideously recognisable not-so-Great Public School for boys, where an end-of-year production of McBeth is in the offing...

If you loved Hamlet on Ice than you'll go for Boy's Own McBeth—even more so, I think, because there's more to it. Hamlet on Ice celebrated the Oz hedonist at a loose end. Its centre and marvellous image was Kate Fitzpatrick, one black silken foot on a chair, elbow on knee, head and hand, chewing gum and gazing with misty blue eyes at the audience as, with her opening line she idly plucked out the heart of Hamlet's mystery: "Jeez, I'm blue".

And she had good reason. The spectacular sex change she had undergone for the sake of her sports-mad Horatio meant no more to him than over-developed pectorals. The whole panto was devoted to the resolution of this agonising personal dilemma: it was not for Hamlet or her audience to concern themselves with the rotten state of Denmark.

But today we are living in sterner times. The Head Prefect lords it in Canberra and yesterday's surfi hedonists are today's dole-bludgers and whipping boys. It is back to school with a vengeance—and so, in Boy's Own McBeth, Dunsinane is presided over by Nick Lathouris as a Headmaster who postures with authoritarianism in public and finds his own way to beat the system in cabinet.

How does one survive in this authoritarian society of Dunsinane? If one is Terry Shakespeare one knocks off the tuckshop proprietress at the age of 13, marries her, is widowed, and then endows the school in return for free board and education for oneself and one's sons. Terry happily exploits a loophole in the agreement which enables their education to continue indefinitely. Now, at 36 the headmaster's indispensable ally, he is privy to all policy-making and the staff's little secrets.

If, on the other hand, you are Head Boy like Hunt, with an influential father, you smash up to the Head and look forward to a joy ride through life. Or, finally if you have the financial pull, you simply take the whole school over, like little Morrie McBeth, until this moment the school scapegoat. Dunsinane School becomes a schule and the board installs the extravagently gay English master, a sudden convert to Judaism, as Head.

In this hilarious denouement, the world, we are told, will be taken over by Jews and homosexuals. (What about the Abo's?) Some might find it a teeny bit offensive if it were not all such innocent fun.

But then, as Dorothy Hewett has remarked, Australian society is characterised by a corrupt innocence—and here it seems to me Boy's Own McBeth is deathly accurate.

Bond and O'Donoghue, with that marvellous gift, familiar from Auntie Jack days, for moving easily between riotous fun, schoolboy cruelty and pathos, dazzle the audience with the inspired frenzy of their script (with Jim Burnett) and music; and their performances as Terry Shakespeare and Elston, the English Master (who also plays Lady Macbeth). The show has much in common with Auntie Jack in the streak of cruelty behind the innocent rags: the way it says out loud, appallingly, the dark, unacknowledged cruelty behind the innocent rags: the way it says out loud, appallingly, the dark, unacknowledged feelings out of sense of fun.

At bottom Boy's Own McBeth has something disturbingly immature, perhaps even destructive. As soon as we see little Morrie McBeth—enchantingly played by Elizabeth Wilder—perched on the piano stool in an unerring green spot and singing sadly, "I guess I haven't got any real friends, but that's so much better than having no friends at all", we know by the pricking in our thumbs that something wicked this way comes. Exploited and ignored, Morrie will before long be dancing with "Lady Macbeth, the lady of Death" in the show's big rock number—a moment when the innocent fun develops a deadly frisson. This is the moment when the boys of Old Dunsinane find themselves out on the streets.

And so it is for the audience too. As the evicted pupils prepare to face an economic climate in which they must be glad of any job that comes along, they leave us with the haunting school song: "We were the boys of old Dunsinane". The crazy world of school dissipates, vanishes like one of the witches' visions. Just as in Shakespeare the witches give Macbeth a false sense of security, so Terry Shakespeare, still a schoolboy at 36, finds the cold wind of reality invading his world. "Can any of you give me a job? he asks the audience. "I've got two children to support." The sad voice reverberates as the audience disperse from the crowded, friendly theatre, into the chill wind of Cleveland Street.

In Boy's Own McBeth Oz has at last caught up with itself in the theatre. It tells us about now. All the recent plays one can think of could have been written five years ago. Boy's Own McBeth could only have been written now. It is altogether an extraordinary and atrocious happening, as directed by Bond and Mark Gould and with an outstanding cast, of whom Paul Johnstone as the Head Boy and Nicholas Lyon and Bjorne Ohlin as Terry's sons, have so far gone unmentioned. It is the group's unique quality that they all play an instrument as well as sing, dance and do character acts. The whole is very good and may well turn into a cult—it has such a finger on the pulse. It must certainly transfer to a further theatre.

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MARAT/SADE

JEREMY RIDGMAN

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams. Queensland Theatre Company, SGO Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened 11 July 1979. Director, Rick Billinghurst; Designer, Peter Cooke; Stage Manager, Victor Ashelford; Lighting Design, Derek Campbell; Negro Woman, Lorna Holloway; Eunice, Kate Richter; Pablo, Rod Wissler; Sailor, Drunk, Jim Porter; Vendor, Doctor, Reg Gillam; Stanley, John Jarratt; Mitch, Robert Van Mackelenberg; Stella, Michele Stayner; Blanche, Judith Anderson; Steve, Duncan Wass; Young Man, Greg Gesch; Mexican Woman, Marion, Gwen Wheeler. (Professional).

In many ways A Streetcar Named Desire is the best thing the QTC has given us for a long time. In sheer visual power it matches the dazzling Habeus Corpus (full marks in each case to Peter Cooke's immaculate set) and in the imaginative handling of a "standard" text, equals the acclaimed King Lear.

Any central performances which attempt, consciously or otherwise, to eschew the Brando/Leigh legacy can only be praised, though they tread on dangerous ground. John Jarratt, ostensibly too youthful for his role, nevertheless succeeds in giving us a Stanley for the '70s. Tall, angular, even gangling in his gait, he is everything Williams says he is not; but the performance works. If the power and self-assertion seem to originate in insecurity (perhaps lending credence to the repeated appeals to external authority, Napoleonic codes, acquaintances in the know) then he is no less dangerous for that, especially when he slouches towards Blanche, a "drooglike" glint in his eye.

Judith Anderson's Blanche I found compelling but less convincing. She rightly concentrates on the small-town schoolma'am, her intonation nasal, her references to Mr Edgar Allen Poe more pedantic than romantic, but somehow the realism is too much. With the translucent enigma of the character gone the poetic tragedy runs the risk of degenerating into a "true-life" story of a nervous breakdown.

The production as a whole is rich and evocative, the one moment tough and sinewy, the next profoundly lyrical. Much of the effect is in the design: Never have I been made more aware of the publicness of the world to which Blanche has fled to have her wounds torn open for the last time than in Peter Cooke's tough grey tenement block, which seems almost to move forward a step with every new scene. To the same effect, the play is orchestrated with finesse, from the streetcars, seemingly thundering through the auditorium, to the carefully timed hoots of the poker players, emanating from the smoky penumbra to encroach upon the tragedy that is unfolding in front of them. And how satisfying to witness a production which does justice to the profusion of light images in the play's poetic texture; an alley, aframe with movie posters, passing inches from the Kowalski's bed and Blanche's trunk, mercilessly ripped open, picked out in a ghostly blue, so that the light almost appears to be radiating from the tawdry glad-rags themselves, images such as these remain long after the action has ceased.

Some kilometers to the west of Brisbane, Performance, the acting ensemble of the performing arts programme at Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, have been shattering the Toowoomba calm with the strident spectacle of Weiss's Marat/Sade. Robert Ketton's powerful production resists the temptation for over-indulgence, though I question the implications of giving the inmates of Charenton the last, Utopian word in an anarchic overthrow of the warders.

Ken Imison's de Sade is first rate, composed yet passionate, breaking into asthmatic wheezes during his flagellation, a perfect metaphor for the paradox of absolute solipsism. Unfortunately, Imison, in his maturity and stature, tends to dominate a youthful, even callow Marat; again, perhaps an interpretative decision, but I feel a
distorting one. Paul Hunt's Herald is everywhere and everything, a fawning, mooning clown, an articulated memento mori and finally, wallowing in Marat's bath, a mockery of the idealism of both protagonists. Jack Ballantyne's multi-levelled set rises to meet the operatic demands of the play, as do the commitment and energy of a thirty-odd strong ensemble — and it is an ensemble for once, which is no mean achievement in itself.

Slickest second-rate show in town

VIVA INDONESIA HILLS FAMILY SHOW

PETER LAVERY

Viva Indonesia and Australia, devised and performed by the Popular Theatre Troupe, Brisbane Qld. From June 1979. Director, Richard Fotheringham.


Seeing the Popular Theatre Troupe perform their latest plays, Viva Indonesia and Australia in their home base hall is somewhat unrepresentative. The following afternoon, however, seeing Australia performed at a backyard barbecue for unionists, one starts to get the feel of the bulk of their performances which happen in sugar mills, mining camps, pensioner gatherings, and prisons, up and down the state. The Troupe's shows are, and always have been, a sugar coated social message, and in the manner of the best cartoon, the more you laugh, the more the message sticks. With real political acumen the troupe aims its message at the half-converted, the vaguely sympathetic non-theatre goer who is amenable to being told exactly what happened in East Timor, or the position that women have in our workforce.

The basic style developed by the Troupe is a big, quick-fire gag presentation alone in an almost two dimensional cartoon context. Historical fact and songs are woven into analogous situations which gain their strength when re-invoked later in the programme. Thus the cock fight between a Javanese sultan and the Dutch is echoed in the later cock fight between Sukarno and the USA. Viva Indonesia stretches the format; there are seven actors in a full hour and a half show which includes Indonesian shadow puppetry and film footage taken by the Australian journalists murdered at Balileo. Australia, on the other hand, is a tight three-hander which accomplishes a lightning quick review of Australian history in forty minutes. The quality of acting is high, with Kathy Porrill and John Lane showing natural qualities particularly suited to the style.

Richard Fotheringham was the leading force in establishing the Troupe and developing the style, and he wrote Viva Indonesia. Richard's latest production venture is The Hills Family Show at La Boite, and his years of experience of ensemble working up a script from scratch stand him in good stead. Here is the La Boite Company on home ground. Dynamic actors like Sean Mee and Chris Burns handle the broad and pacy comedy with ease, and the theatre has always lent itself to the kind of audience participation called for here.

The Show takes the form of a distinctly second rate variety programme, performed by the endlessly extendable Hills family. The family has demanded that the La Boite management recreate a recognisable theatrical venue (you can't play "eyes and teeth" in this new fangled theatre-in-the-round), and we are duly presented with the best of church hall faded proscenium arches. When they finally sort themselves out, the family presents us with a series of acts encompassing ventriloquism, singing, mind reading, magic and melodrama. Like all send-ups it works best when closest to real life. Jo Hardie, as Miss Daisy Hill, is pot on with her slightly overamplified singing tribute to Olivia Newton John, a direct recreation of every second-rate cabaret act one has seen.

The show is pure fun, and as it settles down during the run, it will be the slickest "second-rate" show ever seen in town.
Stage Co Wins Quest

MISSIS QUEEN
THE SOUND OF SILENCE

SUSAN VILE

Missis Queen by Doreen Clarke. Troupe at the Red Shed, Adelaide SA. Opened 19 July 1979. Director, David Allen; designer, Paul Carter; Stage Manager, Christine Anderson.

Emma Forsayth, Gwenda Helsham; Tom Farrell, David Tyler; Stevens, Brown, Von Harnemann, Ron Huong; Grieves, Alf, Wally, Jon Firman; Mercy, Betty, Gloria, Helene Burden; with David Kirk and Geoff Pellan.


Peter Cutler, Don Birker; Helena Cutler; Auldine Leith; Mark Cutler; Richard Lawrence.

In the latest round of Adelaide’s Alternative Theatre Quest, the Stage Company wins hands down from Troupe.

The contestants start with equal odds. Both are using the work of a local playwright; both in a small inner-city location; both on a shoe-string budget. But there the similarity ends.

Doreen Clarke’s Missis Queen is a play in the episodic, documentary style that we’re accustomed to seeing at the Red Shed. It’s a style which suits Troupe, accommodating the enthusiasm of the younger actors as well as the more assured playing of those with greater experience. But it’s a style, too, which in its rejection of conventional plot and character development, requires a stand-point, something to hold the episodes together, otherwise the centre has no chance to hold, and things inevitably fall apart.

Troupe usually has no trouble with stand-point. Even if the play wavers, the direction generally makes it clear. In this case, however, both author and director (David Allen) have betrayed signs of indecision and the actors are left somehow between.

Set at the turn of the century Missis Queen tells of the life of Emma Forsayth, an American/Samoan woman who, together with Australian trader and labour-recruiter, Tom Farrell, sets up a highly successful trading, business in New Guinea. We see Emma’s rise to power at the expense of both Western traders and missionaries in “uncivilised” lands. Billed as a satire, Ms Clarke’s play seems to aim for the second way, but is neither objective nor incisive enough to point the derisive finger with anything but the mildest scorn.

Gwenda Helsham did her best in a part which required her to move from youth to antiquity, but she was wrong for the early years and seemed throughout to be striving for a roundness in the character which the script did not provide. Her heavy-handed approach to dialogue hinders the detachment that makes for comedy, so that laugh-lines — and there were some splendidly comic ones — were often lost. Most of the other characters, stereotypes and often pure caricature, rubbed oddly against this more rounded interpretation. In all, a disappointing night.

Ken Ross’s The Sound of Silence, on the other hand, made for absorbing and even disturbing theatre. It deals with the age-old themes of husband-wife discord, father-son rivalry and mother-son affinity with a freshness and indeed a harshness that compels attention.

Centring on a wealthy suburban family over a long weekend, the play explores the spiritual coming-of-age of a young man as he releases himself from the influence of dominant, materialistic father and loving mother. On the way, he encounters biting antagonism between parents, sarcasm, hypocrisy and incest. Now and then, Ross will break a scene or send the play off in a different direction by stopping the action for a nursery rhyme from the actors. Amusing and almost gimmicky at first, these breaks grow in intensity as scenes and rhymes constantly comment on and draw meaning from one another. Place within that the disintegration of the father from snarling conceit to babbling insanity, amid the whirling repetition of “fear”, “life” and “death” and you have a play which reaches out towards the universal.

Ross is well served by John Noble’s design and direction. These gave a tightness to the play which I suspect is not always there in the writing. Emphasis on the essentially claustrophobic, womb-like atmosphere was pleasingly offset by a visual reflection in the set of the eternal family triangle.

Don Barker and Audine Leith began perhaps too glibly, but were soon sparring off one another with all the energy of spitting cats. Don Barker, particularly, gave a performance both moving and disciplined. Richard Lawrence, though adequate, could not match the vocal and physical ability of the other two.

Played with the intelligence and conviction that The Stage Company have brought to it, The Sound of Silence should make itself heard as an attractive proposition for theatre companies elsewhere.
Lust, greed and magic

THE WHITE DEVIL
THE TEMPEST

CLIFF GILLAM

The Tempest by William Shakespeare. UWA at the Dolphin Theatre, University of Western Australia, Perth. Opened 17 July, 1979. Director, Daniel Seltzer; Design, Ken Campbell Dobbie; Choreography, Margaret Rust; Music, Robert Kay; Lighting, Robin Macrae; Stage Manager, Tim Wilson.

Alonso, Barry Strickland; Sebastian, Malcolm Lion; Prospero, Daniel Seltzer; Antonio, Tony Malkovic; Ferdinand, Guy Bevilacqua; Gonzalo, Sydney Davis; Caliban, Doug Robertson; Trinculo, Mar Bucknell; Stephano, Collin O'Brien; Miranda, Siobhan Sadka; Ariel, Christopher Greenacre.

(Amateur)

Hole in the Wall's The White Devil.

The White Devil, is, despite its sprawling and complex plot, and its proliferation of minor speaking parts, ideally suited to production in close-up, in the claustrophobic intimacy of The Hole. Many of the scenes are conspiratorial, and for the audience there is a kind of hypnotic fascination in being so close to the conspirators as intrigues unfold against the background of Webster's savage imagery of greed, lust, and death.

Raymond Omodei's adaption of the play for an ensemble of eight performers is a small miracle in itself, keeping everything necessary to the understanding of a complex plot, and everything which supported the development of a kind of hothouse atmosphere in which evil flourished irresistibly, but paring away irrelevant spectacle and inessential sub-plots. His version was thus faithful to Webster, yet had a clarity of line which the original text lacks. This clarity of line was reinforced by the striking simplicity of design — a blacked-out open playing area, and costumes suggestive of period in design but almost uniformly white (with the occasional exception of a cardinal's red, a bereaved mother's mourning, a convertite's sober habit). Lighting, by Jake Newby, was also spare, key to the starkness of visual impression — mainly white light, harsh or subdued according to mood, often splashed into selected areas of the stage so that the performers moved in and out of light, flickering into momentary intensity, fading back into shadow.

Webster is a contriver of great scenes, rather than of great plays. In the end, consistency matters less than magnitude. Omodei seems to have reasoned (correctly) that it is not Webster's people we are interested in, but his world, and that the best way to realise Webster's world was to play each scene to the hilt. His cast of eight obliged, and in the process came up with some of the finest individual performances I have seen this year.

Of the eight players, only three, did not...
double up on roles. The other five on the whole
trebled roles. Among these Bevan Lee (mainly Francisco) and Steve Jodrell (mainly Ludovico) were outstanding, performing with assurance and authority. Bevan Lee’s short cameo piece as the conjurer deserves special mention.

Merrin Canning played all the female parts, apart from Victoria, and in doing so revealed a range and sophistication as an actress I’d not suspected her of possessing. Her mad scene, as the aging mother Cornelia was beautifully done, and almost matched by her renunciation scene as Isabella, Brachiano’s wife. But in a cast distinguished by the clarity and meaning they gave to Webster’s difficult verse, Ivan King (mainly Cardinal Montecelio) stood out. His speech of accusation in the great trial scene was a high point of the production.

Hitchcock’s Flamineo was a thoroughly professional piece of work but fell just short of forcing a focus of the play in Flamineo’s basic emotion of disgust. As Vittoria, Wanda Davidson was superb where nobility was the issue the trial scene was a personal triumph for her but less convincing where viciousness was the point. As Brachiano, Klaus Schulz found energy and commitment for the poisoned-helmet death scene, but was otherwise not convincing. It was a pity that in a production otherwise so strong the most glaring weakness should occur at the heart of the play. It is necessary to believe in the force of Brachiano’s illicit passion for Vittoria. Schulz did not force me to believe in it.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this production is that one can express such reservations about the performance of major roles and yet still insist on the quality of the production. For it did have quality, this stark savage ritualised dance of death in a perverted and corrupt world of ambition and lust; this materialization, in theatrical terms of the “skull beneath the skin” which T S Eliot once claimed Webster saw.

The production by the Undergraduate Dramatic Society of the University of Western Australia of Shakespeare’s The Tempest warrants a few remarks. It is a special case because it is directed by, and features, in the role of Prospero, a consummate professional in Professor Daniel Setzer, Professor of Drama at Princeton University who came to Perth at the invitation of the English Department of UWA, to take up a 6-week appointment as Director-in-Residence.

The primary duty of the Director in Residence is to produce a play — simply that and essentially the choice is his own. What limits most is the time factor — the appointment runs for six weeks — take off a week for getting acquainted, two weeks for the run, and you are left with three weeks’ rehearsal, which is not a lot of time when most of the actors are amateur undergraduates. Daniel Setzer chose The Tempest, partially no doubt because his having performed the role of Prospero in a New York production gave him a solid background from which to work, as compensation for the limited rehearsal time. What I found most remarkable about the production however was that, despite the energy which must be consumed by working up such a commanding performance as his Prospero, Setzer’s major role, as director, was not neglected — was in fact equally successful.

Despite the unevenness intrinsic to a cast whose levels of experience and natural talent varied widely, there was a basic consistency in performance level throughout. The verse was spoken with assurance and the action was on the whole extremely well-paced. Some of the individual performances belied the amateur status of the performers, among them those of Chris Greenacre (whose Ariel was not quite ethereal enough, but whose general sensitivity and assurance was notable), Doug Robertson (who handled the sudden expansion into sympathy of Caliban, in the ‘I cried to dream again’ speech with remarkable delicacy and finesse) and Collin O’Brien (whose comic timing, in the role of the sottish Stephano, was spot on every time).

The design, by Ken Campbell-Dohbie, was basically very good — the stage space reduced to a naked, three tiered circle which proved a most effective playing area — but some of the costuming was more elaborate than it need have been, tending to distract by its fussiness.

On the whole, the standard of the production was very high indeed. More importantly, many of the aspiring young actors, directors and designers in this city have had the privilege of working with a man whose own performance proved what his being able to get the play together at all in such a short time suggested, that he was thoroughly professional and highly gifted to boot.

In excellent shape

RUDYGGORE

MARGOT LUKE

Rudgore by W S Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan. Perth Playhouse. Opened 28/6/79. Director, Raymond Omodei; Musical Director, Peter Bandy; Designer, Graham Macelean; Sir Ruthven Murgattood; Christopher Waddell; Rose Maybud, Terry Johnson, Sir Despard Murgattood, Des Luky; Mad Margaret, Anne Watson; Richard Dauntles, Reg Warwicker; Dame Hannah, Valerie Melrose; Sir Roderic Murgattood, Kevin Roach; Old Adam Goodheart, Bill Couckley; Zorah, Susan Donohy Ruth, Pauline Rock.

(Amateur)

The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of WA is a remarkable institution. Its performances combine the enthusiasm of the amateur with the consistently high standards many a professional company might envy.

This year’s presentation is Rudgore (the original and “offensive” spelling has been resurrected, as there are now no Victorian sensibilities left to shock). Rudgore falls between the most popular of the Savoy Operas and the “too classical” Yeomen of the Guard. Its satirical barbs are gentle, its music is lyrical and frequently hymn-like, and altogether, the feeling that Sullivan rather than Gilbert is in control is slyly suggested by the lines in the patter trio:

This particularly rapid, unintelligible patter Isn’t generally heard, and if it is it doesn’t

matter!

Ray Omodei’s direction is stylish, and in collaboration with designer Graham Macelean, makes wonderfully imaginative use of the visual possibilities. Act I is bright and colourful, dominated by the Professional Bridesmaids gently waving pink bouquets against the background of a slightly rundown fishing village, with barrels and seachests cunningly doubling as steps to the upstage area. Act II is gothic in the grand style, a suitable environment for ghostly ancestors in family-portrait costumes and monks’ habits. The contrast in mood between “pretty” Victorian order and the darker things ruthlessly repressed by stern Victorian rules and morals, is best brought out by the transformation of “mad Margaret” (Anne Watson, who in her madness is alive and vital (even if she does resemble Barbara Streisand playing the Queen of the May), but once she has been tamed and become respectable, in severest black, she is changed into a puppet-like creature, whom only the code-word “Basingstoke” can keep on an even keel. In fact, the “Basingstoke” scene is one of the highlights of the evening.

The singing throughout is first rate. Most of the leading singers are by now typecast to some extent — Christopher Waddell is once more the young hero with the manly voice, but this time has to add the speed of patter songs to his repertoire; Terry Johnson makes a charming

Rune Maybud, who has to be both attractive and infuriatingly fickle and priggish while singing like an angel. Des Luky, traditionally a “heavy” here has the chance to start off as a Bud Baronet and end as a Good One (even though he has much better songs when he’s bad). Reg Warwicker has one of his best roles in years as Richard Dauntles, the jealous Foster Brother. He dominates the stage — not only does he have a fine voice, but he is extremely tall, and instead of trying to disguise his height (as sometimes previously) it is used for comic and dramatic effect. Valerie Melrose, sporting a classy tea-cosy as headgear makes a gallant Dame Hannah (an aunt in love with a ghost), and especially in the abduction scene combines the seeming irreconcilables of dignity and high comedy all the while keeping control of her rich mellow voice. Kevin Roach makes a truly Byronic Sir Roderic (ghost of a Deceased Baronet) and if there is no musical of Dracula available, then someone should write one for him immediately.

The Bridesmaids are in particularly fine voice, and in fact the whole chorus is a pleasure to the eye and to the ear. Musical Director Peter Bandy is clearly to be congratulated.

A programme note pays tribute to the work done in past years by John Milson (now in Brisbane) in raising the standards of the G and S Society — the present team is clearly keeping it in excellent shape.
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Big production, little play

ERROL FLYNN & GOUGH WHITLAM

GARRIE HUTCHINSON

Errol Flynn's Great Big Adventure Book for Boys by Rob George; Music, Gary Down. Melbourne Theatre Company, Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne. Opened 31 July 1979. Director, Bruce Myles; Set designer, Tanya McCullum; Costume designer, Mark Wager; Musical director, Robert Gavin; Choreographer, Colette Mann; Lighting designer, Jamie Lewis. Errol Flynn, Bill Hunter, Leo, Carol Burns, with Betts Bobbitt, Peter Cummins, Gary Down, Suzanne Dudley, Michael Edgar, John Heyward, Kate Turner.

Musicians, David Jones, Grant Walis.

I always think of Errol Flynn as a chivalrous but sexy blade, the gentle yet tough swordsman. That's what he's like in the movies. Then we hear that he was as caught up in Hollywood doing bad things to young girls. And now we discover, if we're interested, that he was a nasty racist, an alcoholic, and that he had discovered The Duck Secret.

This is the best joke in the play and deals with the physiological fact that ducks cannot digest pork. It goes straight through them. Thus if like young Errol you string a bit of pork, and give it to a sequence of ducks, you have a living necklace that Leunig would be chuffed to own.

As well, it goes without saying, that he had discovered The Duck Secret. (This is the best joke in the play and deals with the physiological fact that ducks cannot digest pork. It goes straight through them. Thus if like young Errol you string a bit of pork, and give it to a sequence of ducks, you have a living necklace that Leunig would be chuffed to own.)

Well, it goes without saying, he was, according to Rob George's play, a nasty sexist as well. And he appeared in 55 films; one of the more attractively charismatic heroes of the silver screen.

Rob George's play might well be about any of these things: it's hard to tell given the lavish over production. It's as if The Salvation Army Brass Band was produced by Busby Berkeley. There's a welter of singing and dancing, there's a band on stage, there are 12 actors and musicians (even David Williamson barely qualifies for that number). There are teeth 'n' smiles, tits 'n' ass. It's a musical pretending to be a play with music.

Firstly, what were we to make of Errol? We are given a lot of information about his life as a racist, sexist, thief... but we are also presented with a production that glorifies in these characteristics, exemplified by the musical genre. It could be that it's impossible to be critical in a musical. Certainly you come away with a production that glorifies in these characteristics, exemplified by the musical genre. It could be that it's impossible to be critical in a musical. Certainly you come away from Errol Flynn feeling a good deal of sympathy for a bloke with his problems. Can he help it if he likes a drink, likes girls, likes making money? He's just trying to get by without doing too much.

The critical idea of "Errol Flynn Horrible Example of Hollywood Star And What He Did To Make It To The Top" gets lost because it's a play performed by actors who more than likely meant to do by casting Bill Hunter as Errol, but sadly it doesn't come off. The idea seems to have been to take another kind of Film Star: the bluff, gruff Australian exemplified by Bill Hunter as a critical casting against type. The problem is that Bill Hunter is bluff and gruff, and doesn't have the physical grace, or easy charm of Errol. Thus what we get is an absence of Errol rather than the positive presence of Bill.

Another part of the critical aspect of the play as written is the use of a "reporter" device. Carol Burns plays a children's book writer who wants to do kids' stories of Errol's exciting adventures. She talks to him, he tells her, they become part of the acted-out story, she as unseen onlooker, he as an Errol in the action. It is a clumsy device that never really establishes the reality of any convention. Is it all happening in Carol Burns' head? Or Errols? Are they transported, Woody Allen like, to observe time-capsuled events? Carol Burns gives an excellent performance as Googie Withers, nonetheless.

Perhaps the life of Errol might have been better done as if it were performed by Errol Flynn, letting his exploits speak for themselves. They were awful enough to make the point without, for instance a sequence of excruciating schoolboy sex jokes not well told. In the end Rob George's play is smaller than a big production. This one over reached itself and made nonsense of a little play.

The Victorian College of the Arts students under the guidance of Albert Hunt staged another hero in the form of Gough Whitlam. Gough doesn't come out of it unscarred, having been performed by Gene Kelly in the MGM musical version of his life & times. All that needs to be said about this is that however useful doing political events in the form of old movies might be for the students, it doesn't represent much progress in the ideas of Albert Hunt. Bradford, Brisbane and now Melbourne: the politics are lost in the style, because the style is the same for everything.
Come full circle
THE POINT ISN'T TO TELL YOU

SUZANNE SPUNNER
The Point Isn't To Tell You, written, directed and staged by the Stasis Workshop comprising Elizabeth Drake, Jenny Kemp and Robert Meldrum.
The Man: Robert Meldrum; The Woman, Elizabeth Drake.
(Professional)

The Stasis Workshop emerged from the Australian Naturalism confines of the Australian Performing Group in late 1976 with a group generated production on dream imagery called Stasis. Subsequently the group then consisting of Robert Meldrum, Roz De Winter and Sue Ingleton developed a full scale and highly successful production based on the life and writings of the American poet Sylvia Plath and they followed this with an equally ambitious adaption of Ibsen's Peer Gynt. They were later joined by Jenny Kemp, their voice teacher cum director for a production in the Pram Factory of Antony and Cleopatra in June 1977. This year the group received a grant from The Australia Council which has enabled them to work independently of the APG and Rob Meldrum and Jenny Kemp, the two remaining members, have been joined by Elizabeth Drake.

Their current production at La Mama was first seen a month ago at St Marks Hall in Fitzroy, at that time it was staged in tandem with the second half comprising improvisation exercises. Later this year The Point Isn't To Tell You will be staged in Sydney.

Until this production Stasis' work had been total ensemble work with all members of the group acting and directing the performance. Their style was characterised by precise physical exploration of voice and gesture which incorporated acute observation but eschewed Naturalism.

Their work was very much acting about acting — in all their previous productions all the roles were shared between the actors on stage which worked against and commented upon the common practice of one actor being indivisible from the character he or she played; so for instance in Peer Gynt all three played Peer at different times in the play.

In The Point Isn't To Tell You they have broken with that formal device and could almost be said to have come full circle to a form of hyper realism. Rob Meldrum and Jenny Kemp wrote the play — a one actor — about a man who wakes up in the morning, gets dressed, has breakfast and waits for his girlfriend to arrive, in the meantime he ruminates on his relationship to her and the state of the world. Rob Meldrum plays the lead role and it is to all intents a one person show. The writing is a sharp and wryly amusing comment on the obsessive domestic rituals of a person living alone in a style that is reminiscent of Beckett's prose works — Malloy and Malone, the set is sparse — a table, a chair, a bed and a cupboard all painted white.

The play concentrates on the banal minutiae of the every day with sorties into the man's fantasies of how he will handle the next encounter with the woman. The only way it could possibly work, let alone have been as engrossing as it was, depends entirely on Rob Meldrum's performance. And it was stunning — pure craft and pure art indivisibly mixed with everything that smacked of simple imitation stripped away. Each flicker of a gesture is intentional and perfectly articulated. It is the sort of theatre that borders on performance art and to my mind theatre still, and all the better for it.

Robert Meldrum (The Man) in The Point Isn't To Tell You.
The Woman is cumbersomely styled as a Greek Tragedy, the time being the siege of Troy by the Greeks. After a great deal of obscure politicking, Ismene, the wife of Heros, is taken (voluntary) hostage by Hecuba, the leader of the Trojans. In captivity, Ismene incites the Greeks at the gates of Troy to go home, but they won’t until they get a statue captured by the Trojans. For her pains, Ismene is walled up, and Hecuba plucks out an eye rather than see her grandson hurled off a wall. Interval.

Those of the audience who didn’t escape at interval — a tricky procedure in the warren of the Pram, with acrobatic tongues at every door, were driven into an informal Agora made up of a circle of seats, denying any possibility of desertion. A group of happy islanders indulge themselves in a festive dance, and we discover that Hecuba and Ismene have escaped to this paradise, to be revered as seers.

Unfortunately this island idyll is disturbed by the arrival of Heros, in search of the statue. He threatens to kill the islanders if Hecuba does not hand over the goods. Hecuba institutes a foot race, the winner of which will get the statue. Heros is pretty confident of success as his only opposition is a Caliban-like cripple who has won Ismene’s heart. Somehow the cripple wins the race (Hecuba cheated) and Heros is killed. The invading Greeks are driven from the island. The End.

The point of the play eludes me. But what was more alarming was the obvious confusion of the cast. It is beyond denial that the APG houses any number of able and talented actors. Wilfred Last, as Heros was tentative to the point of over-acted. The other actors suffered from a common malady when presented with the unrepresentable: they over-acted.

It is a distressing come uppance for the APG in particular and theatre in general that The Woman was performed at all. Unless of course you embrace the Reign of Terror.

It was with heavy heart that I darkened the portals of the Playbox on the following evening. The worst of my fears were allayed when I discovered that The Immortalist was only about an hour long. A “drawing room piece”, the play is styled as an interview. In a play of any length, this can become tiresome, but is a useful and well tried device in shorter pieces.

The compere, (over) played by Sean Myers, interviews 279 (Jonathan Hardy) a man who is 279 not out and looks like continuing his innings to infinity. Heckled and patronised by the cyanic compere, 279 calmly expounds his thesis of longevity: a combination of diet and the conviction that to believe in mortality is to be mortal. He maintains that time is a false concept imposed by the capitalist regime which demands obsolescence in all things. Jonathan Hardy, in an immaculately understated performance gave complete plausibility to his role. And, but for Sean Myers’ unforgivable hamming, to the contention of immortality. It was funny, sharp, witty, smart — and short. And if there weren’t any conclusions to be reached from the matter of the play, there was from the style.

Theatre mostly occurs at night. Theatre goers mostly work during the day. So they’re a bit tired by 8 o’clock. And they rightly believe that they have done the world’s work for the day. They’re looking for entertainment, relaxation, leisure. They want to laugh a bit, cry a bit. Most Australians have been paranoid into going to the theatre, so that’s one of the places they seek their laughs and tears. And they’re perfectly happy to have it in short bursts, so they can go to dinner or a party afterwards. A play like The Immortalist caters for that audience. And perhaps if more theatres considered their audience rather than the bunch of frustrated aesthetes who use the prosenium as a torture chamber, the stage might once again become a thing of magic and infinite possibility.
"pub theatre". The Kirribilli is now into its third production and is turning people away.

In May 1979 I directed a co-operative of professional actors in Gidget Goes Down Under which opened the Courthouse Hotel for my own company — Axis Theatre Productions. With luck, we will soon be turning people away.

Pub theatre exists.

Fifteen productions, at four venues, in less than three years. And that’s not counting the activities of the esteemed amateur group, Rocks Players, at the Orient Hotel.

I have been involved, as writer, director or assistant director, in ten of those fifteen productions, and so I feel qualified to complain that Theatre Australia, in its 30 issues to date, has not found one inch of space, Theatre Guide excepted, in which to examine, evaluate or even review this exciting and accessible form of entertainment.

And yet one can only imagine TA’s editors being absolutely desperate for copy when two whole pages of the December 1977 issue is devoted to Barry Eaton’s scintillating and in-depth report on “Where the Stars Eat”, an article that would surely have been more at home in TV Week.

The policy of pub theatre, certainly as far as Axis Theatre Productions is concerned, is to provide cheap ($3.50), accessible (hotel lounge) entertainment for a relatively wide cross-section of the general public. Industry people seem interested, even intrigued, but it is the many people who have never seen live theatre and who are now breaking the ice with pub theatre for whom our highest hopes are held. In the lounge of the local, “non-theatre” people feel perfectly comfortable, and, if their first encounter with theatre can be not only painless but also most enjoyable, it is not hard to imagine a few appetites being whetted for more.

At present we have no Patrick Whites, Jim Sharmonds or Kate Fitzpatricks to wax lyrical about taking theatre to the people, but then, for all their dreams, we are doing what they only talked about.

Whether pub theatre exists in other cities I do not know, but it is not up to me to find out. It is not even up to me to be informing TA about a reasonably-established form of theatrical enterprise that has apparently eluded its notice for three years.

Surely, if “our” magazine is to be taken seriously, it should be seeking out just such enterprises. Pub theatre isn’t Brecht, I know, but it is infinitely more relevant to the citizens of suburban Sydney. Professionals working in pub theatre do not at present earn the Equity award, but they are professionals none-the-less. And they do get paid. As Geoff Pullan of the Stage Company also pointed out, financial members of Actors Equity do not like being called “amateurs”, even if they’re working for nothing (although, even here it is hard to understand TA’s policy, as several amateur and pro/am groups, La Boite to name one, receive almost limitless coverage).

It is extremely difficult for actors in Sydney to get anything even resembling good, regular theatre work and it is virtually impossible for small, unsubsidised groups to find anywhere to play, let alone to find a “theatre” of their own.

Sydney’s two professional pub theatre companies do have somewhere to call home and their regular actors, and both companies have some, are enjoying good, regular work.

Pub theatre is here to stay. How many more years will pass before Theatre Australia gives it the coverage it deserves?

Yours faithfully,
Malcolm Frawley,
Director,
Axis Theatre Productions,
Mosman, NSW

PS An excellent opening article would be “What exactly is pub theatre?” (What are your rates for freelance contributions?)

Dear Sir,

Though W F Oakes (TA May) makes a valid point, overall he or she appears to be somewhat uninformed as regards the world of amateur groups.

Existing, as most groups do, financially from production to production, experimenting is something that the majority of groups simply cannot afford: “Local documentary theatre of the Peter Cheeseman Style” — if I remember correctly Peter Cheeseman was a professional director who worked with one group over a very long period (something like a few years) to achieve his desired results. The amount of time and money it takes to do this sort of thing is quite considerable, how many Peter Cheesemans are there in Australia; how many grants are available to carry out this kind of thing? Most audiences “may not know much about theatre but they know what they like” (to paraphrase) and experimentation is not one of the things they like.

W F Oakes does not mention the names of plays in the Third Suggestion. If there were plays dealing with lower classes, costing for $150 might be possible, but if for middle or upper classes an inventive rather than high standard would be more to the point. Does the $150 include accessories, power used, time and labour?

It is amazing that anyone should have to ask why amateur musical theatre is thriving as against professional. The main reason would have to be fairly obvious, that of finance. Amateur theatre companies do not have to lay out anywhere near the finances of professional companies. That apart, Mr and Mrs Average Theatre-goer (Mr especially) are more inclined to go to see a musical which has already proved to be a success, in their own area, with a cast filled with many people they know, in a venue with which they’re familiar.

Why should an impact be made firstly at an amateur level with some universities teaching drama? And in what way? As far as I can ascertain, universities do not teach drama along the lines of say NIDA so much of what they do teach would be inapplicable to amateur groups. Most of the university graduates I have known who have featured the performing arts foremost in their studies have done so from the point of view of applying them in the professional sectors of the arts.

Crap! is the word that immediately springs to mind regarding the first sentence in item ten. I think it will be found that the onus lays with professional directors, producers, entrepreneurs, agents, publicists and, to a certain extent, the general public. And quite rightly so; when money is being paid for a performance the payer has right to know that the goods they’re paying for have been, and will be, forthcoming in an area where the talent is presumed to be evenly concentrated and allegedly the best. Nearly every professional person I have ever met or known has been more than willing to talk about their amateur background; as already stated, the reluctance will be found elsewhere.

The answers to the last two questions are so obvious they shan’t even be given the grace of a comment.

As a professional director working with amateur groups (none on a subsidy I can assure you) it would be great to have my work reviewed by the likes of Theatre Australia, more than anything else for my own self esteem. But on what level should it be done? It is extremely difficult to achieve the simplest technical effect with casts where quite often at least half of them simply have no idea of “how” or “why”. “Pace” from many amateurs has to be seen to be believed. Standards from performer to performer, from group to group vary so greatly I ask again, how could it be done in such a way that would be fair and not condescending? From experience, believe me the money is certainly earned. Efforts are fruitful in minor ways but will only be truly fruitful when there is continual work with experienced teachers and/or directors.

As the Arts Council of NSW has mostly acted as an entrepreneur I can hardly see how this would improve amateur theatre in the country. The infrequent schools, workshops, etc that they have conducted may have had some result, but again for any radical result to be seen, continual classes are required.

Yes I most certainly agree that a very important area has been neglected with regards the performing arts, but if the misconceptions that W F Oakes has are an example of the thinking of others, is it any wonder?!

Yours faithfully,
Maxwell Donithorne-Sims
Newtown, NSW.
Raymond Stanley investigates the present situation, Elizabeth Riddell reviews the latest films.

**FILM EXTRA**

**The Honeymoon Is Over**

Raymond Stanley

The 1979 Australian Film Institute awards will be presented in Sydney on September 28, and the ceremony will be televised by the Nine Network.


To coincide with the awards Raymond Stanley, who contributes a weekly column to the London trade weekly Screen International, takes a glance at the current Australian film scene, giving views of some leading film figures he has recently interviewed.

Australia has reached the stage where something like a score of films are being made each year but "the honeymoon between the Australian public and Australian films is over". That is the opinion of Henri Safran, who made Storm Boy, one of Australia's most successful films, both in terms of box office and artistically.

After years of a non-existent film industry, Australia has reached the stage where something like a score of films are being made each year, international praise is being heaped upon many, and they have been bought by 94 countries. Yet only a few are faring well at the Australian box office.

No one doubts that the current wave of films exist because of the injection into film production of Government money — both at a Federal and States level.

Films are expected to show profits; although in terms of international exposure they can "sell" Australia to the world, show the way of life here, and act as a tourist boost. Every cent invested can, in a roundabout way, make some sort of eventual return.

Producer Phillip Adams, who as much as anyone was responsible for the setting up of an Australian film industry, moaned to me that we not only have an Australian film industry "but six provincial film industries, and in my view it's out of control and in the next couple of years I think we'll have a shaking out process and finish up with nothing like that many state bodies surviving as feature film operatives."

**IS THERE ENOUGH SUBSIDY?**

John Duigan, who directed Mouth To Mouth and Dimboola, believes the Australian film industry, compared to other art forms such as theatre, opera or ballet, is drastically under-subsidised. "The subsidy per head of audience that goes to see films is tiny compared to all the other art forms", he told me. "It's very important to consider that the film isn't really any different to the other art forms, it's simply a more popular one".

There are indications that investment from the private sector will far exceed that of governments, which could mean aid from the latter source being concentrated more upon the marketing of our pictures, and other areas.

Mad Max, which is shaping up as the most successful Australian film ever made, was financed privately, and so will be Leoniski, a film based on William Nagle's novel about the "Brownout Murders".

Taxation incentives announced last December provide a write-off of 100% of investment in Australian film rights over a period of two years instead of 25 years. Addressing the 1979 Convention of the Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association of Queensland in July, the Minister for Finance, Eric Robinson, indicated that since this scheme was introduced there is emerging a marked shift of emphasis away from direct Government equity investment in films towards a willingness on the part of private investors to totally finance feature films themselves.

"In the first six months of operation", he stated, "60 films and television programmes have been approved under the Scheme and about 20 applications are currently under con..."
FILM EXTRA

Raymond Stanley

This represents a budget of about $21.5 million for the films so far certified; about $18 million of that amount is represented by private investment and the remaining $3.5 million is by direct Commonwealth and State government investment.

"Much Australian industry is highly protected, it's the only way it survives", commented John Weiley, producer of Journey Among Women and Dimboola. "In the case of the film industry it is subsidised, but in the market place it's competing next door to pictures that cost a hundred times as much. In the market place we're really in a much more difficult situation than most Australians, because effectively we're in a dumping situation. The majors will distribute their pictures in Australia, even if the Australian return is $25,000-$50,000.

The Chairman of the Australian Film Commission, Ken Watts, stressed to me that Australia, having created a film industry will continue to have one.

"Money could be more efficiently spent if we had a success incentive scheme", is the view of veteran director Tim Burstall, whose latest picture is The Last Of The Knucklemen. "We've reached the point now where we need a few changes. "The Government puts in about three quarters of the cost of a proposed picture: say, for a $400,000 picture $300,000 is put up by the Government. For the most part the pictures don't take more than about $100,000, so basically $300,000 is dead. That's all the industry sees of it. It works like a sort of wheat subsidy, but it works at the front end, not at the other end. Let people find the budgets, but let the Government put dollar for dollar at the box office."

THE RETURN TO PRODUCERS

According to Anthony Buckley, who produced films like Caddie, The Irishman and The Night The Prowler, producers are very disturbed that some of their films have made a lot of money at the box office — but return very little, if anything, to their creators. "We think that there's got to be a reappraisal at Government level — ministerial level — of the equity of the hand-out of the dollar from the box office. That is that on the end — the beef producers — get a fair share of the dollar from the first dollar taken at the box office."

Because a particular film has a long run at the box office the general public probably believes it is returning enormous sums of money to its producer. Such is not the case. It will cost X number of dollars to keep a cinema open: rent, staffing, advertising, etc., and the return to the producer is only from the amount over that particular figure. The exhibitor is quite happy if the actual figure is maintained each week — but there is little if any return to the producer.

Contrary to popular belief, film producers in this country are not overpaid. When a budget is pared at the request of the AFC or a state corporation, usually it is the producer's salary which suffers.

Around the time Newsfront opened in Melbourne I talked with its producer and director, David Elfick and Phillip Noyce, and Elfick provided the key as to why Australia is able to make pictures at lower budgets than overseas. "It seems to be the producer and the director who are paid the set fee and who, six months after the film's finished shooting, are still sitting around plugging it. I'm sure Phil and I wouldn't mind being paid ten dollars an hour for the work we've put into it."

INTERNATIONAL OR TELEVISION?

There is much controversy amongst film makers as to whether it is necessary to aim at the international market — which inevitably means America — or concentrate upon the domestic scene. Naturally every film maker would like his film to succeed overseas, but many are sold direct to German television or the BBC and not released theatrically. In fact general opinion seems to be that many of our films should have been made for television in the first place.

"A number of people working in the industry should work for television", is the view of director Peter Weir (Picnic At Hanging Rock, The Last Wave, etc.) "Our television is in a very poor way. There's the odd flash of excitement." One project which was made specifically for television but actually obtained also a cinema release here was Tom Haydon's The Last Tasmanian. "If a film has primarily a television market", Haydon told me, "it is an excellent idea to get it some sort of cinema exposure, even if the box office is not amazing, because you get the critics, it becomes a running event, and it's not a bad idea for that to happen while you're negotiating your television price."

The Grundy Organization, producers of The Young Doctors, The Restless Years and Prisoner, in the past have made several telemovies but, with commercial TV channels here no longer interested in the latter, are to concentrate upon feature films instead. "The majority of films here have been produced for between $300,000 and a little over a million dollars, which as to us is falling in no man's land as far as producing similar films is concerned", Grundy's managing director, Ian Holmes, told me, "We have got to keep our eye on the international market, of course", was the comment from John Morris, Chief Executive of the South Australian Film Corporation, "but we must never sit down cynically and attempt to make an international film or even sit down to make a box office film per se."

"There's no sense in us having utterly indigenous films that don't make sense to the rest of the world", asserted Michael Pate, who recently produced and directed Tim. "To date we haven't yet had a totally successful contemporary film."

Actor, Jack Thompson has some definite and relevant ideas on the local film industry, and is hoping to produce soon his first movie, Welcome Stranger. "I don't think there is a formula for the magic film that will crack the overseas market", he told me, "nor do I think that we should be making international films at the expense of the local film. I don't think that we should have our eye glued to the American market as if that were the real Australian film industry, because if we did, then we wouldn't have a film industry for very long."

According to Henri Safran, "the chances of making it big in the American market are very slim, with the odd exception."

"Just make films that you really care about and want to make for your country, and it'll cross the borders if it's good enough", suggested Fred Schepisi, director of The Devil's Playground and The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith. "Why have we got to imitate America? If you want to do that — go to America."

Believing there is room for both large and small budget movies, but important that the majority are in the region of $350,000-$400,000, John Duigan's opinion is that it is realistic to aim at the local market in the first place. "We should be trying to gear our budgets to the money that we can expect to get back locally, so that any
overseas money we get is icing on the cake. Where the subject matter is such that we can really hope to get into film markets in a big way, we can use much larger budgets.”

Henri Safran pointed out: “Even if you make a cheap film it costs $350,000. You may recoup your money here and pick up a few television sales here and there. But you never make any money”.

For Mike Thornhill an international movie “involves above the line elements, especially in the cast areas. It’s got to have more than just an international name, it’s got to have a couple of international names. I don’t say super stars, but it should have above the line talent commensurate with the type of story and cost, so that you can pre-sell.”

“The French, the Swedes and the Czechs made their inroads by being as distinctive as they are. And I would like to think that we would be that distinctive”, was the view of Fred Schepisi. “Firstly, why are you importing the stars? To what area is it going to sell your film? If it opens up a television market, or television money in America, then you have to have a different set of stars to those stars that appeal to the feature market. All we can really afford are names, and names are not going to be the big pull that a star is.”

**H ave We Got the Writers?**

Most people talk to in the film industry (and outside of it), believe the biggest weakness in Australian films is the scripting. “That part of the industry is just not functioning”, Paul Riomfalvy, Chairman of the NSW Film Corporation told me, “and we certainly would bring in scriptwriters from overseas. As long as we have Australian producer-Australian director and Australian artistic control, we can’t see any danger in supplementing the section of the industry which is weak, and that is the script writing.”

Grundy’s Ian Holmes believes that a high budget picture requires monies from overseas and that, from the point of view of raising such finance, it is necessary to look at name writers. (They are importing Stirling Silliphant who scripted In The Heat Of The Night to write the screenplay of their big budget R & R Murders).

“But I don’t think that applies necessarily to the making of films which are low or medium budget films — that are primarily for the Australian market”, said Holmes. “It is not a necessity; in fact it is not very practicable either, because ‘name’ writers for instance in the United States are expensive to us.”

“At the level of actually turning out an international script I think we’re weak”, Tim Burstall told me. “Our acting in terms of turning out people who can do our sort of thing is quite okay, but we haven’t got stars — that is, we’ve got nobody who’s got drawing power overseas.

One person who will lay no blame at the scriptwriter’s door is Mike Thornhill. “The responsibility is first, second and last with the entrepreneur producer, and if the producer has not been able to generate reasonably good material, then it’s the producer’s fault, and just to start attacking the writers all the time seems to me to be not only kind of childish, but it’s sort of hypocritical. What happens here is that the writers really have had very little direction. They tend to write ensemble stories — that is stories for an ensemble group of people rather than star parts. That’s not the writer’s fault, that’s the god-damned producer’s fault.”

**And the Future?**

What of the future then of the Australian film industry? In recent months there has been a lull in film production around the country. As Patricia Lovell, producer of Picnic At Hanging Rock, Break of Day and Summerfield observed to me: “The Australian film industry is going through a stage of ‘sorting out’. It’s not getting easier to make films in this country, it is getting harder.”

John Lamond, producer/director of pictures such as Australia After Dark, The ABC of Love and Sex and Felicity made another point. “Everybody here is going out for the prestige and the awards. I don’t think there’s any future in that, because it doesn’t pay any bills. I still want to opt for the entertainment film.”

“If you’re going to have a regular industry, you try to get people working regularly. There could be a lot more films made here, but they seem to be too selective. Say they (the AFC and state corporations) were going to finance ten films a year. All right, let them go for the prestige and the prizes and the film festival awards with five of the ten, but make the other five ‘Carry on’ films, smash and grab films, or anything, because that’ll give the director, the producer, the writer, the actors and the technicians all work. They want them all to be the other way”.

John Daniel, Director of Project Development at the AFC, made other points. “The producers have been watching, for the first time in their lives, the box office and what is making money and what isn’t making money, and at long last they’re starting to make films not for the sake of making films but for the people to watch. They are being more selective.”

Henri Safran believes Australian films “will have to be a little more intellectual, a bit more aesthetic, than they are. They cater for a market that doesn’t go to the cinema”.

Phillip Adams believe we have been over-producing by a factor of about three-fold. “In my view we can sustain the situation with say a couple of Jimmie Blacksmiths a year and a couple of middleweight films, and then perhaps three or four less significant films, for the drives-ins if you like. But for main thrust I think we can really handle only about six features a year. And the other reason for that is that there’s no hope of investors getting their money back — really making a profit at least.

“The Australian film industry has a future, but the future isn’t Utopian, and it isn’t gargantuan, it isn’t Metro-Goldwyn Mayerish, it’s much more Scandinavian. It’s back where we started. Where else could we be?”
Sydney Film Festival

It never ceases to amaze me that so many subscribers to the Film Festival ($70 down to $32, plus some extras, probably adding another $10) actually seem to dislike so many of the films on view. Possibly most of them, if taxed, would not admit it. But a pretty fair assessment can be made of the climate of opinion by somebody standing in a lavatory queue (a good deal of Festival time is taken up standing in lavatory queues). I can only talk about ladies’ lavatories; perhaps the view is more euphoric in the gents. But you would think that people who have paid this sort of money and have to defy the elements — it’s a well-known meteorological fact that heavy rain always occurs during the Film Festival — and Sydney city traffic, would feel it incumbent on them to have a good time at their annual outing to the flicks. Perhaps it actually is their annual outing: they may never make it to the neighbourhood cinema or the city complexes, or on the other hand they may be secret Clint Eastwood watchers, in which case they would surely find Messidor or The Idlers in the Fertile Valley or Man of Marble unendurably tedious, and the Bill Douglas trilogy, My Childhood, My Ain Folk and My Way Home unendurably depressing.

Nevertheless the Gold ($70) subscribers dutifully filled in their voting cards by the closing night, Saturday June 30, when the Festival director, the imperturbable, incurably enthusiastic David Stratton, made an announce- ment. The votes for the 12 best came out something like this, not in order of popularity:

The Marriage of Maria Braun, Knife in the Head (German); The Idlers in the Fertile Valley (Greek); A Simple Story, Dossier 51 (French); Nick Carter in Prague (Czech); Man of Marble (Polish); To My Beloved (USSR); Woman in a Twilight Garden (Belgian); The MP (Spain) and Blue Collar (USR). In fact The Marriage of Maria Braun and Knife in the Head, by Fassbinder and Hauff, came top of the bill.

When David Stratton was making up his programme for the Festival, not one film in the collection had been chosen for commercial release. Even his American opening and closing films, Movie Movie and A Perfect Couple, by Stanley Donen and Robert Altman respectively, may have a struggle to get commercial screens.

Films from the 1978 Festival are only now drifting on to the above — Outrageous, Providence etc. They are used to be shown in the small art houses, but these have vanished and it is increasingly difficult to find something that isn’t block buster or run-of-the-mill.

My own choice from the first 12 would be The Marriage of Maria Braun which is Fassbinder at his erratic best and has a dazzling performance by a little-known — to us — German actress named Hanna Schygulla, and a plot of equally dazzling complexity; The Idlers in the Fertile Valley by Nikos Panayiotopoulos which will be a shock to those Australians whose knowledge of Greek life is confined to a weekend on Hydra. The director’s black look at a family of the Greek middleclass is horrifyingly funny and extremely well produced and performed; Man of Marble by Andrzej Wajda, known for Kanal and Ashes and Diamonds, about how a socialist state can bury a one time hero whose philosophy and enthusiasm are out of date.

Both French films are quite ordinary, and A Simple Story by Claude Sautet is especially disappointing because it features the delectable and talented Romy Schneider. It has nothing to say beyond a few cliches about the re-ordering of a woman’s life when she is divorced and a working mother. The French film that apparently failed to please the voters was Violette Nozière by Claude Chabrol, a recreation of a crime that occurred in the 1930’s and took up considerable space in the French press. The star is Isabel Huppert, the impassive heroine of The Lacemaker, and the film tells in extraordinary detail the progress of a discontented schoolgirl from the claustraphobic household of obsessed parents into a career of illicit trivial pleasure with pathetically small rewards.

Chabrol is a master of this kind of film, an examination of the amateur, ill-informed, inefficient “criminal” and Isabel Huppert gives a performance to match.

Among other treasures of the festival, which this year offered films from 30 countries including Australia was Assault on Precinct 13 which was shown at 11 pm one night (and cost an extra $4.00) and was made by a new American director, John Carpenter who also wrote the screenplay and did the music; Messidor, a film by Alain Tanner about two girls who drop out in a Swiss summer, run short of money, take to petty crime and take one chance too many, The Stud Farm, a gloomy, savage film from Hungary about what it was like when Stalin was still the boss; Hullaballoo over Georgie and Bonnie’s Pictures, made by James Ivory with a mixed English (Peggy Ashcroft) American and Indian cast, marvellously funny about the interaction of the races; Skip Tracer, an intelligent Canadian film, not ambitious but extremely well made, so unpretentious and with such a tight story line that it should be required viewing for Australian producers, directors and writers; the abovementioned Douglas trilogy, a powerful autobiography that has taken a long time to make because Douglas, whose story it is, used the same actor, Stephen Archibald, from boy to man.

The only film that drove me into a frenzy of boredom was Alexandria — Why? from Egypt, made by Yousef Chanine. With others, I had fondly hoped for a look at Alexandria (does it look as The Alexandria Quartet reads?) but Chaine’s film could have been made anywhere — though I concede that his family in the spotlight was probably identifybly middle-class Alexandrian. I stayed until the end because brainwashed by a notice continually flashed on the screen to the effect that patrons should neither come late nor leave early. I can agree with the first but not the second. Life is too short to sit through a bad film or a bad play.

The Festival’s opening film, Movie Movie, is a good little joke, or rather two good little jokes. Made by Stanley Donen with George C Scott and Trish Devere, the first film is Dynamite Hands and the second Baxter’s Beauties of 1933. send-ups respectively of a Jimmy Cagney-type vehicle and a Busby Berkeley-type vehicle, to coin two awful terms. The first is black and white, the second colour and both are moderately amusing.

To close the enterprise the board and director chose A Perfect Couple, one of three recent Robert Altman films, a rather feeble story about computer-dating between the son of a fanatically close-knit Greek-American family and a girl who lives in a loft-commune in Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo and sings with a pop band, possibly the worst pop band in existence. To say it does not come off would be too kind, but Altman can be forgiven a few failures.

**AUST FILMS AT FEST**

The Plumber, which may be Peter Weir’s best film so far, was included in the Festival on the evening of June 19 and shown the next night on commercial television. It was in fact made for television, backed by the Australian Film Commission, the South Australian Film Corporation and TCN9, written by Peter Weir from an idea he had been harbouring for some years, directed by him and put together in three weeks on a very small budget. It reveals Weir as a protean man; it has nothing to do with his Picnic at Hanging Rock. The Cars that Ate Paris or The Last Wave. Weir has made a creepy little film about an anthropologist and his wife, apparently a biological chemist, and the wacky plumber who comes to repair, but in fact ruin, their plumbing in a dinky high rise apartment building near the University of Adelaide. These roles are played by Judy Morris, at her most bleakly attractive, Robert Coleby and Ivor Kants. There is a good deal in it relating to the lives that academics live, the way they are regarded by sturdy representatives of the working class and the competitive aginies of
research scientists.

I have to correct myself here — The Plumber exposes, as Hanging Rock and The Last Wave did, a weakness of Weir's: he has lovely plots but each contains a flaw. In the case of The Plumber the flaw is that one sensible word from the anthropologist and/or her husband, and the plumber would have been out of the flat before you could say lowdown-suite. The film has, however, a stunning denoument and most of what goes before is entertaining. Judy Morris, Coleby and Ivor Kantis give impeccable performances.

I can see what Albie Thoms meant to do with Palm Beach, the second interesting feature-length Australian film which he wrote and directed and which starred Bryan Brown (they don't make films without Bryan Brown any more) Nat Young, Julie Macgregor and Amanda Berry, but it didn't come off. The incessant sound of the radio, a fact of Australian life, was meant to set our nerves jangling, and set them jangling it did, but not exactly for artistic reasons. The noise level is several decibels too high so that almost all dialogue is lost. There is a limit to how much mumbling an audience can take, and a limit to how much it can be left to its own devices to discover what is going on. As far as I can gather Thoms is giving us a picture of the Peninsula as the scene of drug trading, dropping out and lying around. It is social realism carried to excess — too many car bonnets, beer cans and how-are-yer-mates. Palm Beach itself looks beautiful, as it is.

Two entirely successful shorts were Con Man (but not silent film by Stephen Wallace) Love Letters From Teralba Road beautifully imagined, beautifully photographed, full of laughter and good feeling, and Darcy, made by Ben Cardillo from a short story by Patricia Rolfe.

The Old and New in Enacted Violence

Knucklemen and Mad Max

The Last of the Knucklemen and Mad Max, two of the latest Australian films to hit a sagging market, represent the old and the new in enacted violence — body conflict between males and the impact of one piece of heavy metal on another. (I think we can disregard the meretricious argument, put forward by some reviewers, that Mad Max is not violent because not much actual blood flows.)

The Last of the Knucklemen is from the John Powers' play of the same name which had a run a few years ago. Powers had his team of laborers working a wildcat mine in the scrub, or desert, somewhere near Andamooka, but for stage purposes had perforce to confine them to the bunkhouse. In the interest of opening up the action the film director, Tim Burstall, has them working with the drill, swimming in a river, and off duty, if that's the phrase, in the township. However, when locations changed, the tone does not. It remains oppressively coarse and often boring, and not less claustrophobic.

The knucklemen, who subordinate each other by threats, jeers, fists and occasionally sentiment, are played with varying skill by such veterans of television and film as Gerard Kennedy, Gerry Duggan, Mike Preston, Michael Caton, Stewart Fatchney and Peter Hehir. Michael Duffield and Hehir contribute two good performances, the first assisted by having the only intelligent dialogue — the script is entirely without wit or humour though there is much "reportee" of the order of the "you and who else" calibre — and the latter by the characterisation which requires him to say and do almost nothing, but simply exude mystery.

There is a good deal of talk about mateship, for and against, but it throws little light on a subject which has long since, in spite of The Deer Hunter's efforts to revive it, lost its glamour.

The performances in Mad Max are the least of its claims to an audience. The only two worth noting come from Joanne Samuel as Max's wife Jessie and from Steve Bisley as Jim the Goose. Mad Max, played by Mel Gibson, is pure plastic.

There is so much banging around of cars and bikes that it becomes wearisome, and, in the final half hour, raises a lot of laughs, but it certainly starts out as menacing, and its thesis, that the line between cop and criminal can be a thin one because of the physical processes of law enforcement, is valid. And has, of course, been made a hundred times before.

The story is set in the not too distant future when the Australian roads have become even more hazardous, highways of death dealing (see Assault on Precinct 13) by gangs and individuals. Max leads Mainforce against the night and day deadly riders and soon outdares and outkills them. Max is corrupted beyond professionalism into a rogue cop.

The film was privately funded, produced by Byron Kennedy, directed by George Miller who is said to be a doctor in private life, and therefore familiar with victims of the road on suburban streets and in the casualty ward. It has powerful cinematography from David Eggby and an equally powerful score from Brian May. The noise of vehicles hurtling one against the other or being destroyed with pickaxes sometimes gets in the way of the music. The stunt co-ordinator, who made it all possible, was Grant Page. The film cost around $300,000 and has been sold abroad.
Cathy's Child and In Search of Anna

The Federal and State organisations who feed money into Australian feature films must be having a corporate sigh of relief. Two new films, Cathy's Child and In Search of Anna, will help them to forget some recent turkeys. One of these films has the direct approach of a good thriller — though it does not happen to be about physical destruction — and is based on fact, while the other uses imaginative off-beat fiction with two imaginative off-beat actors to carry it out.

Cathy's Child, directed by Donald Crombie with pace and accuracy right up to a minute or two before the end, has an absolute plus in the performance of Michelle Fawdon as Cathy, the young Maltese woman married to a Greek who has skipped off back to his homeland with their youngest child, Maris. The case was well-canvased in the time after Cathy's cause was taken up, in the interests of news, by the Sydney newspaper The Sun, which runs a Hot Line department and column. Hot Line purports to get things done for obstructed or underprivileged citizens when all else fails. For Cathy it worked, almost accidentally, enlisted the newspaper's help, she presents a sturdy, endearing picture of a woman who won't give up. Ms Fawdon has shown before that she understands working class women and it is difficult to imagine anyone doing better in the role.

Alan Cassell's version of the knockabout journalist Dick Wordley (whose book of the same name supplies the theme) is foolproof, as is Bryan Brown's depiction of Nicko. Hot Line's editor. Arthur Dignam has a bit of fun with a politician's role and Willie Fennell is believable as an Australian diplomat, fussily out of his depth but willing to try anything. It is interesting to see Donald Crombie's work in Cathy's Child after the romantic nonsense of The Irishman. He is moving back into Caddie form.

Cathy's Child was produced by Pont Oliver and Erroll Sullivan, with the major investors being the Australian Film Commission, the NSW Film Corporation and Roadshow. In Search of Anna is the story of a young ex-con on the road from Melbourne to Sydney, hitching rides and getting one, after some unfortunate experiences from a girl of ambiguous age and status who drives a handsome 1938 Buick and does not seem to care how soon she gets to her destination. The man, Tony, wants to catch up with the woman he, so to speak, left behind when he was convicted of robbery and imprisoned in Pentridge for six years. The driver, Sam, is defensive about unstated problems of her own. They drift up the coast — a walk on a beach, a little love, casual meals, tentative discovery. There is no "plot" but there are sub-plots. Where is the money that Tony stole? Will his former associates get it from him? Why did Tony's mother kill herself? Why does Sam call herself Sam and what does she do for a living? Where is Anna if she isn't in Sydney?

Working as writer, director and producer, In Search of Anna is Esben Storm's first real feature. He became known for a film he made with the late Robert McDarra, 27A (In Search of Anna is dedicated to McDarra) but Search is far more ambitious and took three years of virtual pre-production in contrast to its seven weeks sequence of shooting on the road.

Tony is played by Richard Moir, a 29 year old stage and film actor, writer and film editor. He emerges from Anna as a star of the future. Judy Morris, an actress who can cultivate a touch of warm wildness if the role calls for it, but who has also a very contemporary vein of stoicism and acceptance, is Sam. Bill Hunter appears as her lover and flatmate, a commercial photographer, and there is a superb performance by Chris Haywood as a thief and standover man named Jerry. The character of Jerry is one of the most aggressive in recent films. Storm has in fact included two scenes of notable aggression: the beating up of Tony by Jerry and mates and the sequence of shooting on the road from Melbourne to Sydney. Tony stole? Will his former associates get it from him? Why did Tony's mother kill herself? Why does Sam call herself Sam and what does she do for a living? Where is Anna if she isn't in Sydney?

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The music is important in this film. Six bands are used and six musicians, including a Greek, George Moudanidas, a Celtic harpist, Alan Stivell and the electronic John Martyn. The film is clearly the product of hard work, as well as inspiration, from such proved professional people as Michael Edols, director of photography; Sally Campbell, art director; Michael Norton, musical director, to name three in a long list. The Australian Film Commission and the Victorian Film Corporation were associated in production and the film is released in Australia by GUO Distributors.
The dumpy young actor rehearsing Orlando for the National Theatre’s As You Like It gummed his love poem to a wobbly tree, took a deep breath, and performed a beautiful, light-footed cartwheel. “Whatever was that?” gasped his director. “Sorry”, the actor explained, “I’m heavily influenced by the Chinese Opera this morning”. He needn’t have apologised; the cartwheel is staying in the show.

I imagine that little scene has been happening in rehearsal rooms all over town since the Shanghai Peking Opera troupe arrived at the Coliseum. It is 21 years since their last London season: and their renaissance after the ten-year blackout of the Cultural Revolution, has all the appearance of a wonder-working djin at last released from its bottle. We had forgotten, if we ever knew, that such a level of performance was possible; and actors of my acquaintance have been emerging humbled from the Coliseum, echoing Hazlitt’s words on Indian juggling: “It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what is there that I can do as well as this? Nothing.” Not since our first sight of the Moscow Art Theatre and Berliner Ensemble has there been such an impact from a foreign company like the Peking Opera.

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The company, famously, combine singing, dance, acrobatics, material arts, and acting within a single art, whose precision extends to the symbolic make-up which may take two hours to apply. With that load to carry (not to mention heavily ornate costumes sprouting four flags from the back) the impression they give is one of relaxation and having all the time in the world. If there is one image I shall never forget it is that of Qui Shufang as an egret queen leading her forces against an invasion of vultures, and after warding off an avalanche of silver spears with a forearm, a thigh twist, a turn of the foot, so that each spear bounces back to be caught by the hand that threw it. One spear goes over her head, and without looking she raises a foot to return it over her head; two spears arrive simultaneously, and she performs a star jump to volley them both back. The piece is called “The Phoenix of Fire” (including a brief flame episode during which Shufang completes a costume change from white egret to firebird); and its title may stand for the company’s own rebirth, arising from the ashes of the Gang of Four.

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There has also been a tryst with another legendary foreign troupe, the Living Theatre, returning after 10 years to their old London crash-pad at the Round House with a much-travelled spectacle called Prometheus.

A quite audible groan of boredom went up at the prospect of another night of experimental uplift with these cultural heroes of the 1960s, and for the first part of the labyrinthine spectacle, working through Aeschylus by way of Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, and the Kabuki, and featuring a trussed-up Judith Malina intoning “Zap them with holiness”, the worst fears seemed confirmed.

Then, amazingly, came a second act recounting the Bolshevik Revolution with total coherence and absolute mastery of presentational theatre styles. Lenin and Co journey to the Finland Station on four chairs in the Thornton Wilder manner; the years of the Great

The Yandang Mountains presented by Peking Opera at the London Coliseum and the Royal Festival Hall.

IRVING WARDLE is the theatre critic for The Times.
Experiment prompt a chunk of biomechanical pantomime. Re-enacting Evreinov’s festival on the storming of the Winter Palace, Julian Beck recruits terrorists and a Red Army battalion from the audience, and rehearses them for ten minutes for a spectacle that went off like clockwork. The story is told from the anarchist viewpoint of Kropotkin, as the Revolution betrayed. And with news of the prisons filling up again a voice is heard saying “Free me”. It is Prometheus, revealed as a spiderman in a dark geometrical cavern, visible only by the light attached to his body. It is an image straight out of Blake, an intersection point of myth and history where meaning and magic become indistinguishable. This is a territory the Living Theatre occupy too seldom, but when they do it is theirs alone.

I fear there is little to be said of Tom Stoppard’s latest work, Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth, which marks the debut of the British American Repertory Company (Collegiate Theatre). The first part opens as a school prize day in nonsense language and proceeds to a double replay of Hamlet, finally condensing the whole tragedy to 90 uproarious seconds. All good fun. Cahoot’s Macbeth (written in homage to the Czech dissident author Pavel Kohout) belongs to Stoppard’s new East European phase, and is based on the Living-Room Theatre performance with which banned Czechoslovak artists are now circumventing the iniquities of “normalisation”. The play shows one such performance being broken up by a Party apparatchik who comes battering at the door in the moment after the murder of Duncan. From that well-placed effect the piece descends a greasy pole of word-play and facetious business, neither very funny in itself nor showing much insight into the intransigent subtleties of Czech subversion on which Stoppard, elsewhere, has written with much understanding.

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1979
Freewheeling TIE

No man eats, sleeps or loves for himself alone
Harvest and dreams and teaching the young
Don’t take place in a small room
But in the spaces of other men’s lives.

This quote from Bond’s poem touches directly on the social role of TIE work in big cities and in regional communities. Our work cannot be contained solely within school structures but must create connections with the surrounding community.

Our work should stress the social interaction we have with one another in the “small rooms” and in the wider spaces of the community beyond the schools. Freewheels, as a regional TIE Company is very conscious of the need to explore, with kids, this social interaction. I stress regional TIE company because when one works outside the great metropolitan cities it is easier to perceive this rather nebulous thing called “community.”

During the last couple of years several TIE companies have become aware of the need to expand their work with kids beyond the schools and to work in a broader context. A successful regional theatre company is now certain to have a TIE arm or to have begun life as a TIE company and then expanded from that centre.

Freewheels has been working in Newcastle for nearly three years. The first phase of the company’s work has come to an end and now the new company is exploring, on a broader front, the role of TIE in a regional community.

The first phase ended after a trilogy on Unemployment was created and presented to secondary students in the region. The pieces had a strong historical and political basis but their effectiveness seemed to be limited. The kids did not see beyond their immediate school context. They were on the conveyor belt and it was extremely difficult for them to accept an idea of what life might be like when the conveyor belt stopped and they were hurled into a non-work situation. Although unemployment still remains a crucial issue in the Hunter region this programme did not prove to be as effective as had been hoped.

But the work continues in associated directions. If any regional theatre company with a TIE arm is to become a true influence in its area then it must communicate clearly with its audiences. It must explore the language of theatre as widely as possible in order to create the right synthesis of theatrical styles.

This year Freewheels has explored several different styles with the two programmes and workshops conducted. We made strong, new inroads into the Personal Development area of the schools curriculum with a programme written by Peter Matheson called The Right Thing To Do. Its subject was teenage pregnancy and the piece explored the possible alternatives available for two adolescents in such a situation. It was Brechtian in presentation; the story was told simply but directly in many short scenes, some serious and some comic. Scene changes were exposed to the audiences; the three actors changed characters in full view; nothing was hidden. The programme had a great impact on a personal level with all students who saw it because of the content and also because of its simple, but direct theatrical style. Follow-up discussions were always held after each performance and discussions were never superficial and embarrassed but open and direct.

All the time we are working with kids who have never seen a live theatrical performance before in their lives. This can be very refreshing. In such a situation the theatrical style needs to be simple but engaging because those first impressions are absolutely vital. Freewheels broke new ground again this year in Newcastle with our second programme Quick. It was created to serve as an introduction to theatre for lower secondary and upper primary kids in the region. Its origins lie in commedia dell’arte; it is a fast action, fun-filled knock-about comedy with lots of slapstick and both masked and unmasked characters. It is a piece of unreal theatre. It is not a problem piece, but an enjoyable introduction to the language of theatre. We have also found that it is a great family show. Mums and Dads enjoy it just as much as the kids and so it has become an excellent piece of community theatre, reaching out to several groups in the community.

Freewheels is committed to expanding the concept of community theatre in this region, to create theatre for adults as well as kids.

Newcastle lies at the heart of the Hunter region. To a large extent it is a forgotten city, yet most Australians depend on its industrial products. In such a situation an energetic TIE company can become an important and essential part of the Newcastle community. The company can become a voice within the community, exploring and expressing the stories, themes, symbols of that community. The Hunter region is rich in these things. There are two striking visual contrasts within the Hunter region: black, industrial grime close to affluent, rural calm. This contrast is reflected in the Freewheels company colours: green and black.

Freewheels is just beginning to tap the area of local history: to drag away the top soil and expose the seams underneath. This is an essential activity for any regional theatre company. In this way a community can celebrate its past, its present and set about changing the present and the future. Newcastle, as with other large industrial cities, very rarely sees a positive, celebratory image of itself but tends to see itself in utilitarian and productive terms. This needs to be changed. Our theatrical language must be used to explore methods of change. We need to explore the past so we can understand our community and ourselves.
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Three Mozarts, Tchaikovsky and George's opera debut

Neither of the Australian Opera's premieres in the month under review was anything like an unqualified success, particularly at opening; indeed, were I to be pressed to pick my two most satisfying evenings at the opera during July, I would have little hesitation in choosing two State-level productions — a Victorian airing of a little-seen Mozart opera, and a South Australian airing of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love.*

This may seem perverse, but I think it is not. In itself, none of the four works is the sort of masterpiece one could countenance seeing, say, four nights in a week as the hard-core devotee might relish seeing *Der Rosenkavalier* or *Figaro* or... well, quite a few of the acknowledged titans of opera literature.

Mozart's *Idomeneo,* the first AO premiere of the month, is long-winded and inclined to be static. Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades,* the other, is inherently a fine piece of blood-and-guts and heart on sleeve melodrama in the grand Russian romantic manner. But it can only succeed as theatre given tart yet sensitive direction, glorious singing and meticulously controlled orchestral playing that underscores its subterranean emotions without neglecting the intellectual appeal of its lighter, almost uncladly happy, moments.

Unfortunately, each of the national company's productions of the month undermined the effectiveness of the work involved, emphasised the defects rather than highlighting the strengths. It is instructive, briefly, to compare the two major Mozart productions of the month — the AO *Idomeneo* and the Victoria State Opera's realisation of *La Clemenza di Tito.*

Perhaps the greatest inherited fascination involved in seeing *Idomeneo* and *La Clemenza di Tito,* lie on the one hand in the fore-shadowings of greatness to come and on the other in the echoes of past greatness; but this is an aficionado's game which is played as well or better in the context of one's stereo room at home as in the theatre. There is little or no point in going to the opera in the theatre merely to listen.

In the pure listening department, of course, one would hardly expect to beat the glorious central female trio assembled by the national company for this year's run of *Idomeneo.* Predictably, Joan Sutherland dazzled as Electra, particularly in her spectacular suicide aria — although I found her marginally less effective historically than Beverly Berger, who created the role for the VSO last year. Margreta Elkins was vocally dazzling as Idamante, though a good deal less effective than Graeme Wall, who sang well and acted superbly in Melbourne and had the advantage of being the proper sex to play the role dramatically. But for me the all-round personal highlight of the AO *Idomeneo* was Leona Mitchell's Ilia, marvelously sung and poignantly acted.

It was in the inexplicable casting of the title role that this year's *Idomeneo* fell down most seriously — for Ron Stevens simply does not have the right sort of voice and all his other strengths cannot atone for that. When Stevens succumbed to a throat ailment in mid-season his alternate, Sergei Baigildin, proved he could get a good deal closer to the mark — at least vocally; but he failed at any stage to convince dramatically. Why Ronald Dowd, who sang the role magnificently for the VSO in last year's original, and acted it with utmost authority, was passed over when the AO was casting this *Idomeneo* I cannot comprehend. Or why the piece, which meant something dramatically when performed in English last year, was hurled back into the original Italian this time round to the immense detriment of audience comprehension and so, of course, of dramatic validity.

It was of course Richard Divall the musical director as well who was primarily responsible for the birth of this year's more propitious production team (Anthony Besch and John Stoddart) even managed to escape, just about all the time, the intrinsic tediums of opera seria. If there was a legitimate case for the AO to adopt the VSO *Idomeneo* after its original season, as I fully agree there was, then the case surely is even stronger for a repeat performance with this effort. It was simple, visually; fast-moving yet unequivocally effective — with Greek statues, obelisks, thrones and mere platforms rolling on and off from the wings in seconds so the flow of the dramatic action was never compromised.

There were more casting flaws in this VSO effort than in the *Idomeneo,* but even so it was an admirable effort. The unequivocally magnificent individual triumph of the night was Lauris Elms' Sextus; she alone coped vocally with apparent ease; and surprised me, at any rate, with her success at male impersonation (aided by strategically flowing garments in the bosom department and close-cropped hair).

Vocally, she was rivalled only by Margaret Haggart's Vitellia, which by and large rose to the enormous challenge of the part but was far from impeccable. In the supporting female roles, Isabel Veale (Annius) and Halina Niekarz (Servilia) were adequate rather than outstanding. Gerald English turned in a stupendous dramatic performance as the Emperor Titus, but all the goodwill in the world could not cause one to overlook completely the unsuitability of his character tenor for the lyricism at times required of Titus.

The Marriage of Figaro, that undeniable masterpiece even among the cluster of Mozart's operatic giants that includes *The Magic Flute,* *Don Giovanni,* *Cosi fan tutte* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio,* was aired bravely but not very edifyingly in Canberra during the month under review. *Figaro* is a period comedy where style is of the utmost importance: deprived of style, it quickly degenerates into mere burlesque.

The Canberra *Figaro* would not have seemed anything like so unsatisfactory had it not surfaced so long — eight years, to be precise — after the event in a climate dominated by the Australian Opera's *Figaro* of 1971, matured almost without cast change during a vast number of performances. In particular, Ronald Maconaghe has so got inside the title role as to make it his very own; and John Pringle has likewise made the Count his own. In the Canberra context, Colin Slater turned in a very creditable Figaro and — in particular — Margaret Sim was a very fine Countess and Helen Cornwell a perfectly acceptable Susanna.

But beyond these things went wrong, sometimes quite seriously. Bryan Dowling's Count was far too much the dirty old man for comfort. Mary Price's Cherubino was vulgar rather than funny, overdrawn and larger than life where the whole point of Cherubino is that he is almost continually embarrassed out of his wits, trying to be less — rather than more — conspicuous.

Such interpretative faults can of course be largely excused by inexperience; but firm, experienced direction could have eliminated most if not all of them. Jonathan Hardy's production for Canberra Opera not only failed to correct them, but allowed such unthinkable social gaffes as Susanna sitting side by side with the Countess on the same settee — an incredible...
breach of etiquette for just about any aristocratic lady and her servant, no matter what the time and place. Such faults were all too frequent because of the strengths of this Figaro in other areas — in particular the excellent design stint of James Ridewood (sets) and Allan Lees (costumes), and the fine individual performances singled out above.

The credentials of the new Australian Opera production of Tchaikovsky’s The Queen of Spades, which first saw the light of day during the month under review, were just about impeccable — directed as it was by a world-renowned interpreter of one of its leading characters, the aged Countess whose knowledge of the secret of the three cards which will win the user’s fortune causes all the melodrama and mayhem which characterise the piece.

There were a number of very good things about this production, by Regina Resnik to designs by her artist husband, Arbit Blatas — but (ironically, perhaps) not so much in their work as a production team, which was seldom more than adequate and sometimes not even that. Indeed, the greatest flaw in this Queen of Spades was in Blatas’ sets — not so much because of their appearance, though much was made in some quarters of the daily press of the recurrent twin curved stair-cases which dominated most of the scenes visually, as because their clumsiness necessitated long pauses between scenes.

The three acts of Queen of Spades are subdivided into no fewer than seven scenes, so of course four scene changes must be made while the audience sits in its seats and fidgets or pauses between scenes.

Which is not to deny it had its good points: the marvellously evocative scrim featuring a roughly sketched Countess and the three fateful cards — three, seven, ace — which run through the work like an idee fixe, through which some of the action was viewed, heightening the melodramatic impact of the piece by obscuring the mechanics of the visual effects. Act II Scene 2, centre point of the opera, the scene in which the Countess dies of fright when Hermann threatens her with a pistol while trying in vain to make her reveal the secret of the three winning cards. The general atmosphere of Act III Scene 2, by the banks of the Neva River, where Lisa finally drown herself after being spurred by the crazed Hermann, hell bent on the self-destruction that must result from his attempt to use the secret finally revealed to him by the ghost of the Countess; though Dr Who’s Tardis somehow crept on stage for this scene and remained there incongruously throughout the action.

Much of Resnik’s production was straightforward and sensible, though there were inexplicable lapses — particularly in the treatment of the Countess’ ghost which in both its materialisations during Act III was so far upstage and so badly lit as to have little visual impact at all.

Some opera-goers may have felt that Gregory Dempsey’s Hermann was unnecessarily overdrawn; I found it perfectly in keeping with the character which all too often comes across as mere froth and bubble. Hugh Colman’s designs were very well-moulded a fine ensemble performance from the chorus and orchestra were both in good form, though there were a number of occasions when I felt conductor Richard Bonynge deprived the music of a measure of the romantic fervor it ought to have.

Donizetti’s Elixir of Love was given a fine airing in Adelaide during the period under review by the State Opera of South Australia in a production which marked the local debut of Colin George as an opera director.

And a marvellously auspicious debut it was — the most meaty production I’ve ever seen of a piece which all too often comes across as mere froth and bubble. Hugh Colman’s designs helped, and of course the ever-reliable presence of Myer Fredman at the conducting helm; but finally it was George’s night for the way he moulded a fine ensemble performance from the principals at his disposal.

The personal triumph of this Elixir was Thomas Edmonds’ Nemorino — very nicely sung as always, which will be no surprise to those familiar with his previous work; but superbly acted, where acting has not been one of Edmonds’ notably strong points in my previous experience. Carolyn Vaughan (Adina), Roger Howell (Belcore) and James Christiansen (Dr Dulcamara) all turned in excellent stints for which at least a fair slice of the credit must be given, in fairness, to George.

His talents as a drama director have been on display in Australia since he came here in 1975, but this was his first opera production in this country. It should certainly not be his last: other opera companies please note.
Comparisons from Adelaide

Comparisons are, of course, odious, but often inevitable. Particularly in Adelaide at the moment, where the dance and theatre intelligencia are comparing notes on Graeme Murphy's *Poppy*, currently presented by the Dance Company of New South Wales at the Playhouse, and the Nigel Triffit/Jon Taylor collaboration, *Wildstars*, which recently completed a season across town in the Opera Theatre for the ADT. And to further complicate matters, we have been treated to Stars of the World Ballet and the Australian Ballet at roughly the same time; but these examples of traditional work only serve to highlight the two more daring, youthful companies and their controversial, innovative works.

Consider the similarities: the country's two most renowned modern dance companies presenting full-length pieces devised by two up-and-coming (or now, I suppose, up-and-arrived) theatrical whiz-kids; both claiming to be theatrical experiences transcending dance, and proving this by their use of puppets, props, FX and all manner of visual devices. But, given these similarities, the differences are even more remarkable. *Poppy*, the first full-length modern ballet to be created in Australia, was eagerly awaited in Adelaide for one long year, during which time Triffit and Taylor met more or less by accident, agreed to work together, conceived *Wildstars*, wrote, edited, recorded, dubbed, workshoped, choreographed, rehearsed and revised for all they were worth, and presented the second full-length modern ballet just before the first one got here.

The critics approached *Poppy* cautiously, with scarcely a bad word, but confining their praise to the fine ensemble work, tightening of the choreography since Sydney, etc and indulging in much story-telling (incredible when the programme notes are so comprehensive). For what it's worth, both *Poppy* and *Wildstars* received standing ovations on opening night, but whereas *Wildstars* ends on an upbeat note rivaling the destruction of Hiroshima and thus demands an emphatic response from its audience, *Poppy* leaves us to meditate on a visually beautiful, almost static, diminuendo, and a standing ovation indicates the audience consciously felt they had seen something special.

Interestingly, neither of these two pioneering pieces could in any way be called "Australian". The ADT has produced a number of short vignettes with Australian settings; perhaps our culture is too superficial as yet to stand a full-length treatment — or is it simply that dance, the least literal medium, has little to do with nationality?

But the principal difference between the two lies in their very essence: *Wildstars* deals with absolutes, infinites and ultimates — Everyman starring in a universal setting. *Poppy* takes as its subject a real person — French artist Jean Cocteau, just in case anybody doesn't know — and observes the progress of his life and art according to historical fact (and a little speculative mental probing). With the one, the audience seeks personal relevance by absorbing a mass of imagery and distilling this down to something worth holding on to. With the other, the audience must work to build from the specific example (and the teasing invitations) to find some sort of truth — or whatever it is that people go into theatres to find. In *Wildstars*, Everyman becomes Man (or more correctly, "Person" — despite its male-dominated heterosexuality); in *Poppy*, we see a man become Everyman — or Woman, because one thing this sensitive ballet could never be accused of is sexism. Option Two — the specific, as in *Poppy* — is the more courageous.

A device this non-technical reviewer uses to assess the more visual forms of theatre is to occasionally open and shut the eyes very quickly, and retain an after-image "photo" of the action. Applying this to *Poppy* revealed a series of beautifully composed and balanced formations, but also that the dancers were often executing exciting and unusual movements. For contrast: the same technique applied to *Wildstars* often showed striking tableaux and effects, but caught the dancers in attitudes resembling stills from an old Gene Kelly movie.

Much has been written of the theatrical elements and effects. To be honest, however, these are in no way extraordinary given the level of technology the theatre now has at its disposal, but were appropriate devices within the action.

With two exceptions, one good and one bad: it took me quite a while to realise that the ladies whirling around the dance floor in the Cafe scene were puppets; and no sooner had I grasped this than one of them stood up and walked away by itself. This is magic stuff, and dance has a lot to do with magic. Sadly, this could not be said of the Doctor Who-type gadget that scurried about like a robot compere in Act Two. In fact, this coincided with the structurally weakest section of *Poppy*; the fleeting "guest spots" by Dargelos, Barbette and Co. were reminiscent of the mandatory "soul-searching" scene in the last reel of bio-movies of great men: faces zooming into focus and repeating lines from earlier in the story.

The dancers, all of whom demonstrated astonishing competence (particularly on the opening night in a strange theatre), benefitted from perfect casting. And of course, Graeme Murphy, who, apart from some energetic routines, walked rather than danced his way as Cocteau, but always acting out the part with genuine sensitivity, using his face to a remarkable degree. And once again contrasting strongly with *Wildstars*, where dancers tended to be bodies first and foremost. The range of styles and dramatic effectiveness of Carl Vine's score rates more than this fleeting mention.

So much for movements, effects and personnel. What did it say? We cannot all express what we see as well as gifted people like Jean Cocteau, but we call all observe, empathise, take notes and use them for reference — in short, be sensitive to what unfolds around us. And in microcosm, I suppose, this is what theatre is all about. Cocteau would call it poetry.

William Shoubridge has been ill, we hope for an early recovery.

*Photo: Branco Gaica.*
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Barba and Third World Theatre

The back of this book proclaims that the theatre is "journey, barter, waste, potlatch, reservation, ghetto, pueblo, emigration". It is the excitement of the book that by the end you know what this means, and believe it.

Eugenio Barba is an Italian Norwegian, of no formal theatrical training (although he worked in Opole with Grotowski in the early 60's) who founded the Odin Teatret in Scandinavia — now established in Hostelbro in Denmark. Odin is the Norse God, among whose many qualities was that "he spoke with such ease and eloquence that all he said seemed true to those who heard him". In the 15 years of theatrical research undertaken by Barba and the Odin, they have become famous throughout Europe and the Third World for their organising seminars and meetings of what Barba calls the "Third Theatre", as much as for a series of provocative productions.

With this book it is now hoped that they will become famous in the rest of the world.

Like Grotowski, they place great importance on "research" — workshops and training behind closed doors which concentrate on both training the actor physically and vocally, and on exploring the truth of what he says and does in his art. Barba is a self-styled pedagogue, a teacher-master who guides his actors towards self-discovery and the theatrical ability to convey what is discovered. Like Stanislavski and Grotowski in their different ways, Barba believes that the subjective personal resources and strengths of the actor are the basis of his training. His training is designed to search for a link which will allow these to be objectified and conveyed to an audience.

There is a political element to this as well. As the editor of the book says, much modern political theatre "remains politically ineffective precisely because it pays attention only to what it says. It forgets that more important than what is said is who says it". Barba's actors, having found within themselves that inner scream, or "knot of utopian feelings" which makes people wish for a better life or a better society, can develop a more trusting, respectful relationship with an audience.

It is a simple process of course, especially away from the hothouse atmosphere of the workshop and the devotees. This is where the journey, the emigration and the barter come in. Odin travelled in 1975 to small peasant villages in Scandinavia, in 1976 to Indian villages in the Venezuelan Amazon, and in 1978 to the Peruvian Andes. To communicate with completely untutored audiences was difficult. They wanted to do it without philanthropy or condescension, and without disguising their own cultural roots and traditions. Their ideas of theatre as cultural barter began very simply in Southern Italy, on their first journey in 1974. They were staying in a small village, and walking as a group to visit a friend. A crowd followed them expectantly because they looked slightly odd. Their friend wasn't home, so they sat down in the square and sang Scandinavian folk songs. In return the villagers sang Sicilian folk songs. From then on they developed a way of trading "theatrical" performances, preserving their subjective cultural prejudices and receiving performances on the same basis from their "audience". It seems to have worked better than Peter Brook's search for a single "universal" theatrical language in Africa.

The Odin is a theatre of waste because, like tribal barter, the objects bartered achieve value through the act of barter. The trinkets and old coins are in themselves worth nothing, but they come to represent the communication between tribes when they meet.

Like much new theatre the Odin places very little emphasis on literary or narrative, explanatory truths. They start from images which "mean" according to the metaphorical resonance they have for the audience. There is a startling photograph on the last page of this book. It shows three figures sitting or standing on a waste hillside in the Peruvian Andes. A very thin twelve foot high black clad figure with a death's head and arms folded is gazing off left into the distance. A strangely costumed, equally tall female figure is sitting with hands folded in front of her neck, looking sternly front right. In the foreground a white masked clown figure is squatting on a log, head tilted to one side, looking at the camera, bemused and contemplative. The effect is impressive and very moving, but not immediately explainable.

The Floating Islands, which was published in Hostelbro only a couple of months ago, is a collection of essays and interviews by Barba, with introductory essays by Ferdinando Taviani. It is a very rich and provocative book. There are statements which substitute for scripts, about all their major performances, and a large section of photographs of the Odin at work, in their workshop and out in the world. It is a book to be ignored only at your spiritual and artistic peril.
A.C.T.

ALBERT HALL (47 0249)
Canberra Opera
Opera in the Schools Series
The Wandering Scholar by Gustav Holst; Producer, Anne Godfrey-Smith.
Cox and Box by Arthur Sullivan; Producer, John Garlick. James McCusker Orchestra; Conductor, Josette Esquedin.
25 to 28 September.

ANU ARTS CENTRE (49 4787)
Fool's Gallery
Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll; adapted by the Company; director, Carol Woodrow.
To 5 September.

BRYCE HALL (49 7900)
Reg Livermore
Sacred Cow — Glittering Austerity Burlesque
Closes 1 September.
Philippa Gentry Company
Marionette Theatre
4 to 8 September.
The Dance Company
Rumours by Graeme Murphy.
12 to 15 September.
Barry Humphries
A Night with Dame Edna.
24 to 29 September.

PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
Bryan Lawrence School of Ballet
Pineapple Poll plus Divertissements.
4 to 8 September.
Melbourne Theatre Company
The Betrayal by Harold Pinter.
19 to 29 September.

REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP
(47 0781)
Nomo's Nose
The Empty House
Schools in the ACT.
THEATRE 3 (47 4222)
Tempo Theatre
Little Mary Sunshine
Director, Ian Howard.
5 to 22 September.
For entries, please contact Marguerite Wells on 93 3566.

NEW SOUTH WALES

ACTORS COMPANY (660 2503)
Programme unconfirmed — contact theatre for details.

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
School Tours: Blinky Bill, a childrens play for infants and primary; Hunter and North West from 24 September.
Dance Concert Ltd. folk dances for infants, primary and secondary; Central West from 17 September.
The Bundles, world of magic for infants and primary; Riverina from 24 September.
Sontegara, a renaissance musical ensemble for infants, primary and secondary; North Coast and Hunter from September 24.
The Polyglot Puppets. metropolitan area from 24 September.

In My Country with Leonard Teale, Central West from 17 September.
Adult Tours: Bunratty Castle, written, directed and starring Brendon Locke, throughout September.

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (231 2300)
Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House.
Simon Boccanegra by Verdi; producer, Michael Beauchamp; Jenufa by Janacek, conductor, Charles Mackerras; producer, John Copley; Salome by Strauss, conductor, Bill Reid; producer, Tom Lingwood; Patience by Gilbert and Sullivan; conductor, Geoffrey Arnold; producer, John Cox. In repertoire throughout September.

COURT HOUSE HOTEL (096 8202)
Oxford Street, Taylor Square.
Tinsel and Grottel by Rick Maier and Malcolm Frawley; director, Malcolm Frawley; music, Sandra Ridgewell; with Steven Sacks, Susan Aquish, Ted Lansdunn, Curt Jansen and Dianne Harmon. Fridays and Saturdays throughout September.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)

FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 4627)
Thanks for the Memory a musical review from the turn of the century to today; with Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Lorain; directed by George Carden. Throughout August.

GENESIAN THEATRE (55 5641)
The Hollow by Agatha Christie; director, Dennis Allen; with Gaynor Mitchell, Patricia East, Anthony Hayes and Paul Sarkis. Throughout September.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
Annie, the musical; director, George Martin; with Hallie Gordon, Jill Perrymay, Nancy Hayes, Rick Hutton, Anne Grigg and Kevin Johns. Throughout September.

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526)
Civic Playhouse, Newcastle.
Flexitime by Roger Hall; director, Terence Clarke. September/October.

KIRRIBILLI PUBL THEATRE (92 1415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point.
The Vampire Show written and directed by Perry Quinlon; with Patrick Ward and Laura Gabriel. Saturdays into September.

LE CURRIE PRESENTATIONS (358 5676)
Thanks for the Memory
by Sumner Locke-Elliott; director, John Tasker; with Richard Smith, Rob Thomas, Alex Pollack, David Kerslake, Toby Prentice and Bill Hope. Throughout September.

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498 3160)
The Chairman by Phillip Mackie; director, Peter Whitford; with Tom McCarthy, Ron Graham, John Allen, Russell Newman, Elaine Lee, Rosalind Spiers, Max Obsibon and Nick Lidstone. Until 1 September.

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498 3160)
The Druid's Rest by Emily Williams; director, Alastair Duncan. Commences 7 September.

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (357 1200)
Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House.
Richard Bradshaw and his Shadow Puppets; from 27 August to 8 September.

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (909 8222)
Lost to the Devil written and directed by Stanley Walsh; with Ron Haddrick, Alan Wilson and Karen Johnson. Throughout September.

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6585)
Ron Amok, a new review by John McKellar and Ron Frazer; director, Bill Orr with Ron Frazer. Throughout September.

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
Rusty Bugles by Sumner Locke-Elliott; director, John Tasker; with Richard Smith, Rob Thomas, Alex Pollack, David Kerslake, Toby Prentice and Bill Hope. Throughout September.

NIMROD THEATRE (699 5003)
Travelling North by David Williamson; director, John Bell; with Frank Wilson, Jennifer Hagen, Carol Raye, Graham Rouse, Henri Szeps, Deborah Kennedy and Julie Hamilton. Until 9 September.
Downstairs:
Upside Down at the Bottom of the World by David Allen; director, Neil Armfield. Until 2 September.

NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)
School tours throughout metropolitan area: My Home is Your Garbage Bin for primary schools and Actions Speak Louder than Words for secondary schools: both directed by Jan Watson; with Nola Colefax, Margaret Davis, David London, Colin Allen and Bryan Jones.

PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211)
Bondi Pavilion Theatre
The Tamming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare; director, Graham Dixon; with Paul Mason, Rikki McDonald, Ros Sharp and Damien Parker. Into September.
269 PLAYHOUSE (929 6804)
Play It Again Sam by Woody Allen; director, John Howitt; with the 269 Players. Into September.
Belong, along, along children's musical by Rome Warrin with 680 Players, director, John Howitt. Friday, Saturday and Sunday throughout September.

Q THEATRE (047 721 5735)
The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde. At Penrith until September 16, Parramatta 19-23 September and Bankstown 26-29 September.

REGENT THEATRE (61 6900)
Peter Pan by J M Barrie; a Clem Dirago production. Until 8 September.

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (069 25 2052)
The Roy Murphy Show by Alex Buzo and The Les Darcy Show by Jack Hibberd. In Wagga and on tour throughout September.

ROCKS PLAYERS (358 6780/328 7638)
The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui by Bertolt Brecht; director, Anthony Barclay. In repertoire with Lulu an adaptation of Weiskind's Earth Spirit and Pandora's Box, director, Allan

THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1979
Kingsford Smith. Until 29 September.

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692-0555)
York Theatre
This Evening Lola Bleu with Robyn Archer. 13-29 September.

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588-3948)
Free drama workshops on Sat and Sun (10-5) including playbuilding, mime, dance, sculpture, puppetry, design, radio and video.

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT (662-7442)
Roots III, director, Jim Fishburn; with Kate Fitzpatrick, Michael Aitkens and Donald MacDonald. Throughout September.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (699-9322)
Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill; director, Robert Lewis; with Patricia Connolly, Kevin Miles, Shauna O'Grady, Max Plippis and David Webb. From 14 September.

THEATRE ROYAL (231-6111)
Les Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo. Throughout September.

For entries contact Carole Long on 357-1200.

QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36-2344)
Someone Waiting by Emlyn Williams; director, Jenepher Debenham. To 8 September.

CATHERINE by Jill Sherrar; director, Jennifer Radbourne. 25 September - 6 October.

LA BOITE (36-2022)
Peter Gynt, a rock spectacle by Ron Finney based on Henrik Ibsen; musical director, David Watson. To 8 September.

POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE
Ring 36-1745 for current programme details.

QUEENSLAND ARTS COUNCIL (221-5900)
White the Bills Boils starring Leonard Teale, at Twelfth Night Theatre. To 8 September.

Philipe Genty Puppet Company at the Rialto, West End. 24 September - 2 October.

Errol Collins Trio. On tour to 8 September.

QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY
(221-7749) at SHO Theatre (221-5177)
The Ragtime Progress by Igor Stravinsky; producer, Michael Beauchamp; designer, Peter Cooke; Qld Theatre Orchestra conductor, Graeme Young; with Gregory Dempsey, Luise Napier, Paul Neal, Dorothea Dugan, Robert Harrington, Dennis White, John Warner, Gloria Eiser. 20-29 September.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY
(221-5177)
Death Trap by Ira Levin; director, John Krummel; designer, Fiona Reilly; with Fay Kelton, Babette Stephens, Tony Sheldon. To 8 September.

A Midsummer Night's Dream by Shakespeare; director, Alan Edwards; designer, Peter Cooke. Open air in Albert Park. 29 September - 6 October.

TN COMPANY (52.5888)
at La Boite.
Going Bananas. Australian triple bill of plays by Richard Bradshaw, John Summons and Mil Perrin; director, John Milson; designer, Mike Bridges. 19 September - 13 October.

Underground Production: Christie in Love by Howard Brenton; director, Jane Atkins; designer, Mike Bridges. 28 September - 13 October.

TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE CO, DDIAE (30-1300)
Orpheus in the Underworld by Jacques Offenbach; director, Murray Foley; musical director, Peter Rorke. 12-22 September.

For entries contact Don Batchelor on 269 3018.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ADELAIDE REPERTORY COMPANY at the Arts Theatre.
The Bundle by Edward Bond; Director, Phyllis Burford.

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRES
Works in Progress weekend with 2 new Australian plays. La Mama Theatre, Hindmarsh. 30-31 August - 1 September.

AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE (212-2084)
Touring Asia during September and October (Jakarta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Manila).

Q THEATRE (21-5735)
89 Halifax Street.
Darling, I'm Home by John Popplewell; Director, Bill O'Day. Wed-Sat, 15 Sept. - 13 Oct.

STATE OPERA (51-6161)
at the Opera House Theatre.
One Man Show by Nicholas Mawr; Director, Anthony Bischof; Designer, John Stoddard; Musical Director, Myer Fredman. 7.30 pm 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15 Sept.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51-5151)
at the Playhouse.
Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare; Director, Nick Enright. 13 Aug - 14 Sept.

Baggy Green Skins by F J Willett; Director, Kevin Palmer. 17 Sept - 13 Oct.

TROUPE (258-8855)
The Red Shed, Cnr Angas and Cardwell Sts. The Enemy Within by Grazyna Monvid. 5-22 September, Weds - Sat.

For entries contact Edwin Reif on 223-8610.

TASMANIA

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (34 8018)
The Fantasticks, director, Donald Gay. Touring to Smithton 4 Sept, Devonport 5-8 September. She Stoops to Conquer by Goldsmith; director, Don Gay. Dwight Brown Theatre, Rosny College, Hobart. 19-22 September. Touring to Devonport 5,6 October.

SALAMANCA THEATRE (23-5259)

Silly Soup, a new play for primary schools by Carol Korty.

TASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE (23-7996)
In recess.

THEATRE ROYAL (34-6266)
The Philippe Genty Puppet Company. 18 22 September.

For entries contact the Editorial Office on (049) 67 4470.

VICTORIA

ACTORS' THEATRE (429-1630)
New Adventures of Paddington Bear.

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543-2828)
Flexitime by Roger Hall; with Paul Karo, Terry McDermott, Anne Phelan, Sydney Conabere. To 8 Sept.

Babirra Players' Iolanthe from 28 September. Special August/September production for school holidays.

ARENA THEATRE (24-9667 or 24-1937)
Musicians of Bremen, Companies 1 and 2 touring primary schools to grade 3. Hercules and the Golden Apples, Companies 1 and 2 touring primary schools, grades 4,5,6. Tindal's Quest by Stephen Walker, SCAT.

Community Activities: Youth Theatre Group, Women's Theatre Group, Saturday Morning Classes.

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (529-4355)
With Hope: Notes from an Old Man's Diary adapted from Chekhov by Scott Ramsay and Malcolm Robertson. With the VSO: Twice Upon a Time. Children's Opera by Peter Narroway. Sounds Terrific with Wayne Roland Brown.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347-7133)
Pram Factory From Theatre to be announced
Back Theatre: Chores by Jenny Pansacker; director, Jude Kuring.

Mobile Poetry Workshop with Joanna Burns, Rory Harris and Cliff Smythe. Touring.

COMEDY THEATRE (663-4993)

CREATIVE ARTS THEATRE (870-7642)
Community based theatre working on schools, libraries and community centres. TIE team.

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41-3727)
Trapeze Tabou with Bob Thornycroft and Nancy Lang.

GAY NINETIES MUSIC HALL, Geelong.
Director, Kevin Reece. Fri and Sat.

HOOPLA THEATRE FOUNDATION (63-7643)
Playbox.

HER MAJESTY'S (663-3211)
The Two Ronnies, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett.

KOLOBOK DANCE COMPANY (370-6886)
Eastland Shopping Centre 3-8 September. Western District Tour 10-20 September.

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419-6226)
The Circus. Season extended till Christmas.

LA MADDA (350-4593/347 6085)
A new play written and directed by Valerie Kirwan. 6-30 September.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1979

THE REGAL (381-1557)
No performances.

WA ARTS COUNCIL TOURING PROGRAMME
WA Ballet Company on tour,
Ballet Malambo Latino on tour,
Pipi Storms Children's Circus on tour.
For entries ring Joan Ambrose on 299-6639.

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Martin Esslin on criticism
Interview Deborah Kerr.