Theatre Australia: Australia's magazine of the performing arts 4(4) November 1979

Robert Page
Editor

Lucy Wagner
Editor

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Recommended Citation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nimrod at Sydney Opera House</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Until Saturday 1 December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE VENETIAN TWINS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Nick Enright and Terence Clarke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>from the play by Carlo Goldoni</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>director John Bell designer Stephen Curtis</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie Bader, Annie Byron, John Ewing,</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drew Forsythe, John Frawley, Barry Lovett,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jennifer McGregor, John McTernan, Tony Sheldon,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Tony Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nimrod Downstairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Until Sunday 11 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOT I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Beckett</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VICKI MADISON CLOCKS OUT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Buzo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>POTIPHAR'S WIFE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Margot Hilton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>director Ken Horler</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>designers Neil Simpson, Sally Toone, Lindy Ward</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie McGregor, Helen Morse</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nimrod Upstairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Until Sunday 18 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Theatre Company in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BETRAYAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harold Pinter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>director John Sumner</td>
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<tr>
<td>designer Tanya McCollin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Alexander, Neil Fitzpatrick, Edward Hepple, John Stanton</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nimrod Upstairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>From Wednesday 28 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>The NIDA/Jane Street Theatre Production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ON OUR SELECTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steele Rudd/Bert Bailey</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>director George Whaley</td>
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<tr>
<td>designer Kim Carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jon Blake, John Clayton, Roma Conway, Don Crosby, Vivienne Garrett,</td>
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<td>Noni Hazlehurst, John Howard, Robert Menzies, Julianne Newbould,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barry Otto, Geoffrey Rush, John Smythe, Kerry Walker</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nimrod at the Athenaeum Melbourne</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Until Saturday 15 December</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRAVELLING NORTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>David Williamson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>director John Bell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>designer Ian Robinson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jennifer Hagan, Julie Hamilton, Anthony Ingersent, Deborah Kennedy,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol Raye, Graham Rouse, Henri Szeps, Frank Wilson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINGAPORE AIRLINES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great way to fly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEPARTMENTS
3/COMMENT
4/INFO
9/WHISPERS RUMOURS AND FACTS
10/LETTERS
56/THEATREGUIDE (THEATRE, DANCE, OPERA, CONCERTS)
60/THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD

SPOTLIGHT
11/THE VENETIAN TWINS/Lucy Wagner
12/AN AFFAIR WITH ALICE/Ron Rodgers
13/THE GOLDEN YEARS OF GOUGH/Jim Cairns
14/RICK BILLINGHURST AND LE BOITE/Don Batchelor

FEATURES
16/ROCK AND THEATRE/Suellen O'Grady
20/JOHN SUMNER/TA Interview
24/WRITERS' VIEW/Barry Oakley
26/AUSTRALIAN OPERA TROUBLES/David Gyger
44/CHILDREN'S THEATRE, AYPAA/Geoffrey Brown

INTERNATIONAL
42/WINTER COMEDIES (UK)/Irving Wardle

DANCE
47/A MOB OF METAPHORS/William Shoubridge

OPERA
50/NATIONWIDE SUCCESSES/David Gyger
53/DON GIOVANNI - COURAGEOUS (WA)/Derek Moore Morgan

FILM
54/JUST OUT OF REACH/Elizabeth Riddell

BOOKS
55/FOUR NEW PLAYS/John McCallum

THEATRE REVIEWS
28/ACT AUGUSTUS, THE BOAT/Solrun Hoaas
29/NSW/BETRAYAL/Robert Page
SWEENEY TODD/Barry O'Connor
FLEXITIME, DISCOVERING AUSTRALIA, RENE TROUVER/Lucy Wagner
33/QLD/ON APPROVAL, MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM/Jeremy Ridgman
GOING BANANAS, CHRISTIE IN LOVE/Rosalyn
35/SA/TWELFTH NIGHT, ENEMY WITHIN/Susan Vile
36/VIC/THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR/Raymond Stanley
THE ALCHEMIST/Raymond Stanley
MARSUPIALS/Garrie Hutchinson
RIPPER SHOW, SPALDING FAMILY ALBUM/Suzanne Spunner
40/WA/TIME IS NOT YET RIPE, FOOL ON THE HILL/Cliff Gillam
NO MAN'S LAND/Collin O'Brien
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DEREK JACOBI

as

Hamlet

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ROBERT EDDISON
JULIAN GLOVER
JOHN ROWE
TERENCE WILTON
JANE WYMARK

DIRECTOR - TOBY ROBERTSON
DESIGNER - ROBIN ARCHER
MUSIC - DONALD FRASER
LIGHTING - KEITH EDMUNDSION
CHOREOGRAPHER - WILLIAM LOUTHER
FIGHTS - IAN McKAY

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(limit of 2 tickets)
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NIGHTLY at 7.30 p.m.

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PHONE ENQUIRIES: (08) 51 2291
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G.P.O. Box 1269, Adelaide 5001.
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Tuesday 11th Dec. to Saturday 15th Dec.
NIGHTLY at 7.30 pm

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Pensioners/Students $15.50

PARTY ENQUIRIES: (02) 212 2244
PHONE ENQUIRIES: (02) 212 3411
Mail to: OLD VIC BOOKINGS.
C/- Her Majesty's Theatre.
G.P.O. Box 3808, Sydney, NSW 2001.
Enclose self-addressed envelope and cheque/cheque/money order made payable to Her Majesty's Theatre.
The two weeks over the end of September beginning of October, saw a meeting in every state of its major, subsidised performing arts companies. The aim was to discuss the setting up of a central service organisation for these companies. Bob Adams of the Australia Council Theatre Board had invited over to attend the meeting Peter Zeisler, Director of the American organisation Theatre Communications Group; Zeisler was there, not to prescribe a format for Australia, but to talk about TCG and stimulate ideas.

TCG has a membership of the 200-odd subsidised performing arts companies in the US, and is run from New York by a staff of fourteen. It provides a vast range of services; one is personnel services - casting, auditioning, keeping central files on actors, directors and designers. As its name suggests, it disseminates all sorts of information through newsletters and publications, from plays to a managers' bulletin; it organises seminars and conferences and has touring, subscription and fund-raising services. A new political wing called the American Arts Alliance makes it its function to educate and lobby the public and the government about the performing arts, and it has successfully affected legislation to help this. It all sounds very impressive, but the question is, how can such an organisation work in Australia?

Peter Zeisler, although he very properly would make no recommendations after only two weeks in the country, felt that the American personnel services would be inappropriate to Australia because of the comparative smallness of the profession. But he did think that communication among the profession was desperately needed - preferably in an inter-disciplinary way.

Some obvious areas where the tentatively named ADAPT - Association for the Development of Australian Professional Theatre - could be of enormous value, would be in lobbying governments for increased funds, and working on the private sector to move towards the American situation of heavy arts funding. More frequent meetings and collaboration between different companies could undoubtedly be of mutual benefit, and increased inter-company touring would be stimulating to companies and audiences alike.

But there are obvious pitfalls, one of which would be to duplicate existing services. For example, why does the Theatre Board need to instigate an organisation to lobby the Theatre Board? We have in A.R.T.S. Limited a company specifically set up to act as a go-between for the business and arts worlds. The Elizabethan Theatre Trust is itself in the process of setting up an exchange scheme between Australia and international theatre companies. There are organisations such as the Australia Council or Theatre Australia which are already in some senses central resource centres. And the Playwrights Conference provides a Theatre Forum every year.

However ADAPT is set up it will have to find a way of uniting these separate things, or of harnessing them together for the benefit of the companies.

There is a worry too, that in a country as small as Australia the performing arts companies might be too disparate and even too competitive to find that coming together in this way is helpful or desirable. As yet no specific recommendations have come from the potential participants; the next step is a meeting of all together in Canberra, to discuss the what, when, who, how, where and why of ADAPT.

The Elizabethan Theatre Trust is seeking the advice of Patrick Donnelly, retired manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as to its own future. Perhaps it could become a more integrated centre of operations by housing and working with such a central service organisation as, hopefully, ADAPT might be.
TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY

Richard Wherrett on the first season of the Sydney Theatre Company.

"Theatre must exist in the present tense, but it seems right that a theatre company born at the start of the new decade looks forward to its maturity at the start of the new century. The aims and policies upon which we are based now hopefully will see us thriving when we turn 21 in the year 2000.

On the present tense, we aim to provide first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney — theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun; to develop the quality of Australian theatre in both the standard of writing and the standard of production; to establish a theatre company that is light, flexible, committed, spirited and interacting; to provide the highest quality of theatre at the lowest possible price; to discover and develop new and different forms of theatrical expression; and to discover and develop new audiences.

The plays produced will be chosen in terms of their relevance to our contemporary society, and will come from the best of Australian writing, both new and old; the best contemporary writing from abroad; and the classics of dramatic literature which provide the discipline against which the new work is measured.

In the present tense, we aim Sydney Theatre Company's first season of its own productions opens on January 1, 1980. I am delighted that this will be a production of George Darrell's The Sunny South, which, apart from its title, has the added charm that it was written in Australia almost exactly 100 years ago and was first performed in Sydney at what was then also called the Sydney Opera House. This will be the first revival of what I hope will be many Australian classics aiming to establish an Australian repertoire. By looking to the past we throw light on the present.

There will, however, also be two new works from local authors, as well as one from England. A major Shakespeare and a major French classic, neither of which I can remember having professional productions here, complete the season. That it is 50% Australian and 50% foreign, and that it is 50% contemporary and 50% classic makes for a good balance I think. It has been very exciting arriving at a choice from the heady beginnings as I perused the whole history of dramatic literature.

As I write this, a number of artists have already been contacted. I am very pleased that the actors will include Ruth Cracknell, John Bell, Frank Thring, John Gaden, Geraldine Turner, Peter Carroll, John Hargreaves, Lyn Curran, Jennifer Hagan and Mel Gibson; that the directors will include George Ogilvie, Rogney Fisher and Mick Rodger; and that the designers will include Kris Fredrickson, Luciana Arrighi, Ian Robinson and Vicky Feitscher. And there will be a permanent company of eight actors, which will grow to 12 or 14, I hope, when we acquire in addition a second venue."

NEW SEASONS. Theatre companies are now beginning to announce their 1980 seasons. The plays of the Sydney Theatre Company had to be kept under wraps until the press conference a few days after this issue appears, but Richard Wherrett's comments show the general trend.

The SA State Theatre Company's is their last season with Colin George; for the Adelaide Festival he will direct his four-hour adaptation of the Wakefield Mystery Cycles, after which the Artistic Director designate, Kevin Palmer, will direct Alan Seymour's classic The One Day Of The Year, and it will go on a state-wide tour. Chekhov's Three Sisters follows, with Palmer and George co-directing and the latter making his Adelaide stage debut as Vershinin. Then comes another Alan Seymour — a world premiere, The Float, about a mythical country called Parmelia which suffers a similar day to Australia's 11 November 1975. Nick Enright is putting together another musical, this time a documentary on the 30's called On The Wallabies, which will end the season.

Nimrod also has a mixture of classic and Australian plays. The homegrown include Steven Sewell's Traitors — directed by Neil Armfield, as is Pirates at the Barn on Clarke Island in January and Louis Nowra's Inside The Island. John Bell is taking on the classics with the Oresteia trilogy, and the co-direction with Armfield of Volpone, in which he also takes the title role.

It's good to see the swing towards a 50% Australian content and a move away from the idea that one light English comedy per season is compulsory for box office.
THE SUCCESSOR TO COLIN GEORGE at the State Theatre Company of SA has finally been announced: from July 1980 Kevin Palmer will be the company’s Artistic Director, with Nick Enright as his Associate Director. The two haven’t yet had time to decide on a policy or a programme for next year, in fact with Colin George presently in England for two months they’ve had something of a trial run — with Nick Enright directing Twelfth Night and Kevin Palmer Baggy Green Skins.

Palmer says they are both delighted to be given the chance of continuing to run the company, and feels that their appointments show the Board’s desire to maintain standards and the present company structure. “Like Richard Wherrett’s appointment, those of Nick and myself show that theatre boards are now having the courage to appoint Australians. We will certainly be continuing the promotion of Australian plays that Colin has started, and we also hope — if it’s economically possible — to start the company performing in a smaller space as well as the Playhouse. This wouldn’t just be for modern alternative theatre, but also for alternative styles of playing the classics.” They will be announcing their first season (the STC’s second season of 1980) early next year.

ENGLAND IN THE CLUB. Nimrod’s third production, after Elocution and Christian Brothers, to tour overseas will be Williamson’s The Club. John Bell’s production, with all six of the original cast — Jeff Ashby, Drew Forsyth, Ron Graham, Ron Haddrick, Ivar Kants and Barry Lovett — will be running for six weeks at London’s Hampstead Theatre from January 16 next year. It is a subsidised theatre producing mainly new British plays, and has many West End transfers to its credit; let’s hope The Club adds to the list...

Nimrod’s General Manager Paul Iles said Nimrod was very grateful for the sponsorship of Singapore Airlines, a special project grant of $20,000 from the International Program of the Australian Council, and a grant from the NSW Government. Apparently negotiations for this tour have been under wraps for four months.

Mr Iles also said “Mr R J Ellicott, Minister for Home Affairs and the Arts, attended a company meeting at Nimrod in October to tell us all about the terrific future of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in its second quarter century. Mr Ellicott had in September announced the appointment of Wilton Morley as an entrepreneur to exchange Australian theatre companies with the best (or worst) of foreign theatre companies. The Australia Council has funded Wilton Morley’s current eight-week overseas tour to set up exchanges for 1981. We are very grateful to Mr Ellicott for organising our tour.”

THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL is having great success with the “American style” campaign it’s been waging for sponsors. They have BP helping them to bring the Komische Oper to the Festival from East Berlin. The company includes an opera and ballet company and it is the latter who will be appearing on their first visit to Australia. The Komische Oper is one of the most advanced and enterprising in the world, especially celebrated for their stunning visual and technical effects. The company’s visit will be a rare event; they have hardly ever been seen outside their own theatre in Berlin.

The Peter Stuyvesant Foundation have handed over a cheque for $30,000 to the Festival to sponsor the State Opera’s production of Britten’s Death In Venice. The old Paris Theatre team is working on it: Jim Sharman directs, Brian Thomson is designing and Luciana Arrighi has designed over 100 costumes. Myer Fredman will be conducting Robert Gard and Tom McDonnell in the lead roles.

Other sponsors for the Festival are Kodak — for an inaugural audio-visual programme called the Festival Show which is seen by potential audiences as well as people who have never had a chance to experience the Festival.

The Festival Plaza Centre will be "transformed to become the living heart of the Festival City" during the operative three weeks, through the sponsorship of the State Government Insurance Commission. Apparently it will hold all sorts of entertainment, eating, drinking and relaxing facilities. And perhaps the most appropriate of all, is McDonald’s sponsorship of the Scott Theatre, which will be given over entirely to children’s programmes for the whole Festival.
Music Box Theatre, under the direction of Terry O'Connell is one of the projects funded by a Limited Life Grant from the Theatre Board: they'll create and perform four small-scale musicals over the next year. As music plays such a major part in the project, the Music Board have also contributed a substantial amount of the grant. All four initial productions will go on Downstairs at the Seymour Centre, with the first production, Sisters, opening on 14 November.

Sisters was first performed in a much shortened version as a late show by the Riverina Trucking Company, and is about a group of army nurses during WW2. According to co-ordinator Glen Daly, "It has a score of sixteen songs, written by Ken Moffat, Terry O'Connell, Myles O'Meara and our musical director Debra Weedon. Nancye Hayes is choreographing, the designer is Anthony Babicci and we have a marvellous group of musicians — the Music Box Orchestra. We are into pre-production work on the second show already. It is set in Sydney during the depression of the 1930's and the cast includes Bob Baines, Vivienne Garrett and Toby Prentice.

"It's a most exciting experiment for all of us and we are hopeful that we can attract good audiences, during our short seasons at the Seymour, to see the results of our work. Interest is very high and we are receiving valuable assistance from many people, especially the Theatre Workshop of Sydney University."

MONEY MONEY...Publishers, Edward Arnold, have recently brought out a book called The Economics Of The Performing Arts by C D Throsby and G A Withers. It focuses on live and professional performing arts, its burgeoning in recent years, and the growing financial pressures and cost of the arts to the public purse.

In their book, David Throsby and Glenn Withers provide an extensive examination of the contribution that can be made by economic analysis to an understanding of the position of the performing arts in modern society. Drawing on experience from Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and America, the book develops basic theories on the behaviour of arts firms, consumers and patrons.

The case for government support is thoroughly reviewed and levels and forms of public assistance are considered in depth. Their press release states "While this is a strict scholarly book that eschews polemic, there is nevertheless much in Throsby and Withers that challenges conventional wisdoms on the performing arts."

As one who is very much in the thick of and at the top of this area in Australia, we have asked Paul Ilies of the Nimrod to review The Economics Of The Performing Arts, and his reply to the challenge will appear in the January issue.
ANCING ROUND THE WORLD. Two dance companies are recently home after very successful tours; the Australian Ballet and the Adelaide Australian Dance Theatre.

Seventy four members of the Ballet, plus fifty one members of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, left Perth on 30 July for Athens, where their tour opened with four performances for the 1979 Athens Festival. They performed Spartacus and Don Quixote to standing ovations there, and then travelled on to Israel and Turkey. The press called them "the hit of this year's Israel Festival".

Administrator Peter Bahen said of the tour, "Our first visit to Greece, Israel and Turkey brought nostalgia to many members of our audiences in these countries. It enabled them to renew associations with Australia — associations made, for the greater part, during wartime."

The ADT's tour took them to South East Asia, where they went to Jakarta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Manila. It has been the job of Musica Viva for the past eleven years to manage and direct international tours under the Department of Foreign Affairs' Cultural Relations Programme, and they were in charge of the ADT. ADT performed all ten of the ballets in their repertoire, including Jonathon Taylor's Bull Creek and Flibbertigibbet.

AUSTRALIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL. From Susan Vile: Take eleven world premieres, five South Australian premieres, multicultural drama, theatre for young people, cabaret, street theatre, pub shows, radio plays, a forum on Australian drama; put them all together for two weeks in Adelaide, and you have the first Australian Drama Festival.

From 22 November, the Festival, coordinated by Stephen Partington, with assistance from Federal and State Government, hopes to take Adelaide by storm. Billed as a festival of "Australian works", "theatre for the people" and "drama in all its forms", it is reaching out towards new audiences as well as existing theatre-goers. The idea is the most ambitious venture yet to emerge from the Association of Community Theatres, a coordinating body established in Adelaide in May 1975.

Early publicity for the Festival stressed the importance of Adelaide as the venue, since it is now widely held to be the centre of playwriting activity with such names as Dave Allen, Rob George, Ken Ross and Steve J Spears following in the wake of their Eastern counterparts, Hibberd, Romeril, Williamson and Buzo. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Adelaide is geographically distant from the hub of things. All credit, then, to the organisers who have managed to attract groups from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. For all that, it will probably be more of a local festival than the national one it aimed to be. Which is fine. From small beginnings....
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THEATRE AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER 1979
Another film set visit, this time to Perth to watch shooting on F G Productions' *Harlequin* starring Robin Powel, directed by David Hemmings, Broderick Crawford and Gus Mercurio. As usual was able to pick up some pieces of news. Nita Pannell for instance (who plays Crawford's wife) told me she has been reviving her Swan River Saga, and next year hopes to tour Australia with *Empress Eugenie*, the one-woman play Margaret Rawlings has been doing in London.

Also talked with Bevan Lee, one of Perth's most promising young actors, who made such an impact in that film short *Bucks' Party*. He said he's likely to shift to Sydney soon (Sydney managements please note!)... *Sean Myers* (from Melbourne for a role) told me he's an brand new character play which he hopes to perform before leaving for London next year... Heard that Bill Kerr has now settled in Perth.

*Harlequin*, being the first major film shot in Perth since *Googie Witers' Nickel Queen* some ten years ago, all the local actors from the Playhouse, Hole In The Wall and Music Hall companies have been queuing up for walk-on parts. When you see the film, if you look closely at the cymbal-turned-into-pigeon scene (and you'll have to see the film to work that out!) you may spy quite a few local notables, such as Phillip Edgley and Leslie Wright.

Michael Lynch was on the set from Sydney, especially to look after Hollywood veteran Broderick Crawford. Michael apparently is contemplating setting up a literary agency... Was surprised no one on the set connected Broderick Crawford with his mother, Helen Broderick (remember her in the old Astaire-Rogers characters). He had just been playing his old role in *Born Yesterday* on the London stage.

Quite obviously we shall be seeing much more of David Hemmings in this country. He and wife Prue love Australia and David's going to co-produce Australian films along with Tony Ginnane... I managed to convince Robert Powell he ought to do a play in Australia sometime. He finally admitted he'd be interested if the part appealed to him, he could select his own director, approve the Australian cast — and not be in the country too long.

Whilst in Perth took the opportunity of looking up Stephen Barry at the Playhouse. It seems some time in the future the National Theatre Company is going to have a brand new building. He often is able to obtain rights to plays for West Australia only, and therefore Perth frequently sees such attractions long before the rest of the country. Australian TV actors appearing on stage there apparently create more interest than say Melbourne or Sydney where they're taken for granted. A recent example was *Noni Hazlehurst* starring in *The Man From Mackuppin*.

Great news that John Diedrich has got his permit but hasn't yet played the male lead in the English revival of *Oklahoma!* He is really truth is there was no one in England as near capable of playing the part. John tells me he is going to England with mixed feelings. It has meant turning down a year's contract with the MFC, something he says he'd dearly love to do, also he will lose the chance of playing one of the American plays that get staged in this country, seems a mystery why such a fine actor as Alfred Sandor is seldom seen on stage.

Like the title of Jon Finlayson's new company, Full House Spectacular P.L., which is looking for the Glitter Sisters' Other Sisters' show *Remenber When*? which opened at the West Point Casino's recently named Glitter Room at the end of October. The show has been written by Jon and sister Rhonda Schepisis, with Roger Montgomery as musical director... Latest children's musical written by Peter Pinne and Don Barlow is *Beet's Bridge*, gets its first performance at Monash University this coming Christmas. It's their seventh musical.

I see *Barnardo*, the new £350,000 musical to open in London next May, is already being geared to top *Evita* in cost, pre-publicity and early recordings. There has been a search, via TV, to find 'a beautiful singer-dancer actress' to play the role of Sarah, the star's last wife, to make sure she does not have to be British and 'someone waiting for a break'. Hear Glenda Jackson, who apparently possesses a two-octave voice, could appear in a Regency musical next year if other commitments permit.

Will the rash of Joe Orton play revivals in England this year? *Glynis Johns* is to play on Broadway in the stage version of the black comedy film *Harold and Maude*. Tony Curtis is making his Broadway debut in *Neil Simon's* new comedy, *I Oughta Be In Pictures*.

Sydney is in danger of losing its longest-running most prestigious theatre restaurant, the Music Hall at Neutral Bay. It's on account of the greatly increased fire precautions the authorities are demanding. These include installation of a fire curtain and a sprinkler system. An overall expenditure of up to $250,000 would be involved and this is just not on in the present economic climate. Discussions were continuing at last check, with little sign of the authorities relenting, even though this building operated as a cinema for decades before George and Lorna Miller brought it to its present opulence.

There has been some talk also of that other pioneer and popular theatre restaurant, the Bull'n'Bush, having problems. Something to do with a tax matter, I believe, but Frank Strain assures me it's still business as usual at my own long-time favourite nightspot and that he's gearing up for the customary Christmas party rush.

Have you noticed that the name of that shrewdest of showmen, Kenn Brodziak, who loves big musicals, is missing from the formidable entrepreneurial line-up for *Evita*, which reads "...presented in Australia by Robert Stigwood in association with David Land, Gwen Burrows Organisation, Adelaide Festival Centre Trust and Michael Edgley International Pty. Ltd." And oven? *Rumour* reveals now — and positively the last — one-man show, *Son Of Betts*, is again being produced by Eric Dare. It opens in Melbourne in February and comes into Her Majesty's here next May... The Elizabethan Theatre Trust will tour the Melbourne Theatre Company production of *Alex Buzo's* latest, *Big River*, which will be at the Theatre Royal from June 2 to 28 next.

Entertainer Johnny Lockwood, back from another European holiday tour, tells of staying at Danny La Rue's castle-cum-hotel ('It's so enormous that to phone a friend in another suite is a toll call!') and visiting *Roy Dotrice* at his 500-year-old Elizabethan house at Shrimpton-on-Stroud. Roy was playing his last play in the London revival of *Oliver!*, but was soon to depart for America with a new one-man show about Abraham Lincoln which he plans to bring to Australia about next March.

Johnny also saw *Charles (Man Of La Mancha)* West as Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* (I complement him better than *Stradford Johns*, whom I saw on my previous visit) and also our own Marty Rhone doing a fine job in *The King And I*. Marty was then under threat of having his work permit withdrawn, but was hopeful this could be straightened out.

Johnny is now busy preparing to turn one of his own productions into a long-promised Red Army Choir to the Russian Army Song and Dance Co. It's just that there are more song and dance customers than there are choir buffs.

*TA* book review section will no doubt be commenting on the 1978 Performing Arts Year Book of Australia. It is a colossal undertaking that depends greatly on the goodwill of the profession to supply the content, so the incompleteness of some entries is as readily forgivable as are the many literals. I think it is a pity, however, that with a major production like *A Chorus Line*, one of the Melbourne cast is included so that a fine performer like Pamela Gibbons, who all but stole the Sydney season, doesn't get a mention. Nevertheless, it is an invaluable record.

Vale, the incomparable Gracie Fields. By chance, we saw her here on the box with Michael Parkinson just a few days before she died. Among my own memories of her was an open air concert she gave at the Showground some years ago. It was being filmed for overseas promotion and before it began an official exhorted the audience to applaud as loudly as possible after each number. Indignant, our Gracie pushed him out of her front row seat saying "I'm not that necessary. I can get all the applause I need." And she did. Right then and throughout her performance.
WRITER'S RIGHTS

Dear Sir,

My thanks are due to both Monte Miller and TA for airing my grievance about "infamous conduct" on the part of certain theatre companies who have failed to acknowledge my letters, return scripts, and pay royalties. It is to be hoped that they have not lulled themselves into a state of false security as I can assure them that they have not by any means heard the last of the affair...

At the risk of seeming petty minded, may I point out that the title of my play is The Touch Of Silk and not A Touch Of Silk? This is a mistake made by many people and I often wonder how it comes about.

Yours sincerely,

Betty Roland
Eltham, Vic.

MORE BRECHT

Dear Sir,


Yours sincerely,

Susan Vile
Adelaide, S.A.

TRENDY REVIEWING?

Dear Sir,

May I comment on Garrie Hutchinson's non-review of The Golden Years Of Gough?

I don't much care whether or not Mr Hutchinson thinks the show didn't "represent much progress" in my ideas — the show wasn't made for critics to play "Hunt's progress".

But his comment that "the politics are lost in the style" is puzzling. The show was aimed at a Trade Union and ALP audience — Melbourne Trades Hall bought the house one night, the Victorian ALP bought it another. On both occasions, virtually the entire audience stayed to supper — and over the flagons the talk certainly wasn't about style. It was about the fact that the show had made politically-committed and knowledgeable people look at events they were familiar with in a fresh and surprised way. (Which, of course, is what the style was intended to do.)

Garrie Hutchinson's dismissal of the political impact contrasts strongly with Jim Cairns' remark that the show should be made compulsory viewing for Caucas.

(See Jim Cairns' article in Spotlight — Ed.)

But then — I suppose a trendy drama critic has a lot less to learn about politics than a former Deputy Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,

Albert Hunt,
Melbourne, Vic.

RUSTY BUGLES

Dear Sir,

There are several errors in John Tasker's article on Rusty Bugles, as quoted in your September 1979 issue.

I feel that they should be corrected for record purposes. After its opening in 1948 it was revived in 1949 (twice) and 1951. The final and last production, prior to the present one, was in 1964 not 1962.

I can speak with full authority as I was a member of the original 1948 cast, and the only member of that cast to appear in 1964.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Curtain,
Glebe Point, NSW.

STATE COMPANY FOR NT

Dear Sir,

Regarding a proposal for a State Company of the NT — negotiations have taken place with the Theatre Board (through Michael Fitzgerald and Brian Sweeney, both of whom visited us recently) and the Minister of Community Development (Nick Donadas) and his administrative whom the Darwin Theatre Group Committee have met with on two occasions.

The Theatre Board have offered strong support for the idea and assured us of bucking provided that the NT Government and local resources are prepared to come to the party. We have planned a "staged" growth for the scheme to cover several years for development, a copy of which is enclosed. A BASE 3 start at $73,000 is hoped for in the coming year. The "Based" staging was suggested by Michael Fitzgerald. If that can be made to work in terms of the resource aims of the submission, then Base 2 or Base 1 funding can be anticipated in 1981-82, presumably.

The NT Government are much less enthusiastic than the "Theatre Board". The Minister rationalises that the DTG are self-seeking to the disadvantage of taking away funds from the other groups in the NT. He claims that money cannot be found to fund a completely new venture; so stealing from Peter to pay Paul is the only prospect before him. We get $5,000 at present from the NT Government. This money goes towards a part-time business manager. This year (1979) has been the first year in which the NT Government has made any contribution to the DTG. I don't know, but I suspect groups in Gove, Groote, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs get a lot less than our $5,000 — so the theatre bounty from this Government is anything but auspicious by any level of comparison. That it could even match the minimum needs of our theatre resource programme is highly unlikely.

Our main pre-occupation at present is to win over support from the other NT groups especially Alice Springs. Those groups have to be shown how a State Theatre Resource can help their own community theatre — especially through the more regular provision of skilled personnel and informed advice and assistance. There are a lot of references from the original submission stressing the "resource aims"; I find I must come back to those aims constantly if the critics are to be turned from their more parochial vision of "entertainment", "elitism" and "putting on a play". That is, turned in their prejudices from seeing the "self indulgence of the few" to the "communal sharing of as many people as possible".

Funding figures from the NT Government have not been released, so I can add nothing more positive re our position at present. Meanwhile we press on.

Here's a couple of Brecht productions which you might care to add to the Australian lists of your issue before last. The Caucasian Chalk Circle — directed by Robert Kimber. Wattle Park Teachers College Drama Society, December, 1970, South Australia.


Yours sincerely,

Robert Kimber
Artistic Director
Darwin Theatre Group, NT.
Playing Twins

Lucy Wagner talks to The Venetian Twins himself, his director and musical director.

Eclectic is a word that keeps coming up in relation to the Nimrod/Sydney Theatre Company production of The Venetian Twins. Drew Forsyth, John Bell and Terry Clarke all use it to describe the play itself, and their various contributions to it — acting, directing and music.

The production started life as a straight translation, with Australian colloquialisms, of Goldoni's play, by Nick Enright. A little later it seemed to show more potential as a musical, so the dialogue was cut down and songs added; as this version then turned out to be too long more dialogue was cut with the result that now more than 50% of the play is taken up by the musical numbers.

"It's probably closer to commedia dell'arte than Goldoni would have approved of" says Bell, but Terry Clarke, composer and musical director, feels they're sticking to the spirit of commedia in "taking everything we think will make people laugh, and using it."

The eclecticism goes on apace. John Bell explains that they've taken commedia types, but made them much more recognisable to Australian audiences. They almost make up a potted history of musical comedy, with Barry Lovett drawing on his music hall experience, Jon Ewing's character coming from Victorian melodrama and Jennifer McGregor playing a 30's Hollywood musical heroine. The only character that is actually Australian is the dumb twin, Zinetto, who takes his style from Australian vaudeville and variety; the rustic character of an older generation, perhaps of George Wallace's era.

Drew Forsyth is no novice at making people laugh, and it is for his comic talent and versatility that he is cast as both the eponymous twins. Playing two characters in one play involves literally twice as much work for him, though, in a production that in any case involves singing, dancing and sword fighting. By the second half of the play, the plot has speeded up to an incredible pace with the appearances of the different twins coming hard on each other's heels. "I started off trying to make quite subtle differences between the two characters," he says, "but that's gone out the window and they're now quite outrageous. At one point I have to do a big musical number as one twin, exit and enter straight away as the other."

Although the company is taking from wherever and whatever they find appropriate, they feel that the influence of commedia has come down to us primarily through the vaudeville tradition. It seems a pity now that the play has been advertised as "Goldoni's Venetian Twins" — an unsuitable title they all feel — and in the programme it will read "a musical by Nick Enright and Terry Clarke from a play by Goldoni."

Forsyth, Bell and Clarke have worked together previously on How Could You Believe Me When I Said I'd Be Your Valet When You Know I've Been A Liar All My Life?, the adaptation of Goldoni's Servant of Two Masters — a production similar in style but that had much less music incorporated. Drew tells of how they tried then to get some vaudeville tuition from Johnny Lockwood and Gloria Dawn; "Johnny Lockwood told us his life story and Gloria listened and said That's right Johnny'. We didn't really learn anything, but they were very entertaining. The routines those sort of performers work up are to suit their own personalities and you can't transfer them. We have to do the same, which means five weeks rehearsal is really cutting it fine."

There was a great deal of tumbling and acrobatic movement in How Could You Believe Me...? which they thought could be made use of again, but the different staging has knocked that idea on the head. In an effort to tighten the actor/audience relationship in the cavernous Drama Theatre, John Bell is not using the conventional stage at all, but putting a twelve foot wide rake from the edge of it, over where the first four rows of seats are now, to the foot of the now first row of audience. Nimrod-type bench seats will surround the other two sides. This has caused some

(Continued on page 15)
The local residents of Alice Springs boast of a population that is closer to 17,000 than the official statistical records which are more conservative by at least a couple of thousand. With a history of tourism going back almost a century, the indigenous population may have its numbers swelled by close on a quarter million in a good season.

It is therefore surprising, to learn that The Alice Springs Theatre Group has been in existence for some thirty-three years and over that period, its selection of adventurous, quality plays for presentation to a demanding and tenacious Territory audience would shame many major theatre establishments. Some examples which come to mind are *The Removalists*, *King O'Malley*, *A Touch of Silk*, *Flexitime*, *Dons Party* and *Marat Sade* to name but a few.

Around mid-September last year, whilst directing *The Resistible Rise Of Arturo Ui* with The Alice Springs Theatre Group, Brian Debnam laid the ground-work for his scheme to locate himself and three professional actors in Alice to work on a three month low profile-high involvement Community Arts project. The plan was to bring actors with specific teaching skills to act as professional advisors, teachers and performers in a residential environment that, until the Q Theatre’s trail-blazer efforts in Penrith in 1977, was relatively new to this country.

High octane work-loads for the four professionals has been the cornerstone of organising the project, dovetailing one activity into another so that the Alice Springs community, schools and theatre group members achieve maximum mileage from the project. Members of the local group worked on submissions to The Northern Territory Arts Council, NT Government and Australia Council whilst digging deep into their own coffers, providing funds for production budgets and four modest salaries (only the hardy need apply!).

![Brian Debnam in acting class with Alice Springs Theatre Group.](image1)

Four major productions including Freidrich Durrenmatt’s *Play Strindberg*, Neil Simon’s *The Good Doctor*, a pub-show to be written on the history of Alice Springs *A Town Like Stuart* and an East End version of John Gay’s *The Beggars Opera*, are the basis of the “out front” activity. In the wings are Deborah Little, pro actress, handling classes in movement, David Hursthouse, pro actor, handling technical theatre and stage-management and myself, covering voice and speech development. Brian Debnam conducting classes in acting and directing all major works. The project has increased the participating theatre group numbers close on to 60 enthusiastic residents of Alice, providing stiff competition to the football training activity on the oval.

![Alice Springs Theatre Group's 'Arturo Ui', 1978, directed by Brian Debnam.](image2)

At the completion of the Alice Project, Stage Company will have toured *Play Strindberg* to major centres in the Northern Territory for two weeks before flying home to Darwin. “Home” for the Stage Company is the Balcony Theatre in Adelaide where we will have presented a further season of *Play Strindberg* in early October.
The Golden Years Of Gough

By JIM CAIRNS

The Golden Years of Gough was devised and produced by the Victorian College of the Arts and Albert Hunt. It played in August at the Grant Street Theatre, Melbourne to packed houses, and will probably have a national tour in 1980.

The most important task in the world today is to explain the irrational in politics and social life and from that, work out ways of reducing and eliminating it.

The irrational cannot be reduced or eliminated from politics and social life by economics - by economic growth, affluence or rising standards of living. As they have all increased, the irrational has got worse.

To begin to understand the irrational, we need to recognise the reasons people believe they have for their actions are often not the causes of their actions.

The Golden Years of Gough, written and produced by the Victorian College of the Arts, is a superb example of exposure of the irrational in politics and of the fact that the reasons people do have for their actions are often not the causes of them.

Some will be angry about The Golden Years of Gough. They will say it is unfair to the Labor Party and to Gough Whittlam and others. It is not.

And the validity of what the play does, has strength because it is not "professional" - that is to say, choosing to be biased or to avoid bias. It is natural. It is as the writers, producers and actors felt. This is rare on the stage, on paper or anywhere else.

It should be compulsory viewing for every Labor Member of Parliament — now and in the future.

It shows them how to laugh at themselves without having to repress and distort the experience. Pretension, naivete, bitterness and desire to injure, exhibited by any person can be funny. When exposed in this way, it often becomes easier to learn from and hurts less.

The play concentrates upon the main characters. Perhaps time made this unavoidable, but the full story requires the inclusion of others and additional facts. I do not know whether all the facts are accurate, but most of those I know about are.

The substance of the play is a Labor Party under siege: what happened in 1917, 1931, 1947-49 and in 1975. It will always happen whenever a government — and it can only be a Labor Government — threatens some significant interest of those who control the means of production.

In 1917 it was opposing conscription; in 1931 it was using the banks to get money to provide employment; in 1947-49 it was to nationalise the banks; in 1974-75 it was to permit a rise in money wages greater than acceptable to the controllers of the economy, to use the banks to get more money for the Budget than they would provide, and to borrow from sources other than the banks — from Arab countries — to build or buy industries which would compete with the controllers of the economy.

When a Labor Government threatens them and some Labor Governments mostly in the States, can work out ways not to threaten them — then media pressure is turned on. The Labor Government then becomes a "spot-lit enclave" and it is forced away from the actions which threaten the controllers of the economy, and the enclave becomes filled with trivia. Trivia like the Khemlani and Morosi affairs; trivia like the letters I gave to Harris. And so the whole parliamentary party shifts from substantial issues to trivial issues, it accepts the issues that are chosen for it by the media and takes the side on those issues which the media dictates. Hence, those who are wrong on those issues have to be discarded. And so the government disintegrates.

As far as public opinion polls showed, the public approved of my retaining Junie Morosi; it approved of Connors' financing of his national industries; of the expenditure we were making and of the provision of money through the Budget to meet it; and provision even of wage increases. But as 1975 went on, the parliamentary party turned more and more against them. And so we moved from substantial issues to trivial issues and took the side the media set out to make us take.

The Golden Years of Gough could have brought all this out more vividly, but it does so clearly for all those who are not blinkered by media propaganda, or for those who do see that the reasons they call loyalty to the Labor Party may not be the cause of their actions.

The year 1975 made vivid for me Aneurin Bevan's remark in 1959. "The burdens of public life are too heavy to carry for trivial ends." What the Labor Party could do late in 1975 was much limited to trivial ends. It need not happen. If it is to be avoided, much more has to be learned about the irrational in politics.

In the millions of words written about 1975 in papers and books by professionals, most of them have not done nearly so much to provide an opportunity for us to learn about the irrational in politics and perhaps, as a result, to strengthen the Labor Party, as does The Golden Years of Gough.

I congratulate those who took part in it for their skill and integrity.
You don't meet Rick Billinghurst, you are confronted by him — affronted by him some people would say. The aggressive public face of the man transferred to La Boite Theatre in the two and a half years he was Artistic Director, and rescued an admirable amateur enterprise from the possible preciousness its name implies.

It is true that before Billinghurst's time the play policy was adventurous enough, and there were things like the Early Childhood Drama Project (a team of full-time teacher actors working with pre-school and primary kids) and personal development classes for housewives, which showed a clear commitment to serving the community in a more than "theatrical" sense. Here was something other than theatre for theatre's sake, or theatre for self-expression which is an even worse amateur manifestation. What Billinghurst did was to give edge to the policy, shape and balance to the programme, and first-rate presentation to the package.

In addition, his aggressive questioning style, extravagant and wild though it was, prevented the formation of a coterie. Constant internal criticism never allowed people to settle into comfortable roles. The whole time Billinghurst was there, the place was always simmering, and much of the heat generated was between artistic director and board over such things as style and image, the personnel used in production, the programme and consequent limitations on audience, the vexed question of professionalism in a situation where only a few people are paid, and the insistent problem of how to balance the attractions of a subsidy against the loss of independence it represents.

Since Billinghurst is no diplomat, an explosion in this area was avoided largely by the skill and generous vision of Jennifer Blockside who played a key bridging role inside and outside the theatre, allowing his values to flourish.

Chief of these was the belief that theatre should address itself to social, moral, political and theatrical issues which challenge the local community — or should do anyway. The audience for this in a big, provincial town like Brisbane is inevitably minimal, but there was sufficient popular leaven like Bullshot Crummond or Grease to save the box office. Even here the appeal was geared towards the under thirty-fives who tend to supply the core of supporters, though a recent Noel Coward seemed somewhat abberant. The death of university theatre in recent years allowed La Boite to exploit a following from the western suburbs set and not a few of its performers came from the campus.

Perhaps the most interesting example of Billinghurst's socio-political fare was a show called Happy Birthday East Timor, devised in collaboration with Richard Fotheringham and John O'Toole. An ambitious dramatic exploration of the cluster of issues surrounding Indonesia's incursion into East Timor and including such material as the final film shot by Australian journalists killed in the conflict, it was hardly theatre of entertainment. Nor did Brisbane flock to see it. In part this was because neither the creative team nor the theatrical elements quite gelled; but it was a tribute to Billinghurst's social conscience, courage and cool-handedness that the attempt was so significantly made.

It was on occasions like this that Billinghurst's major talent came to the fore — that is his highly developed stage instinct. There are numerous stories of how he helped a floundering actor or a stalled director to make and adjust which released a log jam just before opening night. These stories are matched by an equal number which record his brashness at such times.

The same reputation for boorishness extended to his public utterances to the media or at meetings. The pity was that much of his outspoken criticism of other companies, of Theatre Australia or local critics, of funding bodies and of personalities, got brushed aside as mere mischief or provocation. The result was that he was less heeded and less appreciated than his undoubted energy, care and commitment deserved. A lot of what he said was less than rational, but it demanded
problems; Drew Forsyth was “going to make the first entrance as the dumb twin as if I didn’t expect a rake, and tumble right down to the audience’s feet, but the rake is so steep I would have broken my neck. I was going to come swinging in on a rope too, but...”

He has been in other musicals (Lasseter, Biggles, The Baccho), but doesn’t have a trained voice and is taking singing lessons for Twins. Terry Clarke explains that the music is absolutely as wide-ranging as the rest of the play and production. “There’s a front cloth number for Arlechino and Columbine, a soft-shoe for Drew and an Australian song for him in the other role; we have a tango and even a Brecht Weill type song where the script calls for it.” The actors are being used for their various talents — “only Jenny McGregor with her operatically trained voice is given really showy numbers” though they are rehearsing on Saturdays too to get the songs down.

All three, Bell of course, but also Clarke and Forsyth, have done much of their best work at Nimrod, and all expressed concern that Nimrod will next year be getting a rough deal in comparison with the Sydney Theatre Company, which will have so much “prestige” money. Most of all they object to the fact that the STC will simply be able to pay actors more, while it is Nimrod which has always considered actors, writers and productions first. As Drew Forsyth puts it “At Nimrod you can still get frustrated and annoyed, but you can express that without having to worry about repercussions. The administration has always been only to facilitate production, while with the Tote it was always more of a raison d’etre; I hope it won’t fall into that again next year.”

But that is something Drew Forsyth won’t be finding out at first hand. He goes to England with The Club in January and will spend a few more months after that looking round, courtesy of a NSW Government grant which he has so far been unable to take up. After that he is booked for the second half of 1980 in the Limited Life team led by Rex Cramphorn, working on productions of Shakespeare. Eclectic indeed.
Theatre in rock, or rock in theatre is becoming a fashionable concept to discuss these days. Protagonists from both stages generally argue with great enthusiasm but little real knowledge as to where the cross-fertilisation between the two arts begins and ends.

After all, some say, rock and theatre are in the same league. Both seek to entertain and stimulate in some fashion or another. No, no, sniff others. Rock and theatre are light years apart. Sophisticated theatre audiences could never stand the rowdy noise and discomfort of a rock concert, the very mention of which denotes sweaty and unmentionable adolescent behaviour.

The actual similarities and differences between rock and theatre are more subtle than sectarian prejudices would have us believe. It could be argued plausibly that opera and rock, both being musical forms, have more in common with each other than rock and theatre.

But to be precise to the point of pedantry, rock has more in common with theatrics, (defined by the Chambers dictionary as "relating or suitable to, or savouring of the stage, stagy, histrionic, aiming at producing a dramatic effect") than with the theatre per se. Similarly, drama is more likely to use rock music as a theatric device rather than as an integral factor in production. Sam Shepard did this effectively with *Tooth of Crime*. Locally Tim Gooding tried but failed in his play *Rock'ola* which lost itself somewhere between rock and theatre and never found its way out. Even theatre musicals like *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* use rock music in a traditional dramatic form rather than attempt to stage a pure rock concert.

Film has succeeded better in transmuting rock into powerful cinema without losing its urgency and vitality. *The Blackboard Jungle*, with Bill Haley and the Comets, and *Expresso Bongo* with the late Laurence Harvey, used the dynamics of rock more effectively than the theatre has ever done.

Theatre, (putting aside its use of rock music as a theatric effect) generally is concerned with conveying attitudes and subtlety, imposing mood by inflection, tone and expression. Rock could be described as a more primitive art, concerned with spectacular and wild effect.

Perhaps because of its concerns and its traditional opposition to what is widely considered as a wildly popular and therefore fairly anti-intellectual form of expression. Playwrights and producers have not appeared too eager to study, then transform into theatre the dynamics and effects of a rock concert. So theatre producers have been less successful in employing rock in drama than rock musicians have been in employing theatrics in their concerts.

But rock musicians are not as purist in their approach. David Bowie, a young Englishman, studied mime under Lindsay Kemp for many years to achieve amazing theatrics on stage. Bowie is one performer who has never been adverse to changing his stage persona. His last Australian tour saw him standing still as a statue and commanding much more attention because of his immobility. Kemp had taught him the theatrical value of immobility and he uses it with devastating effect. Bowie also knows the theatrics of lighting to create mood and tension. Lately, he has been fond of black and white light to create a frightening, menacing effect, further illustrating the meaning of his songs.

Kate Bush is another English singer who studied with Kemp to create beautifully erotic stage movements to emphasise her music. In her hit song, "Wuthering Heights", she mimed poor Kathy clawing wildly at the window to reach Heathcliff in a visually stunning performance which no doubt made thousands rush down to their record store and buy her album.

The group Yes, with their beautiful lyrical harmonies had already gone
one further with their rock-theatrical production of *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*. They employed a narrator, a symphony orchestra and a whole cast to tell their musical story. The Who, with their rock opera *Tommy* did much the same thing.

And of course, there is the legendary Mick Jagger, who times the pace of his frenetic concerts with as much care and attention as the most skillful playwright. Jagger used to come on stage wearing a dirty old raincoat, belting his songs out in an order meticulously designed to whip his audiences to the usual frenzy. When they reached that state, he would whip off the coat to reveal a glittering spectacular costume.

Locally, the Angels are the one group to use the theatrics of lighting and movement for optimal effect. All but the lead singer, Doc Neeson, stand motionless throughout the entire concert, forcing the audience's attention to focus on his spastic dancing. Green spotlights stand fixed on the other members, but weave and dance around Neeson.

In the second half of the decade, popular Australian rock groups like Skyhooks and Captain Matchbox used to perform in alternative Melbourne theatre workshops which combined music and theatre before they opted to concentrate on music, using the tricks taught them by their theatre experience.

It is perhaps ironic that rock groups have learned their tricks of lighting and movement from theatre, but tend to use them with far greater impact. I can think of only a few plays (most notably *Equus*) where lighting or any form of technological effect has contributed significantly to the tensions and dynamics of the production.

In rock, such considerations are stock in trade. The continual search for the dramatic and the theatrical by musicians and promoters urged them on to explore the modern technology of lighting and stage machinery.

It is unlikely we would ever have seen the Rolling Stones emerge from the giant mechanical flower, as they did on their tour before last, or the remarkable laser lighting effects used by so many rock groups if Mick Jagger and his peers were not continuously looking for new and visually amazing effects with which to stun their audiences. Demands by rock musicians actually contributed to the
development of laser beam technology.

And less romantically, the logistics lesson of moving 50 or so people with thousands of tonnes of sound and light equipment from city to city could perhaps be learnt by theatre producers, many of whom seem to think these days that the use of props should be avoided at all costs.

But stating that rock performers are better innovators of theatrics than actors and directors is not to imply they are more creative than their theatrical peers. There are sound and decidedly uncreative reasons for this past decade's musicians using theatrics more effectively and dramatically than actors and directors.

The last reason has to do with indisputable facts of money and demographics. Rock music has been extraordinarily popular this past decade. Rock singers were accorded the adulation previously given only to supreme actors and actresses. With that adulation on tap, they were then able to command huge sums of money for live performances.

Neil Diamond received an estimated $1 million for his Australian tour, a sum only to be dreamed about by actors. With unlimited finances at their disposal, rock singers and musicians were then able to afford to buy time and the best creative talent to stage their concerts.

They were able to earn this sort of money because the post war baby boom gave them the largest mass youth audience ever known to mankind. These affluent audiences throughout the world were able to buy sophisticated stereo equipment of their own. Having a perfect sound reproduction of their favourite singers, they then demanded more from live performances — in effect a complete stage production. Again, the huge audiences of up to 250,000 people at one concert, meant the performers had to achieve a visually stunning production to involve all those people in a way that standing still and twanging the guitar could never do.

The acid-test of the vaunted theatrical creativity of rock will come soon. Already there is a recession in the music industry. Concert attendances and record sales are down. So it will not be long before the rock musicians are forced back on their own more fragile resources. Then we can see if they are truly capable of producing innovative theatrics and bettering their teachers.
John Sumner, Artistic Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company, is Australia's longest standing artistic director and head of its largest and oldest subsidised theatre company - the Union Theatre Repertory Company, later the MTC, started in 1953.

To have held a theatre company together for such a time Sumner is necessarily a man with strong views and about whom others feel strongly. What is his response to not infrequent accusations of autocracy and empire building?

I hope to get together the best group of people to do theatre; if people think I have other motives I couldn't care.

If you want a company adept at working in the best way you have to work in a number of spaces. Without new Athenaeum 2 studio space the actors are now working with a completely different audience relationship to anything our prosenium theatres can give - and they'll need this sort of experience for when we move into the Arts Centre.

A company dealing with the classics can become hidebound by them; we must be able to tackle contemporary works or we will atrophy, so where do we do them? We couldn't put a Pinter like Betrayal in to the Athenaeum so we need a smaller space like Russell Street, our main venue because of its size for a lot of contemporary writing which may not have a huge following and because of the style needs an intimate space. You need a rounded repertoire to develop a company and so you need all these spaces.

I'm not concerned about these sorts of accusations because I know why we're doing things.

The MTC's move to the Melbourne Arts Centre now in construction, is projected to be in 1982; it will do little to allay their expansionist image, but Sumner does not intend to give up the company's other theatres when that happens.

We will keep all the theatres going. We're only going into the Arts Centre for a limited time each year so we're hardly going to stop operations for that, and they're not giving us the Arts Centre as our own theatre. In the early stages it seemed different, the excavation was going to be much deeper and it was going to take in all the workshops, rehearsal spaces and storage areas. Now all these facilities are outside and we will only be performing in there for about forty weeks of the year. We will have the opportunity to turn the Athenaeum into a house where good, prestigious revivals can be done, so we can be sure of an audience and it will help to subsidise our operation.

Because of the development of our audience, which is now the largest for drama in the country, the Arts Centre wouldn't be big enough for us; it seats fewer than the Athenaeum which plays to pretty high percentage houses. Can we double our audience? Yes, I think we can, especially to begin with when there will be enormous curiosity about the building, but it's up to the State Government to come up with the funds. Unless they do that we could fail; it's a vast move and has wrecked a number of companies, here and overseas. But there's no point in going in an insubstantial way - you just get mediocrity.

Although the MTC is by a long way the biggest theatre company, its relationships with other Melbourne companies are notoriously cool. What does Sumner think of the groups he has known - I suppose that means they're called 'rivals'?

La Mama is probably the most important of the alternative companies; it's been a constant backbone, doing things that no one else can. Its work should be more known - I suppose that means they should have more money.

I respect the APG. They've had tough times and are now trying to reorganise themselves. I am a great believer in trying to look into the soul of a company every year; we try to redraw the management chart, reassess artistic objectives - I only wish to hell that we could make more dramatic changes, but sometimes one comes to the conclusion you are doing what you can in the right way. It sounds smug, but there are only a certain number of alternatives. No, I think the APG has created some very interesting things.

Hoopla I don't feel is a very distinctive alternative to anything. They do the odd American small-scale musical, but I don't know how necessary that is. I suppose it's always good to have competition, but they're doing it mainly with the same people. I don't know if it's the same audience, but it's the same actors, same designers and largely the same plays, and it would be better if they had something individual to do. The same public money is being spent to do the same work; why?

Proliferation of activity then, does not necessarily encourage quality and Sumner does not envy Sydney its wider range of theatres.

Look at comparable cities in the English speaking world, and you find fewer companies than you have in Sydney; the number's closer to what we have in Melbourne. If you have a reasonably tight theatre community the thinner you spread it the weaker it gets. Talking in general, fewer companies mean better quality. The population comparison is with towns like Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and they generally have just one company.

Australia is not a cultural centre, but if you do want to attract tourists the way is to have one spanning good company - like Stratford on Avon. Any of the state companies could do it, given the money. South Australia is the best off; they have the best conditions to be the top national company, and the biggest grant, but it depends entirely on the leadership.

Talking to John Sumner money comes up as a major factor in every subject touched upon.

The money situation worries me very much; it's very difficult to get your head above water. The war was won by having a good person in the field and a good person administering, but it's very difficult to do both, and money is essential to the whole thing.

We really need a large company of actors, which we don't have. We're forced into giving actors large roles in a series of plays because it's much cheaper to keep actors working day and night, day and night, but it's not good. You don't get the best from them. We have forty or fifty actors engaged at the moment, which is rare,
because we're working on five productions presently - three in Melbourne, one in Sydney and one in rehearsal. It's not a permanent company and I wish it were.

We need a very strong training programme, but if they're working day and night who wants to talk about training? We're working on a Shakespeare in a three-sided auditorium at the moment which is a new experience, but we'd be much better equipped if we were able to have the vocal, movement and fencing training we need, a gymnasium and a pool.

I'd like to widen the artistic component; to have designers engaged on a continuing contract to do four or five designs a year, so they could also be part of the artistic stimulation as with directors. We are taking new people on next year, assistant directors - God knows where the money's coming from - but it is the only way for young people to learn, to be actively attached to a company.

We must keep saying "How can we earn enough money?" The only answer is we have to put a bigger burden on everybody.

The work burden and the lack of funds runs through from John Sumner's view of his own company into his thoughts about the whole of Australian theatre.

The situation is to an extent one of forced growth in which, if we are not careful, support will be withdrawn. The UK is going through this with the new government, cuts and VAT, and I find that disquieting. The only way of coping with that is to ask for more of the work burden and the lack of funds runs through from John Sumner's view of his own company into his thoughts about the whole of Australian theatre.

The chances are that the growth that has been occurring will stop or be stunted, we marked time in 74/5. That has a vast difference between that and a well organised, well run, subsidised company.

Although the smooth organisation of the Melbourne Company is indisputable, it has been attacked for certain aspects of its artistic work. One is its lack of innovation, an accusation its Artistic Director refutes.

The MTC's work is as broad as any. For instance we now have our new studio space, we did the first Vietnam play, and I don't know why more people haven't taken up plays like **Bodies**. *Macbeth* this year was the most innovative Shakespeare we've ever done - it was slaughtered by the critics, but did fantastic business. We do a lot of this and it's often successful, so people think if it's successful it must be traditional. And of course we've done a huge number of Australian plays...

But the company is said to impose an English rep style on its work, antipathetic to the development of an indigenous style.

We don't consciously try to change people's vowel sounds. The classics are written in English and in a way that if you can't get a tongue in the right place at the right time you can't say the words. Obviously you can't do an Australian play in an English accent, and I don't want to think any further ahead than the Arts Centre. He is indefinite on the subject. Obviously I'm not going to be there forever, and I hope to be able to pull away before I am too decrepit. But I don't want to think any further ahead than the Arts Centre at the moment. It is a problem which has set us back several years; discussions were first started in 1960 and our occupancy should have been in 74/5. That has stunted our growth, we marked time in a tiny theatre. Perhaps we should have been more vigorous in building our own theatre. When we went into St Martins Theatre we were attacked for being expansionist, but we were again only trying to prepare ourselves for the Arts Centre.

But is there a possible successor being trained?

Oh, there's always someone to step into the leadership. As long as the company structure is strong and the board knows the aims of the company it will be OK. If I dropped dead tomorrow I don't think the company would stop functioning. They would be unprepared, but last year I went away for ten months and the company didn't fall to pieces. I have very good heads of department who look after the running of the company. I'm sure at times people wonder what I do...
Barry Oakley is a novelist, short story writer and reviewer as well as one of Australia's most notable playwrights. His plays include Bedfellows and The Feet of Daniel Mannix. The Ship's Whistle was performed at the Pram Factory last year, and this month the Melbourne Theatre Company are producing his most recent play, Marsupials.

Everything seems to happen to me relatively late: puberty, marriage, my first novel not published till I was 36, my first play performed (at La Mama, Carlton) at 37... Being ten (and looking fifteen) years older than what used to be called the new wave of Australian dramatists has only one advantage I can think of: it gives one a longer perspective across theatrical modes and fashions, and makes one wary of pronouncements about the coming and going of styles... (realism is dead... Artaud is alive and well and living in North Fitzroy... this is not the way Brecht should be done).

Let me therefore settle into a rocking chair, tap the pipe and recall antediluvian times. My theatre memories extend to the nineteen forties, when as schoolboys, we enacted on the classroom platform such English One-Act perennials as The 'Ole In The Road and The Oak Settle (rustic: "aargh...all draughts be bad, warm or cold").

Occasionally we were allowed out of our prisons for some culture. I remember seeing Hamlet at the Players and Playgoers, a tiny theatre in a Little Collins Street basement. It was run by J Beresford Fowler, a man who loved Shakespeare and tortured the playwright by the month with eccentric performances by a motley company whose doublets and hose seemed to have been cobbled together from old curtains.

The stage was so small that entrances were effected from behind the back flat, which swelled and trembled as each character prepared to enter, so that surprise was impossible and the arrival of the ghost painfully palpable. He came on to laughter, and spoke his lines through a slit in an inverted rubbish bin, arousing sensations of pity rather than terror. Coloured ribbons looped down low from the flies, presumably intending to suggest the panoply of Elsinore. In the duel scene, when the rapiers of tin clattered against each other, Hamlet raised his weapon high, it became entangled, and suddenly the duellists were festooned with streamers and, to laughter, had to machete their way free.

By the time I'd reached the University of Melbourne in 1950, verse drama was the fashionable mode. Christopher Fry dazzled us with The Lady's Not For Burning, T S Eliot bored us with Murder In The Cathedral, and Maxwell Anderson in America and Douglas Stewart in Australia tried to convince us that the low life was poetical too. Anderson's Winterset had gangsters talking in verse, and Stewart did something similar with Ned Kelly who, as he fell in his ploughshares with a thump that shook the boards of Melbourne University's Union Theatre, had some difficulty enunciating his pentameters.

By the time I'd reached the University of Melbourne in 1950, verse drama was the fashionable mode.
fifties, was that theatre tended to split into two opposed conventions. On the one hand Look Back In Anger and Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll. On the other, Waiting For Godot and Ionesco's The Chairs: gritty realism versus the theatre of nihilism, characters lost in metaphysical space.

I saw Lawler's Doll in 1955, and though in historical terms it represented a breakthrough — an immediately successful Australian play by an Australian author with an Australian cast — it provoked admiration rather than excitement to me. It was a well-crafted piece of realism presenting Australian working-class characters within a convincing frame. The middle class audience emitted continual delighted gasps of recognition — not of themselves, but of the rough-diamond types that in those days still largely had Carlton to themselves.

I can still recall the frissons that swept through the theatre at the sounds of forbidden words — bastard, bloody, bugger — words that only seven years before, in Sumner Lock-Elliot's Rusty Bugles, had to be changed, under threat of police prosecution, to stinker, mug and dimwit.

It was rather Osborne's Look Back In Anger that gave new life to the realistic convention. The exciting thing about its protagonist Jimmy Porter was his savage articulateness — what 'Roo and Barney, the cane-cutters of The Doll, can't get across, roars out in a tirade in Look Back In Anger. Osborne did what the verse dramatists failed to do — rediscovered a vital theatrical language. Words were once again poured out on the stage, violent and scurrilous and Elizabethan in their energy.

This isn't the place to analyse the peculiar chemistry that combined and combusted into an indigenous Australian drama in the late sixties — Brecht and Pinter obviously have to go into the mix, as would the revival of the vaudeville tradition, as well as the two conventions I have been discussing. But one thing is apparent: realism, though its death is regularly proclaimed, is still with us, vigorous and alive — realism condensed and intensified, as in Heathcote William's Hancock's Last Half Hour, Barrie Keeffe's Gimme Shelter or David Mamet's American Buffalo.

As Tom Wolfe says about fiction, the introduction of realism in the eighteenth century was like the introduction of electricity into machine technology — once it's there, it's hard to do without. It's there adapted, transmuted, but still sparking in Pinter and in Brecht; Makassar Reef and Travelling North are wired to it; it propels the scenes along in my most recent play, Marsupials; currents of it, I feel sure, will persist in the future, powering more intense and crystallised theatrical forms. Having now made a pronouncement of the kind I warned against at the outset, I'll stop.
AUSTRALIAN OPERA

By David Gyger/After months of scarcely concealed antagonism behind the scenes at the Australian Opera, the departure in mid-October of general manager Peter Hemmings was hardly a bolt from the blue.

Rather, it could most aptly be described, perhaps, as depressing confirmation of the unfortunate fact that the complex power struggles within the top echelons of the national company are anything but over.

The well-publicised conflict between Hemmings and his musical director, Richard Bonynge, is merely symptomatic of a wide-ranging administrative conflict. In itself, it is so typical of major performing companies, particularly opera companies, as to be hardly worthy of passing mention. Indeed, controlled tensions between artistic and business considerations are no doubt a good thing insofar as they represent a striving to achieve the best possible artistic result within the available economic parameters. The trouble with the Australian Opera is that the tensions and conflicts are not tempered by a sense of unity and corporate purpose.

Nobody would suggest that a general manager - or, for that matter, a musical director - should spend his entire working life in one spot; yet the turnover at the top of the AO has been so rapid that it has simply not been possible for any incumbent to contribute as much as he ought to have been able to the development of the company: three musical directors (Carlo Felice Cillario and Edward Downes before Bonynge) and three general managers (Donald McDonald and John Winther before Hemmings) have already paraded by during the 70s, and now we are faced with the prospect of yet another search for a new general manager and yet another disruptive transitional period while he attempts to turn his ideas into realities.

In achieving the delicate balance that is a fully professional opera company working at top efficiency - and hence producing the best possible product within the available resources, the most vital ingredient must be a harmonious working relationship between the two men at the top - the artistic head and the administrative one.

Given a reasonably harmonious working relationship between these two most vital operatives of any opera company, repertory and casting ought to be settled relatively amicably, but finally, if it comes to the crunch, the general manager must have the power to overrule his musical director in these vital areas of management. If he does not have that power, he is not in fact general manager.

All indications are that Hemmings took on the general managership of the Australian Opera two years ago in the expectation he would have a free rein to implement his policies and not fully realising how formidable an obstacle Bonynge would prove to be as much for the possibility he might stomp off, if crossed, and take his illustrious wife, Joan Sutherland, with him as for any rational arguments he might throw up against Hemmings' plans.

Clearly, Bonynge favours the sort of bel canto repertory his wife sings so marvellously, doesn't much care for such late romantic blockbusters as Wagner's Ring cycle and was a major factor in the decision to postpone the AO production which was to have begun this year and was so dear to Hemmings' heart. Clearly the AO board has failed to arbitrate effectively as between the two, most culpably by failing in the first place to lay down clearcut areas of responsibility as between them.

Both men being human, there have also been other lesser accusations to be levelled with some justification by supporters of each against the other, of Bonynge, for instance, that his artistic judgement is clouded by cronyism, that he has in some cases preferred mediocrities to the best available talent when casting operas; of Hemmings, that he has been too aloof and brusque in his working relationships to stimulate a sense of teamwork with the ranks of the AO, and that he has sometimes been insensitive of the wishes of his board.

Important as they are, Sutherland and Bonynge are far from the only major international opera talents with an Australian connection. Why, for instance, has Yvonne Minton not appeared in opera since her stunning Octavians in Der Rosenkavalier in 1972? Why is there a six-year gap between Sir Charles Mackerras' 1973 Magic Flutes and this year's Jenůfas and Boccanegas? Why has Edward Downes not returned here to conduct since Bonynge replaced him as musical director? Why has the brilliant tenor Luciano Pavarotti not returned to Australia since 1965? Why have Domingo, Carreras, Hornel, Caballe, etc never appeared with the AO?

Inevitably, the intrinsic differences in the nature of their two jobs has meant that Hemmings' achievements and failures are a good deal lower profile than Bonynge's. Much of his job is in the realm of long-term advance planning, for instance, whose merits are not proved or disproved until at least a year after the event. In certain areas, though, Hemmings has been an undeniable success: in particular, in the realm of cooperation between the two companies - both in terms of the joint subscription seasons in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria involving the Australian Opera and a State company, and in terms of positive behind-the-scenes co-operation in other areas as well as an increased physical touring presence of the AO itself outside Sydney.
In recent weeks there have been depressing signs of increasing intransigence in all quarters of Australia's opera world. The long-standing rumours of a new professional company in Melbourne (to give vent in practical terms to Victoria's displeasure at getting the short end of the stick in the AO physical presence stakes) have been revived, this time featuring Sir Charles Mackerras as musical director-elect and even briefly, the AO's ousted Hemmings as general manager. In the face of considerable criticism, both in the letters columns of the daily press and an ABC television report (on Nationwide) — some of it quite telling — the board of the AO has maintained an infuriating aloofness that appears increasingly to signal an unreal sense of its own infallibility.

Such polarisation of attitudes as now seems to be more and more prevalent within Australia's burgeoning but at best adolescent opera world may yet prove to be catastrophic insofar as the survival, let alone the development of the art form in this country is concerned. To date, the only sane course has been followed: concentration of funds available for this most costly of the performing arts in one city, Sydney. That it happened to be Sydney, and not Melbourne, is an accident of history; and in particular of the crazy saga of the Sydney Opera House, that extravagent pipedream that became reality largely for base political reasons combined with an understandable, if perverse, unwillingness to admit the folly of starting it in the first place.

But no one can deny that the Sydney Opera House, imperfect as it is as a performing arts complex and costly as it was to build, has not only put Australia on the world cultural map, but has also been an enormous stimulus to the performing arts in this country. In another day, the Melbourne Arts Centre might have provided such a focus; but despite its practicality (itself no doubt stimulated, in part at least, by the impracticality of the Sydney Opera House) it cannot hope to rival the Opera House as a symbol of the arts in Australia.

The major Melbourne-based company which must come, and soon, should not suddenly spring into existence in an atmosphere of hostility to the AO. The obvious next forward step in the development of opera and music theatre in Australia is for the Australian Opera to subside gracefully, over a period of years, into the status of the Sydney Opera — a title which has often already been hurled at it in anger by opera-lovers in other States. At the same time, a performing institution of equal — or near-equal stature — must gradually evolve in Melbourne; to be followed, in due course, by other major companies in Adelaide and Brisbane and maybe eventually in Perth and Hobart.

Logically these companies would evolve from the State companies in each of the capital cities; but in the absence of a viable existing company, perhaps one or two might have to come into existence in the first place through cellular division from the national company. Nothing could be more potentially disastrous for the future of serious musical theatre in this country than to have a do-or-die struggle develop between an infant company in Melbourne and a nominal national company deprived of effective managerial leadership based in Sydney.

Such a struggle would at the best set the cause of opera in this country back to Square One of 25 years ago; at worst, it could result in the Fraser Government, not notably pro-arts at best, washing its hands of opera altogether and leaving it to sink or swim solely on the life support systems vouchsafed by State sources. Inevitably, because top-class opera must have big subsidy to survive, the world-class performing institution that is the Australian Opera as it now exists would disappear.

And in the process a whole generation of performing artists — the solo singers, the orchestral musicians and choristers, the major stars and conductors, designers and directors, who have been lured here (or back here) in the 1970s — would yet again be driven away from Australia. Like many other Australian opera-lover, I couldn't care less who is on the board of the Australian Opera; who gets a knighthood or doesn't; who is musical director or even general manager. I do care, though, about the survival of a company which has brought so much pleasure to so many people, and opened so many new cultural horizons to Australian audiences in the past few years.

And I believe I am putting forward the view of most opera-lovers in this country when I plead for the present board of the AO to stop being so arrogant and inward-looking, and the Melbourne off-shoot mob to stop being so parochial; and Bonynge to accept that any one man's artistic horizons, even his own, cannot be permitted to dictate artistic policy for an aspiring major national cultural institution. When I plead for the infusion of some operatic sense into the hot bed of petty jealousy and intrigue that so overwhelmingly dominates opera in Australia just now.

Nice though it is to see so much of two noted operatic Australians as Sutherland and Bonynge, it is even more important that the Australian Opera have effective managerial control based on broader horizons - particularly in the vital areas of choice of repertory - than Bonynge as so far demonstrated he possesses as musical director. Hemmings seemed to have those horizons; and it was a tragedy to lose him before he had a reasonable chance to prove what he could do given an unequivocal mandate to manage such as any effective executive must possess.
By Roger Pulvers/State Rep.

The obvious and the ambiguous

AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT
THE BOAT

By Solrun Hoaas


Director, Anne Godfrey Smith. Stage Manager, Pat Hutchinson. Augustus, John Cuffe. Beamish, John Paisley. The Lady, Jenny Ongley. (Professional)


Of the first two plays in Fortune Theatre Company's current season of three lunchtime productions in the Canberra Theatre foyer, Australian Jill Shearer's The Boat is a far happier choice than George Bernard Shaw's Augustus Does His Bit. The latter opened the season and, no matter how relevant and entertaining for the British bureaucracy of World War I to see a send-up of one of their own (in Shaw's own words: "...their problem was how to win the war with Augustus on their backs, well-meaning, brave, patriotic, but obstructively fussy, self-important, imbecile, and disastrous."), the play now seems rather trivial and just not funny enough.

It's not that bungling or puffed-up public servants are unknown to us. Nor did the actors fail. John Cuffe as Lord Augustus Highcastle and John Paisley as Beamish, his sole and entire staff, are more than competent and effectively exploit the initial confrontation of irrelevant ideals of order, discipline and propriety versus the more immediate needs of daily living, getting on with it. War or no war, Beamish wants his rise in salary.

The wit and irony in the dialogue and contrast created by the two actors sustain the play for a while, as does initially the entry of the mysterious lady we, the audience, assume to be a spy. She is played with force, flutter and obvious mannerisms by Jenny Ongley both to match and to seduce the ridiculous Augustus. The lady, however, is only after military secrets in order to win a bet. It becomes rather tiresome in the end. Perhaps a tighter direction in the second half might have helped.

That the play is by Shaw would draw an audience. Other than that, it seems hardly reason enough to do it, judging by audience response when I saw this bit of theatre history.

The eccentric and mad are inherently dramatic. In The Boat Jill Shearer exploits this, as well as the theatrical effect of having her main character, Sel, sitting in a red rowboat in the middle of the stage. He lost his balance after returning from a fishing trip to find that despite thirty years of faithful service, the boss's son is now sitting permanently in his own seat. He was retrenched without notice. Now he goes fishing in the living-room.

It is a well-crafted play, the kind that gives one the slightly disturbing feeling that it has followed a recipe, albeit one that works quite well. Perhaps it is that the bones of the structure are showing too much for a naturalistic mode.

In less than forty minutes we are given lyrical passages on fishing, pathos, an unfolding of the past, credible characters, a build-up of conflict reaching a dramatic climax, and a quiet resolution at the end with a hint that the boat may have to be rowed away for good this time. Both play and production leave us guessing as to what stylistic realm we are in for quite a while, as Sel reminisces on past fishing trips, potters around the boat and is assisted in the game by his wife Mary. They could almost be in Albee country. This is very effective use of stylistic ambiguity.

What I find less effective is the revelation of Sel's mental state through the apprehension caused by an impending visit of the son's new girlfriend and the slightly awkward retelling of the retrenchment episode through a dialogue between mother and son. The greatest weakness both in play and performance is in the somewhat crudely portrayed catalyst, the son's girlfriend, a social worker who has studied psychology and knows it all.

Pat Galvin, who has given Canberra some very fine performances recently, including the main role in Romeril's The Floating World, makes the character of Sel not only totally convincing, but gives great nuance and subtlety to the interpretation, allowing for some ambiguity as to how aware he is of what is going on when confronted by the well-meaning but insensitive attempts of the son's girlfriend to crush his dream world. Director John Paisley has wisely downplayed the climactic scene, where Sel is aroused to raise a knife at the girl, and has opted for a less than clear-cut approach to Sel's actual mental state up to that point. This makes the question "Home care or mental institution?" all the more dramatically interesting, in terms of the play, and not just a mental care argument per se.

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Recognition and the lack of it

FLEXITIME
DISCOVERING AUSTRALIA/RENE TROUVER

By Lucy Wagner


Director, Peter Kingston. Cast: Robert Menzies, Annie Byron, Katrina Foster, Stephen Doric, Andrew James. (Professional).

Two companies fighting for audiences— the Hunter Valley Theatre Company in Newcastle and the Griffin Company in Sydney—have mounted two shorts by new writer (actor) John Stone, obscure comedies on the human condition.

Flexitime, as its title implies, looks at life in the office— in fact a public service stores department, but for the purposes of most people, any office. Not, however, in any town; the play is written with an inbuilt facility for including local reference of the "fill-in-the-blank" nature, a useful quality in a small community.

Hall has been called New Zealand's answer to David Williamson, but though much of the comedy is well-observed and the laugh lines very witty, the play's commentary and structure are weak compared to Williamson's work. Any development takes place off stage in the private lives of the characters rather than in their relationships on stage, with each resolving a personal problem by the end. However, as types they are immediately recognisable and Terence Clarke's production maximises the play's great drawcard—recognition.

Robert Alexander in the central role of John, office wit who hides behind the act, gives an excellent and finely balanced performance, filling in the gaps in character that the script leaves bare. Alan Becher makes the Welsh immigrant Huw an agreeable and touching figure, and the compulsory affair—with the fat spinster (Claire Crowther)—a believable piece of escapism.

Vic Rooney's great talent lies in always appearing to play himself and here gives another disarmingly naturalistic performance as Jim, a narrow-minded, easy-going boor who gets what's coming to him.

The fact that an analysis of Flexitime inevitably falls into appraisal of the talents of individual actors is symptomatic of its formula, but for all the play's defects Terence Clarke's direction brought forth some fine ensemble work from the cast and milked the evening for all its laughs and entertainment.

John Woodland's set made good use of the very small Playhouse stage—miraculously fitting in five desks and suitably reflecting the archetypal office environment to house its archetypal occupants.

If John Stone's Discovering Australia attempted to portray some archetypes (second rate, whining pom, vulgar Australian, simple aboriginal) its motives for so doing remain obscure. In several brief and bare scenes the Englishman joins up with the aforesaid Australian and pseudo aboriginal in an early 19th century attempt to cross the Blue Mountains to the interior. In spite of recognisable names the expedition has little to do with historical fact and the ensuing personality clashes have no further point than the nationality joke— but no one wins. One image exemplifies this: the Englishman's desire to buy a chamber orchestra to listen to in a dark room contrasted with the Australian's crude and raucous singing ("that's music") and the aboriginal's tuneless blowing of the digeridoo.

The Grande Finale of Rene Trouver was workshopped at this year's Playwrights' Conference, where, like Rock 'ola and others, it was well received in partial production but seemed unable to live up to promise in full flight.

Unfortunately Robert Menzies did not reach the heights of Barry Otto's performance and detracted from the satire and the character by uncontrolled overacting. Rene Trouver, French immigrant and private investigator is a happy existentialist, but his invocations of Sartre and Camus do little to raise the level of comic philosophising that come wrapped in thriller style.

The Griffin Theatre Company's resources may be small, but the staging of these two plays showed a lack of imagination that augurs none too well for a new professional company hoping to break into the competition for part of the Sydney audience.
Sweeney Todd, or the Demon Barber

By Barry O'Connor

Sweeney Todd adapted by Max Iffland; songs by David Mason-Cox. Q-Theatre at the Bankstown Town Hall. Opened 5th October, 1979.

Director, Kevin Jackson; Designer, Arthur Dicks. Music Hall Segment arranged by Ron Hackett; Choreography, Leigh Chambers; Stage Manager, Libby Higgin and Trevor Connell.

Mrs. Lovett, Gae Anderson; Joanna Oakley, Mary-Lou Stewart; Dr Aminadab Lupin, Peter Kingston; Sweeney Todd, Ron Hackett; Mark Ingsectic, John Stone; Tobias Ragg, Alan Brel; Col Jeffrey; Joe James; Sir William Brandon, Peter Kingston. (Professional)

Sweeney Todd has left his native Fleet Street for the Bankstown Town Hall, where the ‘Demon Barber’ has found a temporary home in a Q-Theatre restaurant production. Sandwiched between music hall and singalong entertainments, in fact between Russian eggs and apple strudel, the traditional melodrama - no, it’s not the obvious and extravagant style of commonly associated with melodramatic playing; they acted boldly rather than over played their parts, hoping to get as good from the audience as they gave it. Often this worked, as when Alan Brel’s Tobias was making yet another decision to eat yet another one of those pies. But generally, whether the audience’s complicity was deserved or obligatory was a question I kept asking throughout the evening. A too tame MC during the music hall warm-up failed to elicit the right kind of benevolent aggression for other than mechanical boo’s and hisses.

The show is billed as ‘a complete night out’, which does sound rather like a paraphrase of Barry Humphries’ famous signature line. But it is good value - $16 for theatre, dinner, dancing, etc. - if you like that kind of thing. However, since melodrama is so much a part of our theatre experience now, because of the restaurant theatres, is it not time for someone to do for melodrama what Peter Hall’s The Recruiting Officer did for the comedy of manners? That is, search beneath the style’s veneer for the realities which history and histrionics have long buried.
Betrayal by Harold Pinter. Melbourne Theatre Company at the Nimrod, Sydney NSW. Opened 17 October 1979 (after previews); first seen in Canberra. Director, John Sumner; designer, Tanya McCallin. Emma, Elizabeth Alexander; Jerry, John Stanton; Robert, Neil Fitzpatrick; Waiter, Edward Hepple (Professional)

Pinter, the master of enigma and ambiguity, has single-handedly elevated the pause in modern drama to a par with the aside and soliloquy of the Elizabethans. His concern with what goes on between utterances leaves his plays with only mute answers to a myriad of questions — uneasiness, confusion and a multiplicity of possibilities in relation to his work is the result.

Then Betrayal. The technique remains, sparse language framed by pauses and imbued with the significant, like poetry framed by blank paper. But the words themselves are much less lyrical and lacking in nuance compared to those of The Caretaker, or Landscape; they are even banal. The situation, the classic love triangle, is apparently all too easily categorised.

The people belong to London’s chic set: a publisher, Robert; his wife, now a gallery owner, Emma; and Jerry, a writers’ agent. The only surprise is that their story is told backwards, beginning with a meeting of the lovers two years after the end of the affair, sparked by a final, all night discussion between husband and wife.

From there, in this rechercbe de temps perdu, it shifts more or less steadily backwards through the significant moments, one assumes, of the liaison: the night in 1977 Jerry discovers Robert has known for years and fraudfully faces his best friend’s implacability; Jerry and Emma, 1975, in the flat as passion dwindles and work provides a let out; 1974, all three together, Jerry unaware all is revealed, Emma keeping up the social mask, and Robert using the topic of squash to convey almost homosexual intent; 1973, Venice when Robert discovers — and in London the subsequent meetings — Emma and Jerry, Robert and Jerry where the discovery remains undiscovered; 1971, afternoon delight in the flat; and 1968 where it all started.

Is it merely a boring story told backward to give it interest? This being Pinter we look for more; more even than the evil thought that this offering might be the exorcism of a certain well-publicised affair.

John Sumner’s masterly direction gives the play a style and precision which goes beyond the naturalistic version of Peter Hall’s (National Theatre, London) premiere. The set in a neutral grey is composed of screens and angular furniture which moves on grooves into various configurations for different settings. Implicit is the coldly put idea of affairs as part of the very mechanics of modern day life.

Affairs lead to betrayal — and here all the possibilities are rung. Emma, of course betrays husband Robert in the Kilburn love nest than can never be a home. Husband and wife betray Jerry by not revealing Robert’s knowledge of the latter years of the affair. Emma betrays Jerry twice; once by conceiving a child while he is in America; later by beginning the triangle again with a new lover, Casey, one of Jerry’s writers. The chilling vision is of family life continuing with superficial calm, but founded only on a substructure of deceit, lies and betrayals.

It is precisely to give this point full and general impact, why Pinter has taken an archetypal situation and peopled it with near stereotypes. Robert the man of outward calm and reserve whose politeness almost condones the lovers’ initial meeting at his party in his bedroom. Neil Fitzpatrick consumately captures his impassive surface but inner disturbance. Jerry, drunkenly clichéd in his first advances, resorting to cloak and dagger devices, then distraught when they are shown to have failed; John Stanton never lets the passion in the character get out of hand, maintaining the balance between sex on the side and intractable family commitment. And Emma, the liberated woman who seeks sexual pleasure separately from family involvement, as played by Elizabeth Alexander dispassionately straightforward, bar one resort to tears, in her infidelities.

The flashback mode allows a gradual check to the facts first presented; at once including Pinter’s long-standing theme of the potholes in memory lane, and deflating any thought that this might have been a momentous affair.

As with Satie’s compositions the debate will continue whether the play is banal or shows masterful restraint. I like the music.
Suicide season, plays

**METAL CAGES, PLAY STRINDBERG, BEDFELLOWS**

Alan Youngson


*Play Strindberg* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Touring production by Stage Company of Adelaide. Opened 26th September, Brown’s Mart, Darwin. Director, Brian Debnam. Alice, Deborah Little; Edgar, David Hursthouse; Kurt, Ron Rodger. (Professional)

*Bedfellows* by Barry Oakley. Darwin Theatre Group at Brown’s Mart. Opened 6th October 1979. Director, Tom Pauling; Designer, Peter Dean. Paul Cummins, Shane McInnes; Carol Cummins, Helen Horsfield; Bill Butler, Tony Peacock. (Amateur)

With the annual build up to the Wet (suicide) Season the theatre fare in Darwin during the past month has tended to reflect this clammy atmosphere by intermingling isolation, separation, loneliness and death - especially in the sphere of marital relations.

First, and most disappointing, was the world premiere of Darwin newcomer and poet Ailsa Mathieson’s *Learning How To Fly In Metal Cages*. Director Robert Kimber has attempted to stage a combination of her poems (Sex is a Filthy Word); sketches (Will you hold that end?); stories (Raw Sensations) and radio plays (Swallowing is a Very Private Thing) through readings, recitations and acting out. Unfortunately, despite the enthusiasm of the cast to display the range of moods from desperate agony to bizarre comedy, the monotony of the theme - learning how to cope with the confinement and relative freedom of our caged minds and bodies - has hammered home ad nauseam, which left one wondering whether the material would have been better left on the page than stage.

In contrast, *Play Strindberg* cleverly adapted by playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt from Auguste Strindberg’s classic tragedy *The Dance of Death* transfers to the stage arena a tragi-comedy in twelve rounds.

Imagine Alice, a failed actress (Deborah Little) being married to Edgar, a failed army captain (David Hursthouse) and living on an island for 25 years. Wouldn’t you be disinclined to recognize any good points in the other? Add a visit by Alice’s ex-lover/cousin Kurt (Ron Rodger) and the result is a tag wrestling match in which the combatants learn how to joke and come to terms with their intertwined relationships, social positions, health, money and problem of growing old in a deadly but hilarious situation. Director, Brian Debnam, of the Adelaide Stage Company, carefully orchestrates his trio of performers to leave us with a feeling of optimism for marriage.

By way of comparison is the comi-tragedy of the menage a trois in Barry Oakley’s *Bedfellows*. What opens in a comic vein, with husband Paul (Shane McInnes) being allowed to dominate as the witty, literary, sympathetic clown drawing a picture of a tired marriage and middle-aged sex, is unexpectedly broken when Carol (Helen Horsfield) reveals that Paul is not the only game-player in the marriage. Not only has she been adeptly pretending not to to know about Paul’s affair, she has been having an affair herself, with his literary rival and best friend, Bill Butler (Tony Peacock).

Fortunately for us the playwright does not shy away from confronting the serious as well as the comic implications of this situation. The match is played out through, it seems, all possible moves, with satisfying dramatic logic, exhausting the possibilities for the players in this situation.

In the moment of truth at the end it is clear that Paul has learnt nothing and Carol has been left with nothing; that the ‘love’ which now relates them is an unromantic complex of convenience, habit and obligation.

Tom Pauling’s unflinching direction brings out the honesty and reality of these conflicts by balancing both the humorous and the serious as the bedfellows face the fact that separation, infidelity, loneliness even isolation will not be their lot - wet season or no.
Perhaps our expectations of the TN Company have been too high too soon. At last we had an alternative professional theatre company in Brisbane committed to performing major new plays - particularly Australian plays - using the manifest resources of local talent; a company to fill the gap between the Popular Theatre Troupe’s theatre to the people outside theatres and the QTC’s conservative semicommercialism. But after a brave start with Brecht and Tom Stoppard, the year faded away with small casts and (partially excepting Happy Days) smaller plays.

The TN Company has presented no fewer than five Australian plays, but all one-acters with few pretensions to profundity. The present offering is Going Bananas, an odd collection of two entertaining frothy pieces - Richard Bradshaw’s Bananas and Mil Perrin’s The Flaw - and John Summons’ relentlessly sombre The Coroners’ Report. Of these The Flaw is undoubtedly the most successful as it unpredictably flies through the absurd imaginings of a man who has apparently come home to tell his wife that he is to be promoted at work. The play, the actors, and the set change styles and meaning with panache, but there’s no bite, no questions left to worry us as we drive off into the night.

Not so in the “underground” production of Howard Brenton’s Christie In Love, which explores the motives and consciousness of the English murderer John (Reggie) Christie, as seen through the eyes of two of the investigating police. Christie is portrayed as an ordinary man, the policemen as ordinary men. All have a surface experience of normality and respectability, yet Christie’s distaste for women led him to kill and then sexually assault them. The policemen’s similar lack of respect for women has led them to be the tellers of dirty limericks and the voyeuristic judges of Christie’s behaviour. In Brenton’s view the moralists are as tainted as the murderer himself. “Why,“ the young policeman balefully wonders, “can’t murderers be more like monsters?” There’s a fascinating dream sequence, our first view of Christie, where he masturbates while wearing a monster’s head and pours out invective against women, which works on the level of being his own fantasy life and also a view of himself as the police would like to see him: more like a monster, less like himself.

But again this work which shocked ten years ago is now a standard issue from the undergraduate repertoire, and its observations on mild mannered police sexual perversity in Noddyland do not contribute much to our own understanding of the police we’re acquainted with. Perhaps the TN Company could be commissioning plays on the perversions and inanities which have helped to determine our own consciousness. (Indeed Queensland history abounds with fascinating and morally ambiguous murderers such as Koppit, who killed hapless train travellers on the Northern Mail between Brisbane and Rockhampton and slid their bodies out of an open window.)

It all comes back to what we expect of the TN Company. I must admit to continuing optimism, for they have some of the most able and energetic actors in Brisbane, they’ve been plagued with financial problems in this difficult first year, and John Milson has understandably played it safe with productions he’s done before. Let’s hope 1980 will see this fine company of actors tackling some exciting and challenging material.
ON APPROVAL
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

By Jeremy Ridgman


Theseus Oberon: Robert van Mackelenberg; Philostrate Puck: Douglas Hedge; Efues Quince: Ken Kennett; Snout: Michael McCaffrey; Hypolymia Titania: Helen Hayle; Demetrius: David Clendinning; Egeus Quince: Kaye Stevenson, Helen Hayle. Other fairies from Qld Ballet Company and Australian Youth Ballet.

Edna Everidge, I believe, has a song entitled "Niceness", a homage that most nebulous and flaccid of human virtues, Frederick Lonsdale seems to have got there first. His 1927 comedy, On Approval, takes the daring step of having two engaged couples, one young, the other middle-aged, retire to a Scotland country house for a trial marriage, the result being that one from each partnership discovers that their prospective spouse is just not nice. (There's no other word for it.) The curtain falls with the two nasties left snowed up together in a mini-Sartrean hell, each the other's painful means of escape. Lonsdale might have added lustre to the tarnished cheek if the play is to work today: in an aftertaste of saccharine vulgarity, best epitomised by a Puck who postures and camps his way through the play like an escapee from Les Girls. And why was a professional set, looking, as more than one person remarked, like a blown-up logo for a gas company? Small can be beautiful, especially in the "green world" of Shakespeare's comedies. But that's Warana for you...

world of boulevard comedy to coincide with Warana, Brisbane's arts festival cum Mardi-Gras; no doubt they hope to recoup some of the losses made by their more adventurous offerings earlier this year. The QTC's open-air A Midsummer Night's Dream, however, is being paraded far more overtly as the spectacle of the festival, the embodiment of Brisbane's own spirit of Comus.

It is, consequently, a production which tries to be all things to all men. In a lavish pooling of the talent and resources of all major state companies, every stop has been pulled out, from Mendlessohn to balletic fairies and from fireworks to a pack of scene-stealing dalmatians, and Shakespeare, bless him, appears to get swamped in the melee. The assumption seems to be that Brook and Kott not-withstanding. The Dream is still the Bard's matinee piece and ripe for the plucking.

Given the scale of the production, one can not help but admire the handling of mass entrances and exits, the creation of some stunning effects and sumptuousness of the costuming. But such riches tend to cloy and the more subtle delights, such as Robert van Mackelenberg's majestic Oberon, are lost as a result. One is left with an aftertaste of saccharine vulgarity, best epitomised by a Puck who postures and camps his way through the play like an escapee from Les Girls. And why was a perfect natural setting, graced with noble Morton Bay Figs, tarted up with a huge luminescent blue set, looking, as more than one person remarked, like a blown-up logo for a gas company? Small can be beautiful, especially in the "green world" of Shakespeare's comedies. But that's Warana for you...
Uneasy and uneven

TWELFTH NIGHT
THE ENEMY WITHIN

By State Rep. Susan Vile


Director, Nick Enright; Designer, Hugh Colman; Lighting Designer, Nigel Leving; Movement, Michael Fuller; Stage Manager, Peter Kauzes.

Olivia, Daphne Grey; Sir Toby Belch, Robert Grubb; Malvolio, Peter Carroll; Feste, Edwin Hodgerman; Fabian, Tony Prehn; Maria, Linden Wilkinson; Lady, Christine James; Priest, Wayne Jarratt; Orsino, Peter Schwarz; Valentine, Wayne Jarratt; Curio, Tony Strachan; Viola, Chris Mahoney; Sebastian, Colin Friels; Sea Captain, Bill Austin; Antonio, Leslie Dayman; Andrew Aguechek, Robin Bowering (Professional)


Director, David Young; Designer, Paula Carter; Stage Manager, Wendy Madigan.

Magda Kellerman, Christina Andersson, Mrs Kellerman, Ilvi Raid; Mrs Braun, Gwenda Helsham; Sophie Zimmermann, Helene Burden.

Since STC is soon to be in the hands of Kevin Palmer and Nick Enright, it is with more than the usual curiosity that one views their work. Twelfth Night left me flat, baffled and anxious for the company's future.

The aim seemed to be the authentic reproduction of an Elizabethan ambience. Accordingly, we were faced with a magnificently intricate and, I have no doubt, accurately researched set: the interior of an Elizabethan mansion. But it overpowered the action, cramped the movement and focused oddly on a pair of double doors which were hardly used. Though the original Twelfth Night may well have been performed in such a space, one imagines it was not the actors' choice venue. It seems absurd to create limitations in order then to strive against them.

Minimal lighting changes and fastidiously authentic (and expensive?) costumes only reinforced the sense of formalism. It seems absurd to create limitations than sit, waxwork-like, as if on display.

Many of the difficulties arose from the choice of actors. Chris Mahoney, already the victim of sad miscasting in Hamlet, gave Viola a youthful confidence, but she saw none of the tragic potential in the role, and, besides being physically unsuitable, needs urgent work on her vocal defects. As Sir Toby, Robert Grubb seemed to be reaching towards the role's complexities, but never quite realising them. Linden Wilkinson's Maria veered uncomfortably from pragmatic licentiousness to an odd primness. Robin Bowering was happier with Sir Andrew, as was Edwin Hodgerman with Feste (I only wish he could sing.).

The gravest error of miscasting was Daphne Grey as Olivia. Her matronly figure made a mockery of Orsino's admiration and, still more, of Viola's awed response, "tis beauty truly blent". They might have got away with it by playing up to comic extremes the older woman/younger man idea, but the production took no risks of this kind. Such miscasting is inexcusable in our only establishment theatre; I can readily think of several young Adelaide actresses who would have been more suitable for both leading parts.

Only Peter Carroll gave us a carefully studied characterisation in his intelligently mannered Malvolio. But even he could not overcome the quirks of direction which left him a slow-moving, self-loving Puritan amid a similarly slow-moving company. Contrast was gone, and with it much of the ground for comedy.

There were high points. The circular letter was a masterly stroke, as was Sir Andrew's all-yellow costume ("tis a colour she abhors"). The idea of Fabian's supplanting Feste is one I haven't seen before and which neatly solves the problem of what to do with Fabian, while reinforcing the "twilight" theme. It needed more focus, however; I know some audience members who missed it altogether.

In all, it was an uneasy night. Uneasy for the future, uneasy for the company. And, as if to confirm this, the performance I saw was spattered with slips and fluffs, a sure sign of lack of concentration, including an astonishing display of lost cues, misplaced words and forgotten lines from Bill Austin as the Sea Captain.

On a brighter note, The Enemy Within at the Red Shed lifted Troupe from the indifference of their last few shows. A consistent style, atmosphere and sense of purpose gave this production a pleasing unity.

The play, by a British playwright of Polish parentage, is set in Germany during the rise and fall of Hitler's Third Reich. Taking a topical theme, it examines the choices made by several women in a male-dominated world. On the whole, it works well and thankfully evades the temptation to present the issue in black and white terms. There is, nevertheless, an unevenness in the writing which could do with some cutting.

A curious dichotomy exists between the two halves. The first sets out the choices in detail, treating all with a freshness, even a naivety, which assumes no prior knowledge on our part. The second, which shows the consequences of each choice, immediately gives us credit for knowing a great deal about the situation (in detail not given in the first half); it also introduces a satirical element and teeters on the edge of melodrama. But perhaps the play's main weakness derives from the fact that the women's choices are clear from the outset, so that any development is more a matter of circumstantial consequence than personal conflict.

Still, it was a satisfying evening, with Helene Burden giving a finely understated performance as the woman who resists. Her natural sincerity exposed the tension of Ivi Kald's portrayal of the extreme, the woman who obeys. Caught between the two, as the play's chief focus for argument, Christina Andersson was most successful in her quieter moments; at other times, though, her voice would rise to something bordering on a petulant whine which she found hard to vary. Gwenda Helsham displayed an unexpected versatility in her four small parts.

Director David Young has an eye for a striking image (I shall not soon forget the picture of the mother in her fur coat sitting in the rubble, humming a lullaby) and is not afraid of stillness or emotion. He was let down, however, by the design, a curious mixture of makeshift and reality.
Seeing the production of The Day After The Fair brings back memories of what "going to theatre" used to be like; when it was an "event", and there was a tense feeling of excitement in the air. The plays were far from perfect perhaps, but one was willing to overlook shortcomings in return for first class production and acting values that camouflaged deficiencies in writing. Neither did it seem necessary for a play to have a message, as long as it provided escapist entertainment.

Taken from a Thomas Hardy short story and set in an English West Country city in 1900, in six scenes The Day After The Fair depicts a situation where Edith Harnham's servant Anna has met at a fair a young gentleman named Charles, who has kissed her and arranged a further meeting. When he returns to London they agree to correspond. Anna, however, can hardly read, let alone write, and the letters are composed and penned by her mistress, Edith.

Anna becomes pregnant and, when informed of her condition, Charles pays a visit and offers marriage, not out of necessity but because he genuinely believes into the part.

Andrew McFarlane as Charles, in a rare but welcome appearance on stage, seems less assured than the ladies and on the first night a trifle stiff and stilted. Possibly this was due to first night nerves and undoubtedly after a few performances he would be more relaxed.

Nothing has been stinted for Paul Dainty's first production since his occupancy of the Comedy, not least being the engagement of director Frith Banbury who, having directed the play's two previous productions with Deborah Kerr, gives it an overall West End gloss. It would have been easy to merely have had the overseas sets and costumes copied; instead Kristian Fredrikson has been employed and his attractive designs add to the evening's enjoyment.

A nice touch at the premiere was provision of free programmes to every member of the audience — on good quality paper and containing better lay-out and material than is normal — with "opening night" printed on the covers.
Titters more than laughs

THE ALCHEMIST

By Raymond Stanley

The Alchemist by Ben Jonson. Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened 25 September, 1979, after six previews. Director, Frank Hauser; Designer, James Ridewood. Face, Simon Chilvers; Subtle, Jonathan Hardy; Dol Common, Sandy Gore; Dapper, Roger Oakley; Dragger, Ian Suddards; Epicure Mammon, Frederick Parslow; Suth, Gary Day; Ananias, David Downer; Tribulation, Robert Essex; Kastril, Warwick Comber; Dame Pliant, Vivien Davies; Lovewit, Bruce Kerr; Neighbours, Laurie Dobson, Nina Holgate, Malcolm Phillips, Ernest Wilson (Professional)

After Frank Hauser's outstanding production last year of The Beaux' Stratagem for the MTC, one confidently expected his staging of The Alchemist to be an excellent companion piece.

Considered one of the great comedy classics, it shows what happens when Lovewit, because of the London plague, leaves his house there in charge of his butler Jeremy, sometimes known as Face. The latter allows so-called alchemist fortune teller Subtle and whore Dol Common to move in and, with Subtle practising his craft aided by the other two, the trio hope to make a fortune. There is a steady procession of gullible visitors ready to pay for favours, building up to Lovewit's inevitable return.

Unfortunately Hauser's production does not attain the heights reached by his Farquhar last year. It should provide an hilarious evening with its farce-like plot, but on the official opening night the anticipated loud laughs were frequently reduced to isolated titters. In the opening scenes the actors tended to gabble — and Jonson's dialogue is not the easiest to follow — which added to the confusion of a complex piece. None of it seemed as amusing as it should have. In obvious efforts to get over the plot lines, some of the fun seemed to evaporate. Things did improve in the second half, but not nearly enough.

Perhaps the fault lay partly in the casting of Simon Chilvers and Jonathan Hardy as Face and Subtle, the two characters upon which most of the action revolves, who are seldom absent from the stage, and have to masquerade backwards and forwards. Both are extremely capable actors, but in my book veer towards dullness and rarely positively sparkle. Thus I suspect some of the flatness was due to the casting together of two somewhat "negative" personalities. Usually the role of tobacconist Abel Dragger is considered a stand-out; Garrick made it the lead and Alec Guinness once had noted success in the part. One would have expected Ian Suddards — who has done notable work with the MTC — to have excelled. That he did not seemed to indicate director Hauser had purposely played down the role.

The two stand-outs undoubtedly were Frederick Parslow as Epicure Mammon, with some flowery speeches magnificently delivered, and for most of the time Sandy Gore as Dol. Their scene together was a rare highlight. Roger Oakley as Dapper also had some telling moments and is a welcome recruit to the company.

The setting and costumes, designed by James Ridewood, are up to the highest standard seen at the Athenaeum.

Footnote: As a piece of trivia, a production I saw of the Alchemist in 1957, staged by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company, had Albert Finney as Face, Michael Blakemore as Lovewit and Colin George as Ananias.
Intelligent and ambitious

MARSUPIALS
By Garrie Hutchinson

Director, Bruce Myles; designer, Larry Eastwood; Lighting, Jamie Lewis; Theme music, Gary Down.

Frank, Max Gillies; Sue, Carol Burns; Tom, Sean Scully; Estate Agent, Matthew King.

Barry Oakley's forays into the area of comic non-naturalism have led him into some pretty strange territories. Recall the humorous love and hate for Archbishop Mannix, the wicked buffoonery of Santamaria, the geriatric pratfalls of the nasty Menzies, the pompous afflation of Horne and Dickens (in The Ship's Whistle) for instance. The real life, historical personages, somewhat disguised in the plays, mark a kind of historical revisionism that is one side of Oakley's work. Here the intellect works through fairly savage satire, moderated by a kind of compassion for the great and nasty. If he stuck the knife into Mannix, Menzies and the rest, he was offering them a beer in the other hand.

The other aspect, seen in Bedfellows, his study of inner suburban infidelity, and now in Marsupials, is a concern with the private lives of Australian minds. Why do Australians do what they do? Why are middle class, educated men and women (who go to the theatre now and again) so bad at relationships? How does this kind of Australian relate to the larger Australian culture?

As always, Oakley has the considerable comic skills of Max Gillies at his service. In Marsupials he plays perhaps the most complex character Oakley has created. Frank is the husband of an unconsummated triangle. He plays the Australian to his wife's temptation, to the rival's successful expatriatism. Frank is the last Australian middle class intellectual. Out of a job, losing a wife, into the booze. He doesn't know what to think of himself, or why he should stay in Australia. He can't get over a fling his wife had with his pal, years before. He knows there's nothing he can do about the temptation that bit of passion still represents, or about the temptation the now urbane, civilised ex-Australian has become. He is unable to do anything to affect his world, so he slides, Lawson-like into the bottle.

The last image of the play, where the tempter returns in a final effort to convince Frank that he should join his wife in England, is graphic. Frank refuses, and as the lights dim, shakes hands with an old mate...friendship frozen on a meaningless, drunken gesture. That's all there is left for this Australian, for the culture he represents.

The wife, with her remembrance of passions past, cannot cope with any more of Frank's inability to act. She wants more passion, and more civilisation. She wants the heart of the beast. Sue, by the end of the play, knows she cannot be more than a "friend" to Tom the tempter, but she uses him to get her a job in London, where something might happen. Regretfully she leaves the known, a kind of expatriatism of the soul. She too has no choice. And if it appears that she is the classic cultural cringer, well, it is the culture of her marriage that made her so.

The tempter, a no-one in Australia now, a famed journalist in London, doesn't want to resume any relationship with the wife. He wants somewhere to sleep, and an intimate view of the inmates of the Australian zoo.

Because it's a play of types who don't relate terribly well, and a play of ideas about being an Australian there aren't any of the emotionally satisfying feelings of "character" or narrative. It's an objective, argumentative sort of play with quite depressing conclusions.

Bruce Myles' production could do with a bit more pace and sparkle, Sean Scully as the tempter Tom, could afford some more civilised charisma; Carol Burns might try for some of the warmth and excitement she seems to have forgotten in the last play or two; and Max Gillies might find some more comedic devices to add to his well known repertoire.

Barry Oakley's urbane style is not as colloquially apt as Williamson's; he has a mind, not just an ear. On the other hand the pursuit of the poetic doesn't come off from time to time, and leaves the actors with some embarrassing lines, fortunately covered by the lights going down.

If the whole play just misses being placed in the top drawer it misses because it is intelligent and ambitious. Would that more writers made the same mistake with the same skill.
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A Keeling Enterprises Production with Lighthouse Productions.
The time is still not ripe and, I fear, will never be for Louis Esson’s *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* (1912) to be appended to that short but non-existent list of “classic” Australian plays. There is far too much second-hand Shaw and cut-rate Wilde about both situation and dialogue in this very early, home-grown political comedy — which is not to say that it offers nothing but its historicity to entice a contemporary audience. Perhaps the most winning thing about the play is that Esson’s satirical objects of so long ago are still familiar to us today — cynical politicians, an apericatic populace, grasping American visitors, female chauvinists and utopian reformists abound. Nothing new under the Antipodean sun it seems.

Directed by Collin O’Brien for the WA Theatre Company, and touted as yet another contribution to our seemingly endless sesquicentennial shenanigans, *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* featured some very strong performances. As the Prime Minister’s daughter Doris, drafted by the Anti-Socialist good women’s league to stand for election in opposition to the grazier-socialist (sic!) who happens to be her beloved, Jennifer Mellet offered vivacity and intelligence, the latter no mean feat given the relative thinness of the role. She was well paired with Richard Williams, as Sydney Barrett, the radical shoot of the Establishment branch. He played with a relaxed expansiveness and geniality which complemented Mellet’s fey wit, and brought credibility to a role stuffed with cliche.

Ivan King struggled manfully, and against the odds of the script, for the whole of the first half of the play with the role of the PM Sir Joseph Quiverton. In Act III however he found his feet, and brought the play alive with his electioneering harangue. This was genuinely funny, a little gem of shrewdly observed, finely timed, parodic performance.

A pleasing aspect of the production was the performance level attained by non-professional cast members, mostly Theatre Arts students from WAIT. Sally Boteler’s stylish chauvinist Miss Perkins, Donald Smith’s intense socialist worker, Neale Brumby’s wondrously chinless, flannelled fool and Ross Manson’s vaguely Chekhovian Utopian idealist all contributed much to a smooth, well paced production.

Collin O’Brien’s direction made the
most of the play's strong point, bringing the contemporaneity of the political satire to the fore while retaining the proper Edwardian ambience, and delicately controlling the excesses of the romantic sub-plot. It located the focus of the play in the tightly orchestrated electioneering scenes of Act III, thus redeeming the dated second-ratedness of Esson's first two acts, and bringing a sustaining energy to the rest of the action.

No such centre to the action was found by Mike Morris in his production of local writer John Aitken's "memory-play" The Fool On The Hill. To be fair to Morris, who contributed his usual flair for imaginative staging and striking (some would say gimmicky) theatricality for this production, the lack of focus is intrinsic to the script. Aitken's "fantastical nostalgia trip" never quite makes up its mind if it intends to say something of a general nature about the 60's sensibility and the different decade of the 70's as measured by that perhaps illusory standard, or whether it really wants to be no more than an exercise in autobiography.

Aitken's assumption of the lead role of Arthur McManus (the maudlin sentimentalist whose boozed recollections of a youthful night spent partying in a brothel on a Queanbeyan hill generates what passes for the action of the play), does not encourage the notion of the play's search for a meaning beyond the personal.

What we got was a series of reminiscences punctured by renditions of vaguely appropriate Beatles tunes, (performed largely in duet, and with taste and affection, by Steve Frondist and Paola Mazzella), and illustrated by back-projected images in the psychedelic style of the time. Lots of sound and sight, but precious little fury and all signifying....?

Pat Skevington has the best lines, as Dorrie, erstwhile madame of the House on the Hill, and she made the best of them. Margaret Anketell's experience and intelligence helped to give a suggestion of credible personality to the semi-retired whore Jean. Peter Hardy and Paola Mazzella had to wrestle with two very ill-conceived "characters" whom I presume were intended to represent the 70's sensibility as Aitken sees it (or better doesn't see it). Hardy tried very hard to make something of the part but it was, understandably, beyond him. Paola Mazzella gave up attempting the impossible and concentrated instead on something she does very well indeed, singing.

I think it is a pity that Morris who has been responsible for some of the most exciting and stimulating productions in this city over the past few years, should have left as his parting-piece (he left recently for film studios in America) this maudlinly mauldering meanderment, which not even his gift for imaginative staging could bring to life. At least there were some visuals to look at (courtesy of R Lawson) and of course, the odd tape of the Fab Four in full voice. The night was made worthwhile for me by the inclusion of John Lennon's magnificent wailing vocal intro to the early Beatles' class Mr Moonlight. I'd endure anything, even The Fool On The Hill to hear that.

Skill and professionalism

NO MAN'S LAND

Collin O'Brien


Hirst: James Beattie; Spooner: Edgar Metcalfe; Foster: Alan Fletcher; Briggs: Alan Cassell. (Professional)

Pinter aficionados - and I am a rabid one - can perhaps detect three areas of exploration in his plays. The first two are matters of thematic concern: the territorial womb room syndrome, explored in such this last development which made Landscape and Silence so initially bewildering, and which moved me to explore them in the only way which counts, by putting the plays on.

No Man's Land seems to me to bring together all three areas. The entry of the old cut-glass chap Hirst with the seedy, s o c k - a n d - s a n d a l l e d Hampstead intellectual Spooner has echoes of The Caretaker (moved closer to Regents Park); the verbal shouldering and even shirt-fronting is the familiar Pinter personal bloodletting; and brooding over all is a metaphor just out of reach. The combination of river images and imminent timelessness might well suggest that these two stand on the bank of the Styx, waiting to be ferried over to their own particular Hades (an idea I admit to having stolen from Alex Hay).

I was recently castigated in the letter columns of these pages for reviewing a play in the light of earlier production, but it is hardly possible to expunge the memory of Peter Hall's original Gielgud/Richardson National Theatre presentation. I was unhappy with John Bury's semi-circular set for that production, and was sorry to see it followed here. The text does not call for it, and I would like to have seen an alternative approach tried.

Hold onto your hat, but I preferred James Beattie's performance of Hirst to that of Ralph Richardson, but over the past twenty years I have felt that Richardson rarely played other than an image of himself as retired colonel. James Beattie's sense of timing and control of inflection supported an imposing performance. Both he and Edgar Metcalfe handled Pinter's long speeches admirably. For all they appear to be shapeless and full of gratuitous pauses, Pinter's plays are very finely orchestrated, requiring the tight control over rhythm demanded by Mozart. Both the actors mentioned handled their arias superbly. Edgar Metcalfe did not play for the seedy dignity Gielgud achieved, but his more subservient, even cowering Spooner is consistent with the text.

I am not sure whether it was the first night audience or the direction which made the play occasionally too comic for my taste, but the effect was to diminish to a degree the menace of both the servant warders Foster and Briggs. As Briggs Alan Cassell played with the relish of a Pinter devotee, but I felt that Alan Fletcher in the part of Foster was less than easier than his fellows with the rhythms and speech patterns that are the stuff of Pinter.

But these criticisms should be seen as merely marginal murmurs of discontent; on balance this was a forceful production, sustained chiefly by the skill and professionalism of the two actors playing the central roles.
Winter comedies

By Irving Wardle

With the approach of the British winter, it is the annual habit of the Royal Shakespeare Company to ransack the dustbins of theatre history and come up with some long-forgotten hit to keep the Aldwych audience warm until Springtime. As these shows regularly transfer and make a mint for the RSC in the West End, and as critics sportingly refrain from slamming works for which no great artistic claims are being made, everyone is thus kept happy, with the possible exception of actors who may find themselves being dragooned into untoward song and dance routines.

The success of revivals like Richard O'Keeffe's *Wild Oats* or Bronson Howard's *Saratoga* depends above all on a sophisticated sense of time; the capacity at once to design and move an old play within its own period while also insisting on the gap between then and now. Hence the cold shouldering of Chichester's revival of Hart and Kaufman's *The Man Who Came To Dinner* compared with the cheers the same authors aroused with *Once In A Lifetime* at the Aldwych. That piece, the first collaboration (1930) of the fabled partnership, tells the story of an out of work vaudeville team who trek out to Hollywood to teach film actors to speak. The comedy is partly an act of theatrical vengeance against Broadway's great competitor, and partly a reworking of the New Frontier myth: "the covered wagon", one of the team remarks, "is slowly moving across the plains towards a marble swimming pool." Its period is also pinpointed at the birth of the talkies, which is no less an advantage to the Aldwych in 1979 than it was to the New Yorkers of 50 years ago.

Trevor Nunn even opens his production with a clip from *The Jazz Singer*, bravely trusting his actors to come through with something even funnier than the sight of Al Jolson reducing a pack of mute extras to tears. The company do not let him down. For one thing, their Anita Loos voices and Vogue postures are no less carefully designed than the Gold Room stairway of the Stilton Hotel and chromium-plated studio elephants of John Napier’s set, which it is fair to claim as the most stunning art deco folly yet to grace the theatre stage.
London stage. What we get is a comprehensive sottisier of the dream factory, coping and bell-hops ever ready to leap on passing producers with audition pieces (usually Kipling's "Boots"), service biographers and monster columnists, and a white wedding climax on the studio floor with a cigar-smoking bishop taking direction from a Stroheim-style genius in jodhpurs.

The invading trio are another matter. The joke here is one of ironic character contrast between May, their leader, and George, the stooge. Smart as she is, May runs into a brick wall with her screech goddess pupils who swiftly, put the skids under her voice school. But George, the brainless innocent, winds up as crown prince of the Glogauer Studios by virtue of a series of apparently ghastly mistakes every one of which earns the company a fortune. We never get to see their original vaudeville act, but you get the illusion of having seen it from Zoe Wanamaker and Richard Griffith's performances which carry vaudeville routines through into the West Coast madhouse: Wanamaker the sharp little number full of plans to beat the system, and Griffiths the bland deadpan feed, signalling his new status by changing his dotty mother are preparing for a family reunion. Before the siblings arrive we observe mother (Beryl Reid) gossipping away to a silent TV set, and M.O tanking up with Benedictine before retreating to beat hell out of his drum kit. Dad's coffin is also on stage, a recent addition to the furnishings as mother explains: "All well here except Dad who died last night."

The guests arrive: Hedley, a backbench Labour MP who is doing his damniest to pull his parent into the 1970s by bombarding her with deep recreses and the furnishings as mother explains: "All well here except Dad who died last night."

Of the play itself, I found it astonishing that a writing partnership famed for its endless revisions, should have released a script so littered with loose ends as to suggest a hasty first draft: but you don't make that kind of complaint on occasions of this kind.

"Sooner or later" says a playgoer in Peter Nicholl's Born in the Gardens (Bristol Theatre Royal) "all the characters line up and start talking about the state of England. It is a typical joke in the author's production that his own characters at that moment are similarly lined up. The play is partly a ruefully affectionate salute to Nichol's home town, but much more another report on the state of the nation. Here we are in dear old Tudor Manor, a half-timbered hovel incongruously encrusted with spotlights and stereo equipment, where the middle-aged M.O and his dotty mother are preparing for a family reunion. Before the siblings arrive we observe mother (Beryl Reid) gossipping away to a silent TV set, and M.O tanking up with Benedictine before retreating to beat hell out of his drum kit. Dad's coffin is also on stage, a recent addition to the furnishings as mother explains: "All well here except Dad who died last night."

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The administration of the Dresden Music Festival in the German Democratic Republic invites entries from composers of contemporary designs from Broadway, schools, regions, and film and television, produced since March 1975 will be displayed.

March 13-15, 1980, Kansas, USA.
By Geoffrey Brown

Up to a certain age, children are fed their doses of the arts — either at school, through dotting relatives who drag them to Christmas pantomimes; or through the channels of television or the caverns of cinemas.

For the International Year of the Child, the Film and Television School has made a positive contribution by holding a national seminar, "Children's Choice", in late August. Well attended by both television personnel involved in children's programming and also representatives of those involved in the live performing arts for young people (in dance, mime, puppetry, drama and music), there appeared to be positive and beneficial exchanges of ideas and possibilities for the development of both areas. I understand that a full report is now available on the seminar (for $12, but I would think well worth it for anyone seriously involved in the arts and/or by young people).

What has the International Year of the Child meant in some of the other areas of youth performing arts? A brief overview would seem to indicate that there has been very little direct and ongoing impact, and that most of what has occurred would probably have happened anyway. Certainly, the arts was not a major priority area for the various national and state IYC committees, and neither were associated areas such as leisure, or "creativity" — although the latter did rate a national non-governmental sub-committee, "The Child in Play and Creativity" (although I would not like to embarrass the IYC by asking for a report on their activities).

Education, also, seemed to take a low rung on the ladder where health and welfare were the major concerns (not forgetting the successful attempts to establish the "Child Accident Prevention Foundation"). One does not wish to suggest that these concerns should be ignored, but perhaps there are other areas in an industrialised and affluent society such as ours which are worthy of closer examination in terms of their overall effect on children.

The arts are currently seen as a vital and integral part of the child's education — at least until he or she reaches secondary school, where there are more important lessons to be learnt. Perhaps a continuing situation of unemployment may persuade the public to accept some changes in the education structures in this country.

No doubt this is where the "back to basics" or "forward to fundamentals" logic begins to apply, and, if so, then it is the responsibility of all those involved in the arts with young people, and perhaps of all those who are involved in the arts at all, anywhere, with anyone, to make it quite clear that opportunities for expression and creativity are as basic to the education of the child as can be imagined, and must be encouraged and fostered from all quarters, from the earliest age, and must never be allowed to be removed from the influences on a growing child. The arts, like anything else, must not be forced on a child, but the educative environment must be such that they are seen to be a part of the range of choices available for children anywhere.

One feels that perhaps the IYC has been let slip away, without fully taking advantage of its potential in this regard. The Reports of projects from IYC Committees read quite well, and are full of "arts" projects, but again, these have happened anyway. And are they really promoting any philosophy of the arts and children, or perhaps just using children as yet another subject for experimenting with techniques not really understood? The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association, in its hopeful but naive promotion of the Kids-Train Project as a major national project for IYC, ran afoul of the difficulties inherent in such national programmes - AYPAA has certainly learnt that all the written support in the world from federal and state government and non-government committees and the like, is no guarantee of hard cash. However, the vast work involved in developing that project was not in vain, as another idea evolved — the Inroads Project.

This project, initially funded through the Office of Child Care as a result of negotiations over the Kids-Train has been happening all over the outback areas of Australia for the past few months — in each capital city, a small band of arts practitioners have gathered, and subsequently travelled to remote and isolated corners of their state (by road convoy and by train) to take performing arts activities to isolated children, involving them in cultural creative play experiences to which they would not normally have access. Funded to a total of almost $100,000 by government bodies (arts, education, IYC committees, community development, etc) as well as some bodies as the School of the Air, Colleges of Advanced Education, the Arts Councils, etc. involving 14 existing groups plus various extra freelance artists (a total of about 150 people for periods of a week to a month), this is a major project for IYC, for children, and for Australia. From the IYC, AYPAA has also gained many contacts in the areas of children's services, at state and national level, and it is anticipated that more support will be available in the future involving arts activities in projects sponsored by these bodies.

Since it received secretariat funding in mid-1978, and thus was placed in the unique position of an arts resource organisation for young people with a base office (tiny) and staff (one), AYPAA has attempted to develop its role as an Information Resource Centre. It now publishes its own bi-monthly magazine, Lowdown, and has implemented Comcon, a "computerised contacts" system for producing up-to-date listings of all those involved in youth performing arts across Australia (and some from overseas), as well as address labels to save time and money in the continual struggle to increase the lines of communication across the country.

Through its system of communication and dissemination of information, AYPAA aims to be responsive to the
problems and needs of those working in
the field, and to thus develop projects to
satisfy these needs. This can be a difficult
situation, as ideas must be put forward and
tested amongst as many of the people
AYPAA represents as possible, and it can
be difficult to expect thoughtful and
critical responses from busy people,
especially if a lot of ideas are under
consideration. The situation can also
become simply "a lot of ideas and no
action" in people's minds too, and yet any
organisation such as AYPAA must not be
seen to develop projects based on the
thoughts of a small number of people, as it
could therefore no longer claim to be truly
representative.

Since July 1, 1978, the main projects
undertaken by AYPAA were the national
tour of John and Sue Fox (reported in the
February 1979 issue of Theatre Australia),
and the development and implementation
of the Inroads Project; not forgetting the
introduction of Lowtown and the
Comcon System. For 1980, AYPAA has
successfully negotiated a Fellowship grant
to enable expatriate Australian, Richard
Davey, to return; has initiated plans for a
"Field Study of Professional Theatre-in-
Education" to be held over a 12-month
period; is working to develop a network of
contacts and resources in neighbouring
countries of Asia and the Pacific; and
hopes to produce up-dated copies of its
main publication - the Directory of
Organisations, and the Scripts Directory.

AYPAA is also concerned with
representing the field to government and
other bodies - representatives attend
conferences; prepare papers and
contribute other resources on a wide range
of topics. AYPAA seeks to foster and
create the most beneficial environment to
enable youth performing arts to flourish. It
is anxious not to force-feed the innocent
who may be unaware of what the role of
the arts and young people may be (whether
they are government officials or leaders of
industry and commerce) but rather to
encourage initiatives to be undertaken
from all areas which may provide extra or
original support to all those working in the
field.

AYPAA feels that the area of youth
performing arts is currently fragmented
and patchy, and that overall support is
somewhat tenuous. In order that youth
performing arts are not seen to be the
force-feeding of the innocent, but rather as
a vital and integral part of the life of the
child, AYPAA believes that back-up
resources from an independent source are
currently necessary and valuable - as
spelt out above. AYPAA has proved it can
do this without sapping the precious arts
dollar from the practitioners themselves
(it currently receives more secretariat support
from the Office of Youth Affairs than from
the Australia Council) and will continue to
attempt to uncover and develop areas of
support which will be of direct benefit to all
those involved in youth performing arts.

National AYPAA is continually
responsive to ideas and criticisms — write
to AYPAA, C - Theatre Workshop,
University of Sydney, 2006 (02-692.0555).

Geoffrey Brown has been National
Consultant for AYPAA since mid 1978.
He has a B.A. from the University of NSW,
and was previously Administrator for the
Toe Truck Theatre, a Sydney-based
Theatre-in-Education company.
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For anyone who has ever read Karel Brahms Bullet for the Ballet or Julian Braunsweg’s Ballet Scandals and rejoiced in the hard faced humour, the drama and the back stage bitchiness of the ballet world laid bare therein, the Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo would seem perhaps to be that world personified.

Everything is there, the pseudo Russianisms, the egos, the power battles on stage and the weird ramifications that go to make up balletic (or operatic) life off (or on) stage. The sets are shoddy or semi-existent, the music badly performed (or in this case recorded) especially in Swan Lake Act 2 and the costumes are outrageous when not dowdy.

It’s all terribly reminiscent of a shoe string entrepreneurial venture, many good examples of which have been seen in this country, courtesy of quick buck enterprises who insist on palming off second-rate stuff onto an enthusiastic if gullible public. What makes the Trocks so different is that all of this is of a design, it is all a part of the image they want to present. The performances are rickety but they are endearing, for the performers are what they are and essentially no more.

What I like most about Les Ballets Trockadero is its good nature. Although it sends up modes and mannerisms of the dance, it does so with wit and affection, and is never derogatory. The mimicry and satire may be so closely observed as to be hair raising, but it is not bitter nor merciless. The Trocks are always true to their conceptual beginnings.

The Trocks are not music-hall knockabout comedians or artistic revolutionaries berating the dance for not being “learned”, they are serious performers, well trained and drilled, who love, fear and respect the form of art they work in. The laughter they create is a healthy corrosive to the encrusted mannerisms of style, character and personality of dance practitioners and that is all. The fact that they love and know dance is exemplified by the fact that they parody the form by using the form and thereby enshrine the art.

For my money the most astute, subtle and thereby effectively observed piece of satire on the entire Trocks programme was Peter Anastos’ Go For Barocco. It was of course a send up of George Balanchine’s Concerto Barocco and I enjoyed it not merely because I admire Balanchine’s choreography but because in Barocco a true manner of dance was satirised, not just the foibles of its practitioners or the exoskeleton of its stylistic frame-work.

The laughs start even before the dancing begins as the curtain rises on the austere neoclassic Balanchine landscape of bare stage, black borders with blue eye and a lonesome, threadbare chandelier dangling from the flies. On stage is a bevy of horsey “girls” in black gymslips (so much for Mr B’s “athleticism”) champing at the bit in their eagerness to get going.

There are all the thumb prints of Balanchine dance, the spiky fingers, broken wrists, daisy chains that trap the unwary, the mechanical “London Bridges” formed from arms manically akimbo, and perky plies. It has an emphatic bump, swivel and turn with every matching dash and syllable of music, again parodying Balanchine’s insistence that dance illuminate music.

The most outrageous comedy rises from the Le Corsair pas de deux and the
Taylor himself was excellent in anyone's that has been missing in the work's subtle and finely tuned. Those four prima effective and humourous because it was (the funniest thing about which were the original Russian Western versions) but the dancing of ballerinas roped unwillingly together on guyed the old war horse for most of the time, contained some genuinely hilarious to it because it relied overmuch on heavy faults that devalued both company itself. Personally, I didn't warm by audiences, the promoters and the gathering, and Australian audiences (incredibly) have never seen doleful spinoffs.

There are other works in the Trocks' repertoire that I would have liked to have seen again, like the Martha Graham takeoff Phaedra Monotonous or that stinging bit of Jerome Robbins' Dances at a Gathering satire, Yes Virginia, another piano ballet. But the humour of parody lies in the shock of recognition, and Australian audiences (incredibly) have never seen Graham choreography or the Robbins masterpiece, or any of their myriad and doleful spinoffs.

Much store was set on Swan Lake Act 2 by audiences, the promoters and the company itself. Personally, I didn't warm to it because it relied too much on heavy mugging and lumps of caricature, the same faults that devalued both Don Quixote (the funniest thing about which were the curtain calls) and the ragged Raymonda's Wedding.

Swan Lake, however, while it tesoirely guyed the old war horse for most of the time, contained some genuinely hilarious moments, especially the dance of the little swans where one of them had to make a great heavy footed jumps to keep up; and in the Waltz where there was much skillful dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing. Pas de Quatre and moments in Swan Lake contained elements of such skillful technique that one wished that some of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing.

Pas de Quatre and moments in Swan Lake contained elements of such skillful technique that one wished that some of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing. Pas de Quatre and moments in Swan Lake contained elements of such skillful technique that one wished that some of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing. Pas de Quatre and moments in Swan Lake contained elements of such skillful technique that one wished that some of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing. Pas de Quatre and moments in Swan Lake contained elements of such skillful technique that one wished that some of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing.

The central pas de deux that starred Natch Taylor as the Swan Queen, though, was startling, not only because it reintroduced the Benno character from the original Russian Swan Lake (something that has been missing in the work's Western versions) but the dancing of Taylor himself was excellent in anyone's book.

The Pas de Quatre was again the more effective and humorous because it was subtle and finely tuned. Those four prima ballerinas roped unwillingly together on stage danced exquisitely and carried the comedy on their sweet deviousness, delicate upstaging and the telling you-bitch-wait-till-I-get-you-in-the-wings smiles. So skillful was the characterisation of these latterday incarnations of Taglioni, Cerrito, Graun and Grisi that one simply forgot that these were real gender males dancing on pointe, and that of course is the real secret of "en travesti" performing.

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and prolate shapes. It is a study in contrasts and isolations, bodies career in unison across the wide stage and then cohere into a tight sculptural Vishnu-like web. Murphy treats his dancers' limbs as cohere into a tight sculptural Vishnu-like shoves, and an air of incongruous quite takes its tongue out of its cheek. The corps dancing, however, looks scrappy, even in its cascading shifts and shoves, and an air of incongruous manipulation seems to pervade these sequences. The one redeeming feature is the central male solo, danced with a fine nervousness by Leigh Chambers who instates a quiet quivering shiftiness into the part. My lasting impression of Scintillation, on its present performances is one of hurried tugging together of images, as if it was a piece-de-occasion that was never meant to last.

Andris Toppe's Toccata still has an impact, but only of two bodies slapping and writhing together. This snappish duet is portrayed without emotion and the dramatic impact grows out of movement and music only. There are too many Mickey Mouses in the choreography — by that I mean a bone-thumping answer to every crash and bang in Carlos Chavez' slick-primitive score. Toccata holds well together, it wastes nothing and the structure is clear, but this miniaturised abstraction of some Strindbergian sexual duel, especially when it comes off as so glib and severed adds up to something less than what meets the eye.

ONE EXTRA

Kai Tai Chan's One Extra Dance Group states in its manifesto an aim to expand the parameters of dance beyond mere dancing. Sometimes the company achieves notable success, such as last year's Family Portrait, a scaringly look at the mores and social problems of a migrant family within a cosmopolitan urban society like Australia's. Sometimes the success is only half baked, the aims and intentions far exceeding the actual execution. I don't think that Kai Tai Chan is over worried about pure dance technique in his works, however. He was for years a dancer in the Margaret Barr Dance Drama Group, and Miss Barr's Graham-moulded philosophy believes that an exact, clean technique isn't strictly necessary and can in fact be a hinderance. Both Kai Tai Chan and Margaret Barr believe that by forcing a virtue out of a necessity and utilising the enthusiasm (if not the technique) of semi-amateurs and thus coming closest to the 'commitment' of the great unwashed, the works will somehow be more emotionally honest. Dance can of course absorb any such philosophy and indeed some sections of the New Dance have built a whole system out of non-dance and even non-movement.

What distinguishes the theatre of both these creators is its dramatic involvement. Miss Barr's most notable works Three Songs From The Portuguese and The Ascent of Everest deal with feminist questions, while Kai Tai Chan's are concerned (in part) with social issues.

Chan's latest work Just Over The Horizon is a white hot appeal from the heart concerning the plight of the Vietnamese boat people. The work starts innocuously enough with a troubled young man (Chan) lying in bed listening to the evening news. Upon mention of the news that the Beatles have refused to perform together to aid the refugees, something snaps within and a tidal wave of memories and regrets engulf him. That, at least, is how I read it, it could just as well be the outrage and anger of any man of moral conscience.

With programmatic subtleties like Pressure Crisis Over The Edge In Limbo, Vultures and Above the Waterline, one senses that this nightmare of remembrance presents us with a modern day raft of the Medusa, a semblance made all the more horrific by the fact that there are myriads of these "rafts" and they are freely chosen as a means of escaping to freedom. As the young man throws himself about the stage in a paroxysm of fear, anger and frustration direly in need of exorcism, the actual boat people struggle in the background; they run for their lives, raped by pirates and left to sink below the waves. It is a nightmare vision and one created in a moment of fury. But it is too immediate, too literal and attempts too much. In mundane terms I doubt that it will last; the group choreography has been transformed into a parrot. The first secret is a bust that laughs in the presence of a woman's dissembling; the second is a thread that, once attached to two mortals, can interchange their bodies. Inside all this lies a hotchpotch of comedy characters and stock situations that the performers "improvise" on.

The story itself is thin and threadbare; the resonances are many and deep, not that the dancers are concerned with that, they're flat out trying to act and sing and dance. The demands of the acting defeat them...and so does the dancing.

Cramphorn has elegantly marshaled this banal fairy tale within his economic and effective set. The gestures and mannerisms step straight out of someone's commedia dell'arte text book, but I do wish he could have coached his performers in the rigours of stage speaking. As for the incorporation of differing disciplines, King Stag achieves nothing of the sort, it just attempts to knot them together...and so does the dancing. Sara de Jong's atonal score, being wildly out of period and diatonically opposed to the careful stylisations of Cramphorn's stage gesture, is down right distracting at times. The same applies to Christine Koltai's choreography, which is in effect a suite of dances interlarded with the fabric of the play. The dance style is of a quasi-classical ballet technique which again is out of period. Gozzi's play was premiered in 1762, ages before Carlo Blasis and Noverre got round to codifying classical technique.

King Stag was a brave venture and occasionally engaging but it all left me rather wistfully dreaming of a fully staged production of the Lully Moliere comedie-ballet Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Now that would truly be a theatrical event.
Two enormously different works — Richard Strauss’ *Salome* and Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* — were the final new offerings of the Australian Opera during its major winter season at the Sydney Opera House.

*Salome* was very slow to get off the ground, but just about atoned for that through Marilyn Richardson’s stunning realisation of the closing scene. The *Patience* was a G. and S. revelation from start to finish: the production I’d been waiting for years to see and just about given up hope of ever encountering: the one to convince thorough-going sceptics like myself that the Savoy operettas really do warrant occasional introduction in the repertory of a serious opera company.

Together they added up to an appropriate finale for a major Sydney season that undeniably had its moments but was far from an all-round artistic triumph. And even in the period under review, without any undue disrespect to the *Patience* and *Salome* of the national company, ventures off the beaten track by the State companies in Queensland and Victoria provided at least as much artistic interest as the efforts of the Australian Opera.

Coupled with the Adelaide *One Man Show* I reviewed in these columns last month, they add up to a truly remarkable three-State effort to present different works of musical theatre in a single month — an effort which ironically excludes Sydney, where the country’s largest potential audience for such pieces must inevitably reside.

But even if some Sydney-siders will be gnashing their teeth, just now, at what they have missed that has been vouchsafed those in other States, they should be grateful for their blessings along more conventional lines — in particular, John Cox’s marvellous new *Patience*.

This *Patience* was not, of course, altogether a sleeper, being based as it was on Cox’s renowned production a few years back in London. Still, one can never rely absolutely on second-hand reports of productions one has not seen, for even if the reports are accurate in themselves they may well not apply fully to a local recreation of an overseas original.

Yet hearing the enthusiasm which Cox obviously still entertains for *Patience* expressed publicly on a couple of occasions before the premiere quite prepared me for the revelation that is this *Patience*. It is G. and S. such as most of us have never seen it before: at least as funny as usual, but quite devoid of the boring, stereotyped, traditional kind of G. and S. playing so encrusted with tradition there is just about no scope left for anything but caricature.

Certainly this *Patience* is the most eloquent argument I have yet encountered for admitting G. and S. to the hallowed precincts of the repertory of a fully professional opera company. By comparison with it, the previous efforts of the Australian Opera in this genre seem even more feeble and unsatisfactory than they did at the time.

Cox seems to have cleared the decks for action, when approaching *Patience*, by rejecting all the traditional G. and S. cultism and looking at Gilbert’s text purely on its own merits: as the penetrating satire it is of 19th-century English society, and in particular the excesses and inbuilt contradictions of the Aesthetic Movement.

Visually, John Stoddart’s designs apparently are meticulously true to the detail of the Aesthetic Movement dictums as to colour schemes, clothing styles and art objects accepted and rejected; but it is a major strength of this *Patience* that it requires of an audience no awareness of such dictums. It is visually clear from the moment the opening curtain goes up on the 20 lovesick maidens of the chorus: all in greens and gently flowing browns and arranged in ludicrously overdrawn late romantic poses, that these misguided young aesthetes are destined to fulfil the prediction of spinsterhood built into their song: “Twenty years hence, we shall be...20 lovesick maidens still.”

And *Patience*, when she appears, is the unsophisticated milkmaid she ought to be in sharp contrast to the sophisticates, and...
endowed with a north-country accent to emphasise her difference so any fool can see why the maidens are so insulted that their idol, the mock-poet Bunthorne, has spurned them in favour of her. And the contrast of the brash red of the soldiers' uniforms with the maidens' gowns lends point to their rejection on aesthetic grounds; and there are some marvellous incongruities built into the sets themselves, such as the oriental pots perched atop an elaborately curlicued pavilion in the opening scene of Act II.

The new Patience is also blessed by some marvellously strong performances in the four central roles. It is no surprise that Dennis Olsen (Bunthorne) and Robert Gard (Grosvenor) excel; but even in the acting department, in which both are always outstanding, there were signs that Cox had helped them to refine and focus their interpretations. And as a special bonus both were singing well above their own previous standards — particularly Gard, whose tenor has developed a most pleasing new warmth and beauty in the past year or so.

Rhonda Bruce, as Patience, acted exceptionally well and sang reliably, though still inclined to shrillness at the top of her vocal range. As Lady Jane, a dragon lady part made to order to suit her acting, singing and instrumental talents (she actually plays the double bass on stage, in this production, having studied the instrument in her trainee years), Heather Begg was a thorough delight. John Pringle, Graeme Ewer and Robert Eddie made a fine trio of block-headed military men, which is about all they are permitted by the text.

Musically, this production was in the most capable hands of Geoffrey Arnold, who brought things together and kept them moving with just the right degree of sparkle to provide a most delightful evening in the theatre.

Richard Strauss' Salome is one of those operas which, superbly done, can be the experience of a lifetime in the theatre; but degenerates into a crashing bore given half the chance. Much of the trouble is inbuilt in the work itself, which demands particularly strong acting and singing at the very beginning in order to involve an audience which has had the benefit of no overture to set the mood.

Nor is Narraboth, the centre point of the first third of the opera, vouchsafed anything very striking in the way of orchestral support — wisps of melody, flute trills, a wildly dissonant, palpitating vocal line are the ingredients Strauss uses to convey the essence of his forlorn infatuation with the princess who at no stage concedes him the dignity of recognising him even as a human being, let alone a potential lover. For this reason, Narraboth is the toughest role to bring off effectively in this remarkable opera.

Salome herself, of course, has some of the most gloriously melodic music, with some of the most lush orchestral backing, that Strauss ever wrote; she must convey to an audience the unfolding horror of the dramatic situation to make her own final downfall credible, and at the same time cope with some extraordinarily demanding music which is at the same time extraordinarily beautiful; but in the ideal performance of this opera she inherits an electricly dramatic situation carefully built up before she appears in the first place.

Many things about producer-designer Tom Lingwood's opera theatre rethink of his original concert hall Salome at the Sydney Opera House three years ago are better this time round, but one is not: the placement of Narraboth and Herodias' page, the boy who is apparently as infatuated with Narraboth as Narraboth is with Salome. In both versions, they are required to play out their opening scene way upstage — far removed from the orchestra and audience and, in the case of the opera theatre version, so far behind the proscenium arch it would all but require superhuman vocal power just to be heard, let alone to convey any very strong sense of dramatic involvement to an audience.

Narraboth is the toughest role to bring off effectively in this remarkable opera.

The original Salome also had the significant opening advantage of Robert Gard as Narraboth — a fine actor, as mentioned above in the Patience context, with ever more impressive vocal attributes. This year, Patience's gain was undeniably Salome's loss; for Gino Zancanaro had neither the vocal resources, nor the dramatic ones, to make a success of Narraboth.

Unfortunately, the above problems
combined to get things off to an unsatisfactory start at both the performances of Salome I attended this season. Which was a pity, because after that things improved spectacularly.

The broad, diagonally descending, flight of steps aimed at the audience provided a much more practical working area than the rather more tortuous concert hall set; the cistern was more prominent this time round and featured a beautifully ominous hinged mesh lid with an opening through which Salome could drop her long ribbon of cheesecloth at the end of the Dance of the Seven Veils - presumably in the vain hop of tantalising Jokanaan with her perfumed undies following the disastrous failure of the more direct appeal to his sexuality. In itself, though, her dance was neither particularly sexy nor did it live up to its name. It was saved, though, by remarkable dramatic support from Gordon Wilcock's Herod, who slavered over her most effectively.

In fact, it would not be unfair to say that Wilcock was the great revelation of this Salome. His was a gripping characterisation - mesmerised almost to the very end by Salome's voluptuousness; only recoiling in horror at the last possible moment so as to make dramatic sense of his order to Kill That Woman. It was quite a major advance on Wilcock's previous work as a character - one might almost say, rudely, caricature - tenor for the AO. And he sang very well indeed, a number of notches better than his previous efforts with this company.

Margreta Elkins provoked and slavered and attempted to henpeck rather nicely, too, appropriately complementing Wilcock in the unsavoury marriage of Herod and Herodias and underscoring the horror of Salome's behaviour through her unequivocal approval. It was an effective dramatic touch, after she had her chair moved closer so she could drool more visibly during the actual beheading, for her to grab the head on the silver salver from the executioner to pass on to Salome.

And then there was Raymond Myers' Jokanaan - which was finally a real personal triumph in the face of quite considerable obstacles. Myers is too small physically, and not large and noble enough of voice, to fit easily and convincingly in the dramatic context and not difficult to take for those with reasonable tolerance of the new and the different; it did not strike me for those with reasonable tolerance of the new and the different; it did not strike me particularlyTerracini - scored considerably personal triumphs.

On first hearing, Howard's music was eminently atmospheric, appropriate to the dramatic context and not difficult to take for those with reasonable tolerance of the new and the different; it did not strike me as particularly memorable, but I was sufficiently impressed by the evening as a whole to hope quite genuinely to have the opportunity of experiencing the piece again in the near future.

Overall, this was a fine effort by the Victoria State Opera and conductor Richard Divall to provide a worthy ensemble setting for the two central characters mentioned above. Thoroughly credible performances came from all the supporting members of the cast, but particular mention must be made of the superb work of the dwarf Mark Colombani as Ivan's servant Peter, as well as the convincing if brief innings of Barbara Sambell as the interloper Princess Ali, pretending to be the long-lost female of royal blood but agreeing very smartly to play according to the rules of Mirovich when it became clear he was the power behind the throne.

The other major regional production of the month, again well off the beaten track though the work itself is nearly 30 years old now, was the Queensland Opera Company staging of Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress at the SGIO Theatre, Brisbane.

I had never expected to encounter as successful a realisation of this piece on stage as was managed by director Michael Beauchamp, on loan from the national company, with generous assistance from Peter Cooke's designs. Gregory Dempsey was a most effective Rakewell, with no small assistance from Luise Napier as Anne Trulove and Paul Neal as Nick Shadow.

The opening night Brisbane audience seemed not to know, by and large, what had hit it till nearly interval; but by the end a sizeable proportion of it was applauding with genuine enthusiasm - no small achievement for any production of this piece, let alone one north of the Bjelke-Petersen Line.

David Gyger is editor of Opera Australia.
Don Giovanni — courageous attempt

By Derek Moore Morgan

Opera Viva's Don Giovanni at Perth's Octagon Theatre underscored again the yawning gap between professional amateur operatic standards.

Mozart's elegantly-turned phrases represent a hard and cruel exposure for singers and instrumentalists alike, and the participants in this performance could take heart from the thought that the true Mozartian flavour and magic are both of them rare commodities - pearls without price.

All this composer's serious operatic roles are fiendish to portray with meaning and depth, and his women wronged, and indeed his upright characters in general all too easily lapse into unconvincing lay figures.

We needed to hear more of the text from Carla Jones as Donna Anna, though she produced effective sounds at the top of her range.

Christopher Waddell as the Don was physically active, jumping like a cat on hot bricks at times, but he hardly came to terms with the aristocratic side of Giovanni's complex make-up. He needed to project his singing further in order to convey authority.

Barry Preece as Leporello had a much simpler task, but his bouffa part can't get by on acting alone, and his vocal stature was somewhat inadequate.

The 18th century gulf between masters and peasants may have been capable of being bridged by seduction, but it was a hard reality in other ways. Maribeth Williamson was suitably cast as the young and innocent Zerlina, while Desmond Lukey conveyed considerably frustration and irritability as her rustic partner Masetto.

As surely one of opera's most quick-fire casualties, Ronald Macqueen's Commendatore needed much greater projection in the statue scene. This crucial point of the opera was deprived of its proper impact in spite of the presence of a monument of imposing proportions.

Necessarily, I suppose, much of the production seemed to be mounted on wheels for easy transportation, unfortunately they tended to destroy much of the illusion. Massed flickering candles effectively suggested a brilliant ballroom, evoking suitable awestruck wonder from the tenantry.

The masks had a faintly luminous grotesque look which I felt to be out of character for the nobility, and an errant spotlight had the masked trio somewhat puzzled at one point. I wondered how the Don's boots went on so easily until I realised that they were complete with zippers. The suggestion of a maze was cleverly contrived and well used.

Ken Campbell-Dobbie as director and designer had a mammoth task under restricted conditions, but things moved along well in general. A greater sense of tension and continuity between numbers needed to be generated at some critical points.

John Hind directed a roughly fifty-fifty strings wind orchestra (led by John Pokorny) from the harpsichord, which he played with skill. There was a lot of pleasant clarity from this small orchestra, but the extra punch of trumpets and drums was sorely missed at climax points from the overture onwards.

The advertising described this as "a daring production", but I found it hard to see why, apart from Giovanni and Anna struggling precariously on a very low-legged balcony, and the Don's hairy chest revealed by a somewhat low-cut shirt.

Nonetheless this was a courageous attempt to scale the heights and depths of this fascinating split personality opera lying in Mozart's ill-defined no-man's land between seria and bouffa.
By Elizabeth Riddell

Just out of reach

Owing to the eccentric and arbitrary regulation of the Australian cinema industry it is never going to be easy for the public to view any locally made films that are not of feature length. The movie houses seldom find a slot for them, for the totally understandable reason that they can acquire everything they want to fill in the first half of a programme for nothing. That is, tourist films, government-made films, commercial puffs.

Which leads us to Just Out of Reach, a film by Linda Blagg which missed getting an airing at the June festivals. It is showing at the Filmmakers Cinema (St Peter's Lane, off William St, Sydney City) for a six week season until November 11, along with Con Man Harry and the Others and Morris Loves Jack, which took out the prize in the fiction section of the Greater Union Awards at the Sydney Film Festival.

Just Out of Reach is about a girl named Cath who twice tries to commit suicide (and will no doubt try a third time, and may even succeed) not because of any great tragedy in her life but mostly because of her disposition and her inability to roll with the punches.

Cath has aspirations she can't formulate, a distrust of the world and her associates. Her concentration is on a short fuse. She makes those trite pleas and assertions - "what is life all about?" and "there must be something more to life than this" - which are quite genuine, quite agonising. Because she is so pretty, so ill-informed, so half-baked - who is baked at 16? - and is reared in a family that has the most boringly simple materialistic attitude to life, in fact a negative, grudging attitude to work and pleasure, her frustration expresses itself in a continual challenge.

"Look at me" she cries, but after a while they don't look.

I suspect that Linda Blagg, who wrote the film as well as directing it, found Cath more attractive than will the average audience (if there is such a thing). In fact it is lucky for the film that Lorna Lesley, who plays Cathy, is such a lively beauty and is able to give the character more charm that it would have if encountered, say, in one's own family. Lorna Lesley has a real future.

I hope producers and directors in the feature-length field will see this film. They may have forgotten her attraction and talent in a cameo role as Chris Haywood's girlfriend in Newsfront.

Just Out Of Reach is fairly tightly written. The best scenes are between Cath and Mike, played by Sam O'Neill with infinitely more skill and sympathy than was apparent in My Brilliant Career. But then the character in My Brilliant Career is stilted, a stereotype to begin with.

The roles of Cath's parents, English migrants, are played by Martin Vaughan, who has an exceptional talent for playing sullen, dislikable men, and Judi Farr. The photography, by Russell Boyd, has earned him a place as a finalist in the cinematography section of the Australian Film Awards, which will have been announced before you read this. The film itself is a finalist in the fiction section.

The other two films, original and imaginative in conception, in the case of Morris Loves Jack a black comedy directed and partly scripted by Sonia Hofman, in the case of Con Man Harry and the Others a kind of celebration of being human and alive directed by Stephen Wallace, have been reviewed earlier in these pages. If comparisons have to be made, these two are unconventional where Just Out of Reach conforms to a pattern, but the three support each other and deserve the season they are getting at the Filmmakers.

Lorna Lesley as Cath in Just Out Of Reach.
BOOKS

Richly theatrical — four new plays

By John McCullum

**Visions** by Louis Nowra. Currency Press, rrp $3.95

The Man From Muckinupin by Dorothy Hewett. Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Currency Press, rrp $5.95

Breaker Morant by Kenneth Ross. Monash New Plays, rrp $3.70

The Ship's Whistle by Barry Oakley. Monash New Plays, rrp $3.70

When Louis Nowra's dramatic oeuvre consisted of Albert Namys Edward and Inner Voices everyone thought him an Exciting New Talent. Now with Visions he will no doubt be hailed as a Major New Playwright, and rightly so. Unfortunately for his reputation with the pundits he does not seem to be analysing the social milieu of typical Australian characters, or exploring the cultural social origins of their behaviour. So the playwrights who want to be playwrights rather than write plays, the bureaucrats who want to please their fellows in the Australia Council, the critics who don't want their criteria exploring the cultural/social origins of the world on the stage can be more complex than that. I may be getting soft, but The Man From Muckinupin is another superb play. Dorothy Hewett has always been popular with teachers and students, but to her richness has now been added a clarity and immediacy of purpose which should (and on the basis of the Perth production will) make her popular with audiences as well.

The play is about life in a small WA town, east of the rabbit proof, told from both sides of the tracks. There is a painfully joyful side to the community life and a cheerfully bizarre scary side.

The whole play is theatrical, not only in itself, but in the images it makes of life in the WA wheatbelt. At the end of the night and the day get married in a gay cynical theatrical comic conversational coming together. The very artificiality of which leaves a serious aftertaste. A touring theatrical pair present The Strangling of Desdemona and the local hero gets so involved in the story that he virtually kills Othello himself.

The Man From Muckinupin is distinctly Australian — it is a celebration of a particular small town childhood but it does not rely simply on the audience recognition of journalistic truths. It doesn't have the anthropological mentality of much self-consciously "Australian“ playwriting. The play with its energetic, musical, dancing theatricality, communicates its feeling for life by creating that feeling on stage, not allowing a set of conventions to represent it. As with Nowra, although the means and the ends are so different, it is the form which is the direct link with life, not a craftsmanlike life with some set sociological content. It's like the difference between saying "I feel full of joie de vivre" and dancing.

This interest in a triumph of form that is not supposed to be invisible, is the key to Nowra and Hewett's work, and the way forward for Australian drama. When we cease to be embarrassed by style, when we can accept our Alex Buzos and not make them feel guilty for stylistic extravagance, then we will have the beginnings of a sophisticated culture. And at least part of this is accepting the cosmopolitan influences which our preoccupation with Local Colour has led us to deny.

In the meantime the search for great Australian heroes continues. Two plays from Edward Arnold, already well known for the productions, are Kenneth Ross' Breaker Morant and Barry Oakley's The Ship's Whistle. In the tradition of Ned Kelly, King O'Malley, James Hardy Vaux, William Chidley, Daniel Mannix, Nellie Melba and others, we have further candidates for larrikin heroes we can all identify with and feel sorry for. The supposed Australian interest in failure (popularly glorified in the ABC's A Place In The World written by a relative newcomer to the country, Michael Cove) is part of it. The overseas heroes we write about, like Marx, Byron, Laurel and Hardy, D H Lawrence, don't have that problem.

According to Ken Ross, Breaker Morant's main problem was that he was shot by a lot of vindictive, self-serving pom. "Orion" Horne (the subject of The Ship's Whistle) was a self-serving pom himself. They are both rather unattractive characters, and that seems to be the point of making them heroes. Breaker Morant romanticises the subject, in a moving courtroom drama, ending in the firing squad and the last words (apparently factual but no more convincing for that) "Shoot straight you bastards and don't make a mess of it". It is a well constructed, deeply involving account of a man one doesn't really want to know. (And I say that as one who knows about and scorns what they said about Douglas Stewart's Ned Kelly at the Melbourne Olympics.)

Not being a Melbournian I cannot understand why The Ship's Whistle failed at the APG, as I gather it did. It is a lively, energetic and beguiling look at a splendidly comic failure from the dark readers of Australian literature of the 19th century. Here was a man with ambitions who left England impoverished, unknown and with a failed marriage and came to the Colonies and remained just that. He gave a series of lectures at Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Art on "The Causes of Success in Life", a subject about which from experience he must have known very little. Barry Oakley's play is full of rich irony and splendid comic absurdity and deserves to be tried again.
ACT

THEATRE

ANU ARTS CENTRE (49 4787)
Act Two. Performance Arts programme. 1-5 November.
PLAYHOUSE (49 6458)
Tonight Lola Blau by George Kreisler; with Robyn Archer; director. Ted Robinson. 2-17 November.
Yamashita by Roger Pulvers; director, Roger Pulvers; with Will Gluth; Howard Stanley and Robert Stephen. From 20 November.

FORTUNE THEATRE COMPANY
Play to be advised. 27 November - 1 December.

REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP
(47 0781)
Jigsaw Company: The Empty House; Nono's Nose; Me Jack You Jill. Schools in the ACT.

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
Australian Dance Theatre: Wildstars by Nigel Triffit and Jonathon Taylor. 8-10 November.

OPERA

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
Canberra Opera: La Belle Helene by Offenbach.

CONCERTS

ANU ARTS CENTRE (49 4787)
University House Baroque Trio: Capella Corelli. 4 November.
CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
Blossom Dearie, Don Burrows. 1 November.
Errol Buddle Quintet Keith Stirling Quartet. Contemporary Jazz concert. 26 November.

NSW

THEATRE

ACTORS COMPANY (660 2503)
Closed for alterations.

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
School Tours: Alex Hood folksinger, metropolitan area until 16 November.
South Coast from 19 November.
Blinky Bill, a children's play for infants and primary; Hunter and North West throughout November.
Adult tours: Bantry Castle, written, directed and starring Brendan Locke: until 18 November.
The Whittle Family commences 5 November.

COURT HOUSE HOTEL (969 8202)
Oxford Street, Taylor Square.
Bangle In The Jungle by Rick Maier and Malcolm Frawley; director. Malcolm Frawley; music. Sandra Ridgwell; with Steven Sacks, Susan Asquith, Chris Galletti, Kurt Jansen and Di Harman. Throughout November.
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; director. George Carden. Throughout November.

GENESIAN THEATRE (212 3411)
Murder in the Cathedral by T S Eliot; director. Brian Donovan; with Denis Allen, Michael Barnaccoat and Michael Pentacost. Commences 3 November.
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
Annie, the musical; director. George Martin; with Hayes Gordon, Jill Perryman, Naney Hayes, Ric Hutton, Anne Grigg and Kevin Johns. Throughout November.
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526)
Treats by Christopher Hampton; director, Peter Barclay; with Robert Alexander. To 18 November.

KIRRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point.
The Western Show by P P Cranney; director. Richmond Young; music. Adrian Morgan; with Patrick Wood, Margie McCrae, Jane Hamilton, Paul Chubb and
Ros Hohnen, Throughout November.

LES CURRIE PRESENTATIONS (358 5676)

Modern Mime Theatre, programme of illusionary mime devised by Michael Freeland for infants, primary and secondary. Throughout November.

Mike Jackson, traditional bush music for pre-schools, infants, primary and secondary schools; North Coast until 16 November.

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498 3166)

Seesaw by William Gibson; director, Alastair Duncan; with Bunny Gibson, and Paul Maybury. Commences 2 November.

MUSIC BOX THEATRE (82 2379)

Seymour Centre Downstairs

Sisters by a musical play written by Terry O'Connell and Ken Moffat; director, Terry O'Connell, with Kim Hardwick, Lucy Charles, Merrill Petein and Jill Floyd. 14-24 November.

MUSIC HALL THEATRE

RESTAURANT (909 8222)

Lost to the Devil written and directed by Stanley Walsh; with Alexander Hay, Terry Peck and Linda Cropper. Throughout November.

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6585)

Ron Amok, a new review by John McKellar and Ron Frazer; director, Bill Orr with Ron Frazer. Throughout November.

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)

Juno and the Paycock by Sean O'Casey; director, John Sumner; with Elizabeth Orr with Ron Frazer. Throughout November.

NIMROD THEATRE (699 5003)

Upstairs: Betrayal by Harold Pinter; director, John Summer, with Elizabeth Alexander, Neil Fitzpatrick, Edward Hepple and John Stanton. Until 11 November.

On Our Selection by Bert Bailey adapted from the Steele Rudd books; directed by George Whaley; with Jon Blake, John Clayton, Don Crosby, Vivienne Garrett, Nomi Hazelhurst, Robert Menzies, Barry Otto, Geoffrey Rush, John Smythe and Kerry Walker. Commences 27 November.


NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (30 7211)

Bondi Pavilion Theatre

Programme unconfirmed - contact theatre for details.

269 PLAYHOUSE (929 6804)

Those Famous Years 1901-2001 created and devised by John Howitt based upon one of the original 680 mime shows; director, John Howitt; with John Howitt, Louise Howitt, Bill Young, Jane Hamilton, Doug McGrath, Peter Parkinson and Jenni Ogle. Throughout November.

PUB THEATRE (98 8445)

Dee Why Hotel

The Jungle Show; director, Don Swonnell with Michael Ross, Sonja Tallis, Christine Woodland, Anthony Martin, and Terry Byrnes. Mondays throughout November.

Q THEATRE (047 21 5735)

Sweeney Todd by Dibdin Pitt adapted by Max Iffland; director, Kevin Jackson; with Ron Hackett, Alan Brel, Peter Kingston, Gae Anderson and Bill Conn. At Bankstown Town Hall throughout November.

Paradise Regained by Kevin Bennett, David Mason-Cox, and Max Iffland; director, Max Iffland; with Mark Hembrow, Robin Jolley, Mary Haire, Darryl Hilton, David Wheeler and Graham Lowndes. At Penrith from November.

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (069 25 2052)

One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. Until 11 November.

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)

York Theatre


SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)

Free drama workshops on Sat's and Suns (10-5) including playbuilding, mime, dance, sculpture, puppetry, design, radio and video.

SPEAKEASY THEATRE

RESTAURANT (662 7442)

Roots III directed by Jim Fishburn; with Kate Fitzpatrick, Michael Atkin's and Donald McDonald. Throughout November.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (699 9322)

Drama Theatre, S.O.H.

The Venetian Twins by Carlo Goldoni; director, John Bell; with Drew Forsythe, Tony Sheldon, Jennifer McGregor and John Mclernan. Throughout November.

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

The Day After The Fair by Frank Harvey; director, Frith Banbury; with Deborah Kerr, Andrew McFarlane, Patricia Kennedy, Gordon Glenwright, Diane Smith and Lynnette Curran. Throughout November.

DANCE

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET (2.0588)

Opera Theatre, S.O.H.

Don Quixote, choreography by Vordere, based on Petipa; music by Minkus; arranged by John Lanchbery. 7 to 27 November.

Anna Karenina, choreography by Prokovsky; music by Tchaikovsky. Commences 30 November.

OPERA

SYDNEY YOUNG OPERA COMPANY (94.5098)

Main Hall, Conservatorium Of Music

L'infedelta Delusa by Haydn; produced by Paul Kelly, musical direction, Andrew Greene; with Amanda Phane, Glenn Winslade, Gary May, Ilsa Averbrant and Sylvia Rivier. 7, 9 and 10 November.

CONCERTS

REGENT THEATRE (61 6967)

The Red Army Choir, song and dance ensemble. Until 3 November.

The Debbie Reynolds Show between 5-17 November.

For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200.

QLD THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)

Winter Journey by Clifford Odets; director, designer, Jason Savage; with Ray Dunlop and Pam Byde-Mullins. To 10 November.

Barefoot In The Park by Neil Simon; director, Christine Kelly; with Jennifer Debenham, Ian Grealy and Debbie Whiteman. From 15 November.

HER MAJESTY'S (221 2777)

Tribute by Bernard Slade; producer.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER 1979 57
**SA THEATRE**

**CONCERTS**

- **FESTIVAL HALL (229 4250)**
  - Demmus Roussos. 15, 16 November.
  - Lord Mayor’s Command Performance. 18 November.

  For entries contact Don Batchelor on 356 9311.

**DANCE**

- **QUEENSLAND BALLET (299 3355)**
  - *One In Five* choreographed by Ray Powell; music J and J Strauss.
  - *Floating World* choreographed by Norman Hall; music, Alan Hovhanes.
  - *The Wedding* choreographed by Harold Collins; music, Jacquey Ibert.
  - *Facade* choreographed by Sir Frederick Ashton; music, William Walton, reproduced by Brian Ashbridge. 22, 23, 24 November.

**OPERA**

- **HER MAJESTY’S (221 2777)**
  - Queensland Opera Company: *Don Giovanni* by Mozart; producer, John Thompson; designer, Alan Lees; conductor, Graeme Young; with Ball, Neal, Robertson, Barnard, Harris, Crook and Bronan. 27 October, 7, 9, 10 November.
  - Australian Opera: *The Abduction from the Seraglio* by Mozart. Director, George Ogilvie; designer, Krystian Frederickson. 30 October, 1, 3, 6 November.

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**THEATRE**

**AUSTRIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL**

- **ADELAIDE THEATRE GROUP**
  - **AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP**
    - *Carelew*. N Adelaide. The Laughing Barnam, The Fitzroy Yank and The Surgeons Arm by Phil Matherwell; director, Wilfred Last. 22 November to 1 December.
  - **DECORUM PRODUCTIONS & AUSTRALIAN STAGE CO.**
    - *The Sentimental Bloke* arranged and performed by John Derum; director, George Whaley. 26 November - 1 December.
  - **ICON THEATRE**
    - Sheridan Theatre: *Bubbles* written and directed by Frank Ford. 21 November - 9 December.
  - **PANORAMA PLAYERS**
    - Theatre 62: *The Touch of Silk* by Betty Roland; director, Michael Baldwyn. 21 November to 1 December.
  - **PRINCES BERKLEY HOTEL**
    - Hindly Street. Cabaret Conspiracy arranged by John Allen. 22 November - 8 December.
  - **Q THEATRE**
    - The Prisoner, a rock opera for kids by Richard Laurence; director Ann O’Day. 25 November - 4 December.
  - **STATE THEATRE COMPANY**
    - *The Merry Widow* by Lehar; musical director, George Bonynge; designer, Kristian Frederickson; with Joan Sutherland. 22, 28, 30 November.

**DANCE**

**QUEENSLAND BALLET (299 3355)**

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- *Floating World* choreographed by Norman Hall; music, Alan Hovhanes.
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DANCE

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
The Australian Ballet. 2-3 November. Sony Joes jazz ballet. 24 November.

For entries contact the editorial office on (049) 67 4470.

VIC

THEATRE

ACTORS' THEATRE
Horror the Lollipop Dragon. Sats 2.30pm.
ALEXANDER THEATRE (543 2828)
Heritage Musical Theatre: Lila: Time by Franz Schubert 1-10 November.
ARENA THEATRE (24 9667)
Plays in performance touring schools: The Musicians of Bremen (lower primary), Hercules and the Golden Apples (upper primary), both by Ernie Gray, writer in residence.
ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (529 4355)
Philippe Genty: Puppet Cabaret. Vic to 10 November.
AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Pram Factory. Front Theatre: Failing in Love Again by Jan Cornal; director, Nano Nagle; with Robbie McGregor, Terry Darmody, Evelyn Krape, Di Dimcombe and Jan Cornal.
COMEDY THEATRE (663 4993)
The Gun Game by D.L. Coburn; director, producer, Peter Williams; with Ruth Cracknell and Ron Haddrick.
CREATIVE ARTS THEATRE (877 4056)
Community based theatre working in schools, libraries and community centres. F1E team.
FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)
The Famous Flying Trapeze Christmas Show.
GAY NINES MUSIC HALL
Geelong. Fridays and Saturdays only.
HOOPA THEATRE FOUNDATION (63 7643)
Playbox: The Ripper Show by Frank Hatherley; director Graeme Blundell designer. Peter Corrigan; musical director, Red Symons; choreography, Betty Pounder; with Bruce Spence, Evelyn Krape, Desdre Rubenstein, John Paramount and John O'May.
Loot by Joe Orton; director, Kathy Mueller.
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THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD

NO. 17

Name

Address

Across:
1. A star with character (11)
2. Uplift the beams, we hear (5)
3. Went too far and burnt it (7)
4. Damn idiot cures car! (7)
5. Suggest a close friend (8)
6. Jaundiced, under water, but still animated (6,9)
7. Divine model could be a bunny girl (6)
8. Unaccustomed to seeing the international American journalist (6)
14. “Wealth...must be...” (J.K. Galbraith) (10)
15. “To ask the hard...is simple” (W.H. Auden) (8)
16. Religion your poor friend follows, with great edification (10)
19. Murder victim hunted down in a belfry (4)
21. Earthly remains sportingly contested (5)
22. Trace porn (kinky!) to the producer (9)
24. Lost girl found by Buttose after 5:00 (7)
25. Flatten, for example, the head of the Shah — life’s full of these reversals (7)
26. An ambiguous 1 (4,7)

Down:
1. E.E. Perth sculptor, remodelled the composer (5,10)
2. Secures a hundred lights (6)
3. Calm achieved through a very quiet rest (7)
4. There’s nothing in the red leader to note, but that’s impressive (7)
5. The tardiest are also the most fashionable (6)
6. Hoard fanatically for this girl (5)

The first correct entry drawn on November 25th will receive one year’s free subscription to TA.

Last month’s answers.
The winner of last month’s Crossword was Mrs Carol Stannard, Glenorie NSW.