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A PREVIEW OF SOME 1980* SHOWS!

Presented by
THE AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE TRUST

February/March 1980

In the World of Espionage a Traitor has No Home!

Robert Morley
in The Old Country
A DRAMA OF A MASTER SPY

June 1980

Big River
by Alex Buzo

February/March 1980

Two Giants of Jazz Together for the First Time

Buddy Rich Big Band and Mel Torme

June 1980

The Dance Theatre of Harlem

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Don't miss 'em.'
London Daily Mail

August — December 1980

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BY BERNARD POMERANCE

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July/August 1980

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* MORE SHOWS TO BE ANNOUNCED.
COMMENT

The Australia Council's next batch of grants for major theatre companies has been finalised, so administrators and artistic directors will be gleeful or despondent by now, at their prospects for next year.

In its 1978/79 Review the Theatre Board said it hoped to restore some of that year's shortfall in its next allocations, but unfortunately they themselves received only a 4% increase in funds from the Government. This means that for yet another year there hasn't been proper grant indexation; some theatre companies have received increases this year, but overall the Board has contained these within the 4%. Not exactly keeping up with inflation, to which the performing arts, as a labour intensive industry, are particularly vulnerable.

The Theatre Board's biggest single "client" is the Australian Ballet; the only company receiving a grant in the seven-figure region. Next year it gets $1,344,000 — no increase — and the Australian Ballet School a further $201,000.

Possibly the AB School is equated with the Theatre In Education teams connected with theatre companies, as several receive separate grants for them. Of the state figure-head companies the Melbourne Theatre Company is more than twice as large as any other at present, in terms of finance, with a grant of $728,000 (including TIE). The company is running two major theatres, a studio space, its Tributary Productions and various educational projects.

The Sydney Theatre Company's funds are well down from that, being at the head of those receiving grants of between $300,000 and $200,000. The interim Sydney Theatre Company had $350,000 — an extra $50,000 — for six productions with which it had a record season in 1979, and actually made a surplus. Richard Wherrett will also be doing six productions in 1980, but the Theatre Board say that the $50,000 reduction this year should be seen as a return to a status quo, whereas last year's extra money was needed for the new company to get off the ground successfully. And of course next year there is '79's surplus. The last grant the Old Tote received was $640,000 for eleven productions in 1978, which put the interim STC on an equal footing with them in grant per production; Richard Wherrett's company is down $8,000 on each production (less the surplus).

Also in the two to three hundred thousand group come Nimrod, with $264,000 (not so far behind the STC after all, as they had feared), the Queensland Theatre Company with $256,000, the Sydney Dance Company with $250,000, the National Theatre, Perth, with $243,000 (plus $33,000 for youth work), and the State Theatre Company of SA with $210,000 (plus $55,000 for youth work). Of course this progression is not necessarily the order of-aver-all funding levels for these companies; state government contributions and other funds vary greatly between them.

The next level comprises only four groups, perhaps an intermediate size of theatre company on the way up or down? The Australian Dance Theatre as a major state ballet company is almost at the next level with $193,000. The APG will be getting $141,000 next year, with both the Q Theatre in Sydney and the Tasmanian Theatre Company working on $130,000.

Our two puppet theatres have been awarded almost identical grants, with the Marionette Theatre of Australia improving by $1,000 on the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's $80,000.

The third group of companies who come within the same funding level could probably be classed as "alternative" — not in the sense of experimental, but in that they claim to be offering a fare that is not provided anywhere else in their state. Top of that group came the Popular Theatre Troupe from Queensland, with $68,000; followed by Hoopla, then Brisbane's TN Company (who also have $11,000 for youth work). Next comes the Ensemble and then, again from Sydney, Marian Street finishing up at $50,000. The Hole in the Wall in Perth will also fit into this group when their grant has been fixed. They have been given notice this year by the Theatre Board that their funding will not be renewed the following year.

Theatre Australia gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the New South Wales Cultural Grants Advisory Council, the Arts Grants Advisory Committee of South Australia, the Queensland Cultural Activities Department, the Victorian Ministry of the Arts, the Western Australian Arts Council and the assistance of the University of Newcastle.

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SON OF BETTY...Reg Livermore's fourth one-man show, to be called Son of Betty, is going to be his last. It's subtitled "The Best of them All" (or "A Souvenir of Obscenities"), and according to director Peter Batey, that's partly what it is. "From the audiences' point of view it probably will be the best; because a lot of people haven't seen them all we've picked the eyes out of previous shows — and of course there is new material too."

Characters to be resurrected are Betty Blokk Buster herself, Vaseline Amylnitrate, Tara the Circus Lady, Leonard and Beryl. But the format will be more stylish than before — less of the episodic impersonations — and the technical effects more sophisticated.

Why is it to be Reg's last show? "Well he certainly won't be leaving the stage for good," says Batey. "It's rather like the end of an era. Reg has gone about as far as he could in that particular approach; he needs to have a decent rest and then we will be working on a new approach for the future. Something with a fresh challenge."

Livermore has given over six hundred performances in Australia of his one-man shows, Betty Blokk Buster Follies, Wonderwoman and Sacred Cow. Son of Betty opens in Melbourne in March next year, but before plunging into that he's taking a break in New York.

JACOBI ON HAMLET

...Derek Jacobi’s playing of Hamlet will rank with the greatest, if the English audiences, and indeed critics, are anything to go by. But this is not Jacobi’s first time in the role; "Hamlet can be played at almost any age. I made my first tilt at the Danish windmill as a less than clear-skinned schoolboy, all rant and rave, piling my Pelian of enthusiasm and good intentions upon my Ossa of inexperience and impertinence. Now in my middle years (with a great deal more trepidation, looking now before and after instead of merely ahead) I have the good fortune to make another attempt at the assault course. Hopefully there will be other opportunities in the future..."

"I find acting difficult to analyse for myself, well nigh impossible to talk about and those thrilling moments when a part takes an actor into overdrive, he himself may often be only dimly aware of the mechanics. It's called inspiration and comes all too rarely. In any case no self-respecting conjuror tells his audience how the tricks are done. If I could show Hamlet's reality, his contemporary accessibility, transmit an unstable malaise, with the blood of the courtier, soldier, scholar burning through his veins and the unfathomable questions gnawing at his heart, then I would like to think that I was, at least, on the right path and in the right mould."

"More importantly I would not do this alone. The play may be called Hamlet, indeed, but it is not, never has been, and I hope, never will be a one-man show."

Derek Jacobi's Hamlet with Robert Edisson as Polonius.
ALL CHANGE AT NIMROD... Nimrod Theatre has not only lost an artistic director this year (and gained two new ones), but is shortly to lose its General Manager. From January 1980 Paul Iles will be leaving Nimrod to take up the same post at the State Theatre Company of South Australia. He will be replacing Wayne Madden at the STC.

In the three years Iles has been at Nimrod (and in Australia) he has built a reputation as probably the top theatre administrator in the country, and pushed Nimrod to the forefront of subsidised theatre. Through his acumen the company has toured extensively not only throughout Australia — which hardly any other companies can afford to do but also to New Zealand, England and the States.

The question is how much does Nimrod's present pre-eminence rest on the capabilities of Mr Iles. That will no doubt be seen in the next few months. It is rumoured that one of the reasons for his departure is internal problems and personality clashes at Nimrod.

Paul Iles

VULNERABLE FUTURE... Taking advantage of the concurrent presence in Perth of Colin George, Director of the Adelaide STC, and Bob Adams, Director of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, Derek Holroyde (Dean of Art and Design at the WA Institute of Technology) organised a seminar to discuss the direction theatre might take in Australia in the 1980's. The visitors were joined on a panel by playwright Mary Gage, actor/director Edgar Metcalfe, WA Arts Council Director Tim Mason, Tony Nicholls and Collin O'Brien. Most of the people who came to the seminar were students from the two universities and from WAIT, and professional theatre people.

Just returned from England, Colin George brought news of Mrs Thatcher's decision to withdraw subsidy from twelve theatres (including the Royal Court and the Open Space) and to reduce substantially the grant to even such prestigious companies as the RSC. This focussed the discussion on the question of subsidy. Theatre which is political (in the broadest sense) such as a group called Desperate Measures was seen to be the most vulnerable, a fact pointed by being recently mentioned in Parliament and grant to them queried. There followed some ideological debate as to the degree to which theatres should woo or confront their audiences.

The Arts Council Directors both seemed to feel that in the eighties subsidy would be directed less to enlarging or propping up large companies, or seeking for overseas prestige (as has tended to be the case in opera and ballet) and more to establishment grants over a limited period and for specific one-off schemes. The idea for the future seemed to be for the encouragement of local theatres and increase in standards by the injection of professional help rather than increased support for larger capital city companies.

THE AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP have picked their new ensemble of actors for 1980, which is being made the nucleus of Pram Factory work. Out of 150 applications, ten were chosen — five men and five women — after exhaustive interviews and days of workshopping.

The group will have a budget of $100,000 when they start work at the end of January, though quite what they will do with it, or what kind of work they will produce isn't yet known.

The new group are: Robin Boord, Richard Healey, Peter King, Margot Knight, Laurel McGowan who has been working in Sydney television, Judy McHenry the only one to have worked previously with the APG, Denis Moore, Danny Nash an ex-rock and roll singer, Curtis Weiss and Jo White.

Bill Garner, who was part of the selection committee, is very optimistic about the outcome of the new structure. "We're confident that we have a very strong group of people — there's not one weak link in the chain. They have to thresh out the kind of work they will be doing and there will probably be conflicting opinions. No single line is emerging yet, but it will be interesting. No one in the new ensemble is from the old Collective: they have to earn Collective membership and their funds will come through us. The old guard will still be part of the Collective, but they will have to generate their own income, though there will be a little money for other projects. Only the ensemble will be drawing weekly wages."

Bill Garner
How ironic that one of the most successful shows of this year in Sydney should have had to close for lack of a theatre. Graham Bond's schoolboy rock musical Boy's Own MacBeth played an eleven week season at the tumbledown Kirk Gallery until September 21 when the Gallery was suddenly closed because of fire regulations. BOMcB had been an absolute sellout and was due to run till Christmas; the company, Birnham Woods Holdings, simply couldn't find another venue in Sydney.

The upshot is that they are currently in the middle of a national tour; in Newcastle they ran for a week last month; they're playing in Melbourne at St Martins Theatre until January 5; and after that it's the Space in Adelaide from January 10 to February 5. On the way back to Sydney they plan a country tour as they travel. Just as the company couldn't find a backer in the first place, or then a theatre, they've had the same response to the idea of an album of the show. Nothing daunted they've got a recording together themselves and put down, mixed and cut the disc and designed the cover, in the space of two weeks, so that its release would co-incide with the Newcastle launch.

When the show's been round the country there's also the possibility of a film of Boys Own. If no one can be found to back this venture then once again the company will look to doing it themselves. Their latest publicity idea is a package deal for the show, of four tickets, an album and four school caps.

SHOPFRONT CARAVAN...Shopfront Theatre for young people, based in Carlton, NSW, have a programme called the Shopfront Caravan. It is a unique travelling theatre community of fourteen young people who will visit country towns to perform and help other young people to build their own plays, dances, music, mime-shows, puppets and other performances, through workshops.

Errol Bray, director of Shopfront says the idea is for young people in country towns to build performances out of their own experiences, about their lives and town. "The Caravan will end their one or two week visit with a Community Day where plays and events created in the workshops will be performed for the whole town amidst clowns, jugglers and wandering minstrels. These plays will also be invited to perform at the Shopfront Theatre as a further aspect of the city-country exchange of creative and community ideas."

Some of the performances the Caravan will be giving to the towns will include Childmirth for high schools, The Tale Play for primary and an adaptation of The Tempest, all of which Shopfront have used in their own area with great success. They are accepting bookings from country towns now for the 1980 Shopfront Caravan.

Shopfront Caravan 1979
ROTHERS IN LONDON... Nimrod's production of Ron Blair's one-man play The Christian Brothers, has recently returned from a season at the Riverside Studios in London. Having played to tremendous receptions all over Australia and in New Zealand, Peter Carroll went on to collect rave notices in London too.

Michael Billington of The Guardian called it "a small gem" and compared it favourably with Benjamin Franklin, saying "unlike that it never dwindles into sentimentality and does not outstay its welcome by a second..."

Michael Coveney of the Financial Times also thought it "a gem" and had much praise for the actors — "a superb complete physical portrait of the Brother whose need for assurance in his own faith is as poignant as his recurring complaint...", and the play — "It is a delicate funny little play that conveys with clinical but affectionate precision the mannerisms of classroom ritual and has much to say about the nature of secular and religious vocation."

Others said: "a remarkable tour de force...rare performance", "beautifully shaded portrait", "bravura performance", "a great play", "masterpiece" and all those other one-liners that look so good on billboards and press releases!

Kate Grenville of the London Australia Magazine felt that "far from having to make any apologies to British theatre, this performance could teach the Brits a thing or two about sheer dramatic interest and sympathy."

Peter Carroll as the Brother

Mike Mullins stirred a good deal of interest last year with his Theatre in Sculpture at the Pilgrim Theatre, but what has happened to him since? His slogan then was "we're moving towards the eighties," but...

"Theatre In Sculpture is no more, it died with an unsuccessful Limited Life application. Having received a special project to mount New Blood, I shall form a new group of people under the title "Space Dump Performance". New Blood will explore the new Australian, that is, the Australian of tomorrow."

Mullins will be using performers Annie Byron, Peter Flynn, Bob Thorneycroft and Maureen McGrath with designer, Sylvia Jansens. Michael Carlos will be composing music and Marysia Krysler acting as literary advisor.

It seems he is still looking for an aboriginal performer and can be contacted at Exiles bookshop in Darlinghurst during December. Performances of New Blood are planned to begin on March 20 at a "yet to be found warehouse somewhere in the inner city."

Mike Mullins

Theatre In Sculpture in 1978.

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Mike Mullins

Theatre In Sculpture in 1978.
DANCE CO CORRECTIONS

Dear Sir,

May I take the opportunity to make some comments and corrections in regard to certain factual aspects of recent reviews concerning the Sydney Dance Company.

In the September issue of Theatre Australia there appeared an essay which sought to make comparisons between Graeme Murphy's Poppy, the first full-length dance work created by Australians and Jonathan Taylor's Wildstars, a full-length work created for Australian Dance Theatre.

The writer referred to Wildstars as the second such "full length" work created in Australia when, in fact, Graeme Murphy's Rumours for the Sydney Dance Company was actually created and premiered before Wildstars. Rumours is the second full-length work produced by the Sydney Dance Company's director within a twelve month period. But I feel some mention should certainly be made of Garth Welch's ballet Kal, which is a full-length creation of the West Australian Ballet. I am not quite sure of the order of things when one considers Kal in this issue and I feel that it is probably not so relevant to discuss who came first with what, but certainly these other two full-length works bear mentioning.

In the October issue of Theatre Australia in William Shoubridge's review of the Sydney Dance Company's "Signature Season", he refers to a duet in Signatures choreographed for two women and credits the dancing to Victoria Taylor and Jennifer Barry. This duet was danced at every performance by Kathy Chard and Jennifer Barry. In Graeme Murphy's Scheherazade he makes mention of a dancer who replaced Sheree da Costa for several performances due to Ms da Costa's illness. The glowing praise should be for Susan Barling and not Francoise Philipbert who actually replaced Sheree da Costa in Andris Toppe's Toccata which featured in a later programme.

I would be very grateful if Theatre Australia could set the record straight for the benefit of dance fans and also for the dancers themselves who enjoy to see their efforts mentioned in a review but certainly prefer to see it done accurately.

Sincerely regards,

Janine Kyle,
Publicity Officer,
Sydney Dance Company

AYPAA'S INROADS

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter to all those who were involved in assisting with the developing of the KIDS-TRAIN Project, mainly to inform you of the eventual results of the initiatives taken by National AYPAA to devise a project as a contribution celebration of the International Year of the Child 1979 in Australia, from the field of youth performing arts.

The concept of the KIDS-TRAIN has not become a reality.

In spite of widespread interest and enthusiasm, and in spite of a considerable amount of written support, there was simply not the hard cash available to enable the project to develop much beyond the feasibility stage. The endorsement of various well-meaning and enthusiastic government and non-government committees and organisations meant very little when it came to the realities of obtaining actual funds.

One of the indirect benefits gained by National AYPAA from its involvement in this project has been the broadening of its experience in dealing with such bodies as the above. National AYPAA will not commit its slender resources in the future, in the same way as it did for the KIDS-TRAIN, without a substantial positive indication (including a financial commitment) of support for a particular project.

However, if there was no KIDS-TRAIN in Australia for IYC, AYPAA has still managed to make considerable INROADS!

As a direct result of the KIDS-TRAIN initiative undertaken by National AYPAA, the INROADS Project is now occurring. In isolated parts of every state and territory, a project is taking place, which, in the words of Senator Margaret Guilfoyle, the Federal Minister responsible for IYC in Australia, and whose Office of Child Care provided the initial financial stimulus for the project, will "involve many children in country areas in culture/creative play experiences to which they would not normally have access".

AYPAA is very excited about this project - a comprehensive series of state-based ventures which will bring undoubted delight and pleasure to many children, parents, teachers, community leaders and others in remote and isolated areas of Australia. In each capital city, a small band of arts practitioners have gathered, and subsequently travelled to these remote areas (by road convoy, train and plane). Funded to a total of almost $100,000 overall by government bodies (arts, education, welfare, IYC committees, etc.) at state and federal level, as well as others such as the School of the Air, Colleges of Advanced Education, Arts Councils, etc., INROADS involves 14 existing arts groups, plus various freelance artists (a total of about 150 people, involved for periods ranging from a week to a month), and is a major project for AYPAA, for the IYC, for children, and for Australia.

Apart from this major and obvious result of the time and energy spent by AYPAA staff to develop the initial KIDS-TRAIN concept, there have been other benefits as well. More indirect, but nevertheless important, they include the establishment of many, many valuable contacts in areas not generally explored by those involved in youth performing arts.

AYPAA will maintain these contacts, and anticipates that many future activities will be able to occur as a direct result of having established links through the KIDS-TRAIN Project. Already, in NSW, discussions have occurred for a major project in the area of early childhood development to occur in early 1980, to be sponsored by the Family and Children's Services Agency, and to involve at least one person with experience in the field of youth performing arts.

The KIDS-TRAIN has proved that one of the roles of AYPAA is to generate ideas, based on the observed problems and needs of those working in the field. Some of these ideas may not come to fruition, generally for valid and important reasons, but it is the obligation of AYPAA to circulate such ideas and to act as a forum for feedback and responses, so that the projects which do come to fruition are those determined by the widest range of people possible, with the best available advice and research. INROADS is the result of this process.

On behalf of AYPAA, I would like to thank you for your interest in this project, and in the activities of AYPAA. We trust that this interest will continue, and we look forward to sharing the ideas and activities of all those who work in youth performing arts in Australia, with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey Brown, AYPAA
Raymond Stanley

Are we in for a Summer Locke Elliot trend? There was the recent Sydney revival of Ross Bogale. a TV series of his Water Under The Bridge is currently in production. Margaret Fink and Gill Armstrong are planning film his Eldens Lost, and one has heard whispers of other Elliot projects.

It seems likely June Jago will remain back in Australia permanently. Hope she commutes to south for their daughter, who has been playing for the MTC. That prodigious writer Peter Yealdham has been commissioned to write a six-part series for British TV, to go into production in Europe early next year. And he's planning soon to start production of his feature picture Friday The 13th.

Oh Calcutta! was to have closed in London November 17 after notching up 3,800 performances and playing for 491 weeks, but announcement of its closure caused such box office activity, it now runs until January 5. And after that a touring production will be mounted...Nice to see Kevin Hanly back in this country after years away in the US. He has been acting as company manager for The Damn La Rue Show.

Following on its current production of Privates On Parade, Auckland's Mercury Theatre Company is to present a Robin Hood pantomime written by New Zealand playwright Roger Calvert. It was to have been his first panto, but also he wrote his own version of Cinderella. Nice gesture of the Theatre Proprietors' and Entrepreneurs' Association to for the first time in its 63-year history—award a life membership to Kenna Brodziai, a former vice-president and president of the association. Present president, recently re-elected unopposed, is Paul H Riomfalvy.

See the script for the New York production of Whose Life Is It Anyway has now been adapted to allow a woman to take the lead, so that Mary Tyler Moore can play the starring role which Tom Conti created in London and New York. Conti incidentally, is to star in the London production of the Neil Simon hit musical They're Playing Our Song. One wonders where the Grundy Organisation will make its mark next. Not satisfied with producing television series, industrial promotions and planning feature movies, it has now gone into the pop record market under the label Go Records, its first contracted artist being singer Edith Bliss.

Film and television people have been doing it for ages, but now it has spread to the theatre scene: a handsome press kit to promote an attraction. It may have been done here before, but the first I recall sighting is the impressive booklet on Hamlet put out by the Australian Elizabthan Theatre Trust...Last January a new musical, which before opening had all the signs of being a smash hit, flopped badly in London and only ran nine weeks. It was Bar Mizvah Boy by Jack Rosenthal whose latest play is Samson. A director, composer, lyricist and management involved in the production of a musical!

With working title Playboy On Broadway, there is a new musical revue in the offing to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Playboy magazine. And mooted is a new musical based on O Henry stories, entitled Stifle! Stifle! Stifle! The musicals are: Mahalia, based on the life and times of Mahalia Jackson. Didn't see it anywhere in the Australian press probably because she never played in this country— but in September one of England's most distinguished actresses died, Catherine Lacey. She could always be relied upon to give a more than good performance. I recall particularly seeing her play the title role in Hugh Ross Williamson's Queen Elizabeth, in one scene of which she had to remove her wig and reveal a totally bald head.

After his superb performance in In Dubious Bond, someone please cast Ray Lawler as King Lear... And if Vincent Price does make these shores next year with his one-man Oscar Wilde show, will someone please make sure Coral Browne is asked to play on stage... And if Noel Ferrier's musical comedy company idea comes fruition, will there be a full-scale production of the Australian Ballad Of The Alies? is included early in the repertoire?

Norman Keavel

When the Australian Council last year with its 320,000 dollar fund raised with help of the National Critics' Circle it had itself created in 1975, Sydney theatre critics decided their annual award was too important a contribution to the local scene to be allowed to lapse. They dived into their own pockets to keep it going. The 1978 award went to John Gadon and was presented by his former secretary now an independent function at the Seymour Centre. A repeat performance is planned for this year and preliminary discussions were held at the Journalists' Club on November 2. Critics involved are Harry Kippax (SMH), Frank Harris (Telegraph and Mirror), Taffy Davies (Sun), Katharine Brisbane and Keith Thomas (Australian), Michael le Moignan (National Times), Harry Robinson (Sun-Herald), Robert Page (TA), Norman Kessell (American Variety) and John West (ABC).

Elizabethan Theatre Trust marketing and promotions manager John Little, still talking of his recent 16-day round-the-world trip, rates the New York production of the Neil Simon musical. They're Playing Our Song, the best show he saw, with high praise for a single $25 seat on the show's third day and which he predicts will rocket Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller right back to the top of the heap. He saw nothing worthwhile in London, but in Tokyo and Osaka he impressed by the Japanese production of Jacobis Hamlet, which many followed with the aid of recorded narration on hired cassettes.

In New York, incidentally, John bumped into former Sydney showbiz scribe Jock Vethich, now living with his wife on Roseville Island, travelling by cable car each to his job on Rupert Murdoch's Star and thoroughly happy in the Big Apple.

I am intrigued by Richard Wherrett's choice of the early Australian melodrama, The Sunny South, as the first production by the new Sydney Theatre Company. Co-star Maximilian Dunhill, who committed suicide at Dee Why in 1921, it had its first performance at Sydney's original Opera House in 1884. It was first revived by Sydney University Dramatic Society with a very creditable performance at the Seymour Centre in 1973. The play follows the fortunes of the noble Chester family which, dispossessed of its English estate seeks new fortune on the Australian goldfields. I persuaded George Miller to see it as a possibility for the Music Hall. He liked it, but not enough to use it. Scenes in the SUDS production included a jolly bush picnic with maypole dancing and sack races, a blessing on Sydney Harbour, and a production of bushrangers with an heroic rescue and a dramatic attempt to wreck a train on the Zig Zag railway line. I can hardly wait to see what Richard does with all that!

Still dipping into the deja vu division: One of the plays John Houseman's The Acting Company will be touring next year is Liviu Ciulei's production of contemporary US playwright Paul Foster's Elizabeth I. It surprises me that so many theatre people are surprised to be told the play has already been done here, by the New Theatre back in January 1976. An American friend of the author who saw that production told Foster about it and he sent over two of his later plays, but these did not fit in with the New Theatre ethos. I remember being impressed by the performance in the title role of Lorrie Crickshank, a schoolteacher and still a member of the company, although I have seen her only once since, in Zuckmayer's The Captain Of Kopenick. The visiting Elizabeth I will be staged in Sydney, together with Ah! Nero by Dunning's 1926 melodrama, Broadway, in Perth and at the Adelaide Festival with Webster's 17th century tragedy, The White Devil.

And again, Sydney's Ensemble Theatre might have claimed the next production the Australian premiere of David Mamet's American Buffalo. oats pointed out that on a visit to Melbourne with the late lamented National Critics' Circle in mid-1976, I saw this done by the APG at the Pram Factory with Max Gillies, Evelyn Krape and John Romeril, directed by Alan Robertson.

I have last count on the times this has occurred over the years has been associated with theatre in Sydney. Even more frequently I have been directly responsible for avoidance of clashing opening nights. I hope, therefore, all groups and companies will co-operate in a system being introduced by Showcast Publications Pty Ltd to compile an Australia-wide listing that will avoid the crazy sort of situation we had in Sydney recently of three major shows opening on the one night.

Another invaluable service planned by Showcast founders David and Chin Yu Williams is continually updated biographies of all listed actors and actresses. These will be immediately available to agents, producers and publicists.

Paul Riomfalvy, chief general manager for J C Williamson Productions Ltd, tells me the projected tour next year by American film actor Al Pacino (The Godfather and Serpico) with his stage production of Richard III has had to be cancelled.
Reintroducing

Boys Own

Macbeth

McBETH

the all new

A PARIS THEATRE

Sydney

28th NOV - 5th JAN

and BUY THE RECORD

Adelaide 10th JAN - FEB

is rotten tragically the space

by Terry Shakespeare

aged 42

the original cast of .......

BOYS OWN

MACBETH

BOMB

As Really

geoffrey

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shakespeare

shakespeare

henry

shakespeare

music: GRAHAME BOND

Lyrics: GRAHAME BOND and JIM BURNELL

arrangements: RORY O'DONOGHUE
John Diedrich

By Raymond Stanley

Around the time this is published, somewhere in England Australian actor John Diedrich will be playing Curly in a revival of Oklahoma! that will probably end up in the West End. It is something most actors would give a right eye to do but — as has happened nearly always throughout his career — it has meant a change of plans for Diedrich, whom I interviewed a few days before he left this country.

He began as a child actor. Picked to play the title role in Oliver in 1961, the Welfare Department refused permission as he was only eight, but he did play a page in Camelot at ten and in the 1966 revival of Oliver was The Artful Dodger.

He appeared in school productions and was in a few episodes of The Terrible Ten TV series.

At seventeen Diedrich staged a pirated version of Man Of La Mancha (having taped the professional production!), calling it The Quest and playing Don Quixote himself.

A Commonwealth Scholarship took him to Melbourne University to study medicine, because his father wanted him to be a doctor. He hated this and, frustrated, wrote to play leasing companies in America. Unsuccessful in obtaining rights to Cabaret, he got them for Minnie's Boys, a musical about the Marx Brothers.

"For the last six months of my year at university all I did was concentrate on getting Minnie's Boys on, so I failed university and didn't go back."

To support himself Diedrich took a job cleaning out toilets, working from 7.30am until 4pm, and then going straight to rehearsals of Minnie's Boys, in which he played Groucho.

The main reason he put on the musical was to interest Kenn Brodziak in buying it. The latter went down one Sunday night when they were rehearsing and talked to Diedrich.

"I think I learned more in fifteen minutes talking to him than I could have learnt at NIDA. I was going there to do the directing course, but Minnie's Boys' dates got juggled up and I just couldn't do both."

Brodziak saw the show and said: "Yes, I like it very much — but it's too expensive."

Diedrich auditioned for Godspell, was asked to understudy, but declined. Then he was cast as juvenile lead in a production of Salad Days at the St Martin's.

"I was 19 when I did Salad Days and was pretty rough round the edges, but the thing I had then, that I still have now if I want to use it, was just unbridled raw energy." He had excellent reviews for Salad Days and was cast immediately afterwards for Harry M Miller's production of Grease and again got good notices. "I
thought: 'This is just fine, it's going to be easy sailing from here on.'

Then he tried to stage the American musical *The Me Nobody Knows.*

"That little lot cost me six grand, and I lost the lot. I got the biggest kick with this business as a profession, and in the pants I've ever had. and that's when really started to come to grips taking it very much step by step."

"And I lost the lot. I got the biggest kick with this business as a profession, and in the pants I've ever had. and that's the easy sailing from here on'."

When I thought *The 20s* was going to London I wrote to Barry and asked if he would represent me. He said he'd be delighted to - he'd seen some of my work on videotape - and when we were over there I rang him and he took us out to lunch and said: 'Are you still interested in working here?'. I replied: 'Oh yes, now that I've been here I am!' 'When do you leave?' 'Tomorrow'. 'Can you stay until Monday and audition for *Oklahoma!* - you've got nothing to lose.' So I did, and not only did I have nothing to lose, I got the part! And then I got my work permit."

Diedrich is as much amazed as anyone that he received his work permit from English Equity, especially as he has no English ancestry. However, it seems no one else came anywhere near to his level at the auditions and had permission not been given for him to work in England, the revival might have been cancelled.

Is Diedrich likely to be another talent we shall lose permanently?

"At the moment all I'm looking at is going over there and doing *Oklahoma!* for as long as it goes, and if there's nothing in the offing I'll be coming back home, because I'm very pro-Australian and don't for a second believe that we are in any way behind what's going on over there."

Then why is he going?

"Because it is the opportunity to be seen by important people and I think that in Australia I've reached the crossroads. I think it is mainly because my work has been in the last few years here that I think I'm not getting nowhere."

"And that's when John O'May and I decided to write *Gershwin* - in 1975 - which we did and had a success with."

Whilst *Gershwin* was at the Arena in South Yarra he was cast for a lead in the TV series *Bluey.*

"Then unfortunately both of them from this he went into his first straight play - *Lloyd George Knew My Father,* which starred Ralph Richardson, from whom he admits he learned an enormous amount. But when the play reached Sydney he contracted glandular fever and had to leave the cast.

Then followed a mixture of minor stage and television roles; around this time Diedrich began to feel he was getting nowhere.

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Whilst *Gershwin* was at the Arena in South Yarra he was cast for a lead in the TV series *Bluey.*

"Then unfortunately both of them came together - it seems to always be the way with my career - *Gershwin* went into the city and *Bluey* started. It was something I'd dreamed of all my life, to have a show of mine go into the city, so I couldn't give that away - and couldn't give up my chance of playing in a TV series, so they both suffered."

It was whilst writing *Gershwin* that Diedrich appeared in his first picture, the film *The Devil's Playground* (his only other film has been *Dawn,* in which he played Dawn Fraser's husband).

"About six months after *Gershwin* finished we started talking about *The 20s* and *All That Jazz,* and this time I was careful. I rehearsed it whilst on holiday from *Bluey,* so I could do both jobs. As we only played it Fridays and Saturdays at midnight, there was no problem with doing *Bluey.* Then as soon as *Bluey* finished we started rehearsing the show to go into Her Majesty's."

To be in the show still when it played Her Majesty's, Diedrich had to relinquish a role he had been cast for in the first production of David Williamson's *The Club,* staged by the MTC.

*The 20s* and *All That Jazz* played in all capital cities and also went on a country tour.

"The 20s" actually took up about two and a half years of my life, from the time we started writing it...about two years too long. We would never have done it, only we were hoping to get it to London."

It did play overseas - Hong Kong, from where Diedrich went to London for a holiday. Earlier it had been made into a TV special, directed by Ted Dunn, a friend of whose - London agent Barry Burnett - met Diedrich on a visit to Australia.

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Then why is he going?

"Because it is the opportunity to be seen by important people and I think that in Australia I've reached the crossroads. I think it is mainly because the opportunity will never arise again. If I really had the choice I would go to the MTC, because that would be better for me...but that would be in the hope that I would get to London one day. You can't turn down something like this. It's as simple as that. But I want to come back because I think it's going to be even more exciting here within the next couple of years - it's going to get even better, and I think it's pretty good even now."
Edgar Metcalfe: HOLE’s New Director

By Donna Sadka

In England, aged 30, Edgar Metcalfe had earned "a resonable reputation in the repertory circuit" and decided he would like to travel. He accepted the post of artistic director at the Perth Playhouse and was rather disappointed not to find jungle growing round the airport when he arrived in 1963.

Over the years he has become a seasoned commuter with two separate terms as director at the Playhouse, another as an associate director with the Melbourne Theatre Company, and various guest productions in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, interspersed with spells of work back in the UK.

In 1974 he decided that, jungle or no jungle, he was going to make his home in Perth and in 1975 became an Australian citizen. In 1976 he was given the WA Citizen of the Year award and in 1978 he was made a Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia for his services to theatre.

During his initial four and a half years at the Playhouse helm Metcalfe gave Perth theatregoers the kind of theatre they wanted and which he knew so well — a good varied repertoire of imports — establishing a professional reputation for quality productions as good as any being done in Australia, as well as a considerable local following. During his second contract (1970 and 71) a few Australian plays (by grace of government subsidy) were sneaked into the repertoire, but it was still a risky proposition to offer conservative Perthis too much of the vernacular.

Metcalfe is now relishing the prospect of taking up the post of artistic director at Perth’s Hole in the Wall next year (an appointment announced last month) not least of all because it means he will be able to prove to critics of his programming that he can do Australian plays. Accordingly, he says his first season there will be heavily slanted towards new Oz work.

In fact in a sense it could be said that as a theatre man in this country he has come of age with Australian drama. He saw the "wonderful" London production of Don’s Party years ago and agrees that many in the English audience were rather nonplussed by it. By contrast he has just read Williamson’s latest, Travelling North.

"Apart from the geographical references" he said "it’s really international.

Another myth he wants to dispel is the reputation he has acquired in recent years freelancing, of being exclusively a director of popular commercial shows. Those familiar with his Playhouse days recall first-rate productions of Sartre, Weiss, and Shakespeare, but of late it has been a series of such shows as Doctor In Love, No Sex Please We’re British and In Praise of Love which have kept him in the public eye.

"People don’t realise that any play requires expertise. When I’m offered a commercial production I know it’s because they believe no one else can do it as well — it’s a compliment. But the same rules apply to any play. Without old-fashioned things like basic techniques (of audibility, of people not standing in front of each other and so on), no play will get across to the audience as it should."

A traditionalist by taste and training (not for him the navel-gazing methodists, the disciples of Grotowski, or the improvisational putsch) he believes in a directors’ theatre. But as both an actor and a director himself he has a quick and sympathetic identification with those on the other side of the footlights.

On his latest visit to England this year he was especially impressed with the individual performances he saw in London theatres. "I felt I was seeing outstanding performances that I’d not really been aware of before — Dinsdale Landen in Bodies, two brilliant performances in Close of Play at the National, Dorothy Tutin...I think it impressed me more because we don’t see that so much here. It’s nobody’s fault. People don’t have the continuity of work, they’ve not the courage to say “this is my part, I’m going to play it to the hilt.” The Australian actor is still a little inhibited about that.

"Similarly, in England there are so many critics that someone is surely going to like you, but in Australia (especially Perth) if you go all out with a performance and the one or two critics both don’t like it then you’re damned. It’s understandable that actors play safe.”

Metcalfe’s own particular trademark is an enormously satisfying professionalism, whether it be in performances in Cuckoo In The Nest or Pinter, or a selection of scabrous panto dames or in countless productions he has directed.

He has recently been appearing as the obsequious Spooner in Stephen Barry’s excellent production of No Man’s Land at the Playhouse and, with James Beatty, giving the kind of performances for which one is inordinately grateful. He is enjoying it too, possibly because it allows him a little of the intellectualising that is denied him elsewhere. That apart, it’s not all a bad thing, he concedes, for the boss to have to stand up on stage for a change and put his money where his mouth is.
At the recent Dixon/Hamer ballyhoo affair — the International Community Education Conference held in the tatty splendour of The Southern Cross Hotel, WEST Community Theatre were one of the participating arts groups. Of the theatre groups who participated they were the only group who took the brief of the Conference seriously.

In addition to performances of their most recent production — a rock musical for schoolkids in the Western region called *Riff Raff*, they held a workshop session on Community Theatre which was attended by delegates to the conference. At the workshop they presented an account of how they devised *Riff Raff* with some thirty year ten students at Buckley Park High School, they then went on to put forward a model for generating scripts and performances with groups within the community using their work on *Riff Raff* as a case study. WEST’s aim was to create a relevant, entertaining rock musical for fifteen year olds in Essendon. The production was to be of, by, from and about those kids, the only decision that the group had taken prior to meeting with the kids was that it was to incorporate rock music.

In the second part of the workshop Jan McDonald and Phil Sumner generalised from the *Riff Raff* scripting/research process and put forward a model for script generation that could be applied to any group in the community. They came up with a seven point plan:

1. Contact the group the script is to be about and approach them with an idea making no secrets about the project. In the case of *Riff Raff* the entire year ten at Buckley Park High School were briefed and of the ninety kids who participated in these three sessions, thirty elected themselves to work on it in detail.

2. Wipe your own slate clean, leave behind your own preconceptions about the group. Even though many stereotypes turn out to be true it is important to discover them afresh and for the people involved to come to them unaided. The development of the group’s own awareness at this stage is even more important than any theatre product that may result, otherwise you run the risk of exploiting the group. At this stage it was important that WEST stated its own values as adults and outsiders.

3. Gather ideas and impressions and jot down lines and situations that come up, and observe the patterns of interaction. Regard your scripting task at this stage as one of steeping yourselves in the atmosphere. Your job is to expose and tease out the issues, from these the eventual themes of the show will come. After each workshop with the group review in detail what has happened outside amongst yourselves.

4. You are now in a position to make decisions about the theme; the frame work or skeleton on which to hang the events; and the style. Jan McDonald stressed that it was important to make these decisions in that order. The content or theme has to be the most important thing and then the framework and style will organise themselves as a result. She stressed that you shouldn't make arbitrary decisions too early on, and that you must resist the panic feeling about what, if anything will eventually emerge.

   In the case of *Riff Raff* the theme was what it is to be fifteen and living in Essendon. The framework became a rock dance that each of the characters were going to and the problems they encountered getting there. The style was to be impressionistic with a documentary feel but would use allegory as well the dance wouldn't be a real dance but a game led by a games master who in some way controlled the kids lives. As the concentration span of the kids is relatively short, a decision was made to work on units and to move quickly between them making a series of short, virtually self-contained, segments.

5. Translate all these decisions onto large sheets of butcher’s paper, work on the floor and on the walls, not off
Jan and Phil were able to keep going the charts. Later this material was classified and added to each section — fragments of interviews, phrases the kids had said, segments were taken from the video and written out and stuck on the wall together with things that the kids had written themselves. Everything you have collected must be made up — it can easily be rejected later. At this stage Jan and Phil were able to keep going back to the kids and ask them to write out scenes along the lines suggested by the charts.

6. Then one writer takes a section at a time and moulds it into a script. As each section is worked upon individually it is brought back to the group as a whole and the writing and ideas clarified and refined. In the case of Riff Raff Jan and Phil were the joint writers and for the main part of this scripting process they worked apart from Ian and Linda who later acted in the final show.

7. Immediately type up what you have written — it then becomes a script. Stick these pages up — for every foolscap page you've got two and a half minutes of your show. By putting up all the typewritten pages you will know at a glance how much of your play is there and what you haven't covered. By the end of this process you will have a draft script, but you will very likely be faced with one major problem — the ending. It is at this point that the writers must draw some conclusions which are their own as a result of their reflection on the group they have been working with, and these conclusions are not always things that the group can or will come up with themselves.

You now have a script which is pretty well there and you can begin working on it with the actors, once rehearsals begin the physical actions and stage directions to flesh it out will follow and have to be added. After outlining this procedure Phil, Linda and Jan discussed the consequences of Riff Raff and working in this way with a particular group in the community.

For these kids Riff Raff broke a cycle of expectations — they did things their teachers never thought they could do, they took on responsibility for the material in the show and in so doing took on responsibility for their own lives. WEST helped them break a cycle of low expectations, but Jan stressed that WEST's moral responsibility to these kids is a serious one, there has to be the possibility for them to do more — WEST must help them start up a Youth Theatre in the region. If WEST doesn't follow up in this way, then they should never have released those expectations in the first place.

Finally WEST said that the community theatre model for group generated scripts was an important and viable way of coming up with Australian material and even more importantly it would be material that the audience it is intended for, can relate to. Moreover such scripts can be adapted to other media — film, video and so open up material to a much wider audience.
On Our Selection

By George Whaley

Folklore is the collective traditional beliefs of a nation or group. Ours takes its subject matter mainly from a rural mythology, which has been solidly and most impressively developed and propagated by a long line of verse and prose storytellers. Even a moderately stirring rendition of The Man From Snowy River will probably have your average computer programmer shaking with patriotism; and urban Australians have traditionally treasured stories of rural primitiveness with a dedication which is matched only by their reluctance to live in these country places where the myths were born.

Around the turn of the century Arthur Hoey Davis, who wrote as "Steele Rudd", created a family, based upon his own, which took up a selection on the Darling Downs in south-eastern Queensland. The Rudd family entered the folklore. The stories were published in The Bulletin and in four "Selection" books. They are remarkable works. Rudd's literary style was selective in the extreme. He painted vivid pictures with a verbal economy and wit which sold vast numbers of the books in the first two decades of this century.

The books are still in print and we have revived the play.

In May, 1912, an Australian newspaper reported: "There is a play running at the King's Theatre, Melbourne, to crowded audiences, which possesses the novelty of being truly native to the soil...it possesses that magic touch of human nature which never appeals in vain to the public...Many Australian plays preceded it, but none have proved such a wonderful draw as this simple exposition of the experiences of men who leave the cities and venture into the neighbourhood of the Nevernever land; and the moral is strong and healthy." I cannot improve upon that columnist's turn of phrase — the appeal of the play, and the books, is perfectly explained.

Early this year when we were planning the 1979 Jane Street season, a script entitled On Our Selection by Steele Rudd, arrived from Currency Press. John Clark was enthusiastic because he saw its popular appeal, and I had fond memories of the books. Then I read the script. It was a weird mix of primitive farce, transparent melodrama and witless "stage business". But there was also the occasional excellent scene; and some of the characters survived the transliteration from novel to play, and emerged unscathed and true to the originals. The strength of characterization, the reality of the events described, and the remarkable conjunction of high farce and tragedy are the most impressive qualities of the Selection books. Enough of those qualities remained in the play to promise something good, and to send me back to a country childhood and the books.

It was obvious that, if we were to produce this most successful of all Australian plays, which ran somewhere in Australia and New Zealand from 1912 to 1929, and in London in 1920, and which gave rise to four films directed by Ken G. Hall, and starring Bert Bailey, some solid rewriting would be necessary. Theatrical expectations and styles change in half a century. Now, there is a common failing among theatre directors, which is the lurking belief that they may be able to write at least as well as those playwrights whose work they have been savouring for years. One of the reasons for this error of judgement is that directors spend a lot of (unpaid) time assessing new scrips and offering unwelcome opinions to the writers. This often induces, in the director, a false sense of dramaturgical adequacy. I succumbed to that, and rewrote the play without the services of a real writer. But then I did have the books as well as the rough old script, and I have a background, and a father and his cronies, among which the vivid bush story still counts for something. I used that experience, and had remarkable pleasure as the audience related to it. Steele Rudd would approve, I think.

We opened at Jane Street on June...
20. We rediscovered "family entertainment" on the same night. The audience age range during the season was remarkable. Small children and ancients responded in a way to gladden the heart of the hardest entrepreneur. But our sort of subsidised Australian theatre is not really conditioned to the notion of success, possibly because it is a rare commodity. On Our Selection is Australian folklore, the characters would be "Australian commedia" if there was such a thing, and it is a success. The Nimrod management recognised that, and we play there from November to January. The Trust was disinterested, the Arts Council said it would not succeed in the country because it was too like country folk and would offend (which attitude I find offensive and embarrassingly suburban) and the Adelaide Festival people loved it but could not afford to take twelve actors to Adelaide.

It turned out that the "Currency" script was one written from memory by the Melbourne actor and director J. Beresford Fowler. We then found Bert Bailey's daughter, Mrs Doreen McLean, who had her father's original production script. Eric Davis, Steele Rudd's son, is sure that his father attempted a play called On Our Selection in 1911 and sent it to J.C. Williamson, who showed no interest. Bert Bailey then bought it, adapted it extensively, and made it his own. Mrs McLean asserts that Bailey started with the books and not a Steele Rudd script. We do not know who first had the idea of a stage version, but Bert Bailey certainly made a significant stage and film career out of the role of Dad.

I had a letter from America the other day from Arthur Bertram who saw a crit of the Jane Street production in American Variety. Arthur played Joe in the original production in Sydney in May 1912. That was seven years before the Russian revolution. The play may last as long again.

When casting a play there is only one principle: "When in doubt get a good actor." If you cast well, with intelligent, vivid and flexible actors who enjoy doing it, then at least half of the director's work is done. We have such a cast. The rest was easy. The actors made an immediate imaginative connection with the characters. It would have been easy to caricature, to confuse rustic innocence with congenital idiocy, to demean the characters and to turn folklore into parody. It would also have been easy to go for the nostalgia. Either mistake would demolish the play. The actors are too good for that. They recognised qualities which are rarely encountered in the still rootless and spasmodic Australian version of their profession.

We all hope, and I must include Rudd and Bailey and Bertram in that, that we manage the transfer to Nimrod and that many thousands more Australians rediscover something about their roots. I think theatre should also be about that.
CHRISTMAS
SHOWS

Cinderella —
And Everyone
Is Going To
Have A Ball!
By Pamela
Rusk

The Melbourne Theatre Company is really letting down its collective hair, stepping off its customary path and giving us a real full-scale pantomime of the kind we haven't seen here for a long, long time. On December 19th the curtain will go up at the Athenaeum Theatre on Cinderella which has been written by English director Frank Hauser with music by Frank Hauser and of course, directed by Frank Hauser.

The MTC's brochure calls it a "pantomime for adults" which is a pity because according to Frank, and he should know, children too will love it. In England it played to hundreds of children as well as adults, and as if to emphasise this, he adds quite firmly, "It is not blue at all because I hate that sort of thing in a pantomime and it would spoil the whole other world feel of it. So as Christmas entertainment, here it is for all the family." In fact, the MTC hopes to put in some extra matinees for the children.

Frank Hauser, one of England's most versatile and gifted stage directors first came to Australia in 1978 to produce The Beaux' Stratagem and Electra for the MTC. On this visit, he had already given us The Alchemist, and in February will direct Hobson's Choice for the company. He has a special affection for pantomimes. Cinderella is the third one, following on Aladdin and The Sleeping Beauty. "I've just finished the book and music for a fourth one, Jack And The Beanstalk."

It was however, Cinderella that captured the theatrical headlines. "I first put it on in Oxford when I was director of the Oxford Playhouse. That was late in 1973 early '74 and at the end of '74 it moved to the West End to the Prince Edward theatre with Twiggy as Cinders. "What," I asked him, "made you even think of Twiggy in this context?" "I didn't! That was Ford Delfont. He has an instinct for this kind of thing. She was marvellous. I never believed in star quality but she had it. She had never appeared on stage before but she worked hard and never faked at all. She gave a very truthful performance. One critic said, 'She can't really sing; she can't really dance and she doesn't really act either but she doesn't put a foot wrong.' She was really magical."

Hauser's Cinderella sticks very closely to the fairy tale with just a secret twist near the end. All the usual characters are in it including Buttons, the Fairy Godmother, the Ugly Sisters, the Prince, and so on. There are two acts and lots of scenes, about fourteen musical numbers and two ponies!

Frank has assembled a superb case for this show. The only unknown quantity is Cinderalla herself. "I was looking for a girl about eighteen and it is difficult to find one that age who has had a lot of experience. I auditioned a lot of girls and chose Jane Scali who is new to the MTC, but has appeared on Young Talent Time, sings and dances well and is pretty. The Ugly Sisters make a marvellously funny pair. Frederick Parslow is the mean and nasty one and Noel Ferrier is the girlish and coy one. We have one scene that is a Western which is very funny. It almost stopped the show in the London production. All the costumes for this are typically Western too, in this scene. Fred Parslow is Calamity Sal and wears a very Naughty Nineties kind of costume with a feather boa and

Noel as Ugly Sister

Noel is a kind of Marlene Dietrich type as she was when she sang "The boys in the back room". "In this pantomime there are very few topicalities because I like the feeling that it all happened in Never Never Land long ago. The clothes are nearly all 18th century but the Western scene is an exception. In Oxford, I had two Australians in the cast and three in London. The third was Bob Hornery whom I'm sure you've seen many times. Anyway because of this, an Australian note crept in at a time when I had no idea I'd be doing it in Australia, but I won't tell you what it is; except to say it brought the house down."

The music for the pantomime is fairly simple and there are some very tuneful songs. Jonathan Hardy is Gumbil, the villain who sings a number, "I'm the King of the Castle". He's a very villainous villain. Noel Ferrier sings a song specially written for the Melbourne production called, "Men! Men! Men!" and in the Western scene, Fred (Calamity Sal) Parslow sings "Calamity Sal". David Ravenswood is the Baron, a slightly
which is all right occasionally but not when it goes on all the time. Hauser's Cinderella is not like that, but it does involve the audience. He tells me that "the essence of good pantomime is getting the whole audience into the children's frame of mind so there is a tremendous involvement through the music and the whole magical feeling of it. It all looks very exciting and lovely and you must believe that anything can happen, but when it does it must have a kind of logic and there must be an element of suspense. The production can never be static and the audience mustn't be allowed to sit there passively. So the idea is that story must move and the audience must be actively involved and concerned about what's going to happen."

"The production is quite elaborate. In London we had a full orchestra which is very expensive. We're going to manage with a band of four musicians. Robert Gavin is the Musical Director and Colette Mann who choreographed the dance at the end of Beaux' Stratagem is doing the choreography and producing the dance numbers. You'll be surprised at how well the cast cope with both the singing and dancing. The costumes are quite elaborate and apart from in the Western scene, many of the characters wear green and purple wigs. We only use the full depth of the stage during the Ballroom Scene and it manages to look enormous. Expensive? Well, I suppose so. In England, there are hardly any full-scale pantomimes any more because of the cost. You need singers, dancers and an orchestra so there's usually only one big one a year."

Frank says that conditions of work with the MTC are better than those in England in many respects. "The reason for this is because the MTC has the whole operation under one roof. Costumes are made, scenery is built and rehearsals all go in the company's workshop in South Melbourne so you don't find that just when you want a couple of cast members to run through a number, they're off in another part of the city having a fitting. You don't lose people here and there's no time lost. There are not many companies with those facilities. Altogether, I'm very impressed with the standard here. I had no more problems with the very difficult lines of The Alchemist than in the UK. It was difficult here and it was difficult there and I think the company did very well. As far as Cinderella in concerned, I'm delighted at this stage. The cast is really very talented and Parslow and Ferrier are really going to have audiences roaring with laughter."

Awarded a CBE for his work in the theatre in 1968, Frank, who was born in 1922, has been a freelance director and producer since 1973 and expects to remain one. "It has an element of uncertainty but it is less wearing and less strain. Before I came out here this year, I toured Frederick Lonsdale's Canaries Sometimes Sing with Nyree Dawn Porter. We had trouble getting a canary that would be sure to sing. In the first act, it isn't supposed to sing at all. Well, we got one that would sing but it started in the first act and wouldn't stop. We managed in the end but it was quite a problem."

So many people in Australia go away for Christmas, that companies have tended to ignore the Christmas spirit and our theatres haven't really given us a great deal of gaiety at this time. As Cinderella will run throughout the school holidays until February 2nd, and most people only go away for two or three weeks, the MTC should be able to count on full houses a good part of the time even with extra matinees. Subscription bookings sell the seats but do not necessarily fill them. This time with a rollicking romp like Cinderella we should all be able to enjoy a very happy Christmas time.
The Virgin — A Nativity Play
By Pamela Ruskin

Murray Copeland is an academic turned theatre man and only someone with his background of scholarship could have created this play. The Virgin which the Hoopla Theatre will have as its Christmas attraction. It had to be written by someone who had studied medieval English and the old miracle plays so perhaps a little information about the shaven-headed Scot is relevant.

He doesn’t sound like a Scot because “my parents tried to bring me up without an accent, ironing it out along the way.” So there’s just a soft burr that sounds more English than anything else. He studied English literature at Oxford but even then was interested in theatre and, before he graduated, appeared in plays there. He became a teacher of English Literature and in 1960 went out to the Sudan and spent four years teaching at the University of Khartoum which he loved.

Then he went to the University of Toronto, lecturing in English Literature until 1967. “I was on my way to Cairo when the Six Day War broke out so I went to Ghana for a year instead. Did I like it? No! The humidity was terrible and after a year I’d had enough. In 1969 I came out to Australia. I was moving slowly from the academic life to the theatre. I taught drama under Wal Cherry at Flinders University in Adelaide and I began to do quite a lot of acting with companies around Adelaide.”

As well as acting, Murray was writing and directing. “I directed a medieval play while I was at Flinders called Gargoyles. It wasn’t religious but a bawdy, wildly humorous collection of sketches put together into a revue. I designed it too. It had never been translated before so that was rather a challenge. It was put on during the 1974 Adelaide Festival and was very successful and then the MTC gave it a brief run as one of their Tributary productions last year.”

At this point, Murray decided that he had had enough of the academic life. He resigned from Flinders and in 1975 went back to England and then to Europe to think about his future. He wanted to cross the bridge from the safe, financially secure life of the university to the precarious life of the theatre. “I decided to make the change. I came back to Australia the following year, not to Adelaide where I was thought of as an academic, but to Melbourne. It took two years for me to get anywhere at all and I’ve had to reduce my standard of living drastically.”

He was the lead in a one act play, a mime role, called The Sex Doll put on by the Victoria State Opera as part of a season of contemporary music Theatre. Then he was commissioned by them to write a short play called The Apology of Bony Anderson in a similar series, and he did the new translation for the Vic Opera’s production of Orpheus in the Underworld. Next came an MTC play-reading of a play of his called The Shamans.

“My first real breakthrough was a play of mine called Dance For Daddy produced by Hoopla Upstairs at the Playbox. I’ve been working more or less continuously since then for Hoopla, particularly directing plays aimed at school leaving audiences, Antigone and Medea among them.

The advantages of having a director playwright with a solid intellectual background in literature are obvious and Carillo Gantner, and Graeme Blundell of Hoopla were not slow to realise this.

And so to The Virgin which Murray says is “my first major work. I put the script together from a whole lot of medieval miracle plays all connected with the Nativity. Originally these miracle plays were little one act plays and I have chosen some and woven them together into a continuous narrative play in two acts. The Virgin is focussed on the figure of Mary and the play begins with her betrothal to Joseph and ends with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. There are a lot of medieval legends all attached to the Virgin Mary, woven into these little medieval plays and I’ve used some of these. Some are quite strange and not known at all today. These plays elaborated the characters quite a lot. Some saw Joseph as an old bachelor carpenter who never wanted to get married at all. He was very suspicious when Mary got pregnant and it wasn’t until the Angel came down and
explained the miracle to him that he accepted her story. That's the Joseph of my play."

There is quite a lot of humour in these plays and Murray has tried to bring this out. He says that he has tried to keep to the medieval verse texts but "I have updated words and phrases that simply wouldn't be understood by modern audiences. I hope I've done it discreetly and kept the medieval flavour. There is, quite deliberately, a clash of styles. Medieval text, 18th century baroque music by contemporaries of Handel and 19th century costumes, some with a slightly pioneer Australian feeling about them. The costumes and sets are designed by Steve Nolan who has worked with the MTC and in September designed the Victoria State Opera's Inner Voices.

The reason that Murray Copeland has this mixture of styles in The Virgin is based on the miracle plays themselves. He says that these plays were very sophisticated and witty and their writers, for instance, used a lot of deliberate anachronisms. While the shepherds, for example, are travelling to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, they will swear by Christ's cross and when Mary and Joseph are betrothed, they are betrothed by a bishop. This was deliberate. They knew what they were doing. "They were trying to develop the double time happening simultaneously — the time of the nativity and their own time. These plays are attractive to people today because they came from an age of secure religious faith and people today feel very nostalgic for that. The 18th century baroque music and the 19th century costumes both reflect a similar period of secure religious faith."

The Virgin is playing in the main auditorium of the Playbox and will run until December 15th. Carillo will play both Joseph and the sheep thief, Mak, and Margaret Cameron will play Mary and Mak's wife, Jill, a deliberate doubling of parts. Harold Baigent will play the First Shepherd and Peter Ford, Gabriel. The other parts are minor. There's a cast of nine. Churches and church organisations will be circularised and Hoopla hopes that The Virgin will attract religious members of the community as well as their regulars, who may or may not be religious.
Julie Holmshaw
Phillip Corben  Colin Gibson
in
WINDSURFERS DO IT STANDING UP

Theo Stephens is SUPERMAN

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As an enormous number of Australian Royalty the makers of 'RA,' (Queens) have lately asked me to pass on a little Christmas message to all their millions of readers of those Theatre Companies whose columns are lined with the names of the names that are on the cover.

To Box 112, N.H.L. 3011
As a matter of fact that is how my Keith was introduced to me via a Roses, Christmas message that ran in his mind's eye, I wasn't convinced whether it was a reference to a former or a current affair, but my Keith was so happy to have another contact, he started corresponding with me. Keith, a married man, with a large family of sixes. Our engagement was almost instantaneous, and it was a surprise to Keith when he was introduced to my family. Mrs. Claus, a Roman Catholic, was not impressed when she met Keith. However, he was able to win her over with his charm and good looks. The Pope, (once North) blessed him himself, to sanctify our union. Of course, he was satisfied with the family of a couple of sixes but was not as happy.

On behalf of my family, I extend our deepest Christmas greetings to my theatre friends, especially those who have supported us throughout the year. I hope my departure from the world of theatre is not too much of a loss. I must admit that I have been involved in a lot of self-deprecating jokes and trying to get into theatre. Now I must say that I have absolutely no Theatrical fantasies.
NIDA was twenty one years old this year, having been established in 1958 under the auspices of the University of New South Wales and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. The National Institute of Dramatic Art is still the best and most respected training establishment for theatre practitioners, but its future as that is looking dicey, and without substantial help soon, decidedly grim.

The ex-army huts on the NSW University campus which constitute NIDA are reminiscent of an impoverished primary school. Their rehearsal rooms consist of five classrooms of which the largest is 30 by 35 feet and nine feet high. This year they have been training a total of sixty one actors; this means a movement class of fifteen first year students has space for a couple of jumps either way, and for fencing they have to beg time at the University gym. Classes have to be taken in half groups because of the cramped conditions, which uneconomically doubles the amount of teaching necessary.

The two workshops are similarly tiny — indeed downright dangerous in terms of fire-hazard — and the design rooms have scarcely enough space for the two to three students to draw, let alone construct models. En route one is also shown the resident designer's office, a luxurious five by four feet, and the hole in the floor that students drilled so the rain water will drain away on wet days.

John Clark, director of NIDA, has a comparatively acceptable office in the pleasant administration building, the "Whitehouse", but talks of a growing change of attitude among his staff.

"Up to a few years ago everyone was aware of the discomfort, but tended to put up with it; they're pretty devoted, but if you looked around the country there were no other schools and most theatres were no better off than us. But since that time things have changed radically. Now you look around and practically every theatre (which are all taking our graduates) is infinitely better off. We're getting the big arts centres which are not lavishly, but reasonably equipped, and we can't teach people the skills they're going to need to work in these places. There are now other schools, too, for instance at WAIT, DDIAE and the Victorian College of the Arts; we know very little about their standards at the moment, but they're better housed than this and now it's beginning to get very irritating."

Their lack of facilities will doubtless start to affect the intake of students at NIDA. The Centre of Performing Arts at Adelaide has started a course in stage management which is run by Bill Guest — who taught at NIDA until 1975 — and which took its first students this year. The result has been that there are no applicants this year to study technical theatre at NIDA from Adelaide.

If people are being well trained in Adelaide, then theoretically it doesn't matter, as Head of the Acting Course, George Whaley points out, "but what we are worried about is our facilities dropping so far behind that the ones who do come here will not be adequately trained — and not only technically, but in acting. You can't talk about training actors without taking into account their use of a certain sort of space. We don't have spaces adequate to proper voice and movement training. We always make do, and we turn out excellent graduates, but it's having to make do."

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly obvious that any theatre of less than 1,000 seats is quite uneconomical for a major subsidised company. With present economic pressures there is quite likely to be a clamp down on funding for many small theatres, and larger theatres and cultural centres are springing up in every major centre right through to Alice Springs. Actors who have not been trained to work in large spaces may find the going very tough.

Whaley and Clark cite the original NIDA production of Don's Party, the actors in which found the Parade a big step from Jane Street; and third year students who tour to Newcastle, finding the 260 seat theatre there enormous.

And what is NIDA's position with its theatres? Since the demise of its offspring the Old Tote, NIDA has released the old Totaliser building theatre for the use of University students, in return for the Parade Theatre on the Western campus. But...
they cannot use the Parade as yet, not until some money can be found, and from John Clark's description its present state is incredible for a theatre so recently inhabited by a major company.

"All the equipment, lighting and sound, is old and worn out; the sound system is a valve one and the lighting patch panel is downright dangerous. The male plugs in it have 240 volts running through them, so you can't give students permission to use them. The flying system has no safety locks, nor counter balance nor brake checks; it would only take one student to untie the wrong line and you could drop a dozen lights on someone's head. The Tote had its own trained technicians, but that's not good in a teaching theatre. We've requested funds from a number of sources to make the place safe and usable. We could move in now, but once you get there and start using it people won't take any notice, so I refuse to use it until it is safe."

The tiny Jane Street Theatre has been leased by the University of NSW for NIDA since 1966 and was set up in equipment by a £6,000 Gulbenkian Foundation grant. Now the theatre has been sold; the University declined to buy it for NIDA and the Federal Government wouldn't support the State Government who were agreeable to do so. They have some hope of hanging onto Jane Street for teaching purposes and the yearly professional season, if only because everything in the theatre seats, raking, stage lighting — all belongs to NIDA, but it doesn't help their present feeling of precariousness.

But NIDA needs more than a decent theatre. Ironically its present workshop facilities are too small to build adequate scenery for the Parade. Vice Chancellor Myer of NSW has said that he hopes to see NIDA housed completely on the Western campus around the Parade, but so far no action has been taken. What scares the staff is the thought of being spread-cagged across campus or even city, with the theatre miles from workshops and administration somewhere else. Not only would it make life impossible with the tight timetable they keep, but such dispersion was a major factor in the death of the Tote.

NIDA's relationship with the authorities who will determine their future is one with very little power. The Institution lives in the University of NSW rent free and receives hidden subsidies in such forms as cleaning and mail services, but the University has no responsibility for it. And of course universities themselves are undergoing serious cutbacks at present.

Like many subsidised theatre companies NIDA is a company limited by guarantee; as such it used to be funded by the Australia Council, but now receives a direct grant from the Tertiary Education Commission (who most unusually and perceptively took over their funding without making any stipulation as to standard or type of training). The irony is that their facilities couldn't be much improved while under the Australia Council, which does not give capital grants, and yet the move to the Education Commission coincided with cutbacks in capital funding there. In 1972 there had been the possibility of some capital funding through the Australia Council, which was unfortunately then in its "overseas expert" phase. NIDA did bring in Norman Eyre from England, who reported to the Council that NIDA's accommodation was a disgrace, but by the time the report got through it was 1974 and the Whitlam generosity had been constrained.

NIDA has been too successful for its own best interests. A consistent attitude to pleas for help has been "If you're doing so well, why change?" while massive financial failure such as the Australian Opera's secures aid from the Government and private sources alike. It is too easy for the authorities to take advantage of an excellent staff who are committed to the work they are doing.

But John Clark believes that morale is dropping and a long-term pessimism setting in. "We would like to see an excellent future with the Parade and keeping our associations with the University of NSW, but we unwillingly now have to consider other alternatives. Macquarie University has for some time wanted us to move out there and be close to the Film and Television School; we refused before because it is so far out, and away from theatrical activity, but we may have to think again.

"Another ironic situation is that UNSW teaches music and drama, but won't give us the facilities; Sydney University has neither, but has an empty building — the Seymour Centre. It's a beautiful complex and it has been suggested that NIDA might be interested, and we think we probably are. Whatever happens, though, NIDA has to change and very soon. Any school that is going to keep in touch with the profession is going to have to change and alter with it."

Perhaps the ultimate test of a drama school is what its graduates take back with them into the business. The list of now famous actors who started their careers at NIDA is endless and increasing all the time. To pick a very few it includes from the very first year names like Peter Couchman, Robyn Nevin, through to Helen Morse, Judy Morris, Kate Fitzpatrick, Angela Punch, Mel Gibson and Judy Davis. James Sharman is listed in the Technical Production course of 1965, and later Rex Cramphorn and Terry O'Connell. John Bell's directing career had its beginnings while teaching at NIDA, and of course Clark and administrator Elizabeth Butcher have between them run the 1979 Sydney Theatre Company season.

It would, though, be most shortsighted to believe that NIDA can continue its essential contribution to the theatre without some consideration from the authorities of how much has to be put in, in order that the performing arts profession can go on taking out.
THE AUSTRALIAN PLAYWRIGHT

What distinguished him or her, inquires the keen mind, from Aristophanes, Strindberg, Feydeau, or Wedekind?

Can it be gum leaves in the hair, the Kodak-like jaw, the paranoia, the despair, a country the world's floor?

Can it be lack of technique, or experience, a tradition, from the First Fleet, or El Dorado's stench?

Can it be we are innocent, and expect too much? Do we clamour for a Rembrandt before we've felt death's lust?

Do we imitate day by day, all imagery hell? Only exploration will say, and only time will tell.

Burke started from the littorals in, we're still ersatz Voss. Inside creativity sings, find it, or we are lost.

SONG OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

I have the numbers on the Board, Sir Sylvester Zinc is my mate, what he says goes, just like the Law: that's how the theatre operates.

I rule artistic policy, the director's an addlepate who confuses art with quality: that's how the theatre operates.

Occasionally I meet the staff, in the corridor when they're late, advise with a loan or overdraft; that's how the theatre operates.

Actors I've seen come and go, like livestock through a set of gates, we always get enough per show: that's how the theatre operates.

As long as the houses are full, we top up last year's aggregate. I will cop sweet the critic's bull: that's how the theatre operates.

I have a knighthood in my sights, to show the poofers how I rate, people crave their theatre trite: that's how the theatre operates.

The lowest denominator, the smart way to manipulate, give them shit, they're sure to applaud: that's how the theatre operates.

Dress it up and work them to death, wear dinner suits, ingratiate, the foyer's full of three-car wets; that's how the theatre operates.

SONG OF AN ACTRESS

Bury me with Thersites' hose, the distaff of a witch. I've always been unchaste of heart, a little on the nose, too fond of vile quips for Cressida's part.

Bury me in a widow's weeds, or a charlatan's hat. I've relished both Pistol and Nym, from Liverpool to Leeds I've played bawds and hags to brillianinted kings.

Bury me in a midwife's caul, the burlap of a shrew. I boast a costermonger's voice, a bum broad as Nepal, eat oysters, beetroot, and anaemic boys.

Bury me as Juliet's nurse, in a sybarite's grave, I want no Friar to lament across my one-wreath hearse: I never once gave a false performance.

Bury me in a keg of beer, beneath some theatre's planks. Summon up Caliban and Wart, a whole company to cheer me with lecherous pranks: one last night of sport.
NOTE TO DAVID WILLIAMSON

David, while you were a Professor at Aarhus, Jutland, Denmark, did Australia's surrealist egghead mafia knife you in the back? No such plot, though they'd hardly have the gall face to face: not only are you our most successful, you're the tallest, mate. Treacherous views are explicable, however, given *Woyzeck* and *Ubu*, and you did once say absurdism is something worked off in youth. If this be fact, some of us are the kindergarteners of the century, and will have to wait epochs, as in *Godot*, for adult philosophy. Yet, I wouldn't feel too embattled, they bard from ivory parapets, and the press is hardly cruel — every second play is your best yet. I haven't seen or studied your latest work, *Travelling North*, though Len Radic claims, and you imply, a more experimental course: it's composed it seems of thirty-seven sententious scenes, one so uncharacteristically brief, it's almost gone before it's been. The unShakespearean techniques, plus the fresh fables you invent, could force many a loyal Melbourne back-stabber Sydneywards, to repent. Still, David, consider those whose plays have often been fragmented, who do not see the universe as it purports to be represented: John Romeril, for example, whose excellent 1971 *Mrs Thally F* lies rotting in a drawer, unheralded by any printing press, or even Jake, prone to precious pauses and carniloquent verbiage: is there only one way to irrigate our absurdly arid stage?

OPENING NIGHT

I loved the sets, the lights, design, thought the performances just great, that the play expanded the mind, up until twenty-five past eight. I go to a play full of hope, to the clubs for definite kicks, to culture I'm socially roped, now that I'm revolting rich. I always doze through the last act, thump my hands at the curtain call, talk of the show mirroring fact, how'd the cast remember it all? My wife invariably dresses well, angles her dentures at the press.

I prop by the bar, what the hell if I missed a few nuances?

Now the Tivoli I enjoyed, the acrobats, blue jokes, and smells; I am just a working-class boy pretending to be someone else.

II

I loved the sets, the lights, the design, thought the acting near RSC, could not detect one whine of strine, we're no longer a colony. The leading man could elocute, his vowels were orotund Oxford, though I believe he hails from Tumut, and has never ventured abroad.

The gestures were fine, never coarse, the dresses well-cut, opulent, though one actress strode like a horse, she'd hardly studied deportment.

The cast was all-Australian, the director clearly British, hence the elegance and clan, the total lack of boorishness.

I sent, backstage, the best champagne, invited them round to my house; out of costume, they all seemed strange, and talked in adenoidal howls.

LETTER TO BRECHT

Dear Bert, I trust this letter discovers you only partly decomposed, that your black forest is really cypress green, that from where you came you'll one day, an unreconstructed Azdak, return. As you may have gathered things are not too stable on this volatile globe: wars continue galore, pure power by the hour adopts another meek mask, machines thrash out lies, it grows more difficult for the plain bloke to think. The masses, in fear, in awe, summon of Turgenev's strong grey bureaucrats; those who have no choice watch strategies and tricks delineated in *The Prince*. Still, they do your plays, as classics of the culinary arts, or monastic bleats, and sugar your bitter songs. Bert, you should've been a politician, or pure poet, the theatre has been your curse. The world's exactly, comically, tragically, the same, and it's not your fault that the bastards and bitches will not listen. In the not too distant future another Hitler or harder Stalin could dance upon your grave, your texts already irrelevant.
Fortune's forte may be comedy. They might consider doing a large-scale comic piece next year, as an opener.

If Fortune is planning on expanding and filling a gap in the ACT, then I hope they will be more bold in their programming. They ought to bring in directorial talent as well, for direction is their weakness. Even this production, which worked, could have been directed with more concentration on the richness of language and the way characters looked and talked to each other. Some of the visual language puns were lost. With so many good young directors short of work around the country now, I'm sure they wouldn't have any trouble bringing someone in.

I think next year will be a good one for Fortune.

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If any one component can be singled out as the major element of the show it is perhaps Terence Clarke’s music; composition and direction. The quintet played with panache his brilliant pastiche score which ranges through Coward, Brecht, Puccini, Sondheim, Anon et al. The musical jokes were as clever as the verbal jokes and at the same time produced song after song of hummable tune and tappable rhythm. The other great quality of the songs was that they were written specifically for the range and limitations of each actor — and in the main the cast are actors with varied singing ability, rather than vice versa.

Drew Forsythe as the twins is of course at the crux of the matter. The identical twins, separated from birth end up in Verona together, unbeknownst to each other, both to get married. Naturally their paths cross and confusion ensues. Forsythe’s performance as Tonino, the bright brother, was based on Derek Guyler (Potter in Please Sir) — as was John Bell’s in The Sea — and as such took, on each entrance, the applause meant for the exiting character as his own. As Zanetto the bumpkin — Australian twin he was much more endearing and his song “Going Back To Jindyworoback” became the theme of the show. In view of this it is unfortunate that Enright has not altered the ending where, as in the original, Zanetto is poisoned and Tonino triumphs over his enemies and thwarted love. Were it not for the somewhat anti-climactic finish there would certainly have been a standing ovation on first night, but the double death (the villain also dies) is somewhat inappropriate and needs rethinking.

Jennifer McGregor as Beatrice was the other star of the evening. As well as her beautiful singing voice she is now developing into a consummate comic actress; her imitation Tosca song was the highlight of the production as she raged and posed and tore her bouquet to pieces.

Bell has type-cast but drawn superlative performances from his actors. Annie Byron was an ideal contrast to McGregor; and Tony Sheldon played the (foiled) romantic hero in matinee idol Coward, fashion (“I’m no coward”, “You’re Noel Coward — you don’t look like him”), but was another casualty of the imperfect ending, being left partnerless. Jon Ewing couldn’t have been slicker as the (hiss the) villain, and Tony Taylor brought some contrasting APG melodrama to the piece. John McKernan, padded outrageously, was a bashful Arlechino and the most absurd chorus in a marvellously insane Gypsy number with McGregor and Sheldon.

Stephen Curtis, only a year out of NIDA, impressed greatly with his sets and commedia musical costumes. A rake built from the Drama Theatre stage right into the audience achieved a new intimacy, with audiences seated on three sides and actors using the auditorium, galleries and “back stage” for different areas and to watch scenes in which they were not taking part. It solved the posture slit problem at a stroke.

Grahame Murray’s complex but unobtrusive lighting plot worked in strongly with the pastiche style, transforming the atmosphere from seamy backstreet to dream to fiesta, with subtlety and ease.

It’s a show which, despite finale reservations, should attract critical superlatives. It once more proves Nimrod to be top company and will be a hard act for Richard Wherrett’s Sydney Theatre Company to follow.
The thread linking the three short pieces downstairs at Nimrod is that they are all one-woman plays. The interest (also rather slender) lies in the different handling of this difficult form by the authors concerned. Thus Buzo’s American lady reporter talks mostly to the telephone — which always sounds a bit contrived. Margot Hilton’s somewhat rancid unmarried Melbourne mother addresses four dummies, the audience, the telephone and herself; the result is fidgety, for all the slowness of the play. Only Beckett, in Not I, goes the whole hog and has his unidentified Mouth speak into and out of the void. And only his words — self-parodying as they often seem — really grip the attention, not least by their visual expression through the actress’s lips and teeth, which are pretty well all one sees, lit in a pencil spot.

As an evening it declined rapidly after the Beckett. Vicki Madison Clocks Out is a terribly thin joke, strung largely on grotesque newspaper headlines and made pseudo-significant by being set two days after the German invasion of Poland in 1939; even if the audience realises this it can only say “so what?”. Potiphar’s Wife, presumably meant to be the main event of the evening, might have been better if it had been cut by at least one-third and given some kind of structure and drive; as it was it was ramblingly self-indulgent and only momentarily lightened at the outset by some good turns of phrase such as one might get in a letter from a talented friend. But a character who can say so neatly “applied youth gazes back at me” as she makes up in front of a mirror should have a richer vocabulary of pejoratives than poor, tired-out “fucking”. And after all the complaining the final capitulation to “the Pharaoh of fucking Fitzroy” (one of the first and best uses of that participle) is likewise pretty wretched. Miss Hilton mustn’t stop writing, but this is a miserable play in more than one sense.

Understandably enough, only the Beckett seemed to command the actress’s confidence. Helen Morse unleashed her flow of semi-consciousness with great momentum, and seemed exactly aware of what her Mouth terms “all those contortions without which no speech is possible”. But her Vicki Madison was much less certain and lacked the virtuoso over-lifesize brashness that might just (but only just) have put the second play over.

And Julie McGregor in the third seemed as uneasy as her role, only clearly showing who she was talking to once she was addressing the telephone and the unseen Pharaoh. A little of Dame Edna’s involvement with the audience might have helped: we were not listening to a woman but watching a whinge.

The one way, perhaps, for Ken Horler as director to rescue things would have been to get one actress to do all three parts as an admittedly rather gruesome tour-de-force, omitting the tedious quasi-symbolic figure who looms up silently at odd moments in Not I. At the same time there could have been a more elegant and self-evident ingenuity about the set, which needs to solve three quite different problems, but rather fumbled them. Though the dummies were nice, and the slides depicting them nicer, it too fell half-heartedly between a number of stools. The feeling I was left with was that nobody had enough faith in the whole programme to give the evening either momentum or shape.
Worthless script

TREATS

By Lucy Wagner

Treats by Christopher Hampton, Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Civic Playhouse, Newcastle, NSW.
Opened 26 October, 1979

Director. Peter Barclay. Designer. Anthony Babicci.
Ann, Deborah May: Patrick, Robert Alexander, Dave.
Alan Becher

(In Professional)

In his review of the original Royal Court production of Treats, Sandy Wilson (an otherwise...great fan of Christopher Hampton) queried the apparent joke that writer and director were playing on the audience. The Hunter Valley Theatre Company's production leaves one similarly bewildered. What appeal did director, Peter Barclay see in this benighted three-hander 'comedy', and why did the company's Board (in loco artistic director) choose it to close their 1979 season?

The eternal triangle strikes again, but this time on a dismally hollow and tuneless note. Patrick has moved in with Ann while Dave is away on a business trip. Dave is a loud and grating misogynist journalist; Patrick is a quiet and humble bureaucrat; Ann is an interpreter and takes an equally passive role in the drama. These generalised descriptions are as the characters are written, broadly and without foundation.

Robert Alexander and Alan Becher work hard, necessarily overplaying to extract any humour from the lines; Deborah May is less than convincing. The plot, though circular, is badly constructed to the extent of several scenes where a character does nothing but listen to a record or watch television. It is also predictable to the point of boredom within the first few minutes. The most entertaining moments are listening to the hits of the sixties which link the scenes.

Anthony Babicci has designed an attractive set, if over-complex for the tiny Playhouse, and visually the whole production is as tidy and precise as Patrick's housekeeping. How sad that so much effort by so many should have been wasted on such a worthless script.

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Fails effortlessly

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

By Richard Fotheringham

The Man Who Came To Dinner by Moss Hart and George S Kaufman, Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane. Opened 31 October 1979. Director, John Krummel; Designer, Peter Cooke; Lighting, Derek Campbell; Stage Manager, Ellen Kennedy. Mrs Stanley, Betty Lucas; Miss Preen, Berys Marsh; Richard Stanley, Geoff Cartwright; June Stanley, Rosemary Ricketts; John Reginald Cameron, Sarah, Gwen Wheeler; Mr Stanley, Reg Gillam; Maggie Cutler, Judy Nunn; Dr Bradly, Ken Kennett; Sheridan Whiteside, Frank Thring; Harriet Stanley, Betty Ross; Bert Jefferson, Kit Taylor; Lorraine Sheldon, Kerry McGuire, Michael, Duncan Wass; Beverley Carlton, Alan Edwards, Westcott; Lloyd Nickson, Burton, Douglas Hedge.

The Man Who Came To Dinner is one of those plays which effortlessly fails to survive its age. That it does appear occasionally is testament only to a fatal weakness peculiar to actors and directors who like to amuse themselves by impersonating the great media personalities of the recent past.

You have to be over 55 or heavily into the trivia of history to be similarly amused by the bitchy gossiping about the beautiful people of the 1930s which comprises much of George S Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1939 potboiler; you have to be a victim of arrested development not to tire of its anal fixations ("poopface", "Miss Bedpan"), and you have to swallow uncritically a plot so silly that even the authors abandon it at the end.

As to the star of the piece, Frank Thring, I'm told he is a very fine actor and I look forward to seeing him perform. Here the premonse one liners of this character ("Mr Whiteside, I can only be in one place at one time" — "That is a fact, nurse, for which this community is profoundly grateful") are indistinguishable from those of the persona he has offered to our eager press: "I sent the QTC a list of the play's I'd like to perform in, unfortunately they chose this one").

I could go on but brittle witticisms are best in small doses, and last night I had a castor oil bottle full.
Set pieces strongest

THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

By Jeremy Ridgman

They Shoot Horses, Don't They? by Ray Herman. La Boite Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened 24 October 1979.

Director: David Bell; Designer: Mike Bridges; costumes: Mike Bridges and Jennifer Carseldine.

Rocky: Errol O'Neill; Gloria Beatty: Sally McKenzie; Robert Syverton: Chris Burns. (Amateur)

"There's no prize for fancy feet. what counts is staying on them." So, Rocky Gravo (Rocky G. your friendly MC) gets a gruelling 700 hour dance marathon off to a deceptively jaunty start. We are in 1930s America, in the shadow of Hollywood; we are also, as with so many dances, in metaphor country, the bizarre spectacle of the marathon functioning as a model for a society founded on competition, illusion and the lure of the quick, elusive buck.

La Boite's programme tells us much about Horace McCoy, author of the original 1935 novel, but nothing about Ray Herman, who has "adapted" it for the stage. I assume, after the making of the memorable film. There is little to recommend Herman's script. The first act cuts awkwardly between set number and "backstage" chat and tussle, and between the present and the trial to come. After the interval, the impact nearly crumbles beneath the weight of a gratuitous and melodramatic sub-plot, involving the accidental shooting of the kindly supporter, Mrs Leyden, and a contrived, if historically accurate resolution, in which the marathon is closed down by a morals conscious pressure group.

The central characters, Rocky and the main pair of dancers, are never developed. I am not sure why the mid-marathon wedding has been transferred, in production, to a peripheral couple, but it tends to accentuate the play's lack of emotional depth and, of course, weakens the impact of the climactic suicide pact.

Errol O'Neill gives a sustained and stylish performance, but is required to play a laconic and fairly straightforward Rocky, not the dynamic but more complex character of the film.

Comparison between play and film should perhaps not be too strongly emphasised: suffice it to say that as a play, Horses steers closer to historical document than to the hymn to despair that is on the screen. David Bell's magnificent production conquers most of the script's inadequacies, turning it into an integrated piece of total theatre. Mike Bridges' set, which transforms La Boite's cockpit into a mighty ballroom, complete with varnished dance floor, has both audience and hopeful hooferers blinking in wonder as they enter together. A long introduction, during which spectators join actors on the floor, allows time to absorb some brilliantly selected details, the glimpse of a seedy washroom, a scrubbed, white first-aid post in the wings, the American Dream conceals a nightmare.

In such a context, it is understandable that the strongest moments are the set pieces, the songs, the derbies, the wedding etc. It is the sheer physical immediacy of the spectacle which makes it so compelling. Here, we are the ogling masses, we spectate, support, even adjudicate and if our attention focuses gratefully on the sophisticated charm of the singer rather than on the wilting contestants, then perhaps there is a point being made.

They Shoot Horses, Don't They? is a promising start to a challenging season under new artistic director Malcolm Blaylock. La Boite looks set to stay on its feet, fancy or otherwise.
Second half drops off

BAGGY GREEN SKIN

By Susan Vile/State Rep

By Susan Vile/State Rep

"If God had wanted me to be in the army, he would have given me baggy green skin."

So speaks Fred Nertz, reluctant anti-hero of State Theatre Company's latest military offering. (This year has already seen A Manual Of Trench Warfare and Oh What A Lovely War, Mate!). Written by local playwright and ex-national serviceman, F J Willett, Baggy Green Skin deals with the situation of a group of Australians in Vietnam, focusing in particular on one "nasho".

Fred Nertz is not quite your ordinary, everyday Ocker. He doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, shows no particular political leanings and displays an alarming naivety at times. Sounds rather dull? So he is, in company; but dullness is neatly averted as he opens the play. Alone on the stage, he sorts through his old tin trunk, remembers and reflects, and all at once he is recreating the recruitment and training days of his army past. It is easy to relate to Wayne Jarratt's personable Fred as he steps in and out of the action, freezing scenes, commenting on them, and even setting up "action replay" sequences. Points are made quickly and with a minimum of fuss; stock figures disappear before they can lose their comic effectiveness; and moments of pathos just give an edge to the buffoonery. A play with something to say.

But the scene changes to Vietnam, and with it the style. The economy of theatrical short-cuts gives way to the circumstantial detail of naturalism. Now stock figures remain too long to be funny. Fence-sitter Fred cannot hide his dullness; he runs the bar, rarely leaves the camp, and is not to speak directly to us again until the end. Our contact is gone. And, although Robert Grubb and I ony Strachan provided some entertaining classes as Sgt Major and private; although Leslie Dayman fleshed out his stereotype to a pitiable — even moving — dipso; neither acting nor direction could disguise what the play had now become: a string of tenuously linked episodes with no real movement forward. The aimlessness is underlined by the incongruity of the ending as Fred drags in the trunk and cries out in frustration. But there has been no build-up. His outburst is empty. Nothing has been said.

Kevin Palmer's direction seemed to be affected by the play's structure; though competent throughout, it was less imaginative in the second part. Most successful was the set, which made an easy transition from sparse economy to naturalism and remained thoroughly functional.

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Single attitude

PLAY STRINDBERG

By Susan Vilé


Director: Brian Debnam; Stage Manager: Sonia Forey; Lighting: Leigh Milne.

Alice: Deborah Little; Edgar: David Hursthouse; Kurt: Ron Rodger.

From July to September, four members of The Stage Company conducted a programme of community and educational activities in the Northern Territory. In October, Adelaide saw one of three productions mounted during their tour: Durrenmatt's Play Strindberg.

It's a beautifully written play. By reconstructing Strindberg's Dance of Death as a twelve-round contest, Durrenmatt has pierced the diffuseness of the original, paring away redundancies, to arrive at a spare, economic script which speaks directly to a modern audience. Director Brian Debnam chose to stress the "game" image. Accordingly, his actors moved like light-footed puppets, deliberate caricatures that danced, hovered, strutted and gesticulated with all the precision of mechanical toys. It was a complete concept, carried through into vocal work, as well as movement. But, in the end, I believe it was a mistake.

For, once the style was established, that was it. What began as a polished display of skilled virtuosity ended as no more than a cold exercise in technique. The effect was to refine still further the refining process that had already taken place in the adaptation, so that one quite lost touch with the soul of the play. Even though Durrenmatt's version points up the comic side of the situation, it exposes, too, the agony beneath the laughter; it has become, indeed, absurd drama. But absurdity springs from a comparison, and this production, by defining everything in terms of a single attitude, allowed for no contrast to emerge. As a result, changes of mood were minimal and listening was at times an effort.

Given the limitations of the concept, the actors worked well. David Hursthouse's toy-soldier Edgar was marred only by an occasional tendency to garble words; Deborah Little's Alice was a darting, pouncing creature; Ron Rodger achieved a studied stillness as Kurt. All three became a twelve-round contest, allowed for no contrast to emerge. As a result, changes of mood were minimal and listening was at times an effort.

Concentration and consistency

KASPAR


Troupe made a judicious choice in deciding to shift from home base at the Red Shed to Theatre 62 for their production of Peter Handke's Kaspar. They were able to exploit the spatial and lighting possibilities of this flexible venue, while still retaining a sense of "rough theatre".

Kaspar is a play to absorb and stun. It absorbs with its demonstration of one person's acquiring language — the triumphs, frustrations and absurdities to the learning process — and the concomitant sobering realisation that even the most intelligent individual may be nothing more than a clever regurgitator of empty phrases. It stuns as Kaspar leaves the bewildering world of nameless things and attains the ordered security of verbal adroitness, only to end as a splintered identity echoing the primitive baseness of Othello's cry, 'Goats and monkeys'. A play of extraordinary power.

The central role is demanding for the most experienced actor. It requires vocal and physical dexterity: the ability to divorce the intention from the surface sense of words, to indicate precisely the blurrings of motivation in movement. Controlled uncertainty, David Kirk was limited in both areas and consequently lost out on the extremes of emotion that can swing this piece from wildest joy to deepest despair. Nevertheless, it is a measure of the play's greatness that, through sheer concentration and an unwavering consistency of approach, this young actor was able to compel attention for the main part of the evening.

Concentration and consistency were, indeed, the strengths of the production as a whole. I enjoyed Keith Gallasch's imaginative treatment of the prompters. Voices only in the text, here they materialised into bizarre, white-faced, black-clad figures of conformity, all purpose and decision as they stalked and tramped across the stage, pummelling Kaspar's mind with sentences and aphorisms and handling with ease the technology of the communications media: tape and cassette recorders, cameras, loud-hailer. PA system, video camera and monitor. Again, there were weaknesses in vocal and physical control, but finely timed ensemble interplay made up for roughness in individuals.

Set most suitably against a blackness broken only by unfinished, intertwining shafts of white, the play was allowed to emerge, as Handke advises in his preface, not as a story, but as a theatrical event.
The Ripper Show by Frank Hatherley, directed by Graeme Blundell, designed by Peter Corrigan, choreographed by Betty Pounder, music by Jeremy Barlow, musical director, Red Symons. Produced by Hoopla downstairs at the Playbox, opened 12 October.

Algeron P. Sharpe, Bruce Spencer, Edwina Sharpe, Evelyn Krape, Charlie Sharpe, John Paramore, June Sharpe, Deidre Rubenstein, Mr. Barley, John O'Nay, the Band Fred Coss, bass guitar; John Grant, keyboards. Freddie Strausak, drums; Red Symons, guitar keyboards.

The Spalding Family Album by Colin Ryan, directed by Robert Chuter, designed by Robert Chuter and Peter Jago. Produced by The Everyman Theatre Collective, Upstairs at The Playbox, opened 26th September.

Mrs Esther Gertrude Spalding, Anna Gilford, James Frederick Albert Spalding Esq., Johnny Quinn, Mrs Annie Priscilla Carter, Anna Mize, Mrs Rose Augusta Grimpole, Kimlarn Frecker, Miss Beatrice Elizabeth Carter, Jo-Anne Moore, Mr Archie Catson, Stephen Oldfield, Mrs Sarah Wholeworth Carter, Jenny Needman, Miss Phoebe Cutlere, Shirley Grange, William Oscar Middleton Esq., John Lindsay, The Pianist, Angela Gill, The Solist, Annie Ryall.

Just as the two previous Playbox shows shared the common theme of sexuality, the two current shows share a preoccupation with death or more precisely murder, but here there is a similarity ends. Downstairs in the prime space is The Ripper Show by Frank Hatherley, an expatriate Australian writer, while upstairs is The Spalding Family Album by Melbourne writer Colin Ryan. The Ripper Show is upfront entertainment, albeit it has plenty of exuberant and competent dancing and singing and is replete with philistine and sexist humour, but to call it theatre is to do the game a disservice. It would have gone down just as happily before the patrons at any of the many Gay Nineties style theatre restaurants that have mushroomed in every second outer suburb. Certainly the music and the acting is a cut above their usual fare, but the script is every bit as awful. In merciful contrast The Spalding Family Album is a serious and engrossing piece of theatre which is carefully written and sympathetically produced. The staging of The Spalding Family Album in the smaller, experimental Upstairs space is a vindication of Hoopla's policy at its best, whereas The Ripper Show demonstrates the worst side of Hoopla's artistic policy, namely that the Downstairs theatre would seem to lack a consistent policy.

The Ripper Show has little to commend it - Hatherley has taken traditional theatre forms - vaudeville music hall melodrama and farce, which are fertile forms for the creation of popular theatre, but he makes of them little more than banal nostalgia.

From a similar set of ingredients the APG produced The Hills Family Show and a form of genuine popular theatre that was true to its roots and still consensually entertaining for contemporary audiences. The play concerns a travelling theatrical family, the Sharpes who tour country halls with abridged Shakespearean productions - 'Sharp, short Shakespeares': realising that these are not pulling audiences they decide to update their repertoire and pander to the salacious tastes of their audiences, by writing their own version of Jack The Ripper.

This format allows Hatherley to spend the first half in a tiresome and indulgent send up of Richard III relieved in part by Bruce Spence's brilliantly Gothic portrayal of the Black Prince, while in the second half he wallows in tasteless, sexist jokes about the Ripper's victims. Hatherley does not even bother to take up the obvious opportunity the play offers to comment on audience taste for unbridled sensation except to put forward the gratuitous and untrue proposition that Shakespeare or Jack the Ripper 'it's all the same.'

Young Ballarat born playwright Colin Ryan had his first play produced at Melbourne University in 1973 and has written some twelve plays since all of which have been produced. The Spalding Family Album is his most recent work, it is a combination of two earlier plays - Esther and Forget Me Not which were staged at La Mama last year and is the fruit of his recent and close collaboration with director Robert Chuter and the Everyman Theatre Collective.

The Spalding Family Album subtitled 'Recollections Of An Edwardian Family' ostensibly brings the two plays together but the interest and organising principle of the piece is still the mystery behind the elegantly attired facade of Esther Spalding. Working as he does with impressions of characters and events in a sharply silhouetted and carefully framed way, weaving past and present, real and imaginary back and forth Ryan does need the dramatic conundrum of Esther as the
sociable gentility and cant, she is hard and direct, her evil is made neither mysterious nor romantic. As Esther, Anna Gilford had a nerv'd cat-like grace and total strength and weaknesses of the text. To my mind the play still requires considerable pruning in the first and second acts but the Everyman Theatre Collective are to be commended on making the transition from La Mama to The Playbox as smooth as it was.

In dazzling style

GIVE THE SHADOW A RUN

By Suzanne Spunner


Whatever misgivings one might have about some of the productions staged at the Prahran Theatre this year, it can certainly be said that the two best productions this year Stephen Sewell's Traitors and this production, Give The Shadow A Run have been also the best Australian work staged in Melbourne this year. And ironically this production and Traitors resoundingly puts paid to any idea that these new writers are in the shadow of the old guard — Williamson, Hibberd, Romeril and Oakley. Indeed the title of the season is apt, Motherwell and Dickins given a run emerge in dazzling style.

Of the five plays only The Surgeon's Arms has not been previously performed last year at La Mama or the Prahran Factory. However this production has been the first opportunity to see Motherwell and Dickins' work staged in tandem. Despite the great diversity in style of the two writers and the deployment of three directors, Wilfred Last, Judy McHenry and Dickins himself there was a remarkable cohesiveness about the evening arising out of this distinguished collaborative exercise by writers, directors and actors.

The ambition of the five plays is resolutely local and Melbournean from Dickins' West Preston suburban fantasies to the Motherwell's petty criminal back streets of Fitzroy. While all five plays have contemporary settings, they are imbued with a nostalgic yearning for lost innocence and resonate with implicit references to the bohoyds of the writers.

Motherwell's three works could be read as episodes from the one narrative and there is a strong sense that all the characters speak the same language and know the same ropes. They attest to Motherwell's fascination with the male desperado whom he invests with considerable charm, self-deprecatory wit, mythic larrikin excess and a simmering aptitude for violence. The Fitzroy Yank is a claustrophobic, nerv'd monologue described as a "prison fantasy". In a consciousness is punctuated with angry snatches of Blues and Rock songs which dissipate the otherwise tight focus of the monologue.

In The Laughing Bantam a cringing trendified local pusher and his cypher of a girl friend are confronted by a gentle giant, criminal acquaintance Big John and his recently released buddy, The Laughing Bantam. Finding that the weak pusher will give him dope gratis the Bantam decides to try him out and demands the rights to the pusher's girlfriend for the night. The encounter is tense and electric with the possibility of violence until Big John intervenes. James Shuvus as Big John the laconically dopey Gary Cooper character provided an hilariously funny counterpoint to the speedy, edginess of the dancing, shadow boxing bantam played by Bill Wilson. The Surgeon's Arms begins with very funny closely observed naturalism which is increasingly broken up by childhood flashbacks. However these stylistic transitions confuse the narrative and leave the action hanging making the finale flat and awkward.

By contrast Barry Dickin's work in The Rotten Teeth Show and The Horror Of The Suburban Nature Strip is peopled by gentle eccentrics with a sharp line in the studied insult. In Rotten Teeth Dickins turns what must have been a private nightmare — the loss of his teeth — into a public hilarity. The licensed sadist, the dentist with the wire cutters and the grappling hook tells us with some relish that the modern extraction is quick, painful and bloody expensive and that he does know what it's like to suffer "I'm only inhuman because it's popular". In Rotten Teeth Dickins plays the consummate victim whether in the dentist's chair or the witness box and Ross Dixon plays his gleeful tormentor firstly as the dentist and then the lawyer who prosecutes the now-gummy patient for non-payment of the dentist's bill. The play is anarchic and uproariously funny — full of asides and apparently spontaneous ad libs, however it can, and did on opening night, loom dangerously out of control into areas of essentially private jokes. And given Dickins' propensity for up-staging the actors need to be evenly matched if all the jokes are to be properly milked and in this production Ross Dixon was no match for the whip sharp, superb timing of Barry Dickins.

In The Horror Of The Suburban Nature Strip Marilyn O'Donnell and Judy McHenry play the two discredent sincere sisters Mag and Bag who share their twilight years in a less than blissful arrangement trading devastating insults with each other — "You lobotomised Malle fowl — you Liberal..." and vying with each other for the dubious honour of

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being the budgie for a day. In between endless cups of tea they swing at dizzying heights above the audience wearing a cardboard beak and preening themselves in the mirror attached to the budgie’s swing.

Of the five plays Motherwell’s Laughing Bantam and Dickins’ Horror Of The Suburban Nature Strip are the most fully realised pieces; and they surpass the best short works by any of the previously mentioned writers from whose shadow they have recently emerged. And while the performances were in the main even. James Shuvus as Big John in The Laughing Bantam and Judy McHenry as Bag Tot in The Horror Of The Suburban Nature Strip stand out. Give The Shadow A Run proves beyond doubt, contrary to Jack Hibberd’s gloomy view that Australian theatre has not lapsed into Nullaborean boredom but is alive and kicking.

Academic absurdism

CLEAN SWEEP

GROUND RULES

By Garrie Hutchinson


Director, Malcolm Robertson; Designer, Ray Triggs; Stage Manager, Vicki Triggs; Clean Sweep, Trogg, Peter Felmingham, Mrs Trogg, Jacqueline Kelkier; Ground Rules, Will, Peter Felmingham, Mr Trogg, Jacqueline Kelkier (Pro. Am).

Critics who venture into the rough and tumble of the real world of the theatre do so at their own peril, as I can well attest. Brother critics who the night before were all smiles; who understood well the pain of sitting through yet another show; who discoursed learnedly on the relative merits of actor and text, director and sensibility; who might buy you a drink if the management forgot; who enquired of actor and text, director and sensibility; sitting through yet another show; who all smiles; who understood well the pain of tumble of the real world of the theatre do so at their own peril, as I can well attest.

This by way of preface to Age theatre critic Leonard Radic’s double bill at La Mama: A Clean Sweep, and Ground Rules.

In normal circumstances I’m partial to an evening there. Small spaces, close-up acting and tiny audiences in general make for honest performances. Writers who try for things beyond the limitations of “mere” acting and “mere” language do not achieve much.

Unfortunately the rather academic absurdism of these plays is very hard to take: especially when they are acted in an unremittingly single paced, naturalistic way, and directed with few concessions to the imagination.

A Clean Sweep is the Beckett of Endgame, sans poetry, sans action: Mr and Mrs Trogg sit outside their cave musing on life and death; an item in a newspaper about death by street-sweeper, the close of the play, guess what. The Troggs in a clean sweep. I imagine that a funny play may be made out of a Beckett pastiche (the legendary Waiting For Godot: The Musical) but the whole 1957 canon holus bolus is a bit too much to swallow these days. If we want Endgame: the lessons in that play are undigested in A Clean Sweep.

The second play, Ground Rules is something else. What it apparently intends to be is a metaphorical, Genet-like excursion on the subject of ‘what are the rules between men and women’, ‘is Man responsible for the sorry state of affairs by his monomaniacal pursuit of meaning for his own life? is search for immortality?’ etc.

The male character is actually building a Monument, the Woman keeps interrupting: what are the rules? And so on and on. Something about all this I found intensely irritating. The image at the basis of the play, the expectation that metaphor is a substitute for language, that generalising is a way to escape the working out of the particular. Seldom has anything annoyed me so much, and for so little reward. By the time the thunder and lightning sounded from the direction of the stage manager I’d had enough. No more absurdism, I cried. Give me the kitchen sink!

From La Mama Theatre’s production “A Clean Sweep”.
THE LITTLE FOXES
By Margot Luke


Director, Edgar Metcalfe; Designer, Tony Tripp; Addie, Sally Sander; Cal, Michael van Schoor; Birdie Hubbard, Jenny McNae; Oscar Hubbard, James Beattie; Leo Hubbard, Alan Fletcher; Regina Giddens, Rosemary Barr; William Marshall, Dennis Schulz; Benjamin Hubbard, Leslie Wright; Alexandra Giddens, Liz Home; Horace Giddens, Alan Cassell (Professional)

It is probably not a good idea to revive Lillian Helman's plays. She has an established position in the American realist drama, with a couple of Drama Critics Awards to prove it. And yet, her exposes of American morals - be they concerned with the witch-hunting of lesbian school-teachers or the dehumanising greed of the American businessman, come over as pedestrian exercises with yawning chasms of verbiage between the galvanising episodes of melodrama.

The Little Foxes really ought to be riveting theatre. The central situation is full of meaty conflicts, and a nice balance of villains and victim figures almost ensures that our sympathies are fully engaged. Except that the characters are cardboard. Strong cardboard, but still cliche. The Hubbard family of go-getters, who married for money, who cheat each other over money, who intend to use their children to secure their money are the ancestors of today's television mini-serial.

For human interest there is tragic Aunt Birdie who carries genteel southern dreams in her head - remnants of a happy childhood - but who has to resort to drink to cope with the horror of an impossible marriage. The decent husband of the female Hubbard has a heart-condition, which just prevents him from outwitting the villains. It must take considerable self-control to play his big scene, dying of a heart-attack, unable to reach the medicine, while his stoney-hearted wife looks on and lets him croak. Ah, memories of Bette Davis in the film version - and if they got hysterics at least it could be cut from the film.

O'Neill could get away with the wordy but manages to combine glamour with poisonous malice, aided by a controlled chilling laugh.

The men have to work even harder, their characters being not merely cardboard, but two-dimensional at that! Alan Cassell as the good guy Horace Giddens manages the invalid scene well, avoiding the two absurdities these entail, but still seems happier in the showdown scene when he almost beats the villains at their own game.

Dennis Schulz makes a regrettably brief appearance as William Marshall, the courteous outsider, whose business offer sets off the crisis that constitutes the action of the play.

James Beattie and Leslie Wright as Oscar and Benjamin - brothers and rivals - have some good scenes of alternating conspiracy and cut-throat competition, though neither of them managed to outwit the playwright by creating a rounded character.

Liz Home, a newcomer to the Playhouse, played Alexandra, the vulnerable daughter, with quiet sincerity and it will be interesting to see what she does with a more complex part.

Presumably this is the kind of drama that originally gave "the well-made play" a bad name, and although interesting as a piece of theatre-history, it hardly seems worthy of all the talent lavished on it in this production.
Some brilliant conceptions

SUMMIT CONFERENCE

By Collin O'Brien

Summit Conference by Robert David McDonald.
Director, Colin McColl; Designer, Richard Hartley;
Lighting, Roger Selleck.
Eva Braun, Catherine Wilkin, Clara Petacci, Wanda Davidson;
Soldier, Gerald Hitchcock.

"Between the beginning and the end", as a T S Eliot parodist once astutely remarked, "falls the middle", and I'm afraid it's a bit that way with Summit Conference: a good theatrical notion well at times brilliantly acted, the play itself suffers from a degree of shapelessness.

The central action is a meeting in 1941 between Hitler's mistress Eva Braun and Mussolini's, Clara Petacci, at Eva's Berlin flat, while their inamorati are in conference. The only other character is the young SS officer who guards Eva.

Eva, played with unaffected ease by an actress new to Perth, Catherine Wilkin, play forbidden American pop records and otherwise breaks the Fuhrer's rules for ideal German womanhood by smoking and drinking; Clara comments acutely on the necessity for her being kept an open secret, as Mussolini has to keep up the pretence of being a good husband. The women discuss their uneasy roles, at the same time revealing by their very existence the corrupt hypocrisy at the core of the fascist dictators' supposed ideal and unsullied societies. By degrees the women adopt the personas of their respective lovers, arguing and bitching at each other. The first act ends in an ironic and harrowing tableau: the girls in an overtly sexual embrace accompanied by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" (not played loud enough for my taste). They draw the SS guard into their game, by turns seducing and bullying him and finally drawing from him a confession of Jewishness. Later he has a long monologue on the repression of minorities, brilliantly handled by Gerald Hitchcock. Some people have remarked that they found this monologue rather shoehorned into the play, but apart from being clumsily introduced, I did not find it out of key with the dramatic conventions the play sets up.

Wanda Davidson's playing of Clara Petacci is a bravura performance. At times I was a little uneasy in that I felt she might slip over the line into a parody of an Italian slut, but it is clear on reflection that a degree of self-parody on the part of Clara is deliberate: both feared and reviled, someone in such a situation might well play up the role.

The play was written by Glasgow Citizen's Theatre playwright Robert David McDonald, who also wrote Chinchilla, which for my money likewise suffered from self-indulgence and loss of shape. Here the writing sometimes appeared gratuitous, not arising from the situation, and the direction of the play fortuitous. This was not helped by a lack of clear direction on Colin McColl's part. I felt for instance that the transitions into their lovers' roles by the women would be more effective more positively charted. There were also irritating matters of detail. I thought Richard Hartley's rather Bauhausish set a wrong conception. As Gillo Dorfles asserts in his excellent anthology of bad taste Kitsch, the Third Reich was kitsch to the core by 1941, good taste being a sign of decadent Jewish intellectualism. But reservations aside this was a good evening in the theatre, some brilliant conceptions and characters rivetingly portrayed by all three actors.
Richard III and two comedies

By Irving Wardle

One of my favourite Dali paintings is of a dark deserted landscape that turns out on closer inspection to be a portrait of Laurence Olivier in the robes of Richard III: a piece of graphic wizardry that completely sums up the hold Olivier has exercised over that role for the past thirty-odd years. No other British leading actor has dared risk the comparison; and the play has been successfully revived only in the context of the RSC's Wars of the Roses cycle which by-passed the problem by scaling Richard down from a mighty Plantagenet abbatoir, with two monumental leaden walls that slide and rotate with a thunderous rumble, and a raked metal floor irrigated with blood gutter for all the on-stage beheadings.

The challenge has now been met head-on in Christopher Morahan's National Theatre production which aims to release the tragedy from these imprisoning memories and restore it to the repertory. To restore Richard as a great acting part, of course, means having a great actor to play him; and there would have been no NT show but for the presence of John Wood, an actor whose speed, wit, magnitude, and sheer devilry give him an unrivalled claim to the role. And, as it turns out, this is Mr Wood's show to an almost slavish degree.

His only near equal is the designer, Ralph Koltai, who has converted the Olivier Theatre's open stage into a Plantagenet abattoir, with two monumental leaden walls that slide and rotate with a thunderous rumble, and a raked metal floor irrigated with blood gutter for all the on-stage beheadings.

It is the set that supplies the first glimpse of Richard whose arachnoid shadow is projected on one of the walls as he hobbles into view for the opening soliloquy. In listing Wood's qualities I omitted perhaps the most important of all his brazen showmanship: the ability to show you all his tricks and still take you by surprise. Not for minute can you forget that this man is an actor: and, of course, the same goes for the character of Richard, who privately outlines his plans to the audience and then carries them out with amazing speed.

One great temptation of the part (to which even Olivier succumbed) is to engage the audience's sympathy in the first half of the play, only to lose it once Richard gains the crown and changes from a witty schemer to a straightforward butcher. Wood is at pains to avoid this. He excites the public and makes them laugh; briefly he even charms them. But he never tries to make friends. He is a monster throughout: an amusing monster to begin with, and finally a terrible monster, with the result that the performance steadily gains in power instead of losing impetus at half time.

The wooing of Lady Anne offers one typical departure from stage tradition. The scene usually hinges on the simple contrast of a murderer playing the perfect gallant to a woman whose kinsman he has just slaughtered. Wood gives us the perfect gallant, but once the corpse is undraped he absent-mindedly dips a finger in the wounds and licks the blood off. The effect, if you can believe it, is extremely funny, especially when he immediately snaps to the opposite extreme and solicitously tucks the corpse up again, folding the shroud in neat hospital corners.

Everything he does is pushed to the limit: piety, wrath; pitiless self-analysis; and often he seems to go past the point of no return until, in the nick of time, he pulls the character back on course. Add to that his capacity for instantaneous reversals — where he savagely knocks a messenger to the ground, and then apologetically brushes the dust off him — and you have some idea of the electricity Wood generates on stage.

However, Olivier remains undisplaced for the simple reason that Richard is a sociable character who needs to be surrounded by strong personalities. "I leave this world for me to bustle in," he says; but all he gets at the NT is a shadow world of interchangeable lords supporting him in conventional groupings and offering him no resistance whatever. It is a great performance, but it takes place in a vacuum even emptier than Dali's deserted landscape.

Antipodean drama made one of its rare West End appearances with the October opening of Middle Age Spread (Lyric). Roger Hall's menopausal comedy on the fears and miseries of the teaching profession. As Mr Hall will need no introduction to Australian readers, it only remains for me to say that the piece survived its anglicisation (dinner table politeness translated into Thatcherese) and the danger of turning into the Richard Briers Show, with marked success; and that even after the inescapable comparisons with Ayckbourn and Peter Nichols, the reviewing fraternity were left with a healthy respect for Mr Hall as a comic writer who does not feel obliged to keep nine-tenths of existence off stage. Such authors being in short supply over here, there should be an eager market for the next Hall consignment.

Of home-grown comedy, Anne Valery's The Passing-out Parade (Greenwich) takes a jovial look at a group of Army recruits going through basic training in the last year of the war. What sets the piece apart from others on this well-worn theme is the sex of Miss Valery's recruits: all ATS girls, first seen lined up before a franglais phrase-dropping sergeant shaped like a tea-chest and wailing under her threat to "turn you flowers of British womanhood into an efficient war machine." Closed female institutions hold an invincible fascination for British spectators, and it is with the sadistic convinence of Jack Emery's production that one watches the snotty public school girl, the Edgware usherette, and their clueless companions being licked into shape.

The action features a ferocious fist-fight, lesbian heart-break, and a strenuous move by the Edgware belle to work her ticket by getting pregnant under the terms of Paragraph II. Regulation bloomers loom large in the show, including one pair that get dissolved in a bucket of bleach. And the flavour of 1944 comes drifting back in barrack room choruses of "I'll be squeezing you in all the old familiar places." Of course they all wind up good mates, intimate secrets exchanged, class-barriers dissolved: but there is a good deal of fun on the way to the inevitable destination, and the girls are as real as your boots.

The National Theatre production of Shakespeare's RICHARD III. Directed by Christopher Morahan. Left to right: Mel Martin (Lady Ann), John Wood (Richard III).
CHILDREN'S THEATRE

TOM UGLY IN FLIGHT

By Gary Fry

TOM UGLY'S ROAMING THEATRE doesn't just work with the young, but they are never very far from our central purpose. The idea of using theatre as an integrative force in the society arises through working with young people, because they see themselves as a positive part of society and don't necessarily approve of the strict segregation often imposed on them through their schooling and at home, nor do they share the cynicism of adults. They have a refreshing freedom and honesty in their dealings which we try to carry over into other projects hoping that some of it rubs off on "grown-ups". In fact, we attempt to bring together young people and adults in most of our projects whether the play in mind is for schools, old people or the traditional theatre.

We are working now with a group of young people at the Addison Road Community Centre in Marrickville, Sydney. These kids are a gang. They are all loud, all swear, build cubbies furnished with old car seats, some get in and out of trouble - they don't like school. We are building a play with them.

I'll give you an example of what that's like. After the "Breaking and Entry" scene and the "Police Brutality" scene we change time and place and have a shoot-out in the Wild West. Edgar and Red Knob are the duelling desperados and Red Knob decides that this is to be his grand death scene. Edgar has to be the fast gun. John counts off the paces six of them. Instead of shooting, Edgar pulls down his pants and "chucks a brown eve" at Red. Red Knob goes into a spectacular, somersaulting death dive. The others are unimpressed and make suggestions to improve the scene.

Later Julie confides she likes to sing. But she can't without gigging and even if she could stop, she still couldn't sing because some of the boys would make it impossible. They laugh at her, chuckle things and yell obscenities. She chuckles things and yells back. Julie admits that she could really sing if Vivien and I (Vivien Clear and I are the workshop leaders) "pushed them all around" a lot. Then, she says, "we'd all have to wake up to ourselves!" So, if we do "push them around", perhaps Julie will sing her favourite song "Satin Sheets to Lie on" and accompany her on his flute.

And what will we do with this play once it's together? It will be a testing ground for a much more demanding project.

The Addison Road Community Centre commissioned Tom Ugly's Roaming Theatre to devise a programme that would have the twin effects of illustrating the Centre, its meaning and activities, and encouraging local youth to make more use of it. The Addison Road Community Centre is an old army barracks with over forty huts each of which houses a different activity. It has Greek and Turkish huts, a Philippine group, an after-school centre, a women's hut, a Sicilian puppeteer, a hut for handicapped people, a hut for children, and much more. It was a testing ground for handicapped people or even their younger brothers and sisters at after-school centre.

The idea of having professional actors and actresses devising and performing plays with young people did not begin with this project.

For these young people, their professional co-performers and TOM UGLY himself will need to acquaint themselves with the range of different lives that make up this place and then forge from all that richness, one play. The idea of using theatre as an integrative force in the society arose when the improvisation changed. There was a desire to enact scenes that escaped the entrapments, to give expression to lives they more fully experienced in their imaginations. And with grace and care they succeeded in mirroring some of these scenes.

Our workshops began with improvisations around this matrix of negative experience. And then a day came when the improvisation changed. There was a desire to enact scenes that escaped the entrapments, to give expression to lives they more fully experienced in their imaginations. And with grace and care they succeeded in mirroring some of these scenes.

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By William Shoubridge

Dance Umbrella — needs more experimentation

Choreographic get-togethers like the Seymour Centre Dance Umbrella or the Australian Dance Festival (of which more next issue) can be pretty messy affairs.

Messy for the organisers faced with the task of bringing all the performing groups together and shuffling them into some sort of order, messy for the performers who have so little time to prepare, and especially messy for the audiences watching them or the critic trying to evaluate them on their own terms.

For the audience its not so much the difficulty of shifting perspectives (any balletomane is adept at that) but rather coping with the wrenching gear changes, emotional and kinaesthetic, that are necessitated when they have to sit through up to fourteen works in one night, some of them so taciturn and brief that one hardly has a chance to "read" them.

For a critic, the main difficulty arises from selecting the equipment necessary to analyse each work, performer, company. It doesn't do to use the same scalpel on the Aboriginal Islanders Dance Theatre as one does for say the Australian Contemporary Dance Company; the aims, intentions and training are worlds apart.

To be exhaustive on the subject would take acres of newsprint, so in the space available, all one can do is isolate certain aspects, certain similarities that floated throughout the season and treat them, hoping to reveal the strengths and weaknesses in each attempt.

THEME NO 1: DANCE WITH A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

With this type comes much talk of "creativity" and "experimentation", two subjects always prevalent in the "perennial amnesia of the avant-garde" to use Arlene Croce’s happy phrase. The hope is grand, but where, on current evidence is the realisation? Where is the analysis of dance, the why, how and wherefore? Apropos the social conscience, where does mere suggestion end and incorporation begin? "Conscience" practitioners are also fond of going on about "Soul" and "Feeling". But what is being felt here and who is doing the feeling? Anyway so many of them have so little dance technique that its impossible to tell if they have any feeling. Time and again this dance style restricts dance to an incidental position to the theatrical statement, the body as metaphor disappears and the body as decoration takes its place.

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These creators by and large retreated from the howling expanse of dance possibilities now open in this century and hidden inside a cozy quotient of narrative, vague unsubstantiated abstraction, or the bulbous paraphernalia of “realism”. As far as the Dance Umbrella is concerned, the works that fall under this genre are Busybodies’ Captain Jack (Geoffrey Chichero), Glass Identities and Athlete War (Norman Hall); Modern Dance Ensemble’s Citi (David Schulberg), Margaret Bar’s Breadline and Bushfire, and the Aboriginal Islanders Dance Theatre’s Embassy Dance (Carole Johnson).

Some of the above works are better than others, some succeed in communicating their intention and others fail dismally. For a start, Chichero’s Captain Jack is extraneous, six minutes of flailing melodrama set to the Billy Joel song that says it all.

Norman Hall’s Glass Identities, saying far less than its programme note, rings cynical and hollow at every turn. This one’s theme is “isolation” and sure enough there are three isolates on stage going through an isolation schtick. But there is nothing to tie it to perceived or experienced reality, no life beyond the confines of the stage and nothing to even hoist it halfway to metaphor. There are no “social issues” in dance, only personal issues and that difference kills off Hall’s piece while investing the Aboriginal Islanders’ Embassy Dance with palpable life, tension and force.

The embassy in question is the one built by aboriginal representatives last year on the Parliament House lawns in Canberra, but the threads go back far into the whole question of land rights and cultural genocide. The work is a long, sprawling piece, raw with immediate demand and proposed change. What stands as the Prologue is an example of tribal dances from Mornington Island done straight, but in the context of the whole work they stand as symbolic of the symbiotic relationship between man earth nature that existed before Whitey showed his face.

In fact, throughout the duration, Whitey never really shows his face as such, all we see is the refuse created by his passing, the drunkeness, warring factions, children taken from their mothers and forcibly integrated. A wide dramatic solo slap bang in the middle of the work encapsulates the discourse. The “Church” waltzes off after having given scant consolation to a bereaved woman, an abandoned black grovels, twists and twines across the stage as the “Nullabor Prayer” ironically intones the story of a blackman having found God and becoming “mates” with him.

Here is where the influences of “modern dance” sidle onto the stage and pre-empt the tribal style. The stamping rhythms disappear and “yearning” motives take over, supplicating arms, arched bodies and slow collapses. What the audience responds to here is not just the content (the dancer) or the material (the energy that directs the content) but the theme that activates the material.

We can see clearly the symbolic behind the actual and it’s that double whammy that gives both the solo and the work as a whole its potency. I say most of the work because the finale, with its banners and “What do we want? Land Rights! When do we want them? Now!” betrays the compassion and directness of what has gone before. The edifice of heartfelt need falls down into the shrill, common-places of agit-prop.

The choreographer of the piece Carole Johnson is an ex-member of the Eleo Pomare Dance Group of New York, that street-wise, more-committed-than-thou consciousness-raised band of American dance activists. I assume Miss Johnson is trying their same modus operandi out here. We’ll see how it goes, but I have a feeling that tirades instead of expression won’t work, just as Pomare and his pals have discovered in America.

I also have a feeling that The Challenge ...Embassy Dance is more a collective attempt than a solo creation, and I hope it is; Miss Johnson has achieved a plangent success in coalescing a real piece of dance theatre that will last as long as the need behind it lasts.

In closing, the Aboriginal Arts Board sees the Aboriginal Islanders Dance Theatre as more a rehabilitation programme than a growing performance group. The Board it seems is more concerned in protecting past cultural
artefacts. It behoves one to ask just what they really want, bits and pieces from an embalmed or dead culture or a forum wherein aspects of that culture can grow and develop, not for it to become a part of our cultural absolutism but rather for us to be the raw material in regenerating it. Surely the performing arts are best suited to doing that?

THEME NO 2: DANCE AS JOY AND LUST FOR LIFE OR TIN PAN ALLEY LIVES!

Why is it that when dancers want to be joyful they immediately fall into peurile platitudes and what they dance looks largely as if it were choreographed in the sandbox? Has the idea of dance “kids” got to them? They seek an expression of unbridled vitality, but all this careering, cartwheeling and jittering about is in effect saying “Don’t you just love us and our lithe, wholesome healthy bodies?” Well no actually, because you have about as much impact as gnats on the wing. This I think may be because so many of these performers rarely get a chance to perform; they create in the studio surrounded by mirrors and thereby forget the all important dialectic between the stage and the audience.

There are two types of Joy dance most predominant; Transcendent Joy, and Fun Dance, under whose aegis comes jazz ballet, tap, show dancing and hoofing. The first dance is practised by the Dervishes and the Sufi mystics, or evident in works like Martha Graham’s Seraphic Dialogue or Frontier or Doris Humphrey’s The Shakers. It is practically non-existent in Australia which is hardly surprising, given the spiritual desolation of the place.

The second is everywhere and its thumping monotony pervades the senses at practically every turn; Leagues Clubs, musical comedies and the dreaded Disco. What the poor, half-starved audience desires of this sort of dancing is the element of surprise. It must have fireworks, it must have outlandishness and it must be kept amazed.

The Dance Umbrella pieces did not achieve this. Busy Bodies’ Bond 77 (Ross Coleman) and Fade in-Fade out (Norman Hall), Canberra Dance Ensemble’s Joy (Stephanie Burridge), New Dance Theatre’s Bugs (Ruth Galene) and a fair selection of the baubles and trinkets brought out by Limbs Dance Theatre were all representative of the soggy results
inherent in lazy, bare, "just for fun" thinking.

Canberra Dance Ensemble's \textit{Jo} in particular had me gnashing my teeth. It was set to Bach's \textit{Brandenburg Concerto No 3} and that immediately put me on my guard. It was everything I expected it to be; witless, literal and so dependent on the sewing-machine monotony of the music that it had no life of its own. A waste of promising dancers. Ross Coleman's \textit{Blood??} was banal batch of disco jump-step-kicks. It was tidily danced by David Palmer, but just \textit{what} was he dancing?

If one can't get surprise, one could at least expect parody, as practised by the Trocks or Jerome Robbins' \textit{The Concert}, but these \textit{pro am} performers didn't have the expertise to be adequately parodistic.

If there was some incidental parody, it was self parody and quite unconscious.

\textbf{THEME NO 3: DANCE AS A RITUAL THAT PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING}

All of dance, in essence, is ritual. The great pas de deuxs of classical ballet are ritual. Modern dance fringe practitioners seemingly are convinced that secretive contortions constitute ritual. The Aboriginal Islanders dancing those Mornington Island hunting scenes demonstrated that you don't have to be hieratic and rhapsodic to be ritualistic; but the others take obscure hieroglyphic twists to stand for sybilline utterance.

A quantitative example of such cobwebby thinking would have to be the Canberra Dance Ensembles \textit{Monty Who?!}. This is collection of immobile figures draped in bed sheets standing around a solo dancer who shivers, writhes and gesticulates in cabalistic intricacies. The "music" is a mish mash of low moans and groans of complaint. It was enjoyable because it was unpretentious but I wonder if it would be just as good without that animation behind it. This is what true dance, ritual or otherwise, should do; the composition of choreography and the attack of the performer are the signposts towards comprehension. They are signposts so strongly erected that there can be no confusion for the viewer, no matter how individual his interpretation may be.

Margaret Barr's \textit{Dialogue} was ostensibly that between a male and female body, but due to the stressful inexpertise of the performers all I could "hear" were the moans and groans of complaining muscles and joints.

The sexual ritual of Lloyd Newson's \textit{Maratus} set to some music from \textit{Jaws} was a high minded cabaret act Apache dance; it was energetic but sentimental.

Trying to stop smoking is a ritual too I guess and Anne Gartner's \textit{Bat...} was funnily refreshing, especially with the sound track of someone's self revelatory speech about the subtleties played in trying to give up the habit. It was enjoyable because it was unpretentious but I wonder if it would be just as good without that backing.

\textbf{THEME NO 4: DANCE AS ITSELF OR WHATEVER}

This intractable field is the favourite of those pro\-\textit{am} who don't really know what they want to say or why they choreograph. As most dance is ritual, all dance is empirically about itself, just like music. Balanchine has proved that, but most Australian audiences haven't yet stumbled onto the fact and it will take cottage prods to make them shift. The SDC and the ADT are two such cattle prods but they are out of the frame of this article.

When the pro\-\textit{ams} do make something in pure movement, rarely is there anything in the dance design or the formulation of the dancers that makes that choreographic propellant visible. The shifting limbs remain shifting limbs and never become signals.

Into this last category falls Stephanie Burridge's \textit{Crossing The Line And In Praise}, Norman Hall's \textit{Firebird}, Virginia Ferris' \textit{Garbage}, Kai Tai Chan's \textit{Two Women}, Ruth Galenes' \textit{Vivaldi}, Lasica's \textit{Discovery} and Christine Parrots \textit{Lark}.

I wish I could really say something about them, but there is nothing to say apart from the fact that they were all suggestive of a choreographer's mind idling over, never moving into gear.

The whole Dance Umbrella is a laudable idea, but there has got to be more \textit{real} experimentation done to make it all worthwhile. I can appreciate the cramped quarters, the lack of money and the limited ability of the dancers available; what I can't understand is the lack of ideas. Whatever these myriad dance people are "into" they're not "into" it very far.

There are exceptions to everything and some of the words presented are well worth keeping. As for the rest however, flame-throwers couldn't force me back to look on them again.

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The future of opera

The off-stage turmoil which so dominated Australia's operatic scene for most of 1979 seems certain to be a major feature of the 1980 scene as well. The departure of Peter Hemmings as general manager of the national company after only a year in office, and the fact he was replaced late in October by an interim general manager only (Sydney solicitor Kenneth Tribe), condemned the Australian Opera to a further period of administrative uncertainty which must produce at least some undesirable side-effects in the artistic area, for performers can never do their best when they are preoccupied by backstage goings-on and uncertainties.

Another operative development late in the year will no doubt prove to be at least as important in the long term as the unfortunate backstage manoeuvrings at the Australian Opera was the announcement on October 19 that the Australia Council had decided to hold an inquiry into the opera and music theatre scene with a view to reassessing subsidy policy in national terms.

Though there have been official protestations that this enquiry is not related to the Hemmings/Bonynge conflict at the AO, it is hard to take them very seriously. Clearly, any assessment of the year will no doubt prove to be at least as important in the long term as the unfortunate backstage manoeuvrings at the AO, it is hard to take them very seriously. Nothing has been resolved by the departure of Hemmings except that the Bonynge view on such matters, which alarmingly seems to have the unquestioning allegiance of the powers which control the AO board, is now opposition-free within the national company.

And very few opera-lovers can find much to rejoice at in the prospect of an AO so completely under the thumb of a man who has — to put it mildly — not demonstrated to date that he has the vision required to wield that thumb in the best interests of the development of the art form in this country.

Even in Sydney, these days, even in the sub-structures of the AO itself, there are deep misgivings at the way things are going in the national company. Yet there is also a kind of passivity syndrome, a feeling that what has happened maybe had to happen even if we ordinary mortals aren't quite sure why, coupled with a strong feeling of complacency engendered by the past few years of operatic plenty when the Sydney Opera House has been the unchallenged focal point of the performing arts in this country, as well as an international arts tourist mecca: when all the goodies have dropped into the lap of Sydney opera-lovers.

SHODDY TREATMENT

In the other major cities, and particularly in Melbourne, anger and determination are more the order of the day: anger at what local opera-goers feel is shoddy treatment by the AO, and determination to do something about it. In Brisbane and Adelaide, opera-lovers in general and the State companies in particular are annoyed not so much by the brevity of the AO seasons in their cities each year, which they concede perhaps is inevitable, as at the choice of repertory which all too often conflicts directly with what the local company can do and would like to do. Surely, the argument runs, a company which can mount 16 operas in Sydney in a year, and a few less in Melbourne, ought to be able to choose a touring repertory that avoids conflict with the work of locally based companies whose repertory must inevitably depend were at the heart of the Hemmings-Bonynge-AO board tensions. Nothing has been resolved by the departure of Hemmings except that the Bonynge view on such matters, which alarmingly seems to have the unquestioning allegiance of the powers which control the AO board, is now opposition-free within the national company.

In the all-too-brief halcyon days at the outset of the Hemmings era, they saw him outside Sydney as a big and powerful friend really determined to help them directly and indirectly — through the joint seasons involving the AO and a State company, through loan of human and material resources, through co-operative planning of repertory. No doubt there are a good deal more complex reasons, in detail, why the joint seasons are in doubt for future years (it has already been announced that there will not be one in Queensland in 1980, but it is impossible to exclude spin-off of the Hemmings-Bonynge row as one of the significant ones.

EVANGELISTIC REPERTORY

In one extraordinary respect, of course, both Bonynge and Hemmings are — were — on the same side of the repertory fence: in the belief that operetta (such as The Merry Widow, in particular) has a legitimate place in the repertory of a grand opera company.

No doubt they are at least none-tenths right: in the context of the whole of the operatic world barring such remote outposts as ours. And even here such works no doubt have their place, if only as...
unmistakable clues to the projected overseas performing and recorded Sutherland Bonynge repertory of the following year or so (yet unusually, as in the case of Lucrezia Borgia and The Merry Widow, without more than token involvement of the local supporting forces). Is it right, they ask, that Australian Opera subscribers should be force-fed try-outs; and that, in effect, the AO's only excursions off the beaten track should be at the whim of Bonynge?

TOO MUCH SUTHERLAND?
There is no doubt at all that Joan Sutherland as the Merry Widow has immense box office appeal; a good deal wider box office appeal than Joan Sutherland as Lucia di Lammermoor or Violetta in La Traviata or Donna Anna in Don Giovanni, all of which roles she is singing in Australia this year and next. The trouble is that even as many of those who will flock to see Sutherland as the Widow wouldn't be caught dead at a performance of grand opera, many opera-lovers feel deeply insulted when they are asked to pay premium prices to see Sutherland as the Widow.

Some even go so far as to refuse to resubscribe if they must have her as the Widow. Does it make sense to drive away such traditional opera-lovers in order to win a broader audience, many of whom will not be interested in progressing on to more serious opera anyhow? And some opera-lovers, no doubt a very small minority, object to hearing Joan Sutherland at all because they dislike her unique vocal sound. More object to seeing Joan Sutherland. Joan Sutherland and Joan Sutherland year after year as the only international operatic superstar on offer in this part of the world. They would a good deal rather forgo her one year in two, say, in favour of the odd Domingo, Scotto, Carreras, Von Stade, Caballe, Pavarotti, Cotrubas, you name him or her to fill your current preferences. Yet all indications are that the AO will be even more firmly committed to the Sutherland Bonynge syndrome from now on than it has been in the past.

ALTERNATIVES
It is all very well, of course, to grumble about what we've got at the moment, operatically, but is there any real alternative? Are those Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne dissidents capable of doing more than just complain? The answer is maybe Yes, if...well, there are quite a few ifs, to be frank, but there may just be enough determination about to override them all.

At least on the surface of the matter, Melbourne would seem to have little if anything to complain of in its current treatment by the Australia Opera; this year and next, in the only two seasons whose planning was significantly affected by Hemmings as general manager, repertory has expanded dramatically and Sutherland fans have had a field day — seeing the lady this year in two operas she did not perform anywhere else in Australia, even in Sydney.

Unlike Adelaide and Brisbane, which have received only a handful of offerings each year and those hardly the pick of the year's AO repertory, Melbourne has received a very fair deal in those years by any objective criteria. It even had the premiere of a new production last year, La Fanciulla del West, though the horrendous logistic problems in first airing any new production 600-odd miles from home base were no doubt a significant factor prompting the decision to give all the premieres to Sydney at least for 1980.

Yet old rivalries die hard, and it is as impossible for Melburnians to concede they ought to be second-best to Sydney in anything, particularly anything cultural, as it is for Sydney to concede such a coup to Melbourne. An the Melbourne Arts Centre is looming ever closer over the horizon, even if no one is yet quite sure exactly when it will open; and there is a bigger Italian, traditionally opera-loving, population in Melbourne than in Sydney, and it has lots of ready cash theoretically available to support the establishment of a major new company to rival the AO.

There are dangers, it seems to me, in these arguments even conceding they have considerable weight. In particular, is it not very possible that the Sydney Opera House really was a one-off event; that the new Victorian Arts Centre, superior as it admittedly will be as a practical venue for the performing arts, has no hope of rivalling the world-famous Sydney venue as a focus of attention and a stimulus to escalating attendances? And what of the proved and reproved entrepreneurial fact, at least in serious music circles, that few Melburnians per thousand attend performances than Sydney-siders? Even the Australian Ballet, whose home is in Melbourne, draws bigger audiences in Sydney, bigger in relation to overall population, than it does in Victoria. All the above points may be somewhat prejudiced anti-Melbourne, but they cannot be dismissed out of hand.

And once having dealt with such possibly perverse and niggling objections to the oft-mooted new major Melbourne opera company, one has to look at the plus side of its theoretical ledger. Politically it would be a coup for the (Liberal) Victorian Government to support the establishment of a new major resident company for its new cultural complex. The (Liberal) Federal Government could be prone to sympathise not only because of its similar political complexion but also because any such move would inevitably be a slap in the face to the (Labor) New South Wales Government, which has got all the benefits of the opera explosion in terms of

Sutherland in Norma. Photo: William Moseley.
Joan Sutherland as Violetta in La Traviata. Photo: Franco Gaieta

performing presence from the national company and tourist trade from the Opera House itself without ever contributing a brass razoo to the development of the art form.

Not to mention the fact that it could be a very good thing indeed, artistically, to have another major opera company in Australia under totally different management from the Australian Opera, presumably performing different repertoire and much of the time, at least, complementing the work of the Sydney-based AO rather than competing with it. This is a strong point — perhaps the strongest point of all — in favour of the emergence of a separate company in Melbourne as opposed to a cellular division of the existing company.

**IS A SECOND COMPANY NECESSARY?**

But does Australia need a second AO-scale opera company at all? Even if it could use one, would not the costs double — taking public support beyond a politically acceptable level in these years when life is not meant to be easy? Not necessarily, says the pro-Melbourne argument; for the vast touring costs now incurred by the AO would be cut significantly enough, probably, to pay the costs of setting up a second chorus, based in Melbourne, and hiring enough principles to make a new company functional.

The big problem would be orchestral, for the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra is heavily committed to accompanying the Australian Ballet and would not have sufficient spare time to service an opera company playing major seasons in Melbourne and Adelaide with the odd excursion to Tasmania or the West.

It is important to be aware of the fact that touring an opera company is a vastly complex operation that not only escalates expenses alarmingly but at the same time actually reduces potential revenues by reducing the number of performances a company can stage. The costs involved in air fares to get the Sydney-based AO to and from Melbourne for no less than five mini-seasons this year, and three next, are enormous; but they are only the beginning. As well as people, sets and costumes must be moved; as well as singers — a wide range of back-up staff. Living away from home allowances must be paid. Expensive rehearsal time must be incurred every time a production is moved into a new theatre, no two of which are identical in terms of dimensions and technical facilities.

An opera company that sits in one house pays no fares or allowances, loses no time in performances forfeited because of travel or re-rehearsal time. And quite possibly is an artistically happier one than the company which tours extensively. For opera singers are human beings too and some even have spouses and or children from whom they don’t care to be separated for months at a time.

Add up all those grass roots plusses, combine the result with the minuses in straight-out cash terms that arise when one is on the road, and the arguments for the Melbourne-based high profile opera company become very convincing. Add into the mix the additional artistic bonus of a second management unaffected by current AO policies and personalities and the case becomes even stronger yet. The entire Australian opera community, patrons as well as those professionally involved, could benefit.

**SOONER OR LATER**

In fact, of course, there is no doubt that something along this very line will happen within the next few years...the only question is whether it happens immediately, provoked by recent developments within the Australian Opera, or whether the pace is more leisurely: whether, to put it bluntly, the progress is by evolution or revolution.

It is very hard indeed to see the present status quo being perpetuated for very long at all. The Australian Opera has bad a very fair go indeed as unchallenged ruler of Australia’s operatic roost; and there is sufficient dissatisfaction with its past performance, and sufficient unease about the prospects of a better performance in the future if it is left to its own devices under the present hierarchy, so that the funding authorities very well may feel obliged to do something.

It would be foolish for anyone to try and guess precisely, at this stage, what will happen; that will depend primarily on who replaces Peter Hemmings at the helm of the Australian Opera and how much power he is given, as well as the recommendations of the Australia Council inquiry and what action is taken to implement them. One thing is certain, though: Australia’s opera scene is in for at least a couple of years of organisational turmoil.

The great dangers are that, on the one hand, the edging edifice that is the Australian Opera as it now exists should be allowed to bumble on unprepared, lurching from crisis to crisis with no more sense of medium to long-term direction than in the past; and, on the other, that parochial and or personal antagonisms should be allowed to provoke the ill-advised, premature establishment of a rival company in Melbourne.

The great hope is that the Australia Council inquiry will probe deeply into the whole scene, and recommend sensibly; and that its recommendations will be implemented with despatch. The great fear is that the Fraser Government will use the current crisis as an excuse for ditching opera altogether — an action that would set the cause back more than 20 years in this country.

Whatever happens, the 80s can scarcely fail to be exciting years for opera in Australia — provided only that heads remain cool enough to avoid activating any of the self-destruct mechanisms which are so treacherously numerous on today’s opera scene in this country.

*David Gyger is editor of Opera Australia.*
FILM

By Elizabeth Riddell

Tim - the full quid

The astonishing thing about Tim, a film produced, directed and scripted by Michael Pate, is that against all odds it almost succeeds as a piece of entertainment. Given its theme - illiterate working-class retarded young man is taken up by mature, stitched-up career woman, love dawns etc it would seem to be an object of embarrassment to one and all, makers, cast and audience.

And of course it is embarrassing, from time to time, because to observe an upright young man behaving like a nong, even a Paul Hogan parody of a nong, makes it hard to keep a straight face. But actually Michael Pate has away rather well with the theme, though the claim of delicacy made for the treatment is not exactly valid. It is the cliche-ridden direction and camera work and the painfully slow pace meant no doubt to be lyrical which undermines concentration.

To spell out the plot, Tim is a 24 year old builders' labourer and part-time gardener described by his loving father as "not the full quid". He cannot read or write. His parents have disclosed to him the workings of a lawnmower but not the facts of life and death. Raking Ms Mary Horton's garden leaves in shorts so skimpy they are just short of illegal, Tim wins her interest and sympathy and she starts him off reading The Wind in the Willows. He likes it, and her — as he keeps saying — and creamy cake and sugary tea. Also, the beer he has with Dad, and Mum's cooking.

Against opposition from his sister Dawnie, Mary takes him off to her Palm Beach shack, and they frolic on the sand just like two kids in a cigarette commercial.

The idyll might have gone on indefinitely but for a family tragedy. Mum dies and then Dad dies, giving the director-producer-scriptwriter a chance at two funerals, and Mary obviously has to look after Tim. Mr Pate (or maybe Miss McCullough) is not about to let them get into the sack without the marriage ceremony.

The catch to all this is that Tim, in the person of Mel Gibson — handsome, a trifle pudgy and a touch knock-kneed — is obviously, in spite of what father says, the full quid. He may not be Einstein, but he is all there.

Some other questions have to be asked. If he watches all those westerns on the box, as he does, how is it that he fails to note that people die? How has he got to be a handsome 24 without feeling the stirrings of passion? To put it rather more bluntly; even if he were shy, would not some carefree beach girl have chased and caught him behind the surf sheds on a dark night?

In other words, the story is phoney. Retarded people of any age do not look like Tim. The film actually, perhaps unwittingly, makes this point: when Mary visits a school for handicapped children to find out how Tim can best be taught, the young people look exactly what they are — mentally handicapped, retarded.

Mary Horton is played by Piper Laurie, whose last big role was as the bitch-mother in Carrie. Given the difficulties, it is a good if saccharine performance. But Pate's real triumph is in the casting of Alwyn Kurts and Pat Evison as Dad and Mum. Years of playing stereotypes have not lessened Kurts' ability to get his teeth into a role, and Ms Evison once again brings a whole new interpretation to the part of a housebound, dutiful, scolding, loving, forbearing, ageing woman. Their scenes together and with others, notably Dawnie's intended-in-laws (Margo Lee and James Condon) are superb. They provide the only genuinely affecting content of the film.

I would not be astonished to find that Tim makes some money. The audience around me was moved to tears apart from some irreverent gigglers. It will do better at day sessions than at night. For some mysterious reason it has a Not Recommended for Children censorship rating. Yet nothing could be purer, unless it is the driven snow. Eric Jupp's music woo-oo-oo-shes melodiously over antiseptic suburban and beach scenery photographed by Paul Onorato.

Among Tim's investors were the Australian Film Commission, the NSW Film Corporation, Greater Union and the Nine Network.
Of the *Performing Arts Year Book of Australia* for 1978, edited by Colin Croft, one is tempted to say "third time lucky", except that so much work has gone into it, from a relatively small group of people, that luck can't have had much to do with it. When Volume 2 (1977) appeared last year I said, more or less, that it was useless - so much information thrown together with no way of finding the particular bit you want. Volume 3 is a vast improvement. It is clearly set out and organised into chapters and sections which are easy to find. Each company or producer is clearly identified. Above all, it has an index (of which the publishers are so proud that they have put it at the front of the book) which in a single stroke transforms it from a vaguely useful recording to the activity of the year. With the index you can follow the work of a performer, play, playwright, musician or whatever, or simply find quickly the production details for any show, film or concert.

There is scarcely a production listed which does not have accompanying photographs, which makes it a good book to browse in.

There are still many inaccuracies, mainly typographical, and the index is by no means complete. There are also some odd differences in the space given to various shows and companies, presumably caused by different material supplied by the publicity departments. The introductions to the chapters vary considerably. Kenneth G Hall and Jilly Seckes attempt some brief critical overview of the year (as does Nadine Amadio, but she's writing about the monolithic AOI, but the others might just as well have signed their photographs and left it at that. To be fair Jill Perryman does come up with the idea that the public should be given what it wants, and that we should make show business entertaining).

These are relatively minor criticisms, however (the index could be more accurate and comprehensive, but it is still an enormous help). Browsing through the book I am perfectly prepared to accept the publisher's claim that "it isn't in the Year Book it didn't happen or wasn't worth but stops short of saying that they are politically wrong, which is where his argument seem to be heading. His artistic judgements are really themselves political.

And yet these political playwrights are interested in individual character. It is the recent British playwrights' great contribution to the modern concern with politics in the theatre that they are attempting to find ways of placing the individual through dramatic character, firmly at the centre of the broad political systems and processes they portray. If it makes for bad political argument it's still great political theatre.

The interest in character does refer us back to another chapter in which Hayman points out the lack of formal experimentation in recent British playwrighting. The writers have on the whole been only slightly influenced by continental writers such as Beckett, Handke and others. Hayman seems to have saved these up for another book, which according to the excellent bibliography in this one, will appear before this year is out.

After all this I promise, for next month, a selection of recent British plays.
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Wednesday, January 9
Opus 31 No. 1 G Major; “The Gypsy”; Opus 31 No. 2; “The Tempest”; Opus 54 F Major; Opus 31 No. 3 E Flat Major; “The Hunt”.

Friday, January 11
2 Sonatinas Opus 49 No. 2 G Major; Opus 49 No. 1 G Minor; Third Sonata follows Opus 79 G Major; “Waldstein”; Opus 53 Sonata C Major; Opus 7; “The Enamoured”

Saturday, January 12
Opus 2 No. 1 F Minor; “Little Appassionata”; Opus 2 No. 2 A Major; “The Spring Sonata”; Opus 2 No. 2 C Major; “The Little Waldstein”; Opus 13 C Minor; “The Pathétique”

Tuesday, January 15
Opus 90 E Minor; “The Beloved”; Opus 101 A Major; Opus 26; “The Funeral March Sonata”; Opus 22 B Flat

Wednesday, January 16
Opus 28 D Major; “The Pastoral Sonata”; Opus 78 F Sharp Major; Opus 106 B Flat Major; “The Hammerklavier”

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January 14 Irish Spectacular
Traditional music, song and dance featuring Australia’s leading Irish musicians including Declan Affley (Wise\ pipes) and Catherine O’Sullivan (Celtic Harp).

January 15 Sydney Songster
Bernard Bolan, Denis Kevans (Australia’s Loner), Bernard Bolan, Eric Bogle, Phyl Lobl and Denis Tracey. Songs to make you laugh, cry and cringe.

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Half a dozen rattling Bush Bands with a packed Programme of Australian folk songs.

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From Britain two outstanding performers, Shirley Collins, “first lady” of English folksong with Peter Bellamy songwriter, musician and singer.

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Country and bluegrass music with Mike McClellan and The Chris Duffy Band

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American piano genius Abdullah Ibrahim in a striking programme of African Music on traditional and contemporary instruments.

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AUSTRALIAN THEATRE WORKSHOP
ANU Theatre Group, Childers Street Hall; Chollo Bonga by John Milligan. December 12-15.
FORTUNE THEATRE COMPANY
Playhouse (49 4488)
Once A Catholic by Mary O'Malley; director, Anne Godfrey Smith. Nov 28 - Dec 8.
REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (47 0781)
THEATRE 3 (47 4222)
For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 49.3192.

NSW THEATRE

ACTORS COMPANY (669.2503)
Workshops with The Corporeal Mime Company December 1-23 Wed to Suns.
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357.6611)
School Tours: Alex Hood folksinger; South Coast until December 13. Blinky Bill a childrens play for infants and primary; Hunter and North West until December 7.
CLEMBEN AUSTRALIA (61.6967)
Regent Theatre Paddington Bear by Michael Bond and Alfred Bradley; directed by Di Drew. Commences December 28.
COURT HOUSE HOTEL (969.8202)
Oxford Street, Taylor Square. The Over-the-Rainbow Show by Rick Maier and Malcolm Frawley; director, Malcolm Frawley; music, Sandra Ridgwell; with Susan Asquith and Steven Sacks. Throughout December.
ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)
Knuckle by David Hare; director, Jon Ewing. Commences December 6.
FIRST STAGE THEATRE COMPANY (82 1603)
The History of Theatre in Dramatic Form by Gary Baxter; director, Chris Lewis; with Angela Benne, Damien Corrigan and Gary Baxter. Touring to schools and public institutions throughout December.
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 December.
GENESIAN THEATRE (55.5641)
Tonight at 8.30 by Noel Coward; director, Tony Hayes; with Charles Zara, Bernadette Hayes and Gaynor Mitchell. December 1-23.
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
Annie, the musical; director, George Martin; with Hayes Gordon, Jill Ferrymen, Nancye Hayes, Ric Hutton, Anne Grigg and Kevin Johns. Until December 8.
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26.2526)
In recess until new year.
KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415)
KIRRibILLi Hotel, Miles' Point. The Western Show by P P Cranney; director, Richmond Young; music, Adrian Morgan; with Patrick Wood, Margie McCrae, Jane Hamilton, Paul Clubb and Ros Hohnen. Throughout December.
LES CURRIE PRESENTATIONS (358 5676)
MIKE JACKSON, traditional bush music for pre-schools, infants and primary schools; country area from December 13.
MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498 3166)
Seesaw by William Gibson; director, Alastair Duncan; with Bunny Gibson, Paul Maybury, Yvonne Adams, Rod Dunbar, Dolores Ernst, Keith Little, Alan Royal and Carmen Tanti. Until December 22.
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 December.
MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6585)
Ron Amok, a review by John McKellar and Ron Frazer; director, Bill Orr; with Ron Frazer. Throughout December.
NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
Jun and the Paycock by Sean O'Casey; director, John Armstrong. Until December 8.
REDH River by Dick Diamond; director, Frank Barnes. December 14, 15, 16, 21, 22 and 23.
NIMROD THEATRE (699 5003)
Downstairs: Burlesco; a Sideshow Company presentations. Commences December 12.
NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)
Stables Theatre Double Actions including a one man show conceived and directed by Ian Watson; with David London; and an adult version of Actions Speak Louder Than Words; director, Ian Watson; with Nola Colefax, Margaret Davis, David London, Colin

THEATRE AUSTRALIA DECEMBER 1979 57
Allen and Bryan Jones. Until December 8.
PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211)
Bondi Pavilion Theatre
Programme unconfirmed - contact theatre for details.
269 PLAYHOUSE
Programme unconfirmed - contact theatre for details.
Q THEATRE (047 21 5735)
Sweeney Todd by Dibdin Pitt adapted by Maxilland; director, Kevin Jackson; with Ron Hackett, Alan Brel, Peter Kingston, Gae Anderson and Bill Conn. At Barkers Town Hall until December 23.
RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (069 25 2052)
THE ROCKS PLAYERS (660 6254)
Regional Centre by Dibdin Pitt adapted by Maxilland; director, Kevin Jackson; with Ron Hackett, Alan Brel, Peter Kingston, Gae Anderson and Bill Conn. At Barkers Town Hall until December 23.
THEATRE GUILD (22 3433)
Dance sculpture, puppetry, design, radio and video.
SPEAKEASY THEATRE
Restaurant (662 7442)
Roots III director, Jim Fishburn; with Kate Fitzpatrick, Michael Aitkens and Donald McDonal. Throughout December.
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. Until December 15.
DANCE
THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET (2 0588)
Anna Karenina, choreography by Prokovsky; music by Tchaikovsky. Until December 22.
CONCERTS
SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (2 0588)
Concert Hall
An Evening with David Gray. June Bronhill. Tommy Tycho and his Orchestra. December 1, 2, 3, 4.
For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200.
OPERA
QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY
In recess.
For entries contact Don Batchelor on 269 3018.
SA THEATRE
ACT (223 8610)
Sheridan Theatre: Done For Money by Bill Agg. Playreading, director, Brian Debnam. December 8.
ARTS THEATRE
Hang Your Clothes on Yonder Bush by Barbara Stellmach; director, Murray George. December 1-8.
FESTIVAL THEATRE (51 0121)
ICON THEATRE
LA MAMA (46 4212)
STAGE COMPANY
STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51 51 5151)
Playhouse: Last Day In Woolloomooloo by Ron Blair; director, Colin George; designer Axel Bartz. To 15 December.
Christmas Roadshow: Me and My Mate directed by Nick Enright and Kevin Palmer. Senior Citizens and Childrens Homes. To December 14.
SA CREATIV WORKSHOP (272 3036)
The Box Factory: Kossmato's Birthday by lan Moreland. To December 9.
THEATRE GUILD (22 3433)
Little Theatre: The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day by Peter Kenna; director, Jim Vile. To December 15.
TROUPE
DANCE
AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE
(212 2084)
THEATRE

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Front Theatre: Failing In Love by Jan Carnal.
Back Theatre: Suitcase Players' season and Governor's Pleasure Theatre Group.

COMEDY THEATRE (663 4993)
Flextime by Roger Hall. See Vic Arts Council.

CREATIVE ARTS THEATRE (870 6742)
Community based, touring to schools, libraries and community centres.

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)
Carnal. Touring East Coast, North East Tasmania and Launceston.

HOOPLA THEATRE FOUNDATION (63 4888)
Playbox. The Virgin: Miracle for Christmas devised and directed by Murray Copeland. The traditional Christmas story professionally enacted with Margaret Cameron, Michael Duffield, Harold Bright, Peter Ford and Carillo Gantner.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 3211)
Old Vic Company: Hamlet by Shakespeare; director, John Robertson; with Derek Jacobi. To early December. Reg Livermore's new show. Early next year.

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6226)
The Circus. Continuing.
Upstairs: Alan Pentland's Shirazz Cabaret (mark 2).

LA MAMA (350 4593)
Counter Spaces by Daniel Kahans and End To End by Dennis Orams. December 6 - 31.

MEIBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)
Russell Street: Once A Catholic by Mary O'Malley; director, Ray Lawler; with Vivian Davies. Athenaeum: Travelling North by David Williamson; Nimrod production; director, John Bell; with Frank Wilson and Carole Ray. To December 15.
Cinderella by Frank Hauver. To Feb 12. Athenaeum 2: Hamlet by Shakespeare; director, John Sumner; with John Walters. OLD MILL (052 21 1444)
Drama Centre of Deakin University.

Regular evening productions.

PILGRIM PUPPET THEATRE (818 6650)
Circus Strings and Things: director, Butt Cooper. 10 am and 1 am Mon-Fri.

POLYGLOT PUPPETS (818 1512)
Multi-cultural puppet theatre touring schools and community centres.

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 2911)
Dams La Rue. Continuing.

STOCK THEATRE COMPANY (24 9667)
Private Lives by Noel Coward.

TIKKI AND JOHN'S THEATRE RESTAURANT (662 1754)

MAJOR AMATEUR COMPANIES

Basin Theatre Group 762 1082
Clayton Theatre Group 878 1702
Heidelberg Rep 49 2262
Malvern Theatre Co 211 0020
Pumpkin Theatre 42 8237
Williamstown Little Theatre 528 4267
1812 Theatre 796 8624

For entries contact Les Cartwright on 781 1777.

For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639.
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THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD
NO. 18

Name: ...
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ACROSS:
1. The French placed an article in the
Swiftian land (6)
5. Mails ant rare charm (8)
9. Look at Northern lad in the
countenance, doing a dancing
number (3.5)
10. "That father ruffian, that.....in years"
(Henry IV Part I) (6)
11. Tweedledum's perversely against
theology sage (12)
13. Point to a small dessert vegetable (4)
14. Vessels used in special mice labs (8)
17. Savage short man can be delightfully
piquant (4.4)
18. Show appreciation at a friend returning
to buck the head of Congress (4)
20. Theatre strata out of bounds for the
defrocked? (5,7)
23. International glimpse? Absolutely
not! (6)
25. Thus a poet leaves behind novice's
badge and becomes a judge (8)
26. Conflict involving good man
common (6)

DOWN:
2. Takes small beer and so is led to woe (4)
4. Shade sounds as though it might be
decorative (6)
5 & 22. Huge obstacle and knot
encountered by sailors (3,5,7.4)
6. Uniformed person who exists, that is,
for the first of the doges (8)
7. Volatile mines are ligamental (5)
8. The worker is nothing towards a
backward layman, but
misanthropic (10)
12. In Yugoslavia, the bands sustain the
clefs (5,5)
15. Put your money on the step? That's
underhand! (9)
16. Goes down and deigns to abandon
study (8)
19. Sympathies sheltered by fantastical
lies (6)
21. Dramatic division not noticed by 23,
we hear (5)
22. See 5

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS
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