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— Music Drama’s revival
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— West End playwright
DRAMA AND THE MEDIA
— plays on radio & TV
DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM
— review of season
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— Film review
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PREMIERE SEASON 1980

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MARTIN VAUGHAN

NIMROD
COMMENT

THEATRE AS BIG BUSINESS

That the theatre and entertainment industry is a major form of business activity was never doubted by the Victorians with their huge auditoria, and certainly by commercial theatre entrepreneurs of today. The largest ventures, worth millions of dollars to their investors, are produced, packaged and sold with the same strategies as any product to be bought in the supermarket. So we have Evita being sold on the same basis as films like Star Wars, where one of the major inducements is the production's record-breaking expenditure. Michael Edgley and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust were not sure that the Dance Theatre of Harlem would be the sell-out success it was until the brilliantly conceived television commercial sent bookings soaring only a few days before opening.

With the advent of Little Theatre and the mantle of subsidy, however, theatre assumed an amateur and precious air, with its acolytes working for little or nothing, shows being mounted to cater to the requirements of art rather than the populace and scant concentration on publicising itself, except to an elite. But times have moved on; in Britain the movement engineered by one woman — Lilian Baylis, herself an ingénue in knowledge of the performing arts — has resulted in vast national opera, ballet and theatre companies occupying huge complexes that are at least as important tourist attractions as any West End theatres.

Here, the major subsidised state companies, and notably the MTC, have grown from tiny repertory theatres to major financial organisations. To quote just a handful of statistics: in 1978 the MTC had a turnover of above $5 million. Nimrod's in the same year was well over $2½ million, even one of the tiniest companies, the Hole in the Wall, saw $300,000 pass through its hands and there has been considerable expansion all round in the last two years.

Another indication of the rising business status of theatres is the increasing private sponsorship it is attracting. In spite of euphemistic terms like "patronage" and "sponsorship", commercial houses, quite properly, have sophisticated methods of assessing the value to them of such donations, in terms of advertising and public awareness. Just as major sporting events provide high profile and good environment advertising, so theatre is starting to make inroads into this area. It is not simply the Australian Opera who can attract money from Utah, but the State Theatre Company of SA from Dunhill, Nimrod from Rothmans, the Sydney Festival, Sydney Dance Company and even lunchtime theatre in Sydney from AGL.

Even the Taxation Department is looking at theatre in terms of revenue, with sales tax a major issue at present. Sales tax is levied on the conversion of raw materials into saleable products. Certain large companies like the Australian Ballet and Opera have been paying tax over the years on the transformation of wood, paint and fabric into sets and costumes, and the Department has recently demanded similar payments from theatre companies, to be retrospective from their inception. Naturally such an unbudgeted expense over some ten years, for most, would be ruinous, and Nimrod is to fight the test case, the result of which will set the precedent for all companies.

The Government, it seems, is also looking at recouping investment in entertainment in a more straightforward way, with the possible institution of a showbusiness talent bank. The idea, conceived by Chris Beardie (of Laugh In fame) and thought favourably of by Tony Staley, is for a joint venture between the Federal Government and private enterprise to fund the development and promotion of rising stars — actors, singers, writers, directors and others — in return for participation in their future equity.

Theatre is moving on apace as part of the educational possibilities of video-taping productions for sales to schools are being investigated No chance of videoing a Williamson play, though, in spite of the demand, because of the very high likelihood of the piece being bought for film or television production. And from various sources the money is being found to finance international tours of increasing numbers of Australian companies. Three of these, the Australian Dance Theatre, Circus Oz and the Ensemble, representing three different capitals — are appearing this month at the Edinburgh Festival.

Gone are the days of Little Theatre; theatre is now big business.
A SHAKESPEARE COMPANY... The latest project to get underway, funded under the Limited Life Scheme by the Theatre Board, is Rex Cramp-horn's group, now calling themselves A Shakespeare Company. It consists of some of the most eminent practitioners in the country: Ruth Cracknell, Rex himself, Arthur Dignam, Drew Forsyth, John Gaden, on release from the Sydney Theatre Company, Ron Haddrick, Jennifer Hagan, John Howard, Robert Menzies, Kerry Walker and Jim Waites.

The company's aim is to study in detail and perform a text or texts of Shakespeare's. The project is being pursued away from the time and money pressures of the five-week rehearsal period which has become the tradition of Australian professional theatre. They are attempting to come to a detailed understanding of a text in the light of the vast body of Shakespearean research and criticism available, and, secondly, to translate their understanding into a simple and direct performance of the text. They are particularly conscious of a need to work in reaction to the prevailing tradition of naturalism in performance.

Everyone in the project is working on a full-time basis, and the work is being carried out at the old Darlinghurst School behind the Seymour Centre, and at theatres in the Seymour.

In their general survey, the Company are limiting themselves to a consideration of the early plays, the comedies and the late plays, leaving the histories and major tragedies to one side. Work has already begun on The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and if time permits they intend to continue with a middle period "problem comedy" and one of the late plays.

In November a season of performances at an advanced stage in the work will be given in the Everest Theatre at the Seymour Centre.

LETTER FROM MELBOURNE... I was impressed with Graeme Blundell's dry, elegant yet punishingly analytical article in the July issue of TA. The loss of major theatre artists like himself is a blow from which Melbourne intellectual life may never recuperate. Melbourne's few remaining actors, directors and writers of note or promise will now have to look to Sydney for creative example and decade-deciding ideas.

For many here this will come as a relief. Melbourne is exhausted. For an epoch it has had to carry the burden and the opprobrium as Australia's premier city of ideas.

Melbourne theatre can now relax, enjoy itself, get on with the mere activity, throw a few parties, read Kim Philby, burn its copies of Brook, TDR and Theatre Quarterly, and disport itself along Grattan St and beyond.

Blundell has put his long, straight finger on one of the most exhilarating developments in Australian cultural history: an intellectual and artistic migration; practitioners and thinkers actually uprooting themselves and their families, travelling North, out of a lust for creative fulfilment.

I see this as the harbinger of a new national maturity. People usually migrate in search of better conditions, a kinder climate, more food, more money, employment, a better press, even freedom. This migration, however, announces a new and selfless idealism, a spacious faith in our theatrical future.

It will take time for Melbourne to adjust to the role of province and colony, to the fresh perspective of Sydney and the bush.

If things here are as rank as Blundell's article suggests, then such a relegation could take one of two courses: firstly, paranoia out of a sense of inferiority to Sydney - something quite novel for Melbourne; secondly, a thorough soul-searching and possible renewal in the light of Sydney's innovations.

It is to Blundell's credit that he has made the latter, more healing, course a distinct likelihood, so free are his thoughts from personal rancour, bias, rhetoric, sycophancy and disruptive geo-politics; quite properly he has refrained from even hinting that he might be the one to salvage the Melbourne wreck. Melbourne's loss is Australian theatre's gain.

Jack Hibberd
FILM AND TV PRODUCTION... The Australian Film and Television School are now advertising for applicants to their highly intensive, four-week course in film and TV production. They can only take twenty-five participants and the course is scheduled to start on February 2, 1981. The closing date for applications is November 4.

The course includes all aspects of production, from actually using a 16mm camera, to cutting in the camera, lighting, film stocks — all in theory and practice. Then there's documentary direction, scriptwriting and continuity.

The next part of the course is concerned with actual filming exercises and seeing the work from all points of view, from script-writer/director to boom operator. From there you go on to editing in principle to editing your 16mm exercise. The film aspect is rounded off with production design and management and finally all important marketing.

The television side starts with studio familiarity and dives straight into exercises including directing light entertainment and chroma-key work. Drama direction, script evaluation, visualisation and casting are all major parts of the course. There are also workshops, choreography sessions and discussions.

Entry to this extremely comprehensive course is by written application to AFTVS and then by a selection committee.

PLAYWRIGHTS-IN-RESIDENCE... The Literature Board of the Australia Council is now calling for joint applications from playwrights and theatre companies for assistance under the 1981 playwright-in-residence scheme funded by the Literature and Theatre Boards.

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

Two different types of playwright-in-residence grants are offered, one for professional theatre companies for the employment and training of promising new or young playwrights and the other for TIE or community groups for established playwrights to work on the production of new programs and wider community involvement in theatre.

In the past year the Boards' contributed to the salaries of thirteen playwrights - in - residence, grants usually being determined on a 3:1 basis and ranging from $700 to $3,000 for periods of one to six months.

Guidelines and application forms are available from the Literature Board, PO Box 302, North Sydney, 2060. Applications on the appropriate forms must be received by the Board by the closing date of 30 September 1980.

MUKINUPIN TO OLD VIC... The State Theatre Company of South Australia's current production, The Man From Mukinupin, Dorothy Hewett's latest musical, is to be revived and taken to London in March next year.

An invitation to bring the production over was extended to Kevin Palmer (the show's director) by the new director of the Old Vic, Timothy West, who had seen the company's work during two tours of Australia he has made with the then Prospect Company. The Hon Murray Hill, SA Minister for the Arts, said, "This overseas tour, to the former home of the National Theatre of Great Britain, reflects the growing overseas recognition of Australian talent in general and the standard of the STC ensemble in particular. This invitation is especially significant following closely on the Australian Dance Theatre's trip to the 1980 Edinburgh Festival."

At this stage it is thought that the entire present cast will tour to London — Maree D'Arcey, Daphne Grey, Robert Grubb, Edwin Hodgeman, Audine Leith, Deborah Little, Carmel Millhouse and Tony Strachan.

The music for Mukinupin is by Jim Cotter with lighting by Nigel Leving and sets and costumes by Sue Russell.

Let’s hope the production doesn't share the same fate as The Club at the Old Vic, the status of which as a venue has declined somewhat since the departure of the National for their new complex.
CONTINUING SAGA OF CIRCUS OZ... Following its ten week season at Sydney's Paris Theatre, Circus Oz headed off to Papua New Guinea to perform with about 1,400 participants from all over the South Pacific in the third South Pacific Festival of Arts, of which Ken Horler was one of the adjudicators.

The Festival, centred in Port Moresby but also reaching Lae and Wewak, opened on July 1 and ran for two weeks. During that period Circus Oz presented nine performances, all outdoors, to enthusiastic audiences of up to 6,000 people, mostly nationals who had never seen a circus before. They showed through their overwhelming response, particularly to clowning and aerial work, that the largely visual forms used in circus transcend cultural barriers with consummate ease.

Their reception was aided by the absence of television in PNG; audiences turned up four hours in advance to be sure of getting a good view.

The Australian contingent also consisted of Aboriginal dance groups from the Bamyli and Lake Evella regions of Arnhem Land, the Torres Strait Islanders and Mornington Island, all of whom were extremely well received, and whom Circus Oz found a great pleasure to meet and perform with. The tour was arranged basically by the Aboriginal Artists Agency.

Stephen Champion of Oz feels that "perhaps the most treasured aspect of this adventure for Circus Oz is our heightened awareness as Australians, of the immense cultural wealth and diversity within the South Pacific region. Something we are glad to have felt a part of before we embark on our European tour" - which opened in Rotterdam on August 6 and will then take them through Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and England before returning to Australia in mid 81.

SONGS FROM SIDESHOW ALLEY... There are great things brewing for Robyn Archer following her triumphant tour of A Star Is Born. Helen Montagu wants it for London and Alan (Can't Stop The Music) Carr thinks it will be a smash hit in the USA. 1981 looks like the year when Robyn's international stardom will be born.

Meanwhile she is reworking Songs From Sideshow Alley which she wrote, composed the music for and appeared in, along with Robyn Nevin, for this year's Adelaide Festival. Now it is to be revived in a new production by Max Oldfield at the Paris in Sydney. Rodney Fisher is to direct, not the two Robyns, but Nancye Hayes and Maggie Kirkpatrick in the roles of the two sideshow hands. Opening night is set for October 16.

HARLEM PHOTOS... There have been so many enquiries about the superb photography done for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, that the man who shot it all deserves special mention. The Harlem photos were taken by Paul Crowley of Sydney.
**WOMEN AT THE NATIONAL...** Good things are predicted from the National Theatre Company, Perth, during the next few months, and mainly from the female members of the company.

**Empress Eugenie.** Nita (dubbed Perth's first lady of theatre) Panell's new one-woman show, had its premiere a week ago and there are plans for the rest of the country to see it later. Director Marianne MacNaughton has flown out from the UK to handle this production.

The National's present

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**EVENTS AT LA MAMA...** BAARC, or The Brunswick Actors and Righters Collectiv.is a new group who showed their first production, Testing Ground at La Mama last month. Devised and performed by the seven or so members of the group it was a fresh and exciting piece somewhere between mime, dance and performance art dealing in archetypical images about society and the individual in an aesthetically satisfying way, and free of cliche and pretension. The images it created were utterly crystalline in their clarity and relevant in content without being topical or didactic.

The performers are young and relatively inexperienced but their commitment to creating a new sort of theatre language indicated that they are a group to watch. In fact Testing Ground heralded the acknowledgement of an expansion of direction at La Mama and one which has been coming for a long time in the work of Val Kirkwan, James Clayden and Lloyd Jones.

During the month La Mama is the venue for a series of performance events incorporating music, film and performance art by local filmmakers, musicians, actors, writers, and visual artists. What will come out of it remains to be seen but the least that will happen is that the boundaries between these forms of expression will be pushed some way further forward, and the unevenly compartmentalised will have found a new, and hopefully not temporary, home.

And again one must be glad that La Mama exists and is able to constantly re-evaluate and recreate its direction in a way that other theatres in Melbourne rarely do.

Suzanne Spunner

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**MTC SECOND SEASON...** The Melbourne Theatre Company has announced the details of its second season for this year, from September to April 81.

Michael Blakemore, who was last in the country for the ill-fated Deathtrap, is directing the O'Neill trilogy Mourning Becomes Electra at the Athenaeum, but before that comes the second Australian production (after the National Perth's premiere early this year) of Peter Nichols' British army comedy Privates On Parade. In November, Frank Thring will repeat his Brisbane performance as Sheridan Whiteside in The Man Who Came To Dinner.

At Russell Street, another Australian director who has found success overseas, Ted Craig, will direct The Elephant Man, an MTC AETC production. Craig has recently been acclaimed in New York for his Look Back In Anger starring Malcolm McDowell.

Robert Hewett, who has long been an MTC actor, has turned playwright, and his Just One More Dance has gone through the Tributary playreading process to full production at Russell Street in December. And early next year, Dorothy Hewett's most successful play yet, The Man From Mukinupin, will make its Melbourne debut in the same theatre.

At Athenaeum 2, Jean Genet's The Maids is being continued for a further six weeks, due to unexpected public demand, and it will be followed by Gordon Graham's latest, Demolition Job.

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**THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1980**
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Listen & Learn Productions
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Melbourne 3001
by Norman Kessell

What an encouraging box-office bonanza the Dance Theatre of Harlem became for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Its three-week season in Sydney netted a record take of $620,000 and a one-performance visit to Brisbane collected another $150,000—an astounding 97 percent capacity in paid-for tickets, compliments bringing attendance to 100 percent at every performance.

At the time of writing both Melbourne and Adelaide had passed break-even figures and were headed for similar sell-out seasons. Regularly break-even figure for Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide was $154,000 and for Brisbane $112,000. Total break-even figure for the six-weeks visit was $882,000, easily exceeded before the tour was half over.

As the above, every review I read credited Michael Edgley as prime mover of the visit. An understandable mistake, of course, because the Edgley organisation has promoted just about every major ballet---the visit. An understandable mistake, of course, because the Edgley organisation has promoted just about every major ballet and were headed for similar sell-out seasons. Weekly break-even figure for Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide was $154,000 and for Brisbane $112,000. Total break-even figure for the six-weeks visit was $882,000, easily exceeded before the tour was half over.

Access to the above, every review I read credited Michael Edgley as prime mover of the visit. An understandable mistake, of course, because the Edgley organisation has promoted just about every major ballet to come here in recent years. Even the programme had Michael's picture above that of AETT general manager Jeffrey Joynton-Smith.

The fact is, however, that credit for organising the visit belongs solely to the Trust's entrepreneurial division, which began negotiations five and a half years ago. These involved five subsequent visits to New York by the division's administrator, Jeffrey Kovel.

Offered a piece of the action, the alert Michael Edgley International Pty Ltd took a 25 percent investment and JC Williamson Productions Ltd another 20 per cent. The Trust handled administration and management and Edgley contributed his indispensible expertise in promotion and advertising. Final filip to a supremely successful venture was the presence of Sir Robert Helpmann as consultant on repertoire.

Will the newest Stephen Sondheim musical, Sweeney Todd, ever come to Australia? The Adelaide Festival Centre Trust has an option, but programming manager Tony Frewin has been reported as saying: "It might be too bloodthirsty for Adelaide." More likely deterrents are that it folded on Broadway with a loss of $400,000 and that Variety termed its London box-office potential as "questionable," especially at a record top ticket price of $24 in the 2280-seat Drury Lane Theatre. A friend of mine who attended the final preview in London was mildly entertained, but found the characters all too steely and the storyline dispiringly cheerless.

What's in it for playwrights these days? Talking to Peter Nichols in the foyer of Sydney's Theatre Royal on the opening night of his Born In The Gardens, I asked if this was his first visit to Australia. "Oh, yes," he said. "I couldn't possibly afford to come. I'm only here now because the company paid for me. I did, however, pay for my wife."

Here's a thought for local restaurantiers. The famous Simpsons-in-the-Strand restaurant is offering a 10 percent discount on dinner served between 6pm and 7.30pm. provided the customer holds tickets for an evening performance at any London theatre. Same concession applies to matinee ticket holders for Saturday lunch.

Variety says London legit press agent Paul Barnard is moving to Australia, but will retain a contact office there at Hilton Advertising.

After a break of five years since the Q Theatre moved to Pen rith, lunchhour theatre is back at the AMP Theatre at Sydney's Circular Quay with some interesting bedfellows—that Australian Gas Light Company in an extension of its long and valuable support of the Festival of Sydney; the Sydney City Council with a cash donation of $3,000; the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust with its entrepreneurial expertise. Production is by the Australian Repertory Company, but Gas Company backing has been acknowledged by titling the venture The Living Flame Lunchtime Theatre.

I had already seen some months earlier a preview of the opening production, Paul Ablan's Hank's Night (which the Q Theatre itself had staged some years ago). This version is neatly designed for presentation in restricted areas as part of an interesting concept by actress Valerie Newstead called Theatre In The Home. It is well-directed by Michael Morton-Evans and engagingly played by Christine Cameron and Michael Freundt, both currently in East Lynne at the Music Hall which, alas, finally closes on September 6 together with Peter Fleet, currently in Cyrano de Bergerac at the Opera House and Susan Hahowr, recently seen in the TV series, Prisoner.

Morton-Evans is artistic director of the company which is controlled by its three directors, Lord Mayor Nelson Meers, Lady Sonia McMahon and Professor Eric Daniels, with day-to-day running handled by a management committee of three actors, Ron Ratcliffe, Valerie Newstead and Felicity Gordon.

Meanwhile, the Stage-Act Company, founded by actors Olive Bodill and Anthony Wheeler to present lunchhour shows at Anzac House Theatre, has run into troubled waters—something to do with availability of dates which may involve litigation. The contretemps forced deferment of a performance of Anouilh's A Phoenix Too Frequent, which was to have played from July 7 to August 1.

What a variety the past year has provided for versatile actor Barry Lovett. A richly comic performance in the Nimrod's The Venetian Twins at the Opera House was followed by an eventual four months in London with David Williamson's The Club. Back home to two widely divergent roles at Jane Street the Greek cafe proprietor in Louis Esson's The Bride of Gospel Place (with a credit card TV commercial as a bonus!) and the Jewish father of the possessed bride in Solomon Anski's The Dybbuk. Next, on September 2, he joins the "Fairstars" for a Sitmar cruise on which he will appear in a trio of revues under the title Advance Australia Where? Other members of the company are David Gilchrist, recently back from overseas and last seen here at the Music Hall, Lola Nixon and Kay Powell. They return November 28.

Odious Comparisons Dept: We heard a woman behind us at the opening night of 13 Rue de L'Amour tell a companion: "I saw a French play a few years ago and it was better than this. It was An Imaginary Invalid by Moliere."

Sydney director Ted Craig, now operating internationally, has had a busy year. Since directing Find The Lady at the Adelaide Festival Centre in January he has directed Look Back In Anger for New York's Roundabout Theatre and a revival of Find The Lady for a UK tour which opened in Coventry, commuting between the two countries for the previews. He will be back in Australia to direct a Melbourne Theatre Company production of The Elephant Man, which opens on October 6.

If you've been wondering whatever happened to actress Elaine Lee, she is busy reading Tarot cards at clubs and private parties, but that doesn't mean she won't be back on stage as soon as the right role is offered.

If you have any Shakespeare first folios lying around, they're now worth big money. One sold recently in London for $187,000 and another in Paris for more than $600,000! And talking of prices, John Lennon and Yoko Ono recently sold one of their pedigreed Holstein-Friesian cows at the Syracuse State Fair for $265,000, believed to be a world record.
The Darwin Theatre Group seeks the following staff for the 1981 year. D.T.G is an amateur group moving towards the establishment of a semi-professional theatre company.

**DIRECTOR**

A Director is sought, preferably to start work in early February. Salary in the range of $15,000 to $20,000 p.a. depending on qualifications and experience. The Director would be expected to present a programme of plays as directed by the Committee, including one or more touring shows. The Director would also continue negotiations on the group’s behalf for continued State and Federal funding.

**ACTOR**

The D.T.G. is also considering appointing one full-time actor. Equity rates would be paid with loadings for additional skills such as directing or tour management.

Applications should reach:
The President, Darwin Theatre Group, P.O. Box 1028, DARWIN, Northern Territory 5794 by October 30, 1980.

Applications are invited for 1981 entrance to The Drama Studio.

All enquiries to the Administrator, The Drama Studio Pty. Ltd. P.O. Box 201 Woollahra 2025 Sydney, N.S.W. Australia. Telephone (02) 31 3755

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They're Playing Our Song—Jacki Weaver and John Waters

by Lucy Wagner

Jacki Weaver and John Waters—perhaps the two best known performers in the country; she a tiny person famous for her big personality; he with a huge female following for his enigmatic sex appeal. The casting for the two-person musical, They're Playing Our Song seems an obvious one, and yet they've only worked together twice before first in a revue called God Save The Queen and more recently in the final episode of Rush the award-winning episode as Waters points out.

"Everyone won an award except me," rues Jacki. They went to the Logie ceremony to collect Hugh Keays Byrne's trophy, "and John lost it."

"Yes, but Hugh didn't mind, he just said his mother collects them. He was very sporting about it" claims the culprit, but adds, "He'll probably send someone else next time."

They both appear genuinely enthusiastic about the show—not just another musical (although they don't denigrate the form in any way), but principally a major Neil Simon play with all the qualities you expect of one. The script is tightly written and very funny, and as the plot concerns a composer and lyricist the songs are fully integrated.

John Waters—"It's not exaggerating; he's a great writer of theatrical dialogue, it times itself perfectly. It's not a bunch of one-line gags. There are no major decisions about how to do it, it's done; it's like Shaw, you don't need to change a comma. The difficulty is just doing it."

Supposedly based on the relationship between Marvin Hamlisch and Carol Bayer Sager (who wrote the music and lyrics respectively) the characters are opposites, the man retiring except in his compositions and the girl "extremely bright, speaks with candour and honesty, has enormous enthusiasm and she's a lot to deal with." to quote Simon himself.

Were they type-cast?

"I think it's all true except extremely bright," says Jacki modestly.

"No. I've watched musicians all my working life." John reflects "and they really are a breed apart, not like actors at all. They do tend to be very private people who don't express themselves much other than in their music. The theatricality of this lies in the interplay; she won't stop until she's brought him out."

Other highly theatrical elements are of course the rapier-sharp Simon dialogue, and the alter-ego device. Three girls and three boys make up a
"Sometimes I think a lot of what we get paid is for the inconvenience of being known."

chorus, enriching the show visually and musically and, identically dressed, representing other facets of Vernon and Sonia. Playing along with the cast is a twenty-three piece orchestra under the direction of Dale Ringland. But the major onus is firmly on the two major leads, singing, dancing and with all the dialogue, scarcely off the stage for a minute. "I'm just glad it's John, he's so easy to work with," says Weaver.

Production-wise the Australian Song is identical to the American productions, but Jacki Weaver saw the New York show and finds their performances very different. And word director Philip Cusack, who has directed all productions, is that the Australians may be the outstanding cast.

Talk of such acclamation, though, always swings the conversation around to its inverse; the cringe, the lack of a star system, the endemic Australian inferiority complex. Jacki Weaver opines that often people haven't seen overseas work and merely assume that we can't be as good, while in fact we are equally good, equally bad and sometimes equally as indifferent as English or American theatre.

I quoted them a statistic that appeared in last month's issue, that the Theatre Royal was budgeting on 40% houses as break-even for Song, whereas it had been 80% for Deborah Kerr in The Day After the Fair because overseas names are better box

"Take Flexitime", said John, "everyone said it won't do well beside Hinge and Bracket at the Seymour Centre, although you might get some spill-over. What happened? Flexitime was wall to wall and Hinge and Bracket were papering their Saturday night houses, so don't tell me Australian actors aren't box office."

Today the main route to recognition is through television (Dustin Hoffman found out what recognition meant when he walked down the street with a Charlie's Angel, someone quips) as is the case with Weaver and Waters, and perhaps live theatre would be in a better position if Australian television started making more of the country's acting talent. But this pair concede that the public side of stardom is not something they particularly enjoy.

"Sometimes," muses Jacki Weaver, "I think that a lot of what we get paid is for the inconvenience of being well known. Even acting for subsidised companies, where mostly we are all payed the same, the onus of publicising a show falls a lot on us — as it should — but it's a lot of extra work."

The lack of performer hierarchy and levels of bankability does mean that the better known can't afford to stick to one medium — let alone get type-cast. Both say that working alternatively in film and live theatre are ideal for the actor's craft. Returning to the stage after eighteen months and Dracula for Waters, and even longer, Bedroom Farce, for Weaver, is no problem: "It's like riding a bicycle, you don't forget how" (Waters); "It's marvellous to hear that laughter again" (Weaver); "Yes, you say a line and fifteen hundred people laugh — that's adrenalin... power" (Waters).

Interestingly both of them had to audition for the roles of Vernon and Sonia — twice, and along with several others.

Jacki Weaver has turned down offers of better money for television work to act in theatre, although the low pay in some subsidised companies (notably one now defunct) drew some bread-line anecdotes. Perhaps "star" status is a limiting one though, for both would be interested in working for Nimrod or Sydney Theatre Company, but have received no offers of late.

Jacki: "There are some young directors now that I wonder if I'll ever work with. Because there's no real star system no one can afford to get conceited and you put not being asked down to not being wanted. If people think I wouldn't be interested then there's a terrible communication problem. One of the plays I loved doing most was Rock' ola — and that wasn't even a success. Of course you accept lower pay, money isn't everything."

John: "Subsidised theatres, though, should be fighting for audiences the same as commercial theatres, and if you can pack a show for them they should be able to pay the same rates. But then I think they should pay everyone more."

As with most actors, John Waters and Jacki Weaver are pleased if their names, made in film and TV, draw more people to live theatre. She is constantly surprised by people, at Nimrod, even in their thirties and forties, coming up after a show to say they enjoyed their first experience of live theatre. Both feel that commercial theatre here should promote our own actors, for its own sake in the long term. Today Dracula; tomorrow King Lear.

Today — and for at least eight months in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne — They're Playing Our Song; tomorrow...? For Jackie Weaver another television series of The Marriage Game. For John Waters, he looks forward to the lead in a great Australian, urban, contemporary film — if he gets the offer.
QTC—10th Anniversary

by Douglas Hedge

The QTC is celebrating its 10th Anniversary with what it calls a "high profile". Heading or directing casts recruited from both local and interstate artists are such names as Joan Bruce, Ron Graham, Margo Lee, Robin Lovejoy, Mick Rodger and June Salter. It's already notioned up a smash-hit with Gypsy (using the Queensland Theatre Orchestra, which didn't exist a decade ago) and a sell-out season of Travelling North has just concluded.

Early in its history — in fact after its second production — Katharine Brisbane referred to the Company as a "small miracle" but predicted that though its work at the time was "equal to the best Australia can produce", it would not be accepted overnight.

She was right.

The production that inspired Ms Brisbane's remarks was Philadelphia. Here I Come! Alan Edwards, who directed it, had described it as a "middle-of-the-road" play. Shortly after it opened a letter was published in the press over the signature "Theatre Lover, Geebung", deploring what the writer alleged was continual blasphemy throughout the play. This led to audience walk-outs, the cancellation of hundreds of bookings and a heated debate in the press and the pulpits.

Acceptance in other areas was hard-won, too. The Shakespearean account was opened in 1972 with Twelfth Night that was described by one critic as "a Kamikaze dive into culture". Audiences stayed away in droves. Three years later The Taming of the Shrew, starring Diane Clenito and Robin Ramsay, drew such a clamorous response that its season was extended and even then the demand for tickets could not be met. The 1978 version of King Lear starring Warren Mitchell was so successful, both commercially and artistically, that it toured to Sydney's Seymour Centre, where it fared every bit as well.

As the Company enters its second decade its priorities and policies are being reviewed. It recognises the need to maintain its responsibility to the development of local talent while at the same time strengthening its resources by attracting talent from the national pool. A new approach to country touring is being discussed, wherein it is hoped a better means may be found of serving the individual needs of regional communities than the present series of one-night stands. The statewide identity is still important.

"There's a train of thought that believes Queensland has little cultural life of any consequence," Edwards says. "It's as widespread as it is erroneous, and we believe we have done much to dispel it. We rate this as one of our proudest achievements."

The Company's first attempt at Australian drama (as distinct from a musical) was in 1972 with Burke's Company. While nobody would argue that the play is sure-fire box office, the production was a major achievement for so young a company.

The early years spawned some now-famous alumni. The opening production, A Rum Do!, featured a young actress in the role of Sadie, the maid. Her name was Geraldine Turner. The first schools' company gave Carol Burns one of her first jobs; Ivar Kants and Frank Gallacher are two prominent names from the early days and later, Geoffrey Rush was to start his career at QTC.

One of QTC's major objectives over the decade has been to stress the "Queensland" part of its title by serving not just the capital city but the entire state. To this end regular adult tours are made through country centres and theatre-in-education teams are almost permanently on the road. In a state the size of Queensland this presents enormous logistical and artistic challenges — the difference in climate, lifestyle and taste between say, Cairns and Cunnamulla is often as wide as the distance that separates them.

The 1IE commitment occupies a large portion of the Company's funding, and there are often as many as three tours on the road at once, at least two of them of more than six months' duration. Sometimes they average three performances a day in conditions which are, to say the least, unsophisticated. Special tours have been mounted to cater for the specific needs of children in the remote areas of Arnhem Land and Central Australia. But since this line of work is, by its very nature, conducted outside the mainstream, even QTC's regular audiences are not fully aware of it.

But the Company feels that it has paid off.

"Through its work in this area we've helped to change the sensibility of the people of Queensland," Alan Edwards said. "We've helped to give a new dignity to the idea of the performing arts — not just in Brisbane, but all over the state, with particular attention to schoolchildren. We now number among our regular audience young adults whose first experience of theatre ever was through our schools performances."

Douglas Hedge has worked as an actor with the QTC for seven of its ten years, and has compiled and written a history of the company, The Company We Keep, which will be published this month.
by Larry Galbraith.

British playwright Peter Nichols likes to keep busy. He is currently working on two projects, a musical and a pantomime for adults based on an historical theme. He has recently completed a new work Passion Play which he hopes the Royal Shakespeare Company will present next autumn.

"I don't like to leave plays lying around for too long, unperformed" he told me, "the trouble is a lot of people get to read them and it's easy for someone to lift an idea and turn it into a quickie television play".

He had interrupted his negotiations with the RSC to make a rush trip to Australia for the Sydney opening of his play Born In The Gardens. He himself had directed its first production, in Bristol, with Beryl Reid leading the cast. That production had since transferred to the West End.

We were chatting in his hotel room a few hours before its first performance. His main concern was whether its "Englishness" would strike a responsive chord with Australian audiences or whether it would suffer a similar fate to the London production of David Williamson's Travelling North. While he admires Williamson's work very much (he and his wife have entertained Williamson in London) he felt that that play didn't travel well. Born In The Gardens expresses many of his concerns about England, but he was doubtful that they would be shared by us.

He is less concerned with the production of his play, the main worry being the fact that Australian actors tend to play rather loosely with the lines.

"You take a great deal of trouble over writing them, making sure they sound right, that they have the rhythm you want them to have, so consequently you don't like to have them changed, to have them mucked up."

No names were mentioned, of course. He suggested that in England, even the most mediocre actors will respect and play a playwright's lines.

I asked him about his new play.

"It'll play a good deal more theatrically than Born In The Gardens, but it is again a family story, again a play about middle aged marriage, but more dramatic, more serious, less funny perhaps than the others."

Peter Nichols acknowledges that the family is his subject.

"Even those plays which don't seem to be about the family, primarily, such as The National Health which was actually about a number of strangers thrown together in a hospital ward, it was still about the family in the sense that people reconstruct the family, inevitably. Once they got there, one man took on the role of mother, another the role of a father, another that of a son and so on. So you were reconstructing the family as if it were an inevitable unit of society. Even if it didn't exist as an institution, people would still voluntarily reconstruct it."

"My plays are all about the restrictions of the family, the horrors of the family, the comforts, the lures of the family, the difficulties of escaping that."

He tends to write from the point of view of an observer, rather than someone who simply wants to express ideas. He also likes to play around with dramatic structure, to experiment.

"I don't see the point of writing for the theatre without using the experience of sitting there with a lot of people watching a play."

Very often he feels of other people's plays that the could easily see them on television. He wants his own to have a definite theatrical quality, a quality that would ensure they would only work well in the theatre. Consequently he wrote his first stage play comparatively late in life. This of course was A Day In The Death Of Joe Egg which utilised quite a dazzling array of theatrical devices, principally based on acknowledging the presence of the audience in the theatre.

"I think this situation of the witness, which is the audience, the witness of the event is something that has to be acknowledged."
Dorothy Hewett’s latest play *Man From Mukinupin* is to go to the Old Vic. Here, with Bob Ellis’ remark that sixty per cent of successful productions here have music, in mind, she writes about music dramas.

In Adelaide recently, while attending the rehearsals of my play with music, *The Man From Mukinupin*, I went to one of the last nights of Nick Enright’s sold out season of *On The Wallaby*.

It was a delightful and enlightening experience, and once again proved beyond doubt something I have believed in and mulled over and tried to practise, for years now — the Australian public loves burlesque, music, song and dance and sentiment.

For here was the mixture as before from the grass roots upwards; melodrama, farce, burlesque, panto, operetta, vaudeville, the undying shades of Gilbert and Sullivan, musical comedy with a dash of the old left doco living newspaper technique. And there we were, even the most hardened of us, crying over Australia’s queen of song and dance, the incomparable Nancye Hayes standing centre stage singing “Dear Johnny I have nothing to write about”, an unashamed tearjerker if ever I heard one.

In the wings lingered the ghosts of Williamson’s, Fullers, the Tiv, Edgley and Dawe, Sorlie’s Tent show, the Goldfields’ melodramas; even Dick Diamond’s *Reedy River* was out there somewhere.

Recently there has been much talk of reviving the musical theatre in Australia. Last year I went to a Sydney meeting where entrepreneurs, actors, singers, directors, et al discussed the feasibility of revivals of the popular musical comedies of the past. Needless to say nobody thought of an Australian musical. It was left to a young American to point out that the American musical gained its credence and following because it came out of the American experience. Where were the Australian musicals?, he asked us.

Now I have nothing against *Oklahoma*, *Showboat*, *My Fair Lady*, *Hello Dolly*, *South Pacific*, *Camelot*,
West Side Story and the rest. In fact my first theatrical experience, and never to be forgotten, was The Desert Song. I was five, with an eton crop, and a dress made of tiers of tulle frills, scattered with blue roses. I fell desperately in love with the Red Shadow who rode onto the stage of the old Perth Capitol, on a huge white horse, his red cloak wrapped about his enigmatic form.

My second theatrical experience was JC Williamson's The Boy Friend at the Maj. Afterwards came the heady experience of travelling on the Trans-Train to Sydney with the whole cast. I sat on the knee of the "principal boy" and was fed chocolates by the "principal girl" all across those miles of spinifex and mulga.

At eleven in the Corrigin Town Hall, built of the local, pinkish stone, I sat enthralled while Max and Mrs Montesole performed the "melodrama" The Strangling of Desdemona, then went back to the wheat and sheep farm and wrote Lynette the Gypsy Dancer for my birthday celebrations. Lynette was played by my little sister in the fancy-dress gypsy costume she'd worn to the RSL children's ball. I played Tam, the gypsy lover, and the neighbour's children, supports and chorus. It was my first play, with songs, dance routines, and a sentimental plot.

From then on there was no stopping me... Ham, the Chinese Fisherman, more songs and dances performed at Perth College; a blasphemous play in blank verse, more songs, spectacle and "processions" titled Ah! Judas; a melodrama set in the Swiss Alps, yodelling and a German band, with a golden-headed dummy of Ollie Pullet. The Authority figures in the Regal cinema, Subiaeo, and all the American musicals beloved of my dandy grandfather who owned it; Astaire-Rogers, Gene Kelly, Anne Miller, Ruby Keeler, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor singing "Tiptoe through the Tulips"; Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney, the Broadway melodies, Ray Bolger's scarecrow song and dance routine in The Wizard of Oz, Esther Williams diving into clouds of pink mist above a swimming pool decorated with a water ballet forming and re-forming into star and flower patterns below her, the Busby Berkeley marble staircases sewn with mannequins and show girls, turning like a giant wedding cake while a matinee idol sang "A Pretty Girl is like a Melody", and the particular "style" of a John Garfield, a Hepburn, a Bogart or a Lauren Bacall.

The dramatising of visions, plasticly, became part of my stock in trade, learnt from all those old late thirties and early forties movies; Sally Banner standing at the apex of the New Fortune Theatre at the University of WA in The Chapel Perilous, white-faced, in a dramatic death-like mantle; Dolly Garden swanning down the staircase in green crepe-de-chene in Bon-Bons And Roses for Dolly; the static funeral scene of Esme in The Golden Oldies with a spill of scarlet roses over the coffin; the stylised "rape" of Tatty Hollow and the set all glittering surfaces, hard chrome and deco mirrors; Eek, the water diviner and star gazer standing centre with his divining rod at the end of Act one of The Man from Mukinupin.

Scenes played like film montages, the element of threat and strangeness in "the stillness" learnt from the movies... monster figures and the monstrous... Nana, Robbie and Orlo and star gazer standing centre with his divining rod at the end of Act one of The Man from Mukinupin.

All these are plays with music, not only because of the enduring influence of the film and the musical comedy, but for very particular stylistic reasons, which are bound up with my personal vision of the theatre and my passionate attachment to language. To find a language that transcends naturalism, and yet has unmistakable links with reality, to express a heightening of experience that will be acceptable to an Australian audience, to move freely on an open or symbolic stage set with all the paraphrenalia of dream, vision, spell and story has been my principal struggle in the theatre.

And in this struggle I have discovered that the medium of music, the dance, the chorus, the individual song lyric, the use of folk, popular, traditional, and original song will enlarge the theatrical universe, act as a quick scene and mood change, give shorthand information, illuminate the central character's particular dilemma, burlesque, parody and sour
musical about a transported convict.

In Melbourne there were the documentary agit-prop type entertainments like *Marvellous Melbourne* at the Pram, and it was here and at La Mama that Jack Hibberd laid the foundations for his rough vaudeville theatre, songs, comic turns, prat falls and a scatological vision that goes straight back to Mo and the Tiv.

In *The Man from Mokinup* I was searching for Australian mythic images, that went back to the music theatre of my childhood, and fused with the characters, sounds, images and landscape of the real country towns I lived in and visited and heard about as a child. I used the musical comedy stereotypes, the principal boy and the principal girl. The in-joke is of course that they both go off to play leads in JC Williamson. From the same source came the happy ending, the pairing principle, every Jack must get his Jill, the duets, the “crowd” scenes, the solos, the patriotic and group songs. It is a benign world that has no vicious villains. The hero and heroine (doubled) are flawed by human failings, the madman contemplates murder but does not carry it out. Polly is not “raped” by the Hobby but just “given a bit of a fright”, only the murdered Aborigines in the creekbed cannot be washed offstage, and the only happiness that the outsiders Harry Tuesday and the part aborigine Touch of the Tar can find is to take to the wilderness across the saltlakes... even there “happiness is mighty hard to find”.

The music written by Jim Cotter is an admixture of the romantic, music hall, folk, patriotic chorus, traditional, popular and Elizabethan, with a Noel Coward type duet thrown in for good measure. There is also a sound track known as “the weird night music” which uses every electronic device to create the atmosphere of the little township as night falls and the spirit of Misrule takes over.

In a play with music the music becomes an integral part of the structure of the play, the sound track and the songs arise naturally out of the action, the mood, the dialogue, pointing up the moment, reminding the audience of what they perhaps already know, or foretelling a future action. Sometimes a song will set a character so that the particular song is associated with that character throughout the play. The music is never intrusive, nor are the dance routines. They are not set pieces as in the traditional musical comedy. They slide in and out of the action, with as much naturalness as the writer, composer, director, musicians, actor, choreographer and lighting man can devise. What they do is help create the imaginative world, the atmosphere by which the audience is drawn into the play, attends to it, is hopefully captivated by it, goes out into the foyer perhaps humming a couple of the catchier tunes, but carries home with them a heightened and magical understanding of the world they have grown up into.

The play with music, unlike the musical, can deal with the most complex human states, with comedy, tragedy, black comedy; play ducks and drakes with time; have the most complicated plot structure; explore human relationships; use the devices of symbolism, expressionism, naturalism, ritual, surrealism, as a kind of marvellous admixture sown with songs. A fragmented montage, ceremonies, ritualised and orchestrated speech, do not seem awkward placed side by side with the most realistic, one-to-one dialogue. The audience, suborned by the music of speech, and song, entranced by the plasticity of natural, crowd and dance movements will follow the playwright into a world of the imagination that recognises no boundaries. At least that is the theory, and the experience seems to bear out that the normally pragmatic Australian who likes his film and theatre as close to the real as possible (whatever that is) will take any amount of panto, burlesque, farce, melodrama, vaudeville and poetry wrapped in the tinsel of music and dance.

Perhaps then this is the way out for those of us who espouse “the other theatre” — a way that is hallowed in Australian tradition, so that the audience read the signposts and follow, past the ghosts of Mo, George Wallace, Nellie Melba singing “Home Sweet Home”, Nellie Stewart, Our Glad, the Marcus girls, the tent shows, the “folkies” and the whole glorious tradition of music and dance.

Perhaps then this is the way out for those of us who espouse “the other theatre” — a way that is hallowed in Australian tradition, so that the audience read the signposts and follow, past the ghosts of Mo, George Wallace, Nellie Melba singing “Home Sweet Home”, Nellie Stewart, Our Glad, the Marcus girls, the tent shows, the “folkies” and the whole glorious band, into the poetry, the style, the plasticity, and the overall vision that can illuminate our lives in the theatre.
MICHELE FIELD LOOKS AT FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR

Retrospectively, 1980 is going to look like a turning-point in Australian radio and television drama. It was the year ABC-FM drama productions flowered in Adelaide. It was the year when the ABC-TV Drama Department discovered the country’s theatre playwrights and produced six stage plays to a standard that the state theatre companies had set. It was the year the ABC’s Committee of Review considered the recommendations on media drama submitted by the Australia Council, the Writers Guild, Actors Equity and others. It is the year the ABC may launch a Listener-type magazine that will discuss not only its own drama programmes but also will review live theatre performances. It is the year the Federal Government announced its plans for cable television—a development which will completely change the complexion of media drama.

Despite the rush of developments, however, radio and television drama still have their problems. Many problems arise from the deep-rooted suspicion that alienates people in the live theatre from those who work in media drama. In principle, for instance, it would seem like a good idea to draw the cast of a current stage-play into an ABC recording studio for an afternoon, to reproduce the performance for radio audiences. But both the ABC and the theatre managements find it unscaleable in practice.

There are also fiscal obstacles to the developments that should be taking place in media drama. ABC-FM is chronically short of money both to execute the plays it has commissioned and to keep the commissions flowing out to the writers. The ABC suggests that it is also the shortage of money that creates antipathies with the wider theatre community—because it cannot afford to buy the work of freelance drama producers or to employ freelance producers in its own studios. The ABC broadcasts virtually nothing of Australian drama unless it’s the work of its own staff.

But the greatest obstacle of all is the distance that separates media drama from its audience. Radio drama is the Red China of the theatre world: the audience is legion but mute, and the critics either ignore it or are ill-informed. (Barry Hill of the Melbourne Age is, I think, the only ‘China-watcher of any substance.)

Rapid changes in the technology of television broadcasting, however, are changing all this. The viewer of a television play is obviously going to respond less passively if he has gone to the trouble to tape the performance on his video-cassette recorder and replay it when he feels most receptive. Also, if a cable-television system involves a meter which charges the viewer for each play he watches, he is motivated to pay closer attention to get his money’s worth.

Any Pay-TV system is going to drastically shift the financial balance-of-power in the theatre world. By 1985 Pay-TV in the United States will have a revenue of $6-7 billion; if one divides by 16 to take account of Australia’s smaller population, that is still a projected $430 million revenue for Pay-TV here. If even one-tenth of this money is channeled back into producing stage-plays for this discriminating television audience (a small share of what is to be spent buying the rights to show movies simultaneously with their commercial cinema distribution), it will make an enormous difference to the livelihood...
of playwrights, actors and directors.

The American body which corresponds to our Australia Council (the National Endowment for the Arts) has a Media Arts Program which emphatically encourages the production of one-off plays on American networks. So far, the Australia Council has not taken a stand on this. However, in the Australia Council's submission to the Committee of Review of the ABC, it was recommended that ABC-TV broadcast more live theatre productions straight from the theatres. (The Annan Committee which made the same recommendation to the BBC in its 1977 report used a wonderful euphemism, referring to the televising of "productions created for other places.") The head of ABC-TV drama, Geoff Daniels, however, believes that production values fall too low in that kind of programme. What can be done when plays are textually revised and remounted for television is shown in the six plays of the Australian Theatre Festival, but if that is the only option then the expense stands in the way of enjoying good Australian drama as a regular TV diet.

The alternative is to buy one-off dramas from overseas — such as the series mounted for Stuart Wagstaff to compare. ABC-TV buys fifteen foreign plays a year, mainly from Britain, the United States and Canada. Using a much broader definition of "television drama" than I accept (in fact counting everything that's acted), the ABC offers about 400 hours of drama a year — 80 hours of which it produces itself. Of those 80, less than 20 hours would be "plays" in the sense that the live theatre understands the word.

The figures argue the well-known point — that small English-speaking countries like Australia and Ireland are especially vulnerable to imports from the two large English-speaking television-producing countries. Under that handicap, Australian television may be giving us as much serious drama as we can reasonably expect. Or, maybe not.

The Sydney audience of as Sunday afternoon radio play is roughly twice the audience which the Nimrod draws in a whole year. ABC Radio runs four "theatres" — Playbreak (Radio 1 on Friday mornings), which broadcast 48 plays in the 1978-79 season, 17 by Australian writers; Classical World Theatre (Radio 2 on Saturday nights) which broadcast 23 plays last year, 5 by Australian writers; Sunday Play (Radio 2 on Sunday afternoons) which broadcast 52 plays in 1978-79, 28 by Australians; and Audio Writers' Airzone (ABC-FM on Monday nights) which broadcast 36 plays last year, about a third by Australian writers. That is more than 150 plays on ABC Radio — roughly 50% more plays than all the theatre companies around the country produced in their major seasons in 1978 (159 radio plays to 105 stage plays).

In 1978-79, about a third of the radio plays were by Australian writers. And a third of the 105 major theatre plays in 1978 were Australian. Four-fifths of the ABC Radio plays had Australian producers and actors (the rest were purchased from the BBC), but since radio drama provides such short-term contracts and remunerates talent so poorly, it cannot be compared to the live theatre as an employer of talent. Producer Andrew McLennan did wonders on a meagre $14,000 budget for ABC-FM drama in 1980-81; even the $60,000 budget for a year of Sunday Plays isn't grand when compared to cost of live theatre — in fact, it is less than one-fifth of the Government's annual subsidy to the Nimrod Theatre alone.

Given the smallness of the bait, it's remarkable how much talent ABC Radio drama does attract. The history of the radio play in English (unlike the German genre, for instance) is a history of poorly adapted stage plays. This is an odd way for a genre to grow — it is as though the novel had developed out of those awkward "novelisations" of films and television series that are now so pervasive. British radio drama broke from these origins and became an innovative literary and dramatic form in its own right in the 1950s and 1960s with writers like Samuel Beckett, Louis MacNeice, Dylan Thomas, John Mortimer and Muriel Spark. ABC Radio drama was not far behind, but came slowly: it is only recently that we see it as an ascendant star. Among the writers who were commissioned by ABC Radio for plays this year are Frank Moorhouse, Lois Nowra, David Foster, David Allen and (the ABC's own playwriting discovery) Kevin Brewer. Barry Oakley's The Great God Mogadon was commissioned by ABC-FM drama, published by the University of Queensland Press, sold to the BBC and to "Earplay" in the United States, and is the official Australian entry in the Italia Prize.

As I see it, radio and television drama have two responsibilities — perhaps these are somewhat contradictory, when budgets and talent cannot serve both masters. One responsibility is to develop a distinctive type of theatre suited to the media, and to give those writers, actors and directors who want to specialise in this kind of theatre a range of possibilities in which to move. The other responsibility, I think, is to electronically convey the experience of live theatre to anyone who, for reasons of expense or distance, disablement, cannot attend a performance in a physical theatre. As far back as the 1942 BBC Yearbook, this responsibility is espoused — "to provide... theatrical entertainment for lovers of drama cut off by circumstances from the theatre itself."

And as recently as the Australia Council's submission to the Committee of Review last June, the ABC is exhorted to remember this: "The whole public should be entitled to see the very best performances in government-subsidised theatres and concert halls, even though these, relayed by the media, may not provide the same experience."
The season past: summing up

By Karl Levett

As we look forward to the theatrical season about to begin it might be appropriate to take a final glance at the season past. As Dorothy Parker says: “It’s manners to issue a statement as to what you got out of it all.” So here follow some highly personal Notes and some very Random Awards that for me sum up the 1979-80 New York season.

Company Core: It’s clear that the creative strength of the New York theatre lies in the theatre companies of Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway. The proliferation of these companies continues to amaze me, each with an individual identity and an artistic plan of its own. Within these companies there is an Establishment such as the Public Theater, the Manhattan Theatre Club and the Circle Repertory — but this gives way to a fringe that might truly be called lunatic. On any weekend in the season, there’s at least a hundred to choose from. Long may their creative cauldrons bubble.

Favourite plays of the season:
- Mass Appeal — Bill C Davis
- Lady house Blues — Kevin O’Morrison
- Children of a Lesser God — Mark Meddoff
- Talley’s Folly — Langford Wilson
- Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi — Pam Gems
- The Sorrows of Stephen — Peter Parnell.

Off is On: This season bubbling Off-Broadway came into its own as a source to supply the mainstream of Broadway. Principally these were Talley’s Folly from the Circle Repertory, Home from the Negro Ensemble, Strider from the Chelsea Theatre, Mass Appeal (Manhattan Theatre Club) and Tintypes (St Peter’s Church Theatre) are both ready to go Broadway for the coming season. Given the stagnant scene on Broadway and the much more creative processes of Off-Broadway, the movement is a heartening one.

The Importance of Being Earnest Award: Le Centre International de Rhine, Look Back In Anger, and The Man Who Came to Dinner. Even new shows tried to masquerade as offerings from yesteryear. Romantic Comedy was an updated The Moon Is Blue (with just a dash of male nudity) and Sugar Babies, an affectionate look at burlesque as it might have been. Both these shows judged the public’s pulse very accurately and were unqualified hits. The best revival was Paul Osborn’s Morning At Seven. By placing its 1939 setting back in the twenties and casting wonderful actresses as the four sisters (Nancy Marchand, Maureen O’Sullivan, Elizabeth Wilson, Teresa Wright), it’s hard to believe that the original ever looked as good as this happy revival.

Favourite female performances:
- Laurie Kennedy (Lady house Blues, Major Barbara, He and She demonstrating in one season a range not allowed most American actresses)
- Blythe Danner (Betrayal)
- Maggie Smith (Night And Day)
- Eileen Brennan (A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking)
- Irene Worth (The Lady From Dubuque)
- Maureen Anderman (The Lady From Dubuque and Sunday Runners In The Rain).

Flunking Out: The season saw some leading playwrights stumble:
- Tennessee Williams — Clothes For A
Howard Sackler — definitely not out.
sometimes by women, provided actresses with some fine opportunities and kept the cramped London flat were very real in the fine Manhattan Theatre Club production. And I often think of the women of O'Morrison's Madden family in their kitchen in steaming St Louis in 1919. They may have entered my imagination for a lifetime. A resident classical repertory company has long been a recurring dream in the American theatre. I'm sure this latest attempt is certainly on the right track and deserving of praise for its future plans and its present accomplishments. Such a repertory company allows us to see young American performers grow before our eyes — a very happy experience. At the end of the five play season it was like taking leave of a family.

Plays from this season that you know will be playing in Purgatory when you arrive:
- Charlotte
- Heartaches Of A Pussycat
- Marie And Bruce.

"Be still, be still my soul; it is but for a season. Let us endure an hour and see injustice done."

Avignon Festival — touch and go

by Irving Wardle

In over twenty years of visiting the Avignon Theatre Festival I have never failed to discover something precious, but it was touch and go this year. Things got off to a bad start with the first newspaper I picked up, which carried the following spine-chilling pronouncement from the festival's new director, Bernard Faivre d'Arcier: "Faire d'Avignon pour le theatre, comme Cannes pour le cinema." So far, I am glad to report, this remains an empty threat: and what M d'Arcier means, I think, is that now the old spirit of *theatre populaire* is as dead as a doorbell. Avignon had better cut its losses and concentrate on "co-ordinated" programming, which this year brought Shakespeare and the Greeks under his umbrella.

I confess that the chance of seeing the fabled Maria Casares in *The Winter's Tale* blinded me to the supporting Bardic events which, as it turned out were both drama school shows, while the erstwhile star of Cocteau's *Orphée* was putting in a five-minute appearance in the chorus role of time. Admittedly it was some appearance. The platform of the Cour d'Honneur was spread with a vast silk cloth, rippling and balloonning under the gusts of the mistral, and finally disclosing the head of Mme Casares like a surfaced swimmer with a twist of her body she then transformed the cloth into a gigantic ball dress and launched into the impassive lines as if she were holding the hand of everybody there. Momentarily *theatre populaire* returned to life.

The production was the work of the distinguished director-design partnership of Jorge Lavelli and Max Bignens, who otherwise fell flat on their faces in serving up late Shakespearean romance on a stage that encourages the grossest excesses of French rant.

Worse was to follow in the second Palais des Papes spectacular: Jean-Pierre Miquel's *La Malediction*. Filleted from the three ancient tragedies and Brecht, this retold the story of Oedipus's children with the aim of hanging the albatross of original sin around the necks of the suffering Greeks: and featured another barnstorming company, pitting their elongated vowels against two tin-can percussion groups and striding busily up and down a hairy, half-melted chocolate ice-cream representing the wall of Thebes.

Brilliant, by contrast, was Gerard Gelas's adaptation of the *Orestie* at his resident Avignon theatre, the Chene Noir. Supported by a flow of sometimes magical imagery, this was a determinedly intimate view of the trilogy, concentrating on personal relationships to the almost total exclusion of the Chorus. With performances as good as Fabienne Colomer's Electra, this seemed more like audacity than impudence. And if the result was not Aeschylus, it was what one would like to get, and never does, from Yeats.

The real gem of the week turned up outside the co-ordinated events; the Comedie de Caen production of Jakob Lenz's *Le Nouveau Memoire*. Considering the English-speaking theatre's enthusiasm for Buchner, I have never understood why...
Lenz, his closely related contemporary genius, has been consistently cold-shouldered. In the case of Menza, it may be the sheer problem of staging this gory "comedy" of an adoptive Asiatic prince's disillusioning discovery of Christian society. Tandi, the prince, is a creature of the eighteen-century Enlightenment. This stolid bourgeois host von Biederling is a prototype of Saxon comedy. The libertine duellist Count who takes refuge on Biederling's estate is a grand Guignol Almaviva. While the monstrous Donna Diana who hunts the Count to earth in the wake of poisoning her father and burgling the family jewels, defeats my store of respectable literary analogy.

The clue to the whole thing, as the Caen director Michel Dubois masterfully demonstrates, is excess: excessive horror, excessive gags, every effect contradicting the previous one. French acting may be deficient in revealing subtle shades of grey, but it is unbeatable in black and white.

Dubois's main textual liberty is to transpose one of the final scenes to the opening. This is a theatrical discussion between a young dilettante and his robustly philistine father, and it has the effect of presenting the ensuing play as the marionette show the old man is going off to see. Thus Serge Marzolf's parkland set is dotted with toy properties: a miniature pavilion, a cow that rolls ruminatively down stage cropping the verdant fibreglass. When the dread discovery of incest drives the royal newlyweds apart, Tandi simply grasps a square of painted sky and disappears into the blue. In short, a buried masterpiece revived by a virtuoso.


Future Theatre Happenings abroad.

VIIth INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SCHOLARS IN THEATRE RESEARCH organised by the International Federation for Theatre Research will be held in Italy, at Venice, Isola San Giorgio, Fondazione, Cini. The general topic is "The Modes of Expression of non-literary theatre: Examples, definitions and aesthetics". Participants will discuss papers from scholars in Italy, Yugoslavia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, Canada, Belgium, Ghana, United States, Denmark, Netherlands and Austria. Register with International Federation for Theatre Research, University Commission, Institut fur Theaterwissenschaft, Hofburg, Batteranstiege, A-1010 Vienna, Austria. 1 - 3 September 1980.

FIRST SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY will be held at Bonn, West Germany, organised by Eugenio Barba, Director Odin Teatret, theatre-laboratory, Holstebro, Denmark. Activities combine experiments in performance, teaching and research by Western theatre scientists such as Jerzy Grotowski with representatives of Eastern traditions from Indonesia, China, India and Japan. For precise information write to: Herr Hans-Juergen Nagel, Kulturamt der Stadt Bonn, Kufuerstenallee 2-3, 5300-Bonn 2, Federal Republic of Germany. 1 - 3 October 1980.

HOUSE OF HUMOUR AND SATIRE — TO POULARISE COMEDY: In May we received and acted on a request from the "House of Humour and Satire" in Bulgaria for an Australian Contribution to add to their exhibition "Development of the Comedy in the Theatre". We are now waiting for material to come from all Australian theatre companies to send to Bulgaria. If anyone is interested in sending a contribution of their own, the address is: Stefan Furtounov, Director, House of Humour and Satire, Gabrovo, Bulgaria.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE THIRD WORLD THEATRE: The Cyprus ITI Centre in co-operation with the General Secretariat of the ITI in Paris and the Permanent Committee for the countries of the Third World have organised this conference to be held at the Philoxenia Hotel in Nicosia. The main theme is "The theatre in the service of struggles for freedom". The official languages are English, French, Spanish and Greek. Application forms immediately available at the Australian ITI Centre. 20 — 26 October 1980.
The Earthling — pretentiousness plus zoo.

The Earthling is said to have been made a cost of $3.5 million and is an American-Australian co-production: money and stars and producer from the US, a British director, and Australian sub-cast, crew and animals. Especially the animals. Regardless of environment or time of day or feeding habits of the animals, they throng — possums, koalas, kangaroos, deer, geese, magpies, frogmouth owls, rabbits, wallabies, snakes, frogs, crayfish, wild dogs, eagles, kookaburras, fish, ducks, cockatoos, you name it, they have it.

The good news is that the Australian complement is said to have been paid far more than is usually available in an all-Aus production. They earned it, having to recite some of the most banal dialogue ever committed to paper for a script. The speeches are reserved mostly for William Holden, the visiting star, with staccato interpolations from the other visitor, an open-mouthed American juvenile named Ricki Schroeder.

The director is Peter Collinson. I looked him up in my Halliwell (admittedly the 1976 edition) and found this note: “British director who quickly slumped from arty pretentiousness to routine thrillers.” The two films of his that I recall are Up the Junelfion and The Italian Job, not bad at all. But with The Earthling he appears to have slipped back into arty pretentiousness, plus zoo.

The film is not, however, meant for Australian audiences, or at least (or audiences above nine, which is about Ricki Schroeder’s age. It must be destined for US television. The story is about an ageing Australian named Foley who has lived in the US for forty years and returns to Australia, specifically the area around Barrington Tops in NSW, to find the shack his father built of river stone and timber, and die there. He travels by bus as far as a township inhabited by veterans of local television series, including Ray Barrett, Willie Fennell, the talented NZ actress Pat Evison and Alwyn Kurts, together with a cheeky kid who works the bowser, some goats and an unlikely flock of geese.

The boozers in the bar run by Barrett say wise and cryptic things about tourists, a family of which then appears — Jack Thompson, Olivia Hamnett and Ricki Schroeder, in a camper van. The couple fight while the boy looks at the scenery. The camper van slides off a ridge, taking the parents. The boy clambers down several miles of rock face to find his mum and dad but the van just lies there. In most movies it would have burned. The boy follows his nose, escorted by the animals mentioned above plus a pack of nasty bush rats, until he catches up with Foley, who has abandoned a horse and is walking with the aid of a stout stick.

Foley is unwelcoming, to say the least. He makes the boy catch his own fish while delivering profundities about living off the land but never taking more than you need. He interrupts himself with the occasional heart attack. He kills rabbits and a kangaroo but is outsmarted by a wombat, which gets away. The pair are followed by wild dogs, as fat and silky-coated a collection of kelpies as you could hope to find.

When they reach the shack it is decorated with the local wildlife, including some introduced species, they have a bath in a thermal pool to wash away the dirt and bruises of their hike. Ricki plays with a duckling in the steamy pool. Boiled duckling?

Of course the whole thing’s a joke, and a fairly boring joke at that. The story was written in the US by Lanny Cotler, and edited by someone, whose name escapes me, who seems not to have related one section of the terrain to another. It is beautifully photographed by Don McAlpine, more than such an inexpertly put together fantasy-adventure deserves.
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DANCE

BY WILLIAM SHOUBRIDGE

Dance Theatre of Harlem

There would be very few dance companies in my experience which can change their personalities from one work to the next so much as the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

They dance Balanchine's Serenade like misplaced refugees in the style, then perform the same choreographer's The Four Temperaments like a manifesto and wear such pieces as Dougla and Troy Games like an emblem.

The company in performance tells us, as other commentators have noted, that blacks can dance classical ballet, then rush on to make the larger point that dance is an amoebic form, diverse and uncompetitive.

This richness of means was one of the great joys of their Sydney season. One of the most infuriating aspects was the types of work chosen, and the way audiences here reacted to them. And the whole venture started off on the wrong footing due to the way the Edgley corporation presented them, billing them as a company that gave us "classical ballet with soul" falling once again into a bog of Ad-mass.

Yet Four Temperaments and Serenade were masterpieces that focused the attention on the quality of the dance image, while Biosfere, Manifestations etc were apparently created to show off the strengths and personalities of the people performing them.

Serenade was danced in a soft glow of sincere effort, while Troy Games and Spanish Harlem looked effortless, selling the ethnic background ability and heritage of the dancers as against the content. When those latter works took the stage, the icy winds of soulless professionalism swept the theatre, but it was the Balanchine pieces that covered new ground, both for the performers and the audiences.

But our audiences are so overentertained and apathetic that they don't respond to anything but the fireworks and what I would call "prejudice pieces". They read a ballet like Braille, only finding sense in the hits that stick out. They palpably went along wanting to see "black dancers" not "dancers dancing", but if the popular reaction to the Australian Ballet is anything to go by, they don't want to see "dancers dancing" anywhere.

It was the most praiseworthy aspects of all the performers in the Harlem ballet that they did every one of their pieces with the same application and attention. It isn't their fault that while application and "presence" will help get over Biosfere, Dougla and Mirage, it won't be the main product in Serenade and Four Temperaments.

But it was the latter two works that were the greatest joy to me, and at the same time revealed the varying levels of technique and "give" in the company. Although the women's gestures are open and large, they aren't full. They look at times almost apprehensive, lost in the pitfalls and difficulties of their material. The men somehow cover up their faults with bravado and personality.

Both things are absolutely necessary in a Balanchine ballet. Gesture must be big, sure and strong, not timid; and while personality is called for it must always be the personality that the choreography and the music call for. It is the movement and the quality that the dancer gives that makes a Balanchine ballet "go", not the dancer "doing" it.

Serenade was premiered in 1935, the first ballet that Balanchine, ex ballet master of the Ballets Russe created in America for American dancers. It is one of the first signposts of "American" dance and the thin edge of the wedge for a country that has now become the major dance nation of the world. It was perhaps symbolic that it was one of the first works.

Mr B decided to set on the Dance Theatre of Harlem, an entirely new venture at the time.

Serenade has been called a sublime classroom exercise. Everything in the classical lexicon seemingly is there somewhere. Virtuoso technique is not called for, except in some demanding solo passages. More necessary is a lift in the torso (which the Harlem women have), limitless breath, a soaring line and the ability to sustain a phrase (which the Harlem women often didn't have).

Serenade has little to do with steps and everything to do with dancing.

It more than made up for the apologetic "ritualisms" of Dougla and the lurid calisthenics of Manifestations that followed it.

When I first saw Mitchell's Manifestations at last year's Stars of World Ballet, I couldn't help laughing out loud at its corny, serious-mindedness. A year's space hasn't changed my attitude to it one bit.

One doesn't get real dance or even real drama in Manifestations, one gets some stunningly difficult (and they're created to look stunningly difficult) postures and moments about Adam, Eve and the Serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The Serpent shimmies down a rope because a rope is put there and that's what one usually does with a rope. He gives Eve a real apple to eat, the trouble starts and the choreography moves into overdrive, looking anguished and "hot".

One could call it pure corn, but Mr Mitchell has put so much "meaningfulness" into his choreography that one has to find a stronger word to describe the piece. I'd call it solemnised kitsch. But at least Mr B decided to set on the Dance Theatre of Harlem, an entirely new venture at the time.

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Petipa. Daniilova version of the big pas de deux from Pacquita could have done something to save that work, but they seemed to think it as silly as any real connoisseur of ballet would. Pacquita (or at least the pas de deux because that is all there is left of the work) is best danced in a gala programme by the Bolshoi or Leningrad Kirov, they're the only ones that can force the jiggling inanities and stiff courtliness of the piece to mean something in dance terms. The Harlem dancers so uncomfortable and put upon in it that one couldn't see beyond the rigorous academic cliches of it to anything resembling a grand sense of occasion. The hideous costumes didn't help much either.

The major work of the entire season in my opinion, and one that we nearly didn't get to see, had it not been for the indisposition of one of the dancers scheduled to perform in Swan Lake Act 2 was Balanchine's 1946 masterpiece The Four Temperaments.

In terms of movement The Four Temperaments is unique. It would be easy to think of successors in Balanchine's repertoire; Agon perhaps, or Episodes and Ivesiana, but hard to name any forerunners, with the possible exception of Apollo. For the most part The Four Temperaments is a movement vocabulary sprung fully formed from the brow of its creator. Borrowing its title from the especially commissioned Hindemith score of the same name, Balanchine created a series of gestural tableaux using the musical markings of adagio, presto and allegro transformed into the dance possibilities of the Mediaeval diagnosis of the four bodily humours, pensive (melancholic), angry (choleric), impassive (phlegmatic) and confident (sanguine). Out of this hard and fast division came a cornucopia of dance possibilities illuminating the manners through the motions, the humours through the dance patterns. It is this diversion of aspects placed throughout the formal patterns of an ensemble that I think made the Dance Theatre of Harlem choose the ballet to highlight their strengths in a work that is a real test of ability and technique. They achieved their aims in the Sydney performances and that is what makes me think of successors in Balanchine's repertoire; the melancholic variation, for instance, with its movement, soft yet athletic; or the plastic malleability of the phlegmatic with all those unexpected turns and gyrations of the arms and legs. Phlegmatic especially gives a clear light on the material of a dancer. The moment, for example, where the man suddenly finds himself wrapping his hand around an outstretched ankle or looking at his outstretched hands and realising that they are not just hands, on a stage they become signals. But what essentially makes the whole ballet great now and for ever, as well as a departure from previous forms is that it doesn't revel in emotion revealed or covert, it is an intellectual distillation of aspects of personality portrayed in moments of architectural grandeur and surprise, it shows us human forms in the formal mathematics of spatial and bodily arrangement, palpable emotions portrayed as a parable.

It, along with the (unfortunately unseen Agon) is what makes the Dance Theatre of Harlem a ballet company of importance, it makes us look at dancers dancing, forces us to see movement on its own terms, not ours, and thus opens the spread of our sensibilities that bit wider.

When it came to the ensemble of men performing Robert North's Tros Ganes, we were back on familiar territory. The piece was originally created for the white London Contemporary Dance Theatre and again I would presume that Mr Mitchell chose it because it was an ample opportunity to show off the men of the company seeing that Pacquita had shown off the women.

Troy Ganes adds up to an animated Mr Universe contest with music. It says it's sending everything up but it is glorifying it. If it was done flat I suppose it would be boring in the extreme, but all the men sold it so well that they made it palatable in a prancing, pawing sort of way. It is not real dance of course, just a spicy goulash of jetes, soubrejuts, cabrioles and contractions, not making any sense in its own right, but designed to expound, express and relish its performers. When it starts, you think it wants to get an audience appreciation of male movement, a liberation of the danseur, by the end you know what it wants; applause.

Applause is what it gets, but the Dance Theatre of Harlem has got to go a long way yet in devising an aesthetic that will make it valued as a dance company and not just a collection of dancers.
Chinese Orchestra. Both these orchestras were conducted by Dobbs Franks, the first time in Peking, the company attended a performance given by students and graduates of the Peking Dance Institute, (which has been in operation since 1954). The two hour programme included classical pas de deux, and national dances of China and several other countries. After the performance, principal artists Marilyn Rowe and Kelvin Coe remained behind to give a three hour coaching lesson in the Don Quixote Act III pas de deux to the graduate students. The visitors were most impressed by the high standard achieved at a very early age in these dancer's careers. The Institute has two hundred students in residence to give an idea of its size and they take their secondary education concurrently with their dance training. A special feature is the seven hundred seat theatre where students present in costume and with scenery the classical and indigenous repertoire which forms part of their curriculum.

The Australian Ballet gave three performances of Don Quixote in Peking. Marilyn Rowe and Kelvin Coe opened the season in the principal parts of Kitri and Basil, at the matinee Lois Strike and David Burch took over, and Ann Jenner and Dale Baker led the company in the live telecast watched by an audience in the millions, which was the third performance in Peking. The Australian Ballet was working with others on the Fandango Pas de Deux from Cinderella, and Janne Blanche was working with others on the Fandango from Don Quixote. Everyone was busy, working together or watching each other and learning. The Chinese are very keen to learn and the company loved these simple, kind, talented people with an apparently total capacity for humility and learning. Artistic Director Marilyn Jones murmured at one stage: "It's certainly rewarding teaching dancers like this, but I think there is an awful lot we can learn here too!"

Meanwhile, and almost parallel with the China Tour, we saw the start of the inaugural tour of The Dancers of The Australian Ballet. Their first season opened in Canberra, on May 31. An extension of The Australian Ballet, both in size and (therefore) activities, The Dancers Company is Marilyn Jones' baby. The idea had been mooted before, but by working together on it, she and Peter Bahn, The Australian Ballet's Administrator, turned the idea into a reality this year.

The aims of The Dancers are manifold — they are to a) expand audiences by playing the major country cities of the Commonwealth; b) present, in the other capital cities, works which hitherto have been staged only in Sydney and Melbourne; c) bridge the gap of the overnight leap from Australian Ballet School graduate status to that of experienced artist within the ranks of The Australian Ballet.

In Shanghai Marilyn Rowe and Kelvin Coe again worked with students and graduates, this time from the Shanghai Institute; meanwhile Therese Power and Craig Phillips was teaching them a pas de deux from Cinderella, and Janne Blanche was working with others on the Fandango from Don Quixote. Everyone was busy, working together or watching each other and learning. The Chinese are very keen to learn and the company loved these simple, kind, talented people with an apparently total capacity for humility and learning. Artistic Director Marilyn Jones murmured at one stage: "It's certainly rewarding teaching dancers like this, but I think there is an awful lot we can learn here too!"

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Katya, Rigoletto and Pilgrim's Progress

Despite the worst that Sydney's nasty winter climate could do, July was quite a month for the Australian Opera — quite a good month, that is, which could well have benefitted from paroxysms of ecstasy, well enough sung, but which has just about no depths at all worth the plumbing. Spectacularly sung, it can of course not only hold the stage but rivet an audience; but never for a moment can it move an audience to tears, or produce shivers of uplifting inspiration to tingle the spine.

Given Joan Sutherland, Robert Allman, Donald Smith and Clifford Grant in top form, or something approximating it, I Masnadieri was a marvel; deprived of two of them for most of the night, as was the case the second time I saw it, the piece was virtually unable to hold the stage at all. It is clearly not an opera to merit frequent revival for the simple reason that Verdi lavished nothing but tunes on it — no soul, that is; or just about no soul.

Copley's rethink was evident at a great many points in this season's revival of Rigoletto. The production now underscores more effectively than before several details of the libretto that tend to escape the notice of the vast majority of any predominantly English-speaking audience viewing the piece sung in Italian. The vital (in dramatic terms) appearance of Monterone in Act I, whose curse on Rigoletto so it can be made visually clear that his vituperations are firstly against the one and secondly, when he physically turns round, against the other.

It is, of course, one of the great strengths of thoroughly ensemble companies such as the Australian Opera that they can afford to lavish singers of such quality as Heather Begg on bit parts like Maddalena and Monterone (which was sung splendidly on this occasion by Bruce Martin); for both roles are vital to the drama of the piece and even — despite their brevity — have the potential to impress an audience vocally.

There were a number of other points, too, where Copley's rethink paid obvious dividends. There was more controlled elegance in the brief formal dance sequences in the opening scene, and thus more contrast with the loin-clothed wrestlers and the earthy conviviality verging on riotousness that otherwise dominates the action, and this year's wrestlers approached a good deal nearer the ideal of the male body beautiful than their forebears.

In Act II, the calousness of the courtiers in the teeth of Rigoletto's impassioned concern for the virtue of his daughter was more pointed; and the disdain of Pieter van der Stolk's Marullo to Rigoletto's grousing quite eloquent. Thus, the overall dramatic effect of the scene, and in particular Rigoletto's violent outburst, Vile Race of Courtiers, was greatly enhanced.

In histrionic terms, Raymond Myers' Rigoletto was in superb form at both of the performances I attended this season; but he was not in top form vocally on opening night. By the second performance, a bit more than a fortnight later, not only he but everyone else in the cast seemed to be in top form and the combined result was really quite memorable.

Joan Carden's Gilda was particularly ravishing this year, dramatically committed as always but with a new vocal voluptuousness that was not present before. The coloratura squiggles of her Caro Nome were quite marvellous, the way she toddled off to bed on the breath of the echo of a high trill quite spell-binding.

And the post-defloration scene between Carden and Myers was very touching for its tender vocal appeal and for its visual impact — she in her nightie struggling valiantly to cover herself with a bedspread, he thoroughly convincing as the distraught father trying to afford comfort where no comfort can be given.
Donald Shanks was also once again as toweringly impressive as Sparafucile as one could wish for — singing with his best, most full-throated sonority, dominating the stage with his menacing presence when he glided out of the shadows to accost Rigoletto in Act I. and making gruesome preparations for the murder-to-come throughout most of Act III.

Anson Austin, a newcomer to this Rigoletto as the Duke of Mantua, was done up quite dashingly, black wig and beard and all — he was absolutely convincing as the insensitive roué and, though his Questa o Quella was worrying, his singing improved markedly as the evening progressed and he was coping very well indeed by the end. He seems to be on the brink of developing into a most satisfying Verdi tenor indeed. But his dashing new costume led to a glaring visual mismatch, as Sparafucile as he glided out of the shadows to accost Rigoletto in Act I. and making gruesome preparations for the murder-to-come throughout most of Act III.

On opening night, Richard Bonynge worried me by starting off Act I at such a breakneck pace one might have been trying to catch some train half an hour before the scheduled finishing time; but things quickly settled down and finally he produced a finely-wrought reading of the score which revealed fully the incredible wealth of its musical merits as compared with those of I Masnadieri.

And everyone concerned gave of their best, at both performances I saw, when quartet time rolled round: it was a thoroughly ravishing rendition of one of the great operatic ensembles, particularly due to the addition of the fruity richness of Heather Begg's deep mezzo to the vocal mix.

The new production of Katya Kabanova was an undeniable musical triumph for conductor Mark Elder and the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, at opening; and a visual triumph for its set designer, Maria Bjornson. It was a more equivocal success in vocal and dramatic terms. Not that there was anything to complain of in producer David Pountney's general handling of the requirements of the piece or, indeed, of the casting, which produced moments in the event that were every bit asaurally mouth-watering as they had promised to be on paper.

And a considerable personal triumph was scored on opening night by Rosina Raisbeck in the vital, if thoroughly uningratiating, role of Tichon's mother Kabanicha. (The role is of course much smaller than that of the title character, and therefore Raisbeck's achievement was of distinctly more modest proportions than Richardson's. Kabanicha is an awful character, bullying everyone from her son and his wife to her own lover Dikoy (played by play a little too tenta­tively by Neil Warren-Smith). She is the epitome of insensitivity: the character who provokes the suicide of Katya but is totally oblivious to the dimensions of the human tragedy that is being enacted around her. Unlike the Kostelnicka in Jenůfa, she is a totally parched character, one in whom any audience would be hard put to find much to admire. It was a considerable achievement of Raisbeck's performance that she could somehow provoke a certain admiration of her primitive integrity even despite her colossal bloody-mindedness.

Even on opening night, this Katya had a good many moments of electrifying tension and musical beauty; once it has been given the opportunity to mature fully, it will no doubt be one of the Australian Opera's most memorable achievements all round.

Brief mention must be made also of the Australian premiere season of Ralph Vaughan Williams' The Pilgrim's Progress, presented by Canberra Opera — with a considerable amount of varied support from the Canberra community at large — at the Canberra School of Music in mid-July. This work, based of course on John Bunyan, has never managed to hold the stage, lacking much in the way of dramatic incident and having only one real character, the pilgrim himself. It might more aptly be described as an oratorio or cantata, or even a symphony with choral supplement.

The performance itself was an unequivocal triumph for Canberra baritone Colin Slater, who was required to be on stage almost all night; and conductor Donald Hollier and the sizeable orchestra of quite sufficient quality to cope with the truly symphonic demands of the score. Brian Bell's production was effective within the limits imposed by the capabilities of the opera company's choristers augmented by a children's choir and the voices of the Canberra Choral Society.

All round it was a worthy effort which proved the musical merit of the piece but did not demonstrate that the judgment of history has been wrong in neglecting it as a work of the musical theatre.

DAVID GYGER is Editor of Opera Australia.
STATE REP. MARGUERITE WELLS

THEATRE/ACT

Visually static

TRAITORS MESH

by Marguerite Wells


Director: Warwick Baxter; Stage Manager: John Pauley; Production Manager: Louise Davis; Set: Peter Harris and Chris Piggott; Props: Alice Hekimian; Sound: Lee Shiple; Lighting: Lee Shiple; Warwick Baxter.


(Amateur)


Director: Don Mamouney, designer Colin Williams.


The Australian Theatre Workshop, mainly in the monolithic person of Ralph Wilson, has been around in Canberra for a long time, lightening up the dank depths of Childers Street Hall every couple of months with Interesting Productions (highly unsaleable of course) of Interesting Plays with Good Actors. This is a combination almost unknown anywhere else in Canberra. The telephone on Ralph Wilson’s desk is a hot-line to the best actors and Warwick Baxter has joined the hotline network and brought in a few actors of his own who have developed their acting skills as he developed his directing.

Pat Galvin is one of these actors. His magnificent performance in The Floating World more than earned him his place on the Playhouse stage, now that the Arts Council has extended its sponsorship from Fortune Theatre to ATW. There have been mutterings and rumblings for some time over the past year or so, a number of groups have been sponsored to perform in the otherwise prohibitively expensive Canberra Theatre Centre. It started off with Fortune Theatre on a rostrum in the Canberra Theatre Foyer at lunchtimes, then moved gradually into the Playhouse every now and then whole theatre companies auditioning.

Warwick Baxter’s production of Traitors is one of the most impressive of these “auditions” so far, with an excellent cast and a gripping play. If you don’t know anything about the Russian Revolution, and, like me have always thought of Lenin and Stalin as being pretty much the same person, the first half of the play is a great mystery thriller, and you sit on the edge of your seat frantically trying to sift through the drifts of political information for a clue.

Eventually it boils down to the simple proposition that Anna is a member of a faction within the Communist Party opposed to Stalin, and that’s why she goes in terror of her life and yet can still be such a committed revolutionary. All good clean Agatha Christie. Then having worked all that out, you can sit back, relax and watch Anna and Krasin (a suave and flawless performance as usual from John Coffie), earnestly slide to their doom.

And very earnest it was too, with a drab, earnest set, and drab, earnest ladies smartly and severely clad. Only Krasin, erstwhile worker, now secret service agent returning from a murderous mission in Britain has acquired a taste for luxury, peppermints and the soft life, and a very well-cut greatcoat.

One of the traps of this sort of political play is that the characters tend to do an awful lot of talking; while the torture scenes were very well handled indeed, moving his actors about the stage is not perhaps one of Warwick Baxter’s greatest strengths — though the final tableau, with the two women, guns at the ready, poised to fight and die in the blood-red spotlight, was unforgettable.

The set fragmented the action somewhat; the actors seemed to be inserting themselves onto the stage rather than entering. With various homes and boarding houses upstage right, secret police office upstage centre, an empty room, (the Anna-Krasin love nest), downstage serving as station platforms, barns, art galleries, and various assorted streets, the action tended to seem arbitrarily boxed in at times. Still it was a very satisfying piece of theatre, not the least because this is one of the more successful of the auditions for a nucleus for a theatre company for our National Capital.
With panache...

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

by Robert Page


Director, Richard Wherrett; Translation, Louis Nowra; Music, Sarah de Jong; Settings, John Stoddart; Costumes, Luciana Arrighi; Lights, George Whalley; Lighting, Keith Edmundson.

Cast: Cyrano, John Bell; Roxane, Helen Morse; De Guiche, Robin Ramsay; Christian, Andrew McFarlane; with George Shevtsov, Robin Bowering, Peter Platt, Andrew Tighie, Linda Cropper, Jon Blake, Robert Van Mackelenberg, Stuart Campbell, Jennifer West, Greg Ford, Philip Parr, Craig Ashleys, Ian Kenny, Wilfred Last, John Sheerin, Bill McTuskey, Peter Whittford, Vic Rooney, Brandon Burke, Maggie Blince, Alan Tobin.

(Professional)

Rostand's most well known play has delighted French, English and American audiences since it was written in 1897, but has not, until now it would seem, had a professional production in Australia. Richard Wherrett, the Sydney Theatre Company, a crop of some of our best actors and John Bell in the eponymous role have not only rectified that, but presented a Cyrano of unquestionable import.

The play itself has always been a marvellous anomaly, an eccentric tour de force, a dramatic opera bouffe tinged with tragedy; for when written it was an attempt at revising the old romantic drama in the face of naturalism's verisimilitude treatment of the underbelly of society and symbolism's mood plays of subjective vision and imaginative feeling.

Despite its ill-fitting position in the history of drama, its well-honed structure, engaging if not transporting language, vigorous sense of plot, Three Musketeers swashbuckling 17th century ambience, and above all the bravura central role, have assured its place in theatre repertoires of the Western world. From Coquelin — for whom it was written — on, a succession of famous actors have donned that transfiguring "French loaf" of a nose.

And so to John Bell. If England can be claimed to have found its Cyrano in Ralph Richardson (though Tynan carped that though he "gave a tremendous performance of something... no Englishman will ever play Rostand's Cyrano") then we have found ours in Bell. I suspect his performance would have been viewed in much the same way by Tynan (had he seen it and not, sadly, shuffled off this mortal coil), for he wanted a "braggart of the most extraordinary order" to "dance about the stage like the work of a company with decades of experience and government decree, yet it has sprung into existence fully formed. Cyrano looks like the work of a company, with decades of maturity behind it. One of the responsibilities it has is to mount the classics superbly — its record on the moderns is so far impeccable, but the classics are the acid test and it has passed this one with flying colours; with an ostrichful of plumes; with panache.

Bell, faced with this, might have given us an overblown Arturo with a heart of gold; but no, he fills the largeness with Falstaff's humanity not his bravado, passing off his excess as might an Olympian, as a skill he happens to have; he tempers bluntness with the heart of a poet; he reveals, true sentiment with true feeling; he can't undo the nose — but rather it underscores the tragedy of deformity that flesh can be heir to, a tragedy that can enrich its sufferer, deepen his perceptions and broaden his understanding of what it means to be alive.

Beyond that he epitomises panache, for this Cyrano does not lack stature, nor presence, nor boisterousness, nor a wit that can draw a laugh from the belly or be as light as a whisper. Bell is magnificently, intoxicatingly, engagingly, sternly, soulfully and moreover ridiculously human.

It is a strength which has caught almost the whole company, from the icy peacock De Guiche of Robin Ramsay through Andrew McFarlane's wonderfully apt, handsome and sincere yet vacuous Christian, and Helen Morse as the ravishing, self-willed heroine Roxanne, down to many of the smallest cameo roles.

Richard Wherrett's unavailing individual and imaginative vision is clear throughout; his ability to draw performances is apparent among all the principals, his ability to create rich, variegated crowd scenes rivals the famed Duke of Saxe Meiningen.

Wherrett has filled his company with the best actors available — such names as Brandon Burke in minor roles — and an equally strong production team. Louis Nowra has provided a taut yet fluid translation — perhaps wisely choosing prose instead of the poetry of the original. Luciana Arrighi's costumes are breathtakingly diverse; Keith Edmundson's lighting paints in the ambience and, with some reservations. John Stoddart's unit set is resolutely into a brilliantly impressionistic evocation of each location.

It has been said that the Sydney Theatre Company was artifically created; that art does not spring up to the tune of subsidy and government decree, yet it has sprung into existence fully formed. Cyrano looks like the work of a company, with decades of maturity behind it. One of the responsibilities it has is to mount the classics superbly — its record on the moderns is so far impeccable, but the classics are the acid test and it has passed this one with flying colours; with an ostrichful of plumes; with panache.
Comic and poignant

BACKYARD SCANLAN

by Barry O’Connor

Backyard is a first play by Janis Balodis, comes to the Nimrod Downstairs from the recent Playwrights’ Conference in Canberra. The play is set in North Queensland in 1966 for reasons which are best known to the playwright.

1966 seems to have little to do with what happens in the play. Certainly none of the things in Craig McGregor’s headline-packed programme piece seem to find their way into the script. The one exception is the mini-skirt, thanks perhaps to designer Stephen Curtis.

Backyard’s real setting is everywhere and nowhere. It’s an alternately powerful and comic piece of poetic realism. It’s about people stuck in their own excrement, about the claustrophobia, the imprisoning effect of the backyard. The backyard is a state of mind, which is made concrete bycocooning the downstairs space in chicken wire, Bryan Brown’s Pencil is a cock with two hens to rule: his wife and her sister, superbly played by Julie McGregor and Michele Fawdon respectively. A charmless Peter Pan, Pencil’s mind stopped at three, his penis went on growing, becoming a .22 rifle with Pencil pot-shots pigeons and made to feel strangely uneasy as the accusing finger found its mark.

The play is well scripted, and the production forcefully and tightly directed by Terence Clarke. The set consists of a car, a fridge and a stove, all hall stripped and shunted together. I wondered if relocating these pieces throughout the audience, a la Grotowski’s Kordan, would have been better. The harsh light of the symbolic episodes might have worked better as part of the normal lighting, except of course, in the case of the final shooting.

Backyard is as relentless as a piston, thrusting in alternately comic and poignant strokes.


Pace and vigour

THE CONMAN

by Barry O’Connor

The Conman, adapted from Molière’s Tartuffe by Maurie Scott. Theatre South, Wollongong NSW. Opened July 1980.

Director, Des Davis; Designer, Bill Pritchard; Lighting, Kevin McKie. Stage Manager, Barry O’Sullivan.

Cast: Parnell, John Clayton; Mrs Parnell, Sheelah Royley; Eliza; Lorrie Cruickshank; Marianne, Di Kiennan; David, Geoffry Morrell; Clifford, Gordon Street; Doreen, Bae Montgomery; Albert Tartuffe, John Warnock; Valentine, Anthony Warlow; Mr Balme, David Vance; Sergeant, David Robbins.

Wollongong and Australia have a new professional company: Theatre South. Their inaugural production is The Conman, a clever and witty adaptation of Moliere’s Tartuffe.

The religious satire in the original has been played down — obviously! — but adapter Maurie Scott has managed to find an appropriate milieu for Moliere’s ingratiating hypocrite (John Warnock) in the rich pastureland of Jamberoo in 1898. An elegance befitting the original is furnished by Bill Pritchard’s designs. Truly magnificent, they make believable Albert Tartuffe’s greed and scheming, and they are a delight to look at.

Des Davis directs a fine company of actors with pace and vigour. The headstrong, the smarmy, the cool and the cringing, they are all orchestrated, in their different rhythms, into a harmonious production.

This was an excellent production.
In a word—excellent

THE DYBBUK
by Anthony Barclay

The Dybbuk by Solomon Ansky, NIDA at Jane Street, Sydney, NSW. Opened July 30, 1980.

Directors: John Clark, Roz Horin; Designer: Axel Bart; Music: Mervyn Drake; Lighting: Romeo Conway; Choreography: Anne and Maurice Bellet; Lighting: Keith Edmundson; Stage Manager: Michael Frigg.

Cast: Khammon, Nick Athouris; Hennah; Tim Burns; Carto, Graige Cronin; Miet, John Hannan; Messenger, Mervyn Drake; Channa Joffe, Helen Jones (rev), Vivienne Garrett; Gittel, Fay Mokolog; Frade, Deidre Rubenstein; Sender, Barry Lovett; Nakhman, Mark Ferguson; Dorote Nakhman; Georgia Campbell; Menasha, Paul Blackwell; Michoel, Time Burns; Ariel, Barry Otto.

(Professional)

John Clark and Roz Horin's production of The Dybbuk opens with tableau and song that sound the notes of joyous emotion and give warm expression of festive, rich community with humour. Throughout though there is the figure of Khammon set apart and almost counterpoint with lamentation. These initial resonances of joy tinged with lament reach beyond the particular play for it seems likely this production will be the final chapter in one of the most remarkable and important episodes in Australian theatre.

Since 1966 the NIDA Jane Street productions have given us a great deal: the genesis of such works as The Legend of King O'Malley, Don's Party and On Our Selection; or since 1978 such excellence in treating world classics like Mother Courage or Waiting for Godot. Not to mention the actors, directors and technical crew who have moved from here into general circulation and leadership in the theatre community. One wonders how such consistently thorough and persuasive work emerges from so limited a space and financial resources. But again so many important ventures have emerged from such restrictions in this country. There must be joy for the move to a larger, more suitable venue in the near future; yet lament for the cessation of the Jane Street tradition.

This production is well researched and lovingly detailed. It is explorative and incisive in weaving a large tapestry of Hassidic community life as the backdrop for a love story that involves the entire community in not only its social life but in its mysticism and even its varied private souls. There are, to be fair, some gaps in the range and present capacities of some of the players but to pursue this is to be pedantic when acting, signing, dancing, music and set design coalesce into such splendid unity.

The Dybbuk is justifiably the Yiddish drama of the century and it is a long overdue outing for local audiences. Its history is almost as exotic as its subject matter. The only play of Solomon Ansky, it was written in 1914 and submitted to the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky. The master declined production but his assistant, Vaktangov, produced it in 1922 with the newly formed Jewish Habima company and it remained a standard of repertory for the next forty-three years long after the company had fled the Stalinist purges to become the National theatre of Israel. It has, despite its exotic detailing, such universal interests that it is a classic and has been adapted many ways. Indeed it saw several late night performances at Nimrod earlier this year as a two-hander from Miriam Goldschmidt and Bruce Myers (Peter Brook's CICT) adapted by Myers.

The Dybbuk is set in a small southern European community. Ansky himself a specialist in Jewish folklore has woven around the love story many vignettes of Hassidic life. We have a people characterised by feverish emotion, by enthusiasm, by stories which have profound spiritual meanings even if that is a very subjective matter. A woman whose daughter is dying is a matter of some grief. It is not so much a question that the love of Khammon and Leya does not come to us as direct even physical experience as in Romeo and Juliet. Rather the brooding Khammon's use of Kabala for an odd mixture of metaphysics and magic to attain his loved one becomes the instrument for profound spiritual insight.

Nick Athouris' Khammon was a superbly obsessed and haunted study of social and spiritual alienation: a brooding figure not so much the object of sympathy but a presence that commented on a people and lingered over the atmosphere of the second act. Vivienne Garrett as Leya mastered the demands of a woman in love drawn to and possessed by the dybbuk. No easy task to render the vocal range required and avoid histrionics during exorcism.

I found much in Mervyn Drake's Messenger and Barry Lovett's Sender though both had moments not quite at ease with the full demands of character. Deidre Rubenstein's Frade was a masterly study of big-hearted maternal aunt — moving between joy, sorrow and confusion in wonderful, successive moments. Her singing added considerable stature to the production.

And then, of course, Barry Otto. His Azriel, divided between the demands of spiritual leadership and private, tortured self-doubts, was the grand touch. Otto, entering the play early in the second act, brought all the skill and inspiration needed to lift the work to its heights. Axel Bartz's set: solid blacks, remote yet ever present community in not only its social life but in its spiritual consequences. The love is, in temporal experience, one at a distance: lover's looks predominate over lover's words.

But following Khammon's death, love becomes mystical and spiritual and its consequences strike hard at the community. Indeed the play's second act lances the easy joy of the first and here moves towards its real comic sense: it affirms life but does so by deep exploration of joy and grief. It is not so much a question that the love of Khammon and Leya does not come to us as direct even physical experience as in Romeo and Juliet. Rather the brooding Khammon's use of Kabala for an odd mixture of metaphysics and magic to attain his loved one becomes the instrument for profound spiritual insight.

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Excruciating naturalism

LET'S TWIST AGAIN

by Veronica Kelly


Directed, designed, Sean Mee; Lighting, Shirley Kelly Parry; Stage Manager, Michael Shannon.

Cast: Ian. David Harpham; Laura. Gillian Tye; Joan. Janine Hetherington; Graham, Peter Darch; Joy, Erin Parminter; Shirley, Kelly Parry; John, Bruce Niemann. (Pro/Am)

The author's programme notes suggest a potential perspective for assessing the play's purpose. At the time of its writing in 1975, "(nostalgia seemed) to reflect a culture that had suddenly lost confidence in itself and in the future, and it was having to refer backwards all the time for its inspiration. That lack of confidence is still with us." It's not difficult to guess at specific events in 1975 that made the clock go backwards, but if the RSL hall setting of the play is supposed to recall that particular Armistice Day it is a remote point of reference to which the play itself pays little attention.

The reason behind the reunion turns out to be the fortieth anniversary of John's first screw ever with Joan — now married to a moribund assurance salesman — in this very hall, or rather in a car outside, during the medley number. Joan refuses to recreate that occasion to the (French?) letter and gives him the bad news: "You're old! We're all old!" Whereupon the play takes off for that old Artaudian ritual-and-games country; the only authentic bit of sixties nostalgia the night provided for this viewer. Violence erupts! John goes nuts and tries to ceremonially incinerate a young girl in a pile of chairs so that she may keep forever her youth. His wife catches him playing with matches and nags like Mum: he kills her, intones "you shall not grow old as we that are left grow old" and freezes in a spotlight and a stylistic impasse. End. All in vain in my opinion, as patently the chief dickhead has already attained eternal youth through his own arrested mental development somewhere between the playpen and the mechano set.

Let's Twist Again, the latest in La Boîte's Australian play season. Such treasurable bits of the past appear as sexy EH Holden seats and the Mexican Hat Dance, but serve little cogent purpose. Not that there isn't potential gold to be mined from nostalgia or from assessing the sixties, but this script appears so confused in its basic focus that little of value eventuates other than a longish patch of generally excruciating naturalism from which emerges with startling abruptness a ponderous piece of ritualisation about. I think, the desire for eternal youth.

The excruciating naturalism has as its situation a 1975 reunion in an RSL hall amongst old acquaintances — one could not say friends - after fifteen years separation. John, the chief organiser of the reunion, is a rather gruesomely well-observed specimen of a particular brand of Australian male infantilism, egoism and general immature cretinism, but once this is established little development occurs except for a belated attempt to extend the character towards a symbolic purpose, of which more later. As the couples line up the marital and inter-sexual aggro gets into top gear, and in intensity if not in variation it sticks there throughout. "Shut up you bitch" would be a fair example of a thematic insight emerging from dialogue.

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Vital and Theatrical

THE TEMPEST

by Elizabeth Perkins


Bryan Nason's production of The Tempest with the Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe and amateur actors was another venture into community theatre that pleased those bored with traditional bardolatry but did not offend Shakespeare purists.

The open stage design made the move from the outdoor Fair to the play inside a natural transition, and a natural simplicity of movement, music and acting controlled most aspects of the production. It was a young people's play, with the older generation, like Prospero himself, keeping benevolent control. The young musicians on floating platforms, and the youthful troupe of urchins tumbling all over the stage appeared both free and disciplined. Ariel, played by twelve year old Timothy Draper, was a delicate, fine spirit, handling lines with intelligence and feeling and moving nimbly and gracefully.

Ariel's brief transformations into Superman and Batman were probably intended to show that what Ariel was to Shakespeare's generation these popular mythmen are to ours. If Ariel had been replaced by a muscular adult for these changes the idea might have gained theatrical point, but the effect did not come off because Timothy Draper's Ariel was, frankly, a more imaginative creation than Messers Super and Batman.

The shapes and spirits conjured up by Prospero were of a different order, and it would be hard to find a production where they were more creatively or daringly conceived. Ceres was played by Sandy Voss on cothurni, looking and singing magnificently, the very image of fertility. Juno descended in a canopy and was played by soul singer Shireen Malamoo with this time a very successful blending of Shakespeare and the twentieth century. It is chauvinist, perhaps, but accurate to say that these interludes were more vital and theatrical than the shaky scenes in the 1979 BBC Television production of The Tempest.

With a few exceptions, the other roles were also taken by very young players, and while the older people were adequate, Judith Anderson as Miranda and the comparatively inexperienced John Benetto as Ferdinand were graceful and appealing with a freshness that owed as much to their acting as to their youth. Alan Cooke and Peter Ryde gave fine performances as Antonio and Sebastian, and Chris Hill, another younger player, showed promise as Caliban whose deformity was achieved with striking simplicity by paint and movement.

Robert Arthur is an excellent and versatile actor, but his youthful voice and appearance did not quite meet the demands that Shakespeare makes on Prospero to control the whole play. Prospero is an austere role and needs behind it a suggestion of great wisdom and suffering.

Sandy Voss (Ceres) in the celebration masque in TCT/Grin and Tonic's The Tempest.

which was not felt in the first night performance. The brief scene where Ariel's pity for Alsono and Gonzalo moves Prospero to compassion was one of the play's most dramatic moments and more of this intensity would have given depth to Prospero's part. Yet Prospero did command the performance in a very real way, and his Epilogue, like the whole production, had an artistic sincerity which "flies all faults".

The one disappointment in this production was that the grace and music of the actors' movements did not pass into their spoken lines. Articulation was almost perfect, an achievement in itself, but in a production where there was no much flowing movement, the speech trod dutifully and intelligently on the ground. We certainly got the meaning of the lines but we missed the experience.

But when the challenge of this kind of production is granted, with a professional company guiding dozens of young and amateur actors to an imaginative and coherent performance, the result must be considered very satisfying theatre.

If it's Williamson it must be good

TRAVELLING NORTH

by Sylvia da Costa-Roque

If it's David Williamson it must be good. That's the way a lot of people think at the moment, and with Travelling North they are right.

The Queensland Theatre Company's production of the play at Brisbane's SGIO Theatre left nobody in any doubt that if you put on a Williamson you get full houses. And if you put on a Williamson play starring such seasoned and good performers as Joan Bruce and Ron Graham, the husband and wife pair from television's Certain Women, old-time radio comic Willie Fennell and David Cledinning, you don't just get full houses, they are verbally packed.

The play is well-known, the mature couple who are supposed to know better who go off up north together to live in sin leaving their respective families behind with nobody to do the babysitting.

It isn't a pretentious play. It doesn't carry hidden mysterious messages of drugs and sex. Ordinary people doing ordinary things that people can relate to as if they were working at mirror images. The sort of thing Williamson is so good at.

Director Alan Edwards, who must be pleased with the box office successes of recent QTC productions, got first class performances from all concerned. Joan Bruce and Ron Graham, the husband and wife pair from television's Certain Women, old-time radio comic Willie Fennell and David Cledinning, you don't just get full houses, they are verbally packed.

Those quibbles aside, Travelling North travelled up north very well indeed.
A Delight; and top-heavy

ON THE WALLABY
DONE FOR THE MONEY

by Michael Morley/State Rep.


(Professional)

Done for the Money by Bill Agg. Stage Company, Adelaide SA. Opened July 1980. Director, Designer, Brian Dehnam; Production, Set, Bruce Webster; for Theatre 62. Sandra Griffiths, Bob Jesser. Cast: Zak, John Noble; Steve, Leo Taylor; Barbara, Di Chamberlain; Kathy, Cathie Fisher; George, Alan Lovett; Louise, Maureen Sherlock; Ella, Pam Western.

(Professional)

Alan Seymour's The Float did nothing to advance the cause of the new team at the State Theatre Company: but Nick Enright's depression ("about", not "inducing") show On The Wallaby: does more in half an hour for both his own and the Company's reputation than any production I can recall over the past four years — with the possible exception of The Servant of Two Masters. Too often in the past, I have despaired of ever seeing the State Theatre Company choose plays for what they have to say rather than how they might look, and of watching a group of talented actors working together to produce theatre that arrests, entertains and provides an audience with a connection between the stage and the events outside. On The Wallaby: does all this and more: both as text and performance it could hold its head up in any company.

To get the cavilling out of the way at the outset: the beginning and the end seem rather perfunctory. Only by the second scene does the performer/audience dynamic begin to evolve. And although the function of the ending with its jump forward into the present and its drawing of parallels between then and now is clear and apposite, the theatrical realisation is rather bland. Sending out the show to the strains of "Side By Side" — even though there is an ironic intent — evokes too much nostalgia for the twist of the caption "with whom!" to hit home. For what it's worth, I'd have felt either a bleaker solo number or a bigger, more emphatic and political one could have served as a strong finale.

But in between, there was almost an embarrassment of riches: superb singing, marvellous comic turns, clever song and dance numbers and a whole series of splendid cameos from everyone involved. What one has constantly missed in the STC's past performances was (suddenly?) on view; enthusiasm, vigour, versatility and strong ensemble.

Pace the old cliche about it being unfair to single anybody out: gold billies and stuffed magpies to Robert Grubb, John Saunders, Edwin Hodgeman and Wayne Jarratt. The first for some nicely differentiated pictures of pomposity and power at the top; the second for some outstanding comedy and song routines; the third for his familiar (but not over-familiar) display of closely-observed traits; and the last for a sympathetic and forceful reading of a role that could have easily been all too derivatory. As for the others — bravo, bravo, archbravo: and any company that can boast the singing voices of this group is to be envied. The only sour note (or notes) came during the "Family Portrait" number in the second act, where one felt that a radar set (to find the tune) might have helped.

This apart, the musical side of things, under the direction of Leonie Hempton, was a delight: barber shop quartets, mass song-and-dance numbers, solo spots — all using either songs from the period or others specially written by the director — showed the performers equally at home. Personal favourites? "Carry On" with its clever balanced staging of radio singers on the right and the have-nots on the left; "Phar Lap" and "Kingsford Smith".

Richard Roberts' design was functional and effective: the comedy routines were heralded by flown-in red curtains hovering behind the performers; the radio station numbers by a trucked-on mockup of a thirties radio stage; the family scenes — focussing on the history of the O'Brien family — by a truck with table and chairs and a dresser behind. And the whole area was enclosed by a square of corrugated iron walls, broken by side entrances. Simple, expressive and totally appropriate. High points of the evening? A delicious tableau of South Australia's 100th anniversary in 1936, featuring a swagman clad in white satin trousers and top (complete with gleaming billy) and sundry other walk-ons coyly dispersing themselves as spirits of wheat, sheep and vine. The reference to contemporary cultural happenings seemed — happily —
not lost on the audience.

The production's most positive benefit for the Company's future development must be the emphasis placed on collaboration and ensemble work. The director freely and warmly records his debt to researcher and designer alike. And although his hand is clearly evident in the overall staging— with the echoes of American vaudeville, dance numbers and comedy routines and also (surely) of Dennis Potter's memorable *Pennies From Heaven*—there is no sense of one mind imposing its view on others, whether they be performers or collaborators. The only regret must be the short run (a return is essential).

At the same time as the STC was giving us a view of the more distant (though not remote) past, the Stage Company was performing *Done For The Money* set in the 'fifties (Act I) and the early 'seventies (Act II), at the time of the mining boom and collapse. Yet, oddly, the historically more recent seemed years distant in terms of its characters and attitudes. Much of this was attributable to the writing, which sought to capture the sense of period in a style resembling telegraphese. That is, isolated observations and turns of phrase from the time were thrown in to lard an exchange that might otherwise have seemed indeterminate in its social and historical context. And when this was linked to a dramatic structure which seemed uncertain whether it could accommodate five or seven different ideas for one play, the result was inevitably diffuse and confused. This is not to deny that the author, Bill Agg, has talent. The opening scene of Act II, set in an Oz equivalent to Ayekbournland, is cleverly structured and the writing sparkles. It was played with wit and sharpness by the actors and suggested that, with more attention to basic dramaturgical questions, Mr Agg has the equipment to write a pointed and accurate social comedy.

But the play's central story-line is top-heavy: two mates, one a TV writer, the other a disabled ex-rodeo rider, flat together (Mateship forever?), write a future with more attention to basic dramaturgical questions, Mr Agg has the equipment to write a pointed and accurate social comedy.

The Mother is suitably spartan, but then the Red Shed needs little for Brecht. Wendy Madigan, as her son, Pavel Vlasov, gave some outstanding performances. Michael Atkinson, as the mother, Pelagea Vlasova, is sympathetic to the overall didactic and political dimension of the play. The Eisler score which maintains a tense and emotional atmosphere is excellent. The design by Cath Cantlon is suitably spartan, but then the Red Shed needs little for Brecht. Wendy Madigan as the mother, Pelagea Vlasova and Jon Firman as her son, Pavel Vlasov gave some outstanding performances. When Pavel sings alone in the prison after the visit by Pelagea, of the power of the

State and its ability to oppress and enslave workers, many spines in the audience tingled. It was great theatre.

Probably the most successful scenes were those that took place in the home of Nikolai Vesovchikov, the teacher—a fine performance from David Kirk. The scene in which he began to teach the peasant friends of Pelagea to read and write combined the political, the social, and the personal in one image, while allowing the wisdom beneath the humour to show through. Peter Dunn played all his cameos well, but particularly that of Vasil Yefimovitch, the butcher. Gwenda Helsham as both Natasha Vasilyeva, a revolutionary worker and Vera Stepanovna, the landlady; Geoff Revell, who amongst other parts plays Pavel Sigorski; Christina Andersson as Mascha Khalatov; and Ron Hoenig as Ivan Vesovchikov and Smilgin were all very good. Michael Morley’s piano accompaniment helped make it an excellent production. There are very few plays worth putting on after fifty years. Brecht’s *The Mother* is certainly amongst those few for its politics are still the politics of today.

At the same time as *The Mother* was being performed, there was more Brecht on view in Adelaide; this time a production by the Acting Company of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, written in 1944.

In the form of a parable, the play is concerned with the question of proletarian morality and the problem of proletarian justice. Whether we can make decisions between ourselves after free and equal discussion or whether those decisions are made for us and then imposed from above depends on what kind of society we live in. In the Prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Brecht shows the working of proletarian justice of an exploiting class. In “The Story of the Judge” and “The Chalk Circle” Ardak, the peasant judge, reveals the internal workings of the law as he is motivated alternately by financial self-interest, sexism, irrational whim, and political opportunism; not to mention the all-pervading desire to protect private property.

It was a pity that *The Acting Company*, whose ensemble work was at times so very good, should have decided to cut the Prologue which is crucially important as an introduction to the parable and to make further cuts to “The Story of the Judge” which tend to remove the questions of morality and justice as the centrally important ones and replace them with minor issues. Politically *The Mother* is a much more direct play, but *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has the potential to be exceedingly relevant in the very political matters of justice and injustices.
Troubled domesticity

A DOLL'S HOUSE
A BOY FOR YOU, A GIRL FOR ME
by Colin Duckworth

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen, adaption by Ray Lawler. Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaeneum Theatre, Vic. Opened 2 July, 1980. Director, Ray Lawler; designer, Peter Cooke; choreography, Tony Bartuccio. Cast: Nora Helmer, Vivien Davies; Ellen, Margot Knight; Pontus; Rodney Digby; Torvald Helmer, John Stanton; Christiana Linde, Kate Wilkin; Nils Krogstad, Peter Curtin; Dr Rank, Charles Tingwell; Anna-Marie, Rosie Sturgess. (Professional)

A Boy for Me, a Girl for You. by Ian Nash. Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaeum Theatre, Vic. Opened 2 July, 1980. Director, Judith Alexander; designer, Mark Wagner; choreography, Amanda Muggleton; lighting designer, Jamie Lewis. Cast: Janet Williams, Beverley Dunn; Leon Williams, Frederick Parslow; Peter Rogers, Ian Suddards; Margo Le Grand, Amanda Muggleton. (Professional)

This year's HSC students have reason to be grateful to the MTC for staging this outstanding example of Eng Lit (other notable ones frequently annexed by English studies being by Strindberg, Tchekhov, and even Ionesco). Post-HSC spectators might be a trifle less pleased, for it was probably with an eye on the youngsters, who easily get restless, that Raw Lawler opted for a melodramatic rendering with strong but rather one-dimensional characterisation. This certainly brought out the issues, loud and clear, to an audience that on occasions oohed and aahed, so great was their involvement with the plight of poor little Nora at the hands of her villainous husband. Ibsen's contrived plots and his determination to put complex social issues in simple black-and-white dramatic terms often invite resort to the kind of moral confrontation one associates with melodrama. The only question is, should the invitation be accepted or subtly deflected?

It all hinges on the characterisation given to Nora and Torvald. The text gives many clues that Nora is still a child — but not a baby doll. After ten years of married life and three children by a normally-sexed husband, she is still a giddy young thing, but she cannot look and sound as though she has been auditioning for a remake of a Shirley Temple lollipop, and then convincingly turn into a mature and purposeful woman in the final scene. Vivien Davies depended too much on the schoolgirlishness that had served her so well in Once a Catholic — and the schoolroom overtones were reinforced by John Stanton's personification of Torvald as a cross between ranting schoolmaster, sermonising vicar and snappish sergeant-major.

How has Nora put up with this peevish banker for ten years without shoving his trial balance up his deficit? Surely, to make their attachment plausible, Torvald has to treat her with benign, avuncular forbearance, at times scolding but always sympathetic to a wayward, favourite young girl? The dashing to pieces of Nora's idealised image of Torvald (her potential saviour) and her violent volte-face, lost much of their power and plausibility because of the lack of shading in their relationships. However, it was all lively and clear. It would be good to see John Stanton play Krogstad: he would have achieved the kind of strong, brooding menace that one missed in Peter Curtin, whose Nils was simply too nice and was too easily won over by this Christina — a difficult and thankless part in which Kate Wilkin managed to keep our interest, despite the built-in colourlessness of the role.

Charles Tingwell's warm and affectionate Rank was a delight. An equally troubled domestic setting is presented to us by Ian Nash in A Boy for Me..., which welds together two disparate themes: the vaguely incestuous longing of a mother and father for their son and daughter, who have (understandably) fled the nest and keep their whereabouts hidden; and the rip-off scene of the dance tuition business.

We never know if the children really exist. We could be in Albee country: Peter and Heather might just be the phantoms of a childless couple, like George and Martha's son.

When son Peter (or whoever) sends Janet and Leon a free set of dance lessons, plot and counter-plot develop slowly and, in the first act, take about ten minutes too long. But when the apparently predictable rip-off conspiracy by the ineffective (other) Peter and his partner, Margo, is countered by the kinky machinations of those who were supposed to be the middle-aged victims, an atmosphere of genuine menace takes over from the uneasy and hesitant neo-absurdism of Act I.

Beverley Dunn, in the central role, kept the action together by an unlikely mixture of menopausal nervous energy and deceptive dowdy naivety. Ian Suddards' infantile regression and Amanda Muggleton's switches from obscene violence to smarmy sales-talk showed her versatility. Frederick Parslow was amiable and bumbling, but was often responsible for the slow pace.
THE KEN WRIGHT SHOW
DEATH OF MINNIE
POTIPHAR'S WIFE

by Suzanne Spunner


Director: Denis Moore; Producer: John Timlin; Stage Manager: Catherine Potter; Design: Peter King; Original Music: Danny Nash; Masks and scenic artistry: Barry Dickins; Musical direction: Peter King.

Cast: Ken Wright, Curtis Weiss, with Richard Healy, Lesley Caust, Danny Nash, Marilyn O'Donnell, Josephine White, Peter King, Barry Dickins.

Professional

If we can begin to talk of Post-Wave Australian Drama then at least in Melbourne in the eighties Barry Dickins is its Cezanne. To date he has had productions in the three main theatre salons beginning with Banana Bender at La Mama and now The Ken Wright Show at The Pram and Death of Minnie at the Playbox and so it must only be a matter of time before he's hung in our own theatrical Louvre.

With the production of The Ken Wright Show in the Front Theatre of the Pram we are finally able to see the "new" APG Ensemble in full flight after their abortive debut in Rezistor Routines. Now that John Timlin has returned to his true place at the helm not only has the Pram been cleaned up (let alone purged), but a production under Denis Moore's direction has been got together of which no one need be ashamed. To walk into the Pram on the opening night of The Ken Wright Show was to enter a theatre again - the sense of resurrection and optimism was profound.

In The Ken Wright Show, Barry Dickins has created an endearing image of Australian innocence in his silent, shuffling Ken - a man of the eighties, who says nothing and sees less. Ken is somewhere between Chaplin and The Bloke, and if in a sense he speaks for the author, then it is indeed the lowest profile Mr Dickins has ever assumed. By making the main character silent and using the device of Len Teale Digitalis (the talking radio clock), Dickins still allows himself his favourite party trick (impersonating Mr Homicide) while for the first time successfully writing himself out of his work.

Placing a silent figure centre stage is particularly when everyone around him has no trouble talking, however in this production the dynamic which could arise from this confrontation did not, or at least did not to the extent which it should have. Thus Ken and ultimately his plight remained shadowy and unexpressed as Ken never really made the transition from Fool to Oracle. Instead the characters around him - his family, friends and workmates and consulting psychiatrists - came to assume greater weight than the writing could bear.

Acting for the most part remained at the level of caricature which was appropriate except that for most of the actors it was caricatures of their previous roles. Thus audiences unfamiliar with the work of Marilyn O'Donnell, Peter King and Jo White were entertained adequately by their performances, but for me it was only Richard Healy who created unique, particular creatures out of the many roles he took on; his portrayal of the mafioso boot factory boss was a startling example of the possibilities of sharp cameo playing.

Peter King's design with its rolling props on castors and the beautiful Elk bed were as exciting as they were expressive of Dickinsia, however I was disappointed that the beautifully scalloped cloud flats were not utilised more. The Ken Wright Show was the most positive direction yet seen from the Ensemble, they have caught audiences unfamiliar with the work of Barry Dickins, however I was disappointed that the beautifully scalloped cloud flats were not utilised more. The Ken Wright Show was the most positive direction yet seen from the Ensemble, they have caught the judge's bluff.

Ironically you come out of Potiphar's Wife feeling suicidal or at least cheated enough to feel like contemplating drastic action, and you come out of The Death of Minnie having witnessed suicide and yet feeling that life is even more worth living. For as much sympathy as one has with Potiphar's Wife at the beginning it is rapidly replaced by a feeling of intense irritation and ultimately with sheer boredom, because the experience, like the language in which it is expressed, is so baroquely ornamented it looks and feels fake. It is not simply a matter of simple every day language invariably being the locus of genuine expression and poetic or "artificial" language denoting falsity, because Dickins creates for his marvellous Minnie a language scrolled and curlicued with wit, imagery and resonance.

The Death of Minnie is the most sustained and interesting piece that Dickins has written this year, and I am beginning to feel that it, together with Bridal Suite and The Horror of The Suburban Nature Strip, indicate that he has amongst Australian male playwrights an exceptional ability to create bizarre wonderful women ratbags who could partner Hibberd's equally wonderful mad men.
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There are some kinds of theatre which stereotype their subject despite all efforts to the contrary. By contrast, Roger Pulvers’ plays seem to set out from the start to consciously explore the power of stereotyping and dramatic convention. In general he is a playwright that never lets us lose sight of the artificiality and contrivance of his stage. His theatre is stylish, but stylish in a way that defies easy classification. It is also lucid, formalist and ritualised.

Watching his most recent play Witold Gombrowicz in Buenos Aires it is the abstractions of symbolic logic or the master chess game which spring to mind. Like an earlier work, Brecht leaves Los Angeles, this play passes from surface to black surface. Once again the motifs seem to be those of alienation and survival, though here neither the Polish poet and intellectual nor the city from which it takes its title contribute very much in the way of clues to its meaning.

In retrospect it is a play that tends to fall into a series of framed and usually darkly comic stills. A grisly masturbation scene, a stabbing, a bag of poisonous snakes, a teepee and a TV all have their place in a script littered with philosophical ideas and literary references.

The general scenario of Witold Gombrowicz is one of war, complete with soldiers male and female, a “real enemy”, and an old man, all of whom are caught up in such pronounced stereotypes of pain, surrender and torture that they invariably raise the larger issues of good and evil, sexuality and death.

Under the direction of the playwright the play is paced so that the first three scenes unfold in slow motion slabs of violence, persecution and irony. The characters are not composed in any depth but behave more like vehicles for the demonstration of abstract emotions and ideas, and their interaction is calculated to undermine the familiar by constantly dislocating gestures and colloquialisms from their “natural” context.

This section of the play is both powerful and obscure and is played with a confidence and skill that is exhilarating. After interval however, the energy of the piece, spearheaded by William Zappa’s charismatic “real enemy”, verges on the manic and the crossfire between idea and image is much too rapid to be coherent.

The play ends with a confusing series of symbols and archetypes. The old man is murdered with a metal spike, costumes are changed and William Gluth (formerly the timid and sensitive man) is suddenly transformed into an unlikely Zealot and proselyte. At La Mama, Witold Gombrowicz is staged on something like a Peter Brook’s poor set. The design is spare and sophisticated and an excellent foil for writing which is both dense and remarkably explicit about its own habits of irony, collage and arcane quotation.

The audience, and certainly this reviewer, was sometimes at a loss to know what the play was about, but we were also intrigued by its fierce, passionate quality, its wit, and its striking deviation from the conventions of plot, character and narrative sequence.

Might have worked better

LOOT
by Cliff Gillam

Director. Stephen Barry; Designer. Tony Tripp; Lighting. Duncan Ord; Stage Manager, George Tsousis.

There can be little doubt that of the three plays written by Joe Orton before he was murdered in 1967, Loot is the one which will keep him in the commercial theatre repertoire. Loot is a brilliantly crafted piece, which refines that extraordinary capacity to shock without outraging which Orton had first evidenced with Entertaining Mr Sloane.

Loot adds to this, however a plot cobbled together in hilarious fashion from the controlled frenzies of farce and the titillating intricacies of the detective mystery, reinforcing the comic ghouliness of its truck with coffins and unclad corpses with some really swinging satire against the London Metropolitan Police (although any boys in blue will do.)

As script then, Loot sparkles with possibilities for performers and director alike. Alas, too few of those possibilities have been realised in the Playhouse production.

The single most important reason for the manifold disappointments of this production was voiced long ago by Orton himself, when he cannily warned that "...if Loot is played as no more than farcical, it won't work." It's true that Loot owes much, formally to the conventions of farce, but it won't do to reduce it to farce alone, particularly if such reduction involves performers "mugging up" to the audience to alert them to the upcoming "funny bits".

Nearly all the comedy comes from the fundamental incongruity of the matter-of-fact attitude of nearly all the characters the grotesqueries, mayhem and straight forward old-fashioned larceny in which they are so intimately involved. The key must be "deadpan", quite straight and straight through.

It's no use semaphoring laugh lines frenetically all night, as nearly all the cast was wont to do. Not only does such an approach insult the intelligence of the audience (always assuming that one's audience is possessed of sufficient collective intelligence to recognise an insult) but much more importantly it slows the pace, forces the laughs and cheapens the play.

In the light of this uni-dimensionality of approach (an evasive and ugly periphrasis, I'll admit, but rather less savage a charge than its simplest substitute, is it not?) one could not expect (and did not get) much in the way of performances — even from Maurie Ogden and Jenny McNae whom one might have thought capable, experienced and gifted in comedy as they are, of getting around the problem. Ogden's Mr McLeavy was very disappointing, a characterisation too unreliably whining and further blasted by a fake Irish accent which swallowed up the sense of most of his lines. As Fay, Jenny McNae seemed very uneasy with the part's mixture of femme fatale and home loving home-help — so uneasy in fact that she resorted at times to playing the two parts in turn.

As Hal, Scott McGregor simply gave off too great an impression of rude and bounding health, which was a trifle too incongruous for a lad who exercises only in brothels. There was in fact far too little,
both in his Hal and Gerald Hitchcock’s Dennis, of that frighteningly funny detachment (as of the aging roue), which Orton’s script suggests. In the midst of many lost opportunities, however, Trevor Kent made the most of his as Truscott, borrowing for that manic authoritarian just as many Cleesian mannerisms as he needed (including the famous Fawlty ‘forward-lean’) and proving (no small feat) that he could remain the master of them. A strong, in fact saving, performance.

I’ve probably been a little unfair to director Stephen Barry in this review since, despite my comments so far, his Loot did work, at least in terms of a warm reception by the audience. But then as I’ve already said, it’s a brilliant play, and will always work. I’m simply saddened by the thought that it might have worked so much better, that so much was wasted for the want of a little subtlety.

 Gems here and there

IT WAS THE LARK

by Margot Luke


Director, Edgar Metcalfe; Designer, William Dowd; Stage Manager, Richard Hartley; Lighting, Jake Newby.

Cast: Juliet, Nurse, Lucrezia, Rosemary Barr, Ro. Romeo, Friar Lawrence, Vic Hawkins; William Shakespeare, Edgar Metcalfe. (Professional)

This is Ephraim Kishon’s first play to be produced anywhere in Australia (as the programme informs us), which seems surprising, considering his success overseas. He’s a very funny writer, but a little goes a long way.

We are asked to imagine that Romeo and Juliet did not die in that tomb after all, but are, instead, in the thirtieth year of their marriage. They still argue fiercely over their poverty are the mainspring of their marriage. They still argue fiercely, and are always sick to death of one another. Their one-room flat with kitchen annexe is grotty, they live on Nescafe and spring onions, and Romeo, though described as a ballet teacher, seems to be unemployed, which means Juliet cannot afford a maid and must do her own washing-up singing “Mortadella, Bombers”, and the ghost of William Shakespeare, who acts as referee in the domestic brawls but eventually falls in love with Lucrezia and departs with her.

To add to the lunacy of the situation there is some tricky doubling of roles: Juliet, Lucrezia and the Nurse are all played by Rosemary Barr having a ball with alternating disguises, shapes and accents (not to mention with the split-second timing of costume changes); whilst Vic Hawkins lumbers about as an unballetic Romeo one minute, and then immediately returns tottering and dithering as an improbably Irish Friar Lawrence. Only the Bard is allowed to be uniquely himself, played by Edgar Metcalfe in puckish panto-style, and gloriously tacky costume (black with strips of tinselly silver braid).

The first half of the play is thoroughly enjoyable. Juliet in neatly-wound hair-curlers (which turn out to be a wig which is replaced by a more suitable daytime wig); Romeo’s pop-songs — he does the washing-up singing “Mortadella, Belladonna, if we only had a maid”; Friar Lawrence persists in confusing Romeo with that morose Danish lad always reading and dressed in black; the Nurse, huge and lecherous, tripping the light fantastic with Romey, as they are plotting the murder; Lucrezia disappointed that Shakespeare didn’t write “I could have danced all night” (disco-version); and Shakespeare conversing in appropriate quotations from his better known works (after all, he owns the copyright).

In Act II the things that had initially been surprising and fresh seem feeble — the comic situations seem forced, and the literary allusions, particularly the discussion about the true author of The Plays, become a bit tedious. Even so — the gems still glitter here and there: Juliet poisons Romeo’s wine to the accompaniment of the witches’ curse from Macbeth, whereas Shakespeare gives Romeo some poison “found in the ear of Hamlet’s father”.

Of course, it’s wildly unfair to make comparisons, but the talkative aspects of a Shakespeare send-up cry out for the linguistic imagination of a Tom Stoppard. The present play succeeds with a handful of comic devices until they are stretched beyond their limits, and with some ruthless pruning it would probably turn into the romp it was intended to be.
Old and new


How quickly nostalgia sets in! The Independent Theatre in Sydney, in its later years, was generally derided for its old-fashioned attitudes and programming. In this magazine Rex Cramphorn gave one of his most sorrowful and yet most virulent attacks on one of their retrograde productions of Shakespeare. And yet almost as the the theatre closed people began looking back fondly on its struggles and triumphs. Like many fine companies it began years ahead of its time and finished rather behind its time— but in the case of the Independent that process took more than forty years, which in Australian theatre is an exceptionally good innings. When (in a few months, no doubt) we begin to look back nostalgically on the Grand Old Days of the Old Tote, we shall not be thinking of nearly such an achievement. The successes of the Tote were timely, but the Independent struggled through decades when theatre was a much more risky undertaking than it is now.

Apart from a particular personal interest (I was introduced to theatre through classes at the Indy at the tender age of thirteen) it is good to see an Old Independent show published by Currency with an introduction by Doris Fitton herself (Miss Fitton, to me). And like the Independent in 1948, Rusty Bugles was well ahead of its time. It is a relaxed realistic account of life among soldiers stationed at a Northern Territory supply depot during the Second World War, but it also has a looseness of structure, a scorn for plot-contrivance, and a strong feeling for place and mood, and for life just going on, which should have been more influential than they were. Its central image, of sitting around through a Dry Season and into the Wet, waiting for Leave, has a lot of impact now, and it is a pity that the lack of a theatrical tradition then, and the impact of the much more conventionally contrived Doll, made Rusty Bugles a once.

In spite of its specific, realistically treated subject, Rusty Bugles is formally the most interesting play written before the 60s. It is wry, laconic and undramatic in a way which perfectly reflects a common view of the Australian Character. It is theatrically effective in its humour, atmosphere and gentle acceptance of craziness. It is to be hoped that this new publication will revive professional interest in the play.

Three Political Plays is one of those slightly artificial portmanteau volumes, vaguely linked by a theme. (I used to have one called Three Plays About Abraham Lincoln.) As Stephen Sewell points out, "political plays" merely means "left-wing plays", and with the exception of his own, they're not very radical. A more interesting point linking the plays is that they were all first produced at Brisbane's La Boite theatre and if we get volumes of Traverse Plays and Almost Free Plays, then surely we can have La Boite Plays.

The most interesting is by far Sewell's The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea, which in a strict sense is about politics. In a series of densely human, and moving, scenes Sewell charts the different attitudes of a father, a mother and their two sons to the political, social and economic forces which control their lives, and which include a neo-fascist coup of the sort which many Australians, especially Queenslander, are seriously anticipating. By giving a clear and rich sense of individual lives lived Sewell explores fascinatingly the relationship between broad political processes and individual experience of them. This play has not the economy and precision of David Hare's plays, with which it shares many concerns, but it has a brilliant final image from which it takes its title. We are outdoors (for the first time, it has stopped raining, and the busy sound effects of the rest of the play have resolved into a single loud sound of surf, as the old man stands and stares out to see. The grim sadness which the outside political struggle has brought to his life makes this final vision of him, with his toy bucket and birthday cake, very powerful. Sewell shows the clarity and directness and sure touch of a very fine theatre writer.

Steve J Spears' King Richard is an effective drama of the corruption and power-mongering in "high" places which we all now assume. King Richard and Sewell's play are both definitely post-November 11, 1975. Spears' play is a power game between a leading politician and a leading (prison) unionist. The craftsmanship is so sure, and the twists and turns of the plot so excellently contrived that we completely forget whatever political meaning it might have. The world of the play is so casually and flippantly corrupt that it is hard to take seriously, and yet it is obviously a serious subject.

John Bradley's Irish Stew, according to Bill Hayden, who provides the Foreward to this volume, "uses a seemingly purposeless ferry hijack as an allegorical illustration of how well-meaning men, who wanted to be free and to free others, took command of a system they did not understand and therefore could not control", which sums the play up better than I could. I find it very confusing. It is neither grounded in recognisable reality, nor rich in its own created world. But it uses a strong central visual image (albeit cinematic rather than theatrical) and has some tantalising, because unpursued, moments of power.

I have never been to Brisbane, but La Boite must be a good little theatre. If nothing else this volume should contradict the assertion sometimes heard that all the best new plays go to the big state companies.
ANU ARTS CENTRE (49 4787)
Theatrum Classicum:
Casina by Plautus; Director, Paul Monaghan. 26, 27, 28, 30 September.
CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
James Joyce’s Women with Fionnuala Flanagan. 29, 30 September.
PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
NIDA:
The Women Pirates by Steve Gooch; Director, George Whaley; designer Ken Wilby. 9 to 13 September.
THEATRE 3 (47 4222)
Canberra Repertory Society: Androcles and the Lion by George Bernard Shaw. Director Pam Rosenberg. 17 September to early October, Wednesdays to Saturdays.
REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (47 0781)
The Jigsaw Company: 700,000 by John Romeril; in schools and the community.
Me Jack. You fill in schools.
Canberra Youth Theatre: Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas. 11 to 20 September.
Fools’ Gallery: Images from the Background, devised by the company; director, Carol Woodrow. 25 September, Thursdays to Saturdays till December.

For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 433 057 (w), 480 706 (h).

NSW THEATRE
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
School Tours: The Bushranger, Australian folklore for infants primary and secondary; metropolitan area from September 22.
Jan Carter, classical guitar for primary and secondary; Riverina from September 22.
The Book Book Theatre Company; drama for infants, primary and secondary; South Coast from September 22.
Adult Tours: Flamenco Laberinto; Western Districts, Riverina and South Coast from September 8.

WESTERN DISTRICTS, NEW SOUTH WALES:

NSW THEATRE

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Adult Tours: Flamenco Laberinto; Western Districts, Riverina and South Coast from September 8.

WESTERN DISTRICTS, NEW SOUTH WALES:
Boucher. Commences September 17.
Late Night Shows: Sleep Never Rough with Ward, Johnson, Kelso and Curtis. September 5 and 6.
NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)
The "Shhh" Journey: for primary schools and The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson for secondary schools; both directed by Ian Watson; with Nola Colefax, David London, Colin Allen, Bryan Jones and Rosemary lenzo. Metropolitan area throughout September.
Q THEATRE (047 26 5253)
The Homecoming by Harold Pinter; until September 13 at Penrith. September 17-20 at Orange and September 24-27 at Bankstown.
RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (069) 25 2052
Grease directed by Peter Barclay. September 12-21.
SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
York Theatre: Carnivale from September 13 to 21.
Everest: Theatre: James Joyce's Women written and edited by Fionnula Flanagan; directed by Burgess Meredith; with Fionnula Flanagan and Robert O'Herron. September 2-20.
SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)
Free drama workshops on weekend; includes playbuilding, mime, dance, puppetry, design, radio and video. Shopfront Caravan touring city schools with The Tempest by William Shakespeare and Childmirth and The Tale Play created by the cast and directed by Errol Bray. Youth Theatre Showcase: Kinetic Energy Dance Company September 5-6. Shopfront Caravan's production of The Tempest September 11, 12, 19 and 20.
SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (20588)
Drama Theatre, SOH.
Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand; translated by Louis Nowara; directed by Richard Wherrett; with John Bell, Helen Morse and Andrew McFarlane. Until September 2.
The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare; directed by Mick Rodger; with Jennifer Claire, Janice Finn, Max Phipps, Carol Raye and Robin Ramsay. Commences September 18.
THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)
They're Playing Our Song by Neil Simon; directed by Phil Cusack; with Jackie Weaver and John Waters. Throughout September.
THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (20588)
The Magic Flute by Mozart; conducted by Richard Bonynge and produced by John Copley. Manon Lescaut by Puccini; conducted by William Reid and produced by John Copley. Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti; conducted by Richard Bonynge and produced by John Copley. The Barber of Seville by Rossini; conducted by Peter Seymour and produced by John Cox. Fra Diavola by Aubert; conducted by Richard Bonynge and David Kram and produced by John Copley.
GAY THEATRE COMPANY (357 3342)
For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200/909 3010.

QLD THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
The Merry-Go-Round Went Round by Barbara Stellmach; director, Barbara Stellmach; designer, Michael Morris. Sept 22-Oct 4.
BRISBANE ACTORS' COMPANY (221 9511)
Phone 349 1879 for details.
LA BOITE THEATRE (36 1622)
Legend Of King O'Malley by Boddy and Ellis; director, Malcolm Blaylock. Sept 19-Oct 18.
QUEENSLAND ARTS COUNCIL (221 5900)
On Tour: Queensland Arts Theatre: Deathtrap by Ira Levin; director, Peter Duncan; with Tony Ingersent, Frank Lloyd and Babette Stephens. Accommodations by Nick Hall; director, Lloyd Nickson. South Australian Department of Education presents Bruce Raymond's Polished Brass.
QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 3681)
Outside Edge by Richard Harris; director, Alan Edwards; designer, Graeme Maclean.-27.

DANCE

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (221 2777)
The Australian Ballet presents Anna Karenina. Sept 5-11.
QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY (371 1879)
Schonell Theatre: Five One Act Ballets: Pas De Quatre, choreographer, Ted Miller; After The Ball, choreographer, Andris Toppe; Flower Festival, choreographer, August Bournonville; Savage Parade, choreographer, Don Asker; Six And One, choreographer, Harold Collins. Sept 24-27.

OPERA

QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY (221 2777)
Her Majesty's Theatre:
Martha by Friedrich Von Flotow; producer, John Thompson; designer, Allan Lees; conductor, Graeme Young. Sept 20, 26, 30. Oct 2, 4.
Don Pasquale by Donizetti; producer, John Milson; conductor, Georg Tinter; designer, Tom Lingwood. Sept 25, 27, Oct 1, 3.
For entries contact Don Batchelor on 356 9311.

SA THEATRE

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRES (223 8610)
ARTS THEATRE
CORE THEATRE COMPANY
Touring: Allen Lyne's Fightback, a play about unemployment, and Supershit and Sunshine Show, a play about the politics of nuclear and solar energy. Available for schools and community groups.
MAGPIE TIE TEAM (51 5151)
Q THEATRE (223 5651)
89 Halifax St: You Can't Take It With You by George Kaufman and Moss Hart; director, Barry Hill. Sept 6-27.
STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)
Playhouse: The Man From Muckinup by Dorothy Hewett; director, Kevin Palmer; designer, Sue Russell. Sept 1-6.
TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (34 8018)
Drama Studios, TCAE: Hell Is Other People, director, Allen Harvey. Sept 17-20, 24-27.
SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (23 5259)
In rehearsal throughout Sept.
THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)

DANCE

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
For entries contact Anne Campbell on (049) 67 4470.

VIC

THEATRE

ALEXANDER THEATRE (54 32828)
AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (34 7713)
Front Theatre: A new ensemble show, Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill; director, Peter King. Throughout Sept.
ARENA THEATRE (24 9667)
Chapel Perilous by Dorothy Hewett; director, Steve Wallace. Sept 4-13.
Touring Lower Primary: Where To Turelo by Henri Degoutin. Community Access Workshops: Saturday afternoon and Monday nights.
ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (529 4355)
Jigs Dance Song in Colonial folk tradition with Michelle and Mike Jackson. The Magic Pudding from the original folk story by Norman Lindsay; by the Marionette Theatre of Australia. Throughout Sept.
COMEDY THEATRE (662 3233)
The Playbox Theatre Company presents Edith Piaf by Pam Gems; director, Murray Copland, with Jeanne Lewis. Throughout Sept.
COMEDY CAFE
Brunswick St, Fitzroy: Original comedy entertainment with Rod Quaintock.

DANCE

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
For entries contact Anne Campbell on (049) 67 4470.

OPERA

VICTORIAN STATE OPERA (41 5061)
Touring with Victorian Arts Council: Rigoletto; director, Peter Jordan; conductor, Richard Dirall; with John Wood, Rosemary Boyle, Geoffrey Harris.
For entries contact Connie Kramer on 267 5938.

MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (21 7615)
Albury: They’ll Tell You About Me, a Pub-Club show with Robert Ferrier. Throughout Sept.
NATIONAL THEATRE (534 0221)
Dry Run, a comedy with Reg Gorman and Judith Roberts. From Sept 19.
PALAIS THEATRE (534 0651)
Clifford Hocking and Playbox Theatre Company present Acrobat Of China with the Nanking Acrobat Troupe. Sept 16-27.
PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (63 4888)
UNIVERSAL THEATRE (419 3777)
Scanlan by Barrie Oakley, and Smoking Is A Health Hazard by Anton Chekhov; director, Neil Armitage; with Max Gillies. Sept 3-Oct 2.
UNION THEATRE (347 4186)
WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE (370 7034)
Girls, a song and dance performance by Linda Waters, for Community women’s groups. Also playing, Mother Knows, a travelling Pub Show, with Jan Macdonald and Bronwyn Barton.
AMATEUR THEATRES:
Basin Theatre Group (762 1082)
Clayton Theatre Group (878 1072)
Heidelberg Rep. (49 2262)
Malvern Theatre Co. (211 0020)
Pumkin Theatre (42 8237)

NATIONAL THEATRE (534 0221)

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (654 4000)
Touring Schools: TIE Team presents Or Not To D, a comic-book melodrama based on the transition that students face when leaving school to join the work force.
FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)
HER MAJESTY'S (663 3211)
Evita, director, Harold Prince; Choreographer, Larry Fuller; Composer, Andrew Lloyd Webber; Musical director, Peter Casey; Lyrics, Tim Rice; with Jennifer Murphy, Peter Carroll, John O'May. Throughout Sept.
LA MAMA THEATRE (347 6085)
In One Key: A musical event with Domenico De Clario. Sept 5-6,7.
RAIN by Colin Ryan. From Sept 11.
LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6225)
Upstairs: Show changing weekly.
MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)
Athenaeum: The Matchmaker by Thornton Wilder; director, Simon Chilvers; designer, James Ridewood; with Vivian Davies, Margot Knight, Charles Tingwell, and Peter Curtain. Throughout Sept.
Russell Street: In Duty Bound by Ron Elisha; director, Judith Alexander; designer, Peter Cooke; with Margret Cameron, Marianne Edwards, Babs McLellan, Ray Lawler, Tim Hughes, David Ravenswood and Alix Longman. Throughout Sept.
WA THEATRE
THE ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE
(322 4766)
THE HAYMAN THEATRE (350 7026)
The Devils by John Whiting; director, Steve Jodrell. Sept 17-27.
HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)
Crown Matrimonial by Royce Ryton; director, Peter Williams; with June Salter and John Hamblin. Sept 9-27.
THE WHOLE IN THE WALL
(381 2403)
Daughter Of The Rubbed: Dub Show director, Mike Morris. To Sept 6.
THE NATIONAL THEATRE (325 3500)
Betrayal by Pinter; director, Stephen Barry. Sept 18-Oct 11.
Empress Eugenie by Jason Lindsay; director, Marian McNaghten; with Nita Panned. To Sept 13.
THE REGAL (381 1557)
THE UNIVERSITY THEATRES
(380 2440)
Octagon Theatre: Hinge And Bracket. Sept 1,2,4,5,6.
DANCE
WA BALLET COMPANY
OPERA
HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE
(321 6288)
For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1980

Across:
1. City of the little lad's curse (8)
5. Lawrence is in the concert, for the time being (3,3)
10. Strange man I refuse to allow back in the womb (6)
12. Alternatively, trade in endurance test (6)
13. Cheat from whom wren slid off (8)
15. Bureaucracy at play makes you leave, crazed (12)
18. Little piece at which old French note an exclamation at the sea (4,3,5)
23. Beleaguered mine camp will get supplies (8)
24. Tack on a very soft finish (6)
26. Inadequate companion nevertheless returns to captivate one (6)
27. Soft meadow chant can be agreeable (8)
28. Belted with footwear (6)
29. Artist gives birth to Noel and Dora (8)

Down:
1. "It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,/ A breaking..." (Shelley) (6)
2. It's denounced, we hear, but go in anyway (6)
3. Spy Time in chains (7)
4. Urge involved in baking, perhaps (4)
6. The love of languages (7)
7. Rhyming offspring? (8)
8. Monkey for him to train (8)
11. Find leader of the Welsh irritating and jumpy (7)
14. Hearty fellow has one account (7)
16. Southern snoozers dangerous to postmen? (8)
17. Scented through a habit round the county town (8)
19. Article I join up with and activate (7)
20. Give a reason for one formerly ugly (7)
27. She and the American soldier are making sweet music (6)

Last month's answers:
The winner of last month's crossword was J.B. Finnimore of Warell Heights, Qld. The first correct entry drawn on September 25 will receive one year's free subscription to Theatre Australia.

THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD
No. 25.

Name: ........................................
Address: ....................................

P/Code: ....................................

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48 THEATRE AUSTRALIA SEPTEMBER 1980