Theatre Australia

12-1980


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NIMROD’S 10th ANNIVERSARY

CELLULOID HEROES
A NEW DAVID WILLIAMSON PLAY

IRVING WARDLE

INHUMANITIES ON THE LONDON STAGE
Love, Murder, Power, Revenge, Lust, Romance
ALL IN ONE YEAR!

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Costumes by Anna Senior
Music by Jim Cotter

A beautiful and enchanting celebration of a world long lost to most of us.
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by William Shakespeare

Directed by William Gaskill
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as Hamlet
March 28 to May 9

HAMLET
by William Shakespeare

Directed by William Gaskill
with Kate Fitzpatrick, John Gaden, Alexander Hay, Noni Hazlehurst, George Spartels, and Colin Friels
as Hamlet
March 28 to May 9

CHICAGO
A Musical Vaudeville

Book by Fred Ebb
Music by John Kander
Lyrics by Fred Ebb
based on the play Chicago
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directed by Rodney Fisher
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In association with Winfield

**CELLULOID HEROES**

by David Williamson

director John Bell, designer Larry Eastwood with, **in alphabetical order**

Kate Fitzpatrick  John Gregg  Robin Ramsay  Kevin Smith  Barbara Stephens  Peter Sumner  Henri Szeps  Alan Wilson

by arrangement with the Shopfront Theatre

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**TEETH ‘N’ SMILES**

by David Hare, director Neil Armfield

with Michele Fawdon

Telephone 6995003 for your free copy of the Nimrod Banner with full subscription details.
COMMENT

HAIL NIMROD!

If there is any single reason for believing that Australians in the last 10 years really have found a national theatrical style, that this latest theatre renaissance really is going to last, that we really can have exciting, first-rate theatre here, and that Sydney theatre really is more interesting than Melbourne theatre, then it is the extraordinary success of Nimrod Theatre.

Their achievements have been many, and are documented in this issue, celebrating their 10th anniversary. They have done more than any other company to encourage and produce Australian playwrights. They have found a vivid, original Australian style for the classics. They have given actors and designers an influence more in keeping with their role in the product. They have created a theatre, as building, which is exciting merely to walk into. They have spread their influence, nationally and internationally, without ever losing sight of their specific local goals. They have continued to grow, defying Parkinson’s laws, without becoming set, stultified, backward-looking, traditionalist or (not usually, at any rate) boring. Above all, and as John Bell rightly claims, they have continued to surprise their audiences — to lead theatrical taste without condescension. If you live in Sydney you go to Nimrod to be excited — not for medicinal culture.

Someone once said that at Nimrod you count on one show in three being really exciting or supremely good — the other two dross. (a pretty good average — Kenneth Tynan eat your heart out.) But you never know which one it is going to be, so you go to them all.

Not surprisingly all this has been accomplished with no small amount of critical hammering, cynicism and plain bitchery. People have said that the audience is all trendies, the audience is all trendies, the audience is all trendies. The most exciting prospect at the moment is that of yet another, a third, new wave of “Nimrod playwrights” — like Sewell and Nowra, producing large canvases and showing that there are still huge areas theatrically unexplored, and whole new ways of processing information and ideas on our stages.

Ignoring for the time being the complaints, we thank Nimrod for what they have made of our theatre in the 70s and hope that they continue to surprise us in the 80s.

John McCallum
THE MAN FROM MUKINUPIN
Dorothy Hewett
Commissioned for Western Australia’s 150th anniversary, this musical play is a touching and highly comic celebration of life in a country town of the West at the time of the Great War; and is fast becoming the author’s most popular work for the theatre.

FURTIVE LOVE
Peter Kenna
The second play of The Cassidy Album (the first is A Hard God), in which Joe faces the question of identity without God and attempts to define his own morality and sexuality. He is a playwright and finds in the world of actors some whose tenuous sense of self makes them more real on stage than off.

DON'S PARTY
David Williamson
A new edition of Williamson’s early and enormously popular play which recalls election night 1969. As the results are announced the bawdy cheer palls and the faded ideals and hopes of the characters begin to show. With illustrations from several stage productions and the film version.
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MICHAEL EDGLEY... Michael Edgley International together with a group of Australia’s most prestigious companies has been awarded the management of the new 12,000 seat Sydney Entertainment Centre; the only FM Radio Station in Perth and the new 30 year lease of Luna Park in Sydney.

Michael Edgley, who has been overseas 50 times in the last 10 years, has just returned from a 10 week trip with the most exciting and spectacular bar of attractions and deals that he or any Australian showman has ever captured. Over the next three years Edgley will present throughout Australia in excess of 15 million dollars worth of spectacular entertainment.

Included are:
- Disney World on Ice (a mass of Disney characters on the largest ice rink Australia has ever seen).
- The legendary Marcel Marceau.
- The American Ballet Theatre with ballet superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov.
- The Sesame Street Muppets — live.
- The Moscow Circus.
- The Royal Shakespeare Company.
- The Leningrad Kirov Ballet.
- Dame Margot Fonteyn and Sir Robert Helpmann.
- Some of Broadway’s biggest Musical Successes.
- Major Concert tours — including Kiss.

And early next year Edgley’s first venture into film begins, it will be a major Australian feature film based on Banjo Patterson’s epic poem “The Man From Snowy River”. It is said to be a film of action, adventure and world wide appeal.

THE NIMROD THEATRE... has organised a Women’s Directors Workshop in an attempt to rectify the imbalance of women directors.

The workshop will be conducted by Ms Sue Todd, a leading British freelance director, whose latest production is her adaptation of Zoe Fairbairns’ Benefits.

Ms Sue Todd began her directing career at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1968. From there, she was selected for the prestigious two year Trainee Directors Scheme and worked in major British repertory theatres. In the early 1970’s, her work with Pam Gems on a series of productions at the now legendary Almost Free Theatre, was instrumental in starting the women’s theatre movement. Sue then spent four years at the Montrous Regiment as a writer/director and co-wrote the highly successful play Teen Dreams with David Edgar.

The workshop is sponsored by the Premier of NSW through the Division of Cultural Activities and by the Theatre Board of the Australia Council.
Hailed in London and Paris as the Best Dance Experience of a Generation!!

The Festival of Sydney presents
MAINA GIELGUD'S
STEPS, NOTES & SQUEAKS
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SVETLANA BERIOSEVA MAINA GIELGUD BARRY McGRATH
Michael Manning James Slater

A backstage glimpse into the dancer's private world
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Zagreb Theatre Company
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Limited 2 week season in the unique open-air courtyard
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Performed in Serbo-Croatian. "Language is no barrier
to an understanding of this powerful moving drama"
In association with the Cladan Cultural Exchange Institute of Australia
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Bring your own cushion for extra comfort
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they make Laurel & Hardy, Abbott & Costello seem tame
I COLOMBAIONI
Clowns in the theatrical tradition of commedia dell'arte
January 19-31
York Theatre, Seymour Centre
Mon-Sat at 8.00 p.m.
By arrangement with the Festival of Perth
in association with the Italian Foreign Ministry
Adults $10.50, $8.50; Children $4.50; Students/Pensioners $5.50.
Dear Sir,

Nimrod is to be applauded for its introduction of a Women's Directors' Workshop (INFO TA Oct.), but the impression that Nimrod is breaking new ground in Australia is demonstrably false. Two productions reviewed in the same issue have women directors (MTC Judith Alexander, Perth Playhouse Marianne McNaughton), Elizabeth Alexander directed another current MTC production The Maids, Kerry Dwyer directed the world premier of Traitors at the Pram Factory, Nano Nagle another of the Pram's 1979 productions. Failing In Love. Melbourne's list over the years would include Rene Mitchell, Lorna Forbes, Joy Youlken, Maie Hoban, Moira Carleton, Noel Byrne, and Sydney's list, headed by Doreen Warburton and Doris Fitton, must be equally eminent.

Australia's women directors would undoubtedly more appreciate work and recognition than workshops! Any chance, Nimrod?

Yours sincerely,

Tony Watts,
Melbourne.

THE KINGSFORD SMITH BACKGROUND STORY... Perth's National Theatre Company premiered Mary Gage's The Same Square of Dust on 17th October 1980 (see TA's review in WA Reviews).

Mary Gage, the writer, is the National Theatre Company's writer-in-residence. Educated at Cambridge and trained in journalism by The Times, Mary has also written the plays The New Life and Everyone's a General which were performed in the Greenroom Theatre at the Playhouse in 1974 and 1976. The New Life was also performed in Sydney, published by Currency Press and is now on the New South Wales Leaving syllabus. Another of her plays about Charles Kingsford Smith, The Price of Pearls, tied first in Western Australia's 150th anniversary playwriting competition in 1979.

Though the plot and dialogue of The Same Square of Dust were scrupulously based on extensive research and it was said that the play opened up 'a convincing and satisfying understanding of the motives, strengths and weaknesses of the celebrated pilot of the Southern Cross', performances were terminated after one week.

Why do local audiences show so little interest in the work of local playwrights?
by Norman Kessell

As 1980 draws to a close, we can look back on a generally rewarding theatrical year, one marked by much good new Australian writing and an exciting upsurge of originality and quality in fringe and alternate theatre.

Sydney’s darkest moment was the loss of George Miller’s Music Hall. The Ensemble Theatre came under similar threat, but happily there seems hope that with Premier Neville Wran’s intervention common sense this time will prevail. It is pleasing to tell that in response to the Nimrod Theatre’s appeal to all other companies for help fighting the Taxation Department’s demand for $80,000 back taxes on the manufacturer of sets and props, the first generous cheque came from the Ensemble — and on the very day it had been told of the Board of Fire Commissioner’s recommendation that it be closed down immediately!

On the brighter side, it is pleasing to have our two commercial theatres ending the year with long-running musicals performed by 99.9 percent Australian casts. (Sole exception is the delightful American singer, Mona Richardson in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas.) They’re Playing Our Song will continue at the Theatre Royal till late December, Whorehouse at Her Majesty’s well into January. (Evita comes in there in February).

Except for the aberration of The Merry Wives Of Windsor, it has been a triumphant first year for Richard Wherrett and the Sydney Theatre Company. Still to come (at the time of writing) is The Precious Woman, by Louis Nowra, a brilliant writer yet to achieve a major popular success, but the company’s year was highlighted by the memorable Cyrano de Bergerac, with John Bell in the eponymous role, and such subsequently commercial successes as Bob Herbert’s No Names, No Pack Drill and Simon Gray’s Close Of Play.

The Nimrod, on the other hand, suffered an unaccountable minor eclipse which all must hope will be dispersed by David Williamson’s new play, Celluloid Heroes, opening December 3. Best of the year at the Nimrod, in my book, were Tom Keneally’s Bullie’s House and Stephen Sewell’s Traitors, a flayed play, but well done.

The Ensemble scored strongly with such successes as George Hutchinson’s No Room For Dreamers, soon to have an Australia-wide tour, and Ronald Ribman’s Cold Storage, with Brian Young turning in the year’s best performance by an actor. Jane Street too, had one of the year’s best efforts with John Clark’s absorbingly detailed production of Solomon Anski’s The Dybbuk.

The newly-launched King O’Malley Theatre Company at the Stables Theatre got away to a flying start with Rob George’s Errol Flynn’s Great Big Adventure Book For Boys and John Upton’s The Warhorse, two of the two more new Australian works to follow; the Q Theatre sustained its reputation throughout the year with quality drama at Penrith and ripe comedy at Bankstown; the handsomely refurbished Marian Street Theatre scored with Somerset Maugham’s The Breadwinner and Willy Russell’s Family Circle and is winding up the year with opera star Rob Stevens and Patsy Hemingway in Kiss Me Kate.

The Bull ‘n’ Bush continues at it plush new home in Kings Cross with the Good Old Bad Old Days, starring the brilliantly versatile Garth Meade, together with the perennial Noel Brophy and Barbara Wyndon, Neil Bryant and Suzanne Dudley.

Looking forward a bit, in the planning stage at the Manly Music Loft, where the Toppiano Family have been since March and will continue till mid January, producer Bill Orr has a new show tentatively titled Over There which he is writing with Peggy Mortimer — with a little help from David Sale — and which Peggy will direct. It will be the first time she has staged a show in which she is not appearing. It’ll be a three-hander built round popular wartime songs and possible performers are Margo Lee, Ron Frazer and Lee Young.

No wonder that at the well attended launching at the Opera House Reception Hall, the volume’s more than 500 pages of text and pictures and its 41-page index, listing by my count some 9000 names of plays and players in theatre, film, television and concert, was described by guest of honor John Bell as an epitome of national pride.

Norman Kessell
Theatre Australia

The introductions to the various sections by such writers as Jill Sykes (ballet), Anthony Buckley (film), David Gyger (opera) and Shan Benson (radio drama) are well-informed, crisply expressed and succinctly sum up the state of the art during the past year.

Maria Prerauer
The Australian

This extraordinary record of the details of professional performing arts presentations around Australia.

Jill Sykes
Financial Review

Its niche in life is most definitely the coffee tables of those thousands of artists documented as having done something for someone, somewhere, and at some stage of 1979.

Malcolm Frawley
Sydney Entertainer

The book was supported financially by Shell Australia, The Australian Film Commission, the various Boards of The Australia Council, Reg Grundy and the Elizabethan Trust, but it is still a private enterprise publication, and a brave one, a vital one for Australia’s producers, directors, artists and musicians. If we don’t support it, we don’t deserve it.

Andrew L. Urban
Encore

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Inhumanities

by Irving Wardle

For collections of theatrical rows this has been the best autumn in living memory. Hardly had the O'Toole Macbeth faded from the headlines than it was succeeded by the even noisier affair of Howard Brenton's The Romans in Britain (Olivier). This being a National Theatre show it was accorded the full shock-horror treatment, with a photograph of a tactfully shadowed Celtic nude on the front of the Evening Standard, and an upcoming investigation by Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad. The whole episode was a classic example of how these things happen in England (and perhaps with you as well), staring with complaints by Mrs Mary Whitehouse, our leading artistic busybody, who of course had not seen the show, and threats to withdraw the theatre's grant by the leader of the Greater London Council, Sir Horace Cutler, who of course vehemently denied all imputations of censorship. For as long as we still have the time for these ridiculous charades, and the media have space to splash them, I am convinced that the old country is not yet going under: and in the meanwhile, as always, the cries of outrage have done the Box Office a power of good.

All of which defers the evil moment of discussing the play itself. What most inflamed our moral guardians was a display of ancient Roman buggery performed upon the blameless person of a trainee Druid, previously seen playing nude football with his brothers in the pre-Roman Golden Age of 54BC. Golden for them, that is. Not for their slaves. Not so for the Irish fugitive who blunders into their territory and is hauled upside down up a tree to have his throat cut. After a few such events it seems no bad idea for the Romans to wade in and sort things out. Though when they do arrive, it is only to substitute colonial for tribal atrocities.

I think the play is a mess, but it deserves better than to be received with a dismissive sneer. In design it is a huge anti-colonial parable running from Caesar's Britain and the Arthurian myth to our own time; and presenting the Roman and Saxon.

Michael Bryant as Julius Caesar in The Romans in Britain.
invasions and the British domination of Ireland as all parts of the same pattern. It takes a writer of unusual courage to tackle a work on that scale, and without any doubt Brenton possesses a black driving vision of history that has given him the energy to follow it through. "What nation," asks one of the modern characters, "ever learned from the sufferings it inflicted on others?" True enough; likewise the converse statement by a dispossessed Celtic girl, standing alone on the ruined fields the moment before the modern British soldiers arrive: "Home is where I have a stone in my hand."

At such moments, the play enters a zone of harsh poetry fully in keeping with the epic subject. But such moments are few. Otherwise there are extended passages of attention-killing rhetoric, and (more damaging) a compulsive resort to images of disgust, which lodge the impression that the writer is gloatting over the very things he is denouncing. Structurally, the colonial equation is a constant source of confusion, as one is required to view the same set simultaneously as Britain and Ireland, and the echoes of Waiting for Godot form another eccentric distraction from the matter in hand. Michael Bogdanov's production is at its best in passages of laconic anachronism. "Three little wogs," murmurs an armour-plated Roman on spotting the romping Celts. But it often fails Brenton in conveying the physical actualities of the ancient world: as where a desperate fugitive is seen fighting for his life with a woolly toy dog, or a group stand conversing over the body of a stinking plague victim. The figure of Caesar is a real achievement, both for Brenton and his actor Michael Bryant: he appears only once, in a scene expertly constructed to show off his charm, authority, deviousness, vanity, sense of personal destiny, and total detachment from the sufferings he is inflicting: at one moment the centurians form up behind him so as to allow the god-like leader to extract a tooth in private. However, Caesar is Brenton's sole departure from his rule that "The history of the world can do without psychology and without rhetoric: it is just action." On the evidence of this piece, that seems a bad rule.

Alan Bennett's Enjoy (Vaudeville) offers another example of a fine writer attempting a work beyond his scope; though at first glance, the subject seems anything but ambitious. We are at home with Wilfred and Connie, an old married couple, in "the last back-to-back in Leeds" which is due for council demolition. Wilf, incapacitated by a hit-and-run driver, broods on the days when "I had six men under me." Connie is obsessed with hygiene and has trouble remembering things: "My mother lost her memory; I think." This affectionate little genre comedy is then interrupted by the arrival of an official observer, sent round by the council to study typical local behaviour (with the well-meaning purpose of understanding the lives of those who are to be rehoused). Under the eye of this unspeaking figure, Connie and Wilf start performing. They try to put on a good face on things when their tart daughter announces her departure to Saudi Arabia; when a hooligan pees through the letter box and bursts in and rams the old man's nose into a pornographic magazine. The enormities escalate, ending in assault and paralysis. By which time, the sad affection of the opening scene has been overtaken by a sense of rage against the commonplace inhumanities of life in this country. But rage against whom? Partly against thugs and bureaucrats; but also against playwrights who exploit such material for a night's entertainment. This leads Mr. Bennett into some extremely clumsy stagecraft (the observer, for instance, turns out to be the couple's long-lost son in drag). Line for line, Enjoy is the work of a master comic stylist, even if he is inclined to credit the simple Yorkshire pair with his own gift for elegantly balanced ironies. It is also beautifully played by Colin Blakely and Joan Plowright. But, as in Bennett's last work, The Old Country, there is a growing tendency for self-criticism to overcome social criticism, which may be a morally admirable private position, but which looks in public like a failure of nerve.

Comic revolutions

By Karl Levett

Comedy has ruled the opening of the New York season — comedy with revolutionary themes. But don't expect any theatrical explosions — the revolutions are unhappily limited to the subject matter.

The leading contender for radical status is Steve Tesich's Division Street. Mr. Tesich has previously had limited success Off-Broadway, but now with the bravos for his screenplay Breaking Away ringing in our ears, he has returned, this time to Broadway. And with his lively and original vision he is most welcome. Broadway needs all the new blood it can get.

In Division Street Mr. Tesich has taken a popular topic of continuing interest: whatever happened to the sixties' radicals when the movement died? Mr. Tesich's daring concept is to present this as a farce. His hero is a burn-out radical seeking obscurity as an insurance agent in Chicago. An unfortunate newspaper photograph blows his cover and brings his old comrades out of the woodwork.

Mr. Tesich has conceived a wonderful menagerie of farcical characters: a black landlady who happens to be Polish; a former wife whose dialogue principally consists of song lyrics; a Serbian restauranteur who throws bombs; a milksop
Australia's major companies and artists give an entertaining daytime introduction to a wide variety of the performing arts. Whether theatre patron, performer or attending a performance for the first time come and examine the art behind the art — the creation, development and final workings of live theatre.

WORDS AND MUSIC with John Champ
Cinema; 11am, February 17, 24

THE SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY
Behind the Dance
Opera Theatre: 11am, March 6, 10

THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY
Hamlet Discovered
Drama Theatre: 11am, April 7, 14
Hamlet the Play (full performance)
Drama Theatre: April 28, May 5

THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY
The Actor at Work — Henry IV Part I
Drama Theatre: Monday to Friday, June 10 to July 10

MUSICA VIVA AUSTRALIA
Muzsikas Hungarian Folk Ensemble
Concert Hall: 11am, June 16

THE BIG BAND SOUND
and All That Jazz
Cinema: 11am, June 30, July 7, 14

SONG AND SOUND
with John Champ
Cinema: 11am, July 28, August 4

SYDNEY YOUTH ORCHESTRA
Music for the very young (2-6 year olds)
Recording Hall: 11am, May 5

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Recording Hall: 11am, April 9

THE ART OF RECORDING
Julian Lee Quartet
Recording Hall: 11am, April 29

SYDNEY YOUTH ORCHESTRA
Youth plays to Youth
Concert Hall: 11am & 1pm, August 17

AUSTRALIAN OPERA
Inside Opera
Opera Theatre: 11am, August 24

PETER HURFORD AT THE ORGAN
Concert Hall: 11am, September 18

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Concert Hall: 11am, October 27

LEONINE CONSORT
Voices blend, voices weave...
Recording Hall: 11am, November 3, 10

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Opera Theatre: December — date to be announced

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LEAFLET with full details available February 1981 or send name and address with 22 cent stamp to Bennelong Programme, Sydney Opera House, GPO Box 4274, Sydney 2001.
he intends to shoot himself and as a result is besieged by every dissatisfied group that seeks a martyr. It is a satire of man at odds with society and how he views his survival. The Suicide is a young man’s play, complete with awkward transitions, but also filled with a young man’s passion and fantasies.

Jonas Jurasas has chosen to emphasise this fantastical element. Santo Loquasto’s set heightens this effect: with scaffolding, doors, walkways, firepoles, it looks like a fun house gone mad. It succeeds in being both amusing and frightening at the same time. Jurasas has a bag of wonderful tricks that enhance the production. My favourite is the gypsy band that emerges from under beds when music might seem appropriate.

It is sad to report then that all this invention is undermined by the play’s casting. With the notable exceptions of Mr. Jacobi and one other (John Heffernan) the large supporting cast is just not up to the bravura-style action the piece requires. The lack of depth and technique in many Broadway supporting players has never been so exposed in one single sitting. Nothing is of a piece and the energies of the play and the director are dissipated.

Mr. Jacobi is like Gulliver in Lilliput. The play requires he go from Mr. Average to Hero and on the way there’s a whole catalogue of emotions and styles to be demonstrated. What an expressive stage face he has! There was a suspicion in the early scenes of slumming, but as soon as the heroic qualities emerge he is on surer ground and takes the play in his two hands to make it his own.

Let’s hope that Division Street and The Suicide aren’t the only revolutions, comic or otherwise, we see this season. Every good play should come to the aid of the Party.
When American Ballet Theatre first presented Natalia Markarova’s staging of The Kingdom of the Shades scene from Marius Petipa’s *La Bayadere* back in 1974, audiences, critics and dancers alike realized that here was a work to cherish, a tantalizing ballet excerpt that was very much of its time and a thing of beauty forever.

The palate had been prepared beforehand. The Leningrad Kirov toured Vaganova’s version of this same scene to the West in 1961 and Nureyev had restaged his interpretation for the Royal Ballet in 1964, but American audiences took Markarova’s version to their hearts and where uplifted.

Very much the same opinion was evinced (if a little muted) when ABT presented the entire ballet as adapted and rechoreographed by Markarova, earlier this year in New York and which is now touring regional America.

The euphoria was a product of audiences at last being able to see a full performing version of a ballet that many had thought was all but lost (in the same category as Petipa’s *La Corsair* and *Fille du Pharon*).

The work is still before the eyes and minds of the public only through the extraordinary efforts of a number of people over the years. Markarova’s version issues from that of the Kirov, which was in turn a child of the version created by Chabukiani and Fyodor Lupukov. The West only has the Shades scene by virtue of the muscle memories of Markarova, Bari­shnikov and Nureyev.

The acid test of the ABT version will be whether it can stand up to scrutiny on tour and in successive revivals. I fervently hope that this is the major work that the ABT will be bringing on their projected Australian tour next year.

There are those who have said that the Shades scene is the best thing in the ballet and, choreographically, all that is needed. But to think that is to perilously underrate the importance of tradition in ballet as well as to discount the function of structure in the narrative of a full length work.

For my money, the complete *La Bayadere* is a major acquisition for any company and a necessary addition to anyone’s understanding of the history and canon of ballet.

Markarova has transposed certain parts of the ballet as created by Petipa and filled in many of the holes with her own choreography, but the amendments make for a more fairly divided weight of choreographic interest and development throughout the rambling structure of the place.

There is a lot of mime in the first two acts but it’s necessitated by the convoluted plot of what is basically a sort of Oriental Giselle. The story of La Forza del Destino has got nothing on this!

In short *La Bayadere* tells the story of a humble Temple dancer, Nikiya, and Solor, a young warrior who are in love. The high
Priest of the temple declares his love for Nikiya and she rejects him. Meanwhile Solor agrees to marry Gamzatti, a princess. The High Priest finds out about Solor and Nikiya and she rejects him. Meanwhile (the Kingdom of the Shades). He refuses to marry Gamzatti; the Temple falls into ruins; kills practically everyone; quick punishment and religion. It is also a ballet about love, death, being "more mystical and religious in feeling. It's a ballet about love, death, punishment and religion." It is also a very spectacular production costing more than $500,000 American. The music is by Ludwig Minkus as reworked and conducted by John Lanchbery. The sets and the costumes are a kaleidoscopic mass of brilliant colours, flame, gold, green and torquise in glittering Eastern materials, saris, pantaloons, peacock feathers, rich embroidery and precious stones. It is very, very opulent, or, as the Australian Ballet Administration would say, sumptuous. Costumes are by Theoni Aldridge and sets by Pierluigi Samartini.

But what is important is the changes that Markarova has wrought. In Petipa's original for example, the part of Solor was divided between two men! Lev Ivanov did the mime for most of it and Pavel Gerdt did the big wedding pas de deux. Markarova reinstates one dancer and moves the Wedding pas de deux from the last act to the second. She herself alternatively takes the roles of Nikiya (in classic ballet style) and Gamzatti (a mime and character dance part) but she is unable to get over the problem of continual blurring of these two women and this makes for part of the difficulty in unravelling the work's plot. She gives the corps plenty to do in the "new" acts — temple dances, war dances and so on. She is to be thanked that she has given the role of Solor a lot more fleshing out (in cooperation with her original Solor, Anthony Dowell).

Of greatest interest though is the opium smoking scene for Solor, after Nikiya has died. It gives dramatic reason for the appearance of the Shades (since Solor falls into a drugged trance and dreams of them) and is in keeping with the rich orientalism of the entire work. Whatever one may loe and admire in the rest of the ballet, the Kingdom of the Shades remains the crowning achievement of the ballet and arguably Petipa's greatest creation in mass movement.

What one must remember is that the Shades is an idealised vision of Paradise, but a very 19th century Paradise; Order and Symmetry is all. There are 32 "Shades" in the scene and every one of them must come onto the stage individually with an enchantment of passe arabesque penchee with a huge back bend. One by one they must make their entrances, all 32 of them, repetition after repetition, until a sense of other-worldliness occurs; until the audience is literally hypnotised by the mirror images. If you wanted to be Romantic (and you must be in a work like this) you could call the entire entry a sort of choreographic mantra. All individuality is washed away and what remains is the serene beauty of an entire person.

It is a joyous afterworld, full of choreographed friskings, garlands and groupings, yet the sense of remoteness must remain. Think of the Dryads' scene in Don Quixote or the Wilis in Giselle Act 2 and you may get some idea.

As I said it is a 19th century choreographer's idea of Paradise and only the most drearily dogged literalist would refuse to accept it on its own terms. It is a sublime moment in ballet. Australians may have seen the scene when the Kirov toured it here in 1972 and those that saw Turning Point may remember it from the opening ballet scene in that film.

Solor has dreamed this up so as to be reunited with his beloved Nikiya. It is only a dream of course and he can no longer have any real contract with her, but Petipa would never have allowed such a scene to slip by without setting a pas de-deux and he does so, solving the difficulty of a meeting of two worlds by having Solor and Nikiya dance with a long veil to symbolize the vanishing thread of their association.

It is a very grand and swooning duet and always superbly danced (when I first saw the ballet) by the originals Markarova and Dowell. The lushness suits Markarova's essentially Russian grandness of manner and she makes the most of it, but the greatest joy comes from Dowell, who, hitherto, though a brilliant technician, always struck me as pallid. Here he gets the full measure and scope of the Romanticism, the big gesture and full body line. Other casts, like that of Marianna Tcherkassky and Fernando Bujones, dance it in their own way, grand and fully stretched; although Bujones is hopeless as an actor.

The whole work is a major triumph for the ABT. Since it places great technical demands on them, especially the girls in the corps, La Bayadere is what makes the ABT one of the greatest ballet companies in the world today. It also tells me why the Australian Ballet is, internationally, very minor league indeed. I feel sure it could never handle La Bayadere with anything approaching the conviction and ability it would demand.

The Festival of Sydney and The Sydney Theatre Company in association with the Sydney Opera House Trust presents

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Scenes of terror and enchantment with Michele Fawdon and Brandon Burke

Opens Boxing Day to January 24, 1981
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A Midsummer Night's Dream
Britten in English
January 5, 7, 10 mat., 12, 15, 17 mat.
PRODUCTION GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY QANTAS AIRWAYS LIMITED.

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Mozart in Italian
January 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 24.
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Britten in English
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Verdi in Italian
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February 10, 14 mat., 18, 21, 25, 27.
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With The Australian Opera Chorus and the Elizabethan Sydney and Melbourne Orchestras.

Evening performances commence 7.30 p.m. except Rape of Lucretia which commences at 8.00 p.m. Matinees at 1.00 p.m.
Opera in very fine form

A superb new production of Boris Godunov proved to be the unequivocal highlight of this year's major winter season at the Sydney Opera House.

Aided by a magnificent Boris from Donald Shanks and an outstanding Marina from Heather Begg, director Elijah Moshinsky came up with a remarkably coherent reading of an inherently fragmented opera, cursed both by excessive length and an excessive number of principal characters who cannot be pruned out without grave loss to the musical integrity of the piece.

Moshinsky's overall concept of the piece heavily underscored its built-in contrasts between the ever-suffering Russian populace and the tsars who ruled them in pre-revolutionary times. It exposed graphically the terrible dichotomy in their lifestyles as well as the personal failings of the opera's two central power figures, the incumbent Tsar Boris and the Pretender Dimitri.

In so doing, it concentrated on Boris' inner anguish, for instance, rather than the pomp and spectacle that usually dominate the coronation scene; and as a result it tended to disappoint those familiar with Boris only as a big spectacle overflowing with rich melodic invention and massive vocal sounds.

The low life scenes of this Boris were even more memorable than the high life ones for their brilliant visual imagery: bread being tossed to the starving populace in the first scene of the prologue, a miniature flock of real chooks in the scene at the inn on the Polish frontier, the huge cannon aimed straight at the audience on which the pretender rode in during the last scene.

Donald Shanks was in fine form as Boris, singing at his very best and marvellously expressive dramatically. He conveyed perfectly the self-torment verging on near-insanity on which this production focussed. Heather Begg was an absolutely marvellous Marina, getting across unfailingly the personality and motivations of the character despite the fact she appears in only two of the nine scenes of the opera as performed (all but the St Basil's scene appeared in this production).

Gregory Dempsey turned in a fine performance, as always, as the pretender and Robert Gard was a memorably smarmy and devious Shuisky, aided by marvellously off-balance costuming from John Bury. The supporting principals scarcely have an opportunity to make much of an impression in Boris, an opera where the chorus in fact has more exposure than any single principal — and the Australian Opera chorus rose to the challenge quite memorably, as did the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra under the baton of Elgar Howarth, making his debut

Far and away the most satisfying of the month's Brisbane productions was the QOC's Don Pasquale, reviewed in these columns last month, which was conducted by Georg Tintner — who also, of course, conducted the Samson and Delilah, in which the excellent vocal work of Smith and Elkins was supplemented unexpectedly (to me, at least) by an exquisitely sung High Priest from Robert Dawe, known to me previously only as a concert/oratorio singer.

Sadly, however, David Macfarlane's production and Max Hurley's sets did a good deal less than full justice to the work itself or the vocal aspects of these performances. There were practical difficulties in the presentation of the famous seduction scene, where the music cries out for something soft for Delilah to recline on but she and Samson were perched instead on the mock-stone edge of an ornamental rock garden; and the denouement, one of the most potentially spectacular scenes in all opera, was not brought off with anything like the impact it ought to achieve in performance.

In support, the QLOC chorus shone vocally but at no stage convinced dramatically; the orgy is not an institution capable of being simulated convincingly on stage by amateur, operetta-oriented choristers, no matter how well they can sing — and these Brisbane choristers undeniably do that very well indeed.

The whole QLOC operation was much more convincing, in this overlapping season, when it tackled The Pirates of Penzance. It was almost a classic case of overkill vocally, with no less than three singers imported to sing leading roles in what after all is only a moderately demanding opera.

In absolute terms, this was a very good Pirates indeed, though the Brisbane connection was minimal in the principals department. Keith Redhead provided a nice Major-General Stanley; marvellously precise vocally in the tack-spitting department if short on vocal quality; and Beverley Shean provided an irreproachable Ruth, satisfyingly full-voiced musically and larger than life dramatically as every good G. and S. dragon lady should be but so few actually are. Yet finally the whole show could and ought to have been cast in Queensland; that it was not casts some doubt on the artistic perspective of the QLOC.

Both in Canberra and in Sydney, during the period under review, Rossini's Barber of Seville was being presented and I had the somewhat uncanny fortune to see the
two productions on consecutive nights with the same exponent of the title role. And it was an incredible achievement for the young Australian Opera baritone Gregory Yurisich, who was in the midst of singing no less than four \textit{Barber}s in three days with alternate performances in Sydney and Canberra using different translations. And just to make things a bit trickier, Ronald Macanaghy's production for Canberra Opera was quite different in detail from John Cox's for the AO, as restated by Michael Beauchamp, and Yurisich had scarcely time for a briefing let alone an on-stage rehearsal before his first Canberra performance.

Perhaps it was just the increased adrenaline flow stimulated by the challenge of the gruelling performance stint, but there was no doubt during either of the two performances I attended during this stint that Yurisich was absolutely eating the part for breakfast: even in Canberra, where the announcement he was to replace the ailing local baritone who had been scheduled to sing was greeted with diffidence bordering on downright hostility, Yurisich had the crowd won by the end of his opening aria. Mind you, there is scarcely a more effective entrance in all opera than Figaro's, but Yurisich made the most of it and never looked back, on the night, in Canberra.

His local Rosina, Margaret Sim, was also very good indeed though not an ideal build for the part which exudes slimmess, coquettyness and a bit of fierce female bitchiness. But it did not really matter, finally, that she was not quite right to look at for Sim sang and acted her heart out and ended up turning in quite a marvellous Rosina all round.

Geoffrey Harris also turned in a good Almaviva, though his voice lacks the ideal tenor beauty the role really demands. But (wisely) he at no stage forced his notes and the result, though lacking here and there the optimum power it really ought to have, was far more lyrical a performance than I have previously heard from Harris and for that reason possibly the most successful all round.

Also worthy of special commendation in this \textit{Barber} was Bryan Dowling's Basilio, which had none of the dirty old man about it that so disturbed me a year ago when I reviewed his Count in the Canberra production of Mozart's \textit{Marriage of Figaro} — or rather, had no excess of dirty old man about it but rather the happy blend of comic parody and insidiousness the ideal Basilio demands.

My one real disappointment ws the unfortunate miscasting of John Wood as Bartolo: the role really lies too low for him, and he did not come across quite right dramatically either — lacking the menace that ought to make him a serious obstacle in the path of the quest of Almaviva for the hand of Rosina. Richard McIntyre's musical direction was excellent and Peter Cooke's designs up to his usual outstanding standard within an obviously limited budget.

Apart from Yurisich, the other \textit{Barber} of my month was not finally very inspiring though it exuded promise through quite a few pores. Stuart Challender promises to be a real acquisition to the Australian Opera once his flamboyant semaphore signals are understood more precisely by the forces under his command. Kathleen Moore, on the basis of her Rosina in this season, has a long way to go before her realisation of the part could be termed convincing. In the other major cast change, Henri Wilden's Almaviva got off to a disastrous start musically — he was excruciatingly off pitch in the serenade — but escalated in quality rapidly as it went along: it blended well in the ensembles, and finally was quite acceptable dramatically.

Britten's \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, on the other hand, was even more successful in its brief run at the tail end of the Sydney season than it had been when originally staged at the Sydney Opera House in 1978. Most of the cast was the same, not to mention the conductor, William Reid — and the whole exercise exuded that fact in a most positive way.

The ensemble was tighter, the orchestral playing more assured, the audience more responsive and less prone to stomp out during interval than before. That there were only three Sydney performances before \textit{The Dream} was cast off to make its equally brief Melbourne debut before returning for another Sydney run in the 1981 summer season meant that the audiences for them were no doubt stacked with Britten addicts, but no matter: any potential Britten converts who may have attended ought to have gone home happy as well.

The main cast change was the introduction of Anthony Warlow in the vital (though non-singing, of course) part of Puck; he was even better, finally, than the original Puck of this production, Jonathan Hyde, for the extra dash of malevolence he conveyed and the extra dash of physical ferocity he brought to the role.

The other newcomers, all excellent, were John Fulford as Demetrius, Beryl Furlan as Helena, Bruce Martin as Theseus and Henry Pritchett as Snout. But finally the most memorable performances still came from the old hands: James Bowman as Oberon, Neil Warren-Smith as Bottom, and Graeme Ewer as Flute and even more so Thesbe in a marvellous orange-red fright wig doing his hilarious little jig at the very end.

Late in the period under review, Lyndon Terracini made a welcome reappearance in Melbourne for the Victoria State Opera in Hans Werner Henze's \textit{El Cimarron}, a role he performed with great distinction at the 1976 Adelaide Festival and in Sydney about the same time though the piece had not previously been seen in Melbourne. This year's performance, matured not only by the inevitable passage of time in the life of a relatively young performing artist but by some direct tutelage from the composer himself, was radically different from my recollection of the original — much less demonstrative physically, more probing and introspective psychologically. Less exciting but more subtly effective — at least to those who had seen it before.

The more intimate venue of the Universal Theatre, in inner-suburban Fitzroy, had its plusses and minuses; finally, they cancelled each other out and reinforced the general feel of the performance reported above: that of muted power rather than naked, raw animal aggression.

Finally, I must reluctantly take my farewell of \textit{Theatre Australia} readers with this article — with something of a wrench, for I have appeared in every issue to date — with something of a wrench, for II have appeared in every issue to date and covered to the best of my ability the sometimes turbulent national opera scene in these columns since August 1976.

But in my alter ego as editor of \textit{Opera Australia} I am now able to say all I feel I ought to say about the Australasian opera scene, and I feel it is time to retire gracefully from these columns and give someone else a go; for there is, of course, no truth or falsehood in criticism of the performing arts — only a number of views, all hopefully articulate and informed but none bearing any special claim to recognition as Truth with a capital T.

I look forward to reading the views of my successor in these columns and hope that many of my present readers will feel inclined to continue to follow my writings in \textit{Opera Australia} as well.
NIMROD THEATRE
In association with
Winfield

CELLULOID HEROES
BY DAVID WILLIAMSON

Al Shannon PETER SUMNER
Mike Fontaine JOHN GREGG
Brett Rodgers ALAN WILSON
Gary Brady HENRI SZEPS
Maggie Murnane KATE FITZPATRICK
Alison Mackay BARBARA STEPHENS
Nestor Snell ROBIN RAMSAY
Dick Birakool KEVIN SMITH

Director JOHN BELL
Designer LARRY EASTWOOD
Lighting Designer GRAHAME MURRAY
Stage Manager NEIL SIMPSON
Assistant Stage Manager SUSAN GOFF

There will be one interval of twenty minutes
Production photography by John Delacour
Poster design by Silvia Jansons
As I look at that quaint green and red box that is Nimrod standing sturdily among the debris and rubble and saluted by the honks and fumes of the passing semis, I feel a freshness, enthusiasm and sense of adventure that is strange after ten years of full time slog. I feel confident that despite all the problems, the rising costs, the winds of change, Nimrod will survive, will grow, improve and remain an indispensable and major force in Australian theatre. When I walk into the crowded foyer of an evening, into the offices or dressing rooms, I feel the same sense of enthusiasm from the audience and the people who work here.

Enthusiasm has always been Nimrod’s greatest primary asset and although it has flagged at times, its resuscitation is always possible as long as the whole staff feel involved in the process of making theatre. This process is an ever-changing thing and “what the theatre is about” is our most constant topic of debate. I have always avoided being pinned down to a declaration of policy or manifesto. Besides being invariably pompous, manifestos are useless and limiting. I see the theatre as a place where things can happen but what those things are must be decided at a specific time by the people who are there at the time. Unless there is an atmosphere of potential change and constant revolution, the theatre has started to die. In our early days our programming was deliberately startling, so that people never knew what to expect of us next. I think that our programming over the last few years has become all too predictable; it’s time for more changes.

Over the last ten years we have done an average of seven Australian plays a year. Our original aim was to provide an Australian “way” of doing theatre, using broad slapstick humour, the traditions and times of the Tivoli or Sorlies’ tent show. Text was the least important component. Then in our second year with scripts submitted by Williamson, Buzo, Romeril and Hibberd, our attention swung more on to the Australian writer, who was busy reproducing the Australian sound and dishing out a bit of social criticism.

Over the last three or four years we have encouraged writers to get away from the domestic into epic territory and writers such as Louis Nowra, Stephen Sewell, and John Anthony King tend to produce large canvasses rather than what Sewell calls domestic snapshots.

This exploration of large themes, big events and a more daring theatricality will be, I hope, a preoccupation with Australian writers for the immediate future. We want an audience coming to Nimrod to find the use of the space (not just the stage) exciting and confronting. We are all over familiar with the wornout old cliche about giving the audience “Something they can’t get on TV”, but it’s remarkable how many playwrights don’t look any further than the small screen and realise the potential of an empty stage.

The Nimrod productions of the “classics”, notably Shakespeare, have been, despite heaps of criticism and controversy, a large part of our success. I couldn’t exist in a theatre without the classics. Granted the importance of creating new plays, you have to step back occasionally, take a long distance look at what makes theatre. A theatre without classics is like a man without a memory. As an actor and a director, I need to be reminded of the disciplines of shape, technique, articulation. Audiences enjoy seeing the new plays and the classics ricochet off each other; the new writing given form and definition, the classics given a sense of contemporaneity and localisation. Nimrod has benefited enormously by the constant mix of classics and new plays.

In my own approach to the classic plays, one of the things I have most deliberately set out to do is replace the “English” way of doing them with a way that is our own. I have grown used to the howls of those critics and academics who loath this approach and want their Shakespeare “straight”. What they mean is they want it done as in London in the 1940’s. Funnily enough if you were simply to take a Nimrod production of Shakespeare and stick it in
Elizabethan costume on an "historically accurate" set, most of the critics would pipe down, because they don’t look past the externals and what they really want is their classics, and, by inference, all their "cultural experiences" at a safe distance, handled reverently like bone china and displayed on a shelf next to the Bible.

At the same time my own criticism of our productions of the classics is that they have relied too heavily on design to make the statement. I should like to strip back the design component putting a lot more of the onus onto the actors. I'm not saying that's a new idea and I am not denigrating the designer's contribution to a production. But occasionally it's time for a shift of emphasis.

I suppose everyone tends to see a theatre as belonging to him personally. Is a "Director's Theatre" any better than a "Designer's Theatre"? Should actors or writers feel that theirs is the most important contribution? What about those mimes and musicians who say it without words? And what of the lobbyists who despise and condemn everything as "irrelevant" that does not preach their own point of view?

Any one of the above theatres can exist independently, but a place like Nimrod has somehow to make room for all of them, now giving one a hearing and now somebody else.

It is an anomaly that, up till now, actors have not had more say in the shaping of Nimrod. All Company policy, ideas, criticisms are aired at a weekly meeting attended by the full staff, but since we have not had an acting company as such, actors' interest in the proceedings was transient at best. Now that we have begun to form the nucleus of an acting company and actors are employed full-time, I hope that their ideas and proposals will begin to take effect.

Who is Nimrod's audience now, after ten years? Regrettably, the youth component is not as large as one would wish. But I refuse to get too sentimental about that. I cannot remember a time (in Sydney at any rate) when the theatre was ever patronised by a predominantly youthful audience. Theatre has always tended to be a thing you settle back into, with middle-age. We are doing our best to combat that attitude, and, slowly, I think we are making headway. It's going to have a lot to do with choice of plays obviously, but also a good deal to do with ticket prices and the feeling of Nimrod as being friendly and accessible. Is it a trendy audience? We have been stuck with the "trendy" label for ten years now, but as far as I am concerned, any trendies who have stayed the distance are welcome. It was also regarded as "trendy" to put on plays about prisons and aboriginals. "Next thing," moaned one critic, "they'll be doing a play written by a whale."

Is it a subscriber audience? Only to a small degree. Subscribers make up 30% of our customers, or a two weeks' audience for an eight week run. So while they are a welcome addition to our audience they do not represent it significantly or condition the theatre's reflexes.

More than most companies, I suspect, we have a floating and ever-changing audience. I hope it stays that way, and that we are able to cater for a wide variety of choices.

While not being in any sense a community theatre (a difficult thing to do in our geographical situation with a large Lebanese, Turkish and Greek local population) we are endeavouring to provide services of a non-profit making kind to all kinds of groups within the community. Among these are the free performances of all our productions that we give to pensioners, students, and unemployed people; the teachers' workshop to assist drama teachers in schools; and a workshop for women directors, aiming to encourage ten women this year to further their careers in directing for stage, film and television. Our free public readings of new scripts (usually eight or ten a year) has been of use to playwrights but in this area we are seeking extra funds to support longer, more thorough working of new scripts than the one day rehearsal method we have employed up till now.

So, as I said at the beginning, to me right now the future looks full of adventure and promise.

The stranger feeling is that of looking back, with a sense of wonder that we survived at all. When we blithely threw open our stable doors at Nimrod Street without a penny in the world we weren't looking ten years ahead. How amazed we were to be given the lordly sum of six thousand dollars by the Australian Council for the Arts to allow us to continue for a second year, having got through the first unaided. Thanks to Ken and Lilian Horler, Nimrod came into existence. Thanks to all our staff and friends (and particularly John Mostyn, Tony Gilbert, and Mr Justice Hope who have been on our Board from the start) we are in our present building and battling on. Running a theatre is a risky business, and we've seen companies collapse, others start up and fizzle away. But I hope that what has been a success story for Nimrod will give heart to the others who must eventually grow up alongside us.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA 1980 3
1972
MEASURE FOR MEASURE
SHADOWS OF BLOOD
ROOTED
ON YER MARX
THE SWEAT PROOF BOY
FLASH JIM VAUX
BASICALLY BLACK
THE LAST SUPPER SHOW

MAX CULLEN IN ON YER MARX
PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTHONY HORLER
This tribute to Nimrod on its tenth anniversary will not survey its work in detail nor discriminate between the contributions of John Bell, Ken Horler and Richard Wherrett, its ruling triumvirate for nine years. Its concern is the nature of Nimrod's role and distinction in the revival of Sydney's theatre culture.

First, to put it in perspective: The theatre revival, growing out of the aspirations of the Fifties, has spanned two decades, each with its special character. The preoccupations of the Sixties were increased subsidies for the indigenous theatre, the concentration of these in permanent, professional, regional institutions, and the raising of standards.

Standards are not abstractions. To pursue them in practice you need perceptible models. Inevitably the Sixties looked for models to the influential, pervasive English theatre. That preoccupation gave the Seventies their cue, as the feeling grew that the advances of the Sixties, though admirable, were falling out of step with the developing spirit of new times, a new nationalism vehemently questioning traditional values and imported models.

In theatre this disaffection had its first urgent expression in Melbourne's Australian Performing Group, which nourished Hibberd, Romeril, Williamson and Oakley. In Sydney, it produced the dissatisfied minority audience to which Nimrod addressed its appeal.

Increasingly the preoccupation of the new decade became the redirection of professionalism, and the readjustment of standards, to reflect the local reality. That preoccupation suggests the nature of Nimrod's distinction. It lies in its very influential contribution to the search for a valid, indigenous theatre style.

For Nimrod that search began, ironically, on the Kensington campus where Bell, after formative years in England in the Sixties, returned to work at NIDA, the Old Tote and Jane Street. At Jane Street in June, 1970, he directed "The Legend of King O'Malley", by Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis. Immensely successful, it was the prelude to Nimrod, which opened the doors of its tiny, converted Darlinghurst loft on December 2, 1970. And it was the overture to the Seventies.

Here, vigorously stamped out, was the new wine of the new nationalism, and it was intoxicating. Not because of its form, a picaresque narrative as drawing as an outback camp-fire yarn. And not because of its "total theatre"; others had already given us that. It was intoxicating because of its easy, natural unmistakable Australian "accent", finding, beyond vowel sounds and vernacular, the pitch, tempo and expression marks of a unique mode of utterance; one which here looked backwards to Tivoli vaudeville for its forms and momentum; and backwards, too, satirically to raw jingoism and the militarism of W.M. Hughes to make its points about the contemporary scene. It created, single-handed, an Australian theatrical genre which is still alive and kicking up its heels.

Our concern is with Bell's indispensable stylistic contribution. His production swaggered, as the bush ballads did; in action it cartwheeled, showing off its theatricality with the strut of Bondi life-savers and the bounce of VFL high-flyers. But in utterance it was as terse, laconic and sardonic as Henry Lawson, as contemptuous of illusion as it was of romance.

Its style was as Australian as a gumleaf. It became the foundation of the Nimrod style, and the springboard for its development. What is the Nimrod style? Begin with the Nimrod personality. The foyers, first: cramped at Darlinghurst, but with the congestion usefully eliminating the pomp and circumstance of a "society", rather than a social, occasion; egalitarian, informal, a coatless, open-necked, short-sleeved affair. This atmosphere survived the move in 1974 to the larger spaces of the new converted theatre at Surry Hills. The congestion diminished, but the matiness remained, enhanced by the bar.

The auditorium, next: at Darlinghurst it was as cramped as the foyer, with crowded, hard, uncomfortable planking; but it brought players and audience face to face — for collaboration or confrontation. Involvement was the name of game. To see Martin Harris beaten to death in "The Removalists" was to assist at a murder in your living-room. It gave a shock the little television screen could not match.

The auditorium factor also survived the move to Surry Hills (after an uneasy
1973
PRESIDENT WILSON IN PARIS
HAMLET
THE CHOCOLATE FROG & THE OLD FAMILIAR JUICE
TOM A HARD GOD
THE SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL
THE MARSH KINGS DAUGHTER
HAMLET KASPAR
THE TOOTH OF CRIME

PHILIP SAYER IN KASPAR
beginning), chiefly because of the admirable though still unprofitable proportions of the larger auditorium and the way the tiered circle of audience embraced the playing space. There, as at Darlinghurst, pretension, attitude-shrivelled, dishonesty, and deception were strong. And rarely became predictable. Performance was everything, illusion nothing.

It follows that there was no condescension. Here we pass from Nimrod's personality to its philosophy. It is an easy step — from the informality and equalitarianism of its atmosphere to entertainment directed to popular, all-class tastes, with a bias towards youth, Pop and bawdy. It has never been overtly didactic. (When it got round to Brecht in 1979, in Horler's absorbing "Galileo", the stress was on the play's humanity, not its message). It has never been a cultural mission-house or educator. Its temper was sceptical, not reverent; its method, pragmatic whatever the cost to orthodoxy. It was a child of its time.

And yet — a key to its success — it was never inhibited or circumscribed by that time. It was a leader of taste, not a follower, using Pop not submitting to it. It was never a prisoner of its own orthodoxy nor of a cult — even at Darlinghurst where cult-pressures were strong.

Its history makes this clear. With its shoestring budget it relied in its early years on local scripts. It began by exploiting "O'Malley" with Bell productions of "Biggles" by Boddy, Marcus Cooney and Ron Blair (high-spirited, but uneven and derivative) and "Flash Jim Vaux", a ballad-play by Blair harking back to convict days, an assured success. So far, in the wake of "O'Malley", predictable. Thereafter Nimrod left the "O'Malley" genre to others (Steve J. Spears' "Young Mo", directed by Buzo in 1977, is an exception) and passed to farce (Alexander and — the beginning of a prolonged, fruitful association — to David Williamson's macabrely realistic social fable, "The Removalists", in a Bell production that Harry M. Miller later sent round Australia. That was in October, 1971; from then on Nimrod never ceased to be a force. And rarely became predictable.

"The Removalists" came from the APG's Pram Factory. What has been said here might suggest that the APG was Nimrod's model. Not so; they were different. Nimrod served notice as early as March, 1971, that, unlike the APG, it would not restrict its content to the local scene and its emerging generation of playwrights. After "Biggles" it did "Macbeth"!

What could Shakespeare, staple of the Tote and English cultural export par excellence, contribute to the new nationalism, to Nimrod as an "alternative theatre", to an Australian theatre style?

The answer: nearly everything. For the best test of the relevance and validity of an indigenous style is not simply its capacity to mirror the local society with veracity, important though "the shock of recognition" may be for self-examination. That is a limited, a parochial achievement. The test is to relate that style to the whole range of drama, especially its masterpieces, to elicit from their universality what is of immediate, urgent interest to the local society, and, in so doing, confront that society with the wider, abiding horizons of the world and its history and its cultures.

From "Macbeth" onwards the classics, mainly Shakespeare, have been central in the experience offered by Nimrod. How did they work? The conceptual approach, in retro-spect, seems as important, as a contribution to style, as its expression, which in Shakespeare married the Granville Barker tradition of speed, lucidity and vigour to the Australian practice of these qualities pioneered in "O'Malley". For concept, Nimrod looked inwards to its audience and their interests. "Macbeth" foreshadowed the things to come. It was done by Bell with a cast of seven, mainly from the "O'Malley" team, as a concerto for Macbeth and six players in all the other parts, with the role-changing powerfully reinforcing the text's motifs of hallucination and deception. It was done as a black mass (the Manson analogy was to hand), with Macbeth at the very beginning embracing witchcraft, with the murder of Duncan as a ritual of damnation, with the victory of Malcolm as a ritual of exorcism. It was engrossing.

What was "Australian" about all this? Why, the brushing aside of the personal history of a great man (here, damned from the beginning) and the concentration upon the ruination, from his actions, of his country. This was Scotland's ordeal, not Macbeth's tragedy. Moreover, it had a happy ending. Unromantic Australia is an optimistic country. And it suspects great men.

Bell's "Measure for Measure" the following year took its cue from the popular distaste for worry-serism and gave us the Duke and Isabella as Victorian prig and prude. A perversion? Critics can argue about that; what was compelling was the way in which this rejection of the "morality" element in the play released its humanity, with the flawed, unhappy figures of Angelo and Claudio becoming valid objects of pity.

In Shakespeare, cutting through, to and making palpable, the "unaccommodated" humanity in the plays has been Nimrod's abiding concern. In a Nimrod landmark, the Bell-Wherrett "Hamlet" of 1973, with Bell superb as the Prince, the production brushed aside the politics and religion in the play, exorcised the Ghost as far as Hamlet is his triumph. Nimrod is not simply its capacity to mirror religion in the play, exorcised the Ghost as far as Hamlet is his triumph. Nimrod is the personal history of a great man (here, damned from the beginning) and the concentration upon the ruination, from his actions, of his country. This was Scotland's ordeal, not Macbeth's tragedy. Moreover, it had a happy ending. Unromantic Australia is an optimistic country. And it suspects great men.

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1974
JESTERS
CORALIE LANS-DOWNE SAYS NO
BACCHOI
THE SEAGULL
WELL HUNG
KOOKABURRA
HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW
MY FOOT MY TUTOR

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW

DARRELL HILTON AND MARTIN HARRIS IN HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? PHOTOGRAPHY ROB WALLS
was one of charity, leavened with commonsense, for erring mortals. It avoided sentimentality like the plague.

The Nimrod approach to Shakespeare has had its limitations and defects. Insisting on the recognisable humanity in the plays, it trampled on the courtliness of their aristocratic societies (Messina in "Much Ado" and Verona in "Romeo and Juliet" became small towns, with bourgeoisie lording it over peasants). Searching for fun, its Pop mannerism incongruously caricatured Shakespeare's common people.

Its approach persistently shortened and simplified Shakespeare's world. But, the all-important achievement, the Nimrod approach brought that world, however incomplete, triumphantly back into theatre as a popular art. The Nimrod audience palpably loved "their" Shakespeare, with his matey Australian accent. Splendidly ambitious ventures like the 1978 "Henry IV", which only a few years earlier would have seemed box-office folly, were packed out.

Nimrod's decision to stage classics alongside new Australian plays at Darlinghurst is to move, finally, from its philosophy to its policies in practice, only one aspect of its eclecticism, its Australian readiness to give plays of all kinds "a go".

Turning away from the proven "O'Malley" genre to Buzo and Williamson, both to become Nimrod stalwarts in association, respectively, with Horler and Bell, was only the beginning of an adventurous course of dedicated championship of contemporary Australian playwriting remarkable, probably unique, for the sheer variety of its offerings.

In the two years after "The Removalists" it gave mordant sociological comedy (Buzo's "Coralie Lansdowne Says No"); psychological drama (Alma de Groen's "The Sweatproof Boy"); jeux d'esprit in macabre (Blair's "Woodrow Wilson In Paris" and Michael Cove's "The Jesters"); and "slices of life" and realism (Jim McNeil's "The Old Familiar Juice" and Peter Kenna's "A Hard God") — and all of them were successes.

Such variety, circumventing pigeonholing labels ("a Nimrod play"), it might be thought, must have adulterated the Nimrod identity and image. Not so; these were secure in its style. On the contrary its variety enriched its character. Surprise became an expected part of the Nimrod experience.

Its Darlinghurst survival and success could be explained by cult support, albeit unfairly. The test for Australian drama came with the expansion to Surry Hills and the need for larger audiences. Would larger audiences support a diet of local plays relieved only by Shakespeare?

Nimrod must have had qualms. It opened the new theatre with new departures, a Pop version of "The Bacchoi", a failure, and its first fling at Chekhov, "The Seagull", which also misfired. In the event, its only concession to broaden its appeal was to add contemporary overseas successes to its menu. Shakespeare and the local men remained the staple.

And brilliant were the results, seen as a whole — not just from the established playwrights like Williamson ("The Club" and "Travelling North" had premieres at Nimrod) but from newcomers like Steve J. Spears (whose one-man "The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin", directed by Wherrett and with great acting from Gordon Chater, went round the world) and Louis Nowra ("Inner Voices", "Inside The Island").

Nimrod deserved its successes. They flowed directly from its eclecticism, opening its stages to all comers with talent, regardless of their tastes and predilections; from its courage in backing its judgment, and its relish in "having a go"; and from a sustained professionalism which made it a magnet for many of the best actors we have — from veterans like Gloria Dawn, unforgettable in "A Hard God", to newcomers like Peter Carroll the former NIDA teacher who took Blair's "The Christian Brothers" around the world.

Success flowed, above all, from the sheer entrepreneurial enterprise, nerve and flair which added Downstairs to Upstairs, hosted the Peter Brook company, tempted a visitor like Steve Berkoff to direct his "Metamorphosis" at Nimrod, launched successes interstate and overseas.

Amid such energetic, multi-farious activity, purpose and direction might easily have become lost. If they were not, it can be suggested, it was because Nimrod remained true to its personality and its philosophy, its style. Gielgud said, is knowing what play you are in. With Nimrod it was knowing what country it was in. And showing us.
1975
GINGES LAST STAND
THE RIDE ACROSS LAKE CONSTANCE
NO MANS LAND
YOU WANT IT DON'T YOU BILLY
THEY'RE PLAYING OUR SONG PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT / THE JOSS ADAMS SHOW
MATES & THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS
THE FLOATING WORLD
RICHARD III
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

10 THEATRE AUSTRALIA 1980
There cannot be an Australian theatre without Australian plays — the idea is so simple as to have been overlooked time and again. How often in the past have various established Australian theatres paid only lip service to this before going ahead and buying yet another farce from the West End!

One might also say that there cannot be an Australian theatre without lots of Australian plays failing to please — success is rare in the theatre, a golden lode after many barren claims.

We began the Nimrod largely out of frustration with the Old Tote’s cautious policy, even though the directors of that theatre were, at the time, most careful to hedge their bets and “lend support”. It is amusing and instructive to read again the passage that was the nearest the Nimrod ever came to a manifesto:

“The tradition of the Australian theatre is noisy and vulgar. It is appropriate that the warehouse which is now Nimrod Street Theatre should have been a stable, a gymnasium and a Sunday school. Nimrod wants new Australian plays. We believe that only new Australian plays and contemporary treatment of the classics will bring audiences back to the theatre.”

As soon as it was possible, the Nimrod began to organise subscription tickets. This seemed a good way to build a secure financial foundation and hold a

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**NIMROD AND THE OZ PLAY**

Nimrod’s commitment to Australian writing has always been a priority when planning its programmes for both the Upstairs and Downstairs theatres.

In defence of our commitment, it should be noted that in 10 years, we have produced 79 Australian plays (including revivals) out of a total of 126 productions, and below we list those Australian writers and co-writers whose work has been produced over the last ten years at Nimrod.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Bradshaw</td>
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<td>Greg Bunbury</td>
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<td>Alex Buzo</td>
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<td>Jennifer Compton</td>
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<td>Marcus Cooney</td>
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<td>Aileen Corpus</td>
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<td>Michael Cove</td>
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<td>Rex Cramporne</td>
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<td>Jim Crawford</td>
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<td>Alma De Groen</td>
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<td>Bob Ellis</td>
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<td>Gary Foley</td>
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<td>Tim Gooding</td>
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<td>Dick Hall</td>
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<td>Moya Henderson</td>
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<td>Jack Hibberd</td>
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<td>Margot Hilton</td>
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<td>Ken Horler</td>
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<td>Thomas Keneally</td>
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<td>Peter Kenna</td>
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<td>John Anthony King</td>
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<td>Rudi Krausman</td>
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<td>Ray Lawler</td>
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<td>Robert Lord</td>
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<td>Zac Martin</td>
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<td>Bob Maza</td>
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<td>Jim McNeil</td>
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<td>Robyn Moase</td>
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<td>Bryan Nason</td>
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<td>Louis Nowra</td>
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<td>Mil Perrin</td>
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<td>John Romeril</td>
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<td>Deidre Rubenstein</td>
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<td>Steele Rudd</td>
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<td>Geoffrey Rush</td>
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<td>Stephen Sewell</td>
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<td>Tony Sheldon</td>
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<td>Steve J. Spears</td>
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<td>John Summons</td>
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<td>Lloyd Suttor</td>
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<td>Tony Taylor</td>
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<td>Bindi Williams</td>
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<td>David Williamson</td>
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<td>Eleanor Witcombe</td>
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<td>John Wood</td>
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playwriting — the first time this award was given outside Britain. THE REMOVALISTS was also performed at the Royal Court London in 1973 resulting in the Evening Standard Most Promising Playwright Award. Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York. After a season in Sydney DON'S PARTY went on an Interstate tour before opening at London’s Royal Court in 1975. Four plays followed in quick succession — JUGGLERS THREE (1972), WHAT IF YOU DIED TOMORROW (1973) which later toured to London’s West End, THE DEPARTMENT (1974), and A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS (1976). Nimrod’s production of THE CLUB opened in 1977 and toured to Canberra, Melbourne, two seasons at the Theatre Royal Sydney, St. Georges Leagues Club, and finally to London’s Hampstead and Old Vic Theatres. John Bell’s production of TRAVELLING NORTH quickly followed up the success of THE CLUB with sellout seasons at Nimrod, Theatre Royal Sydney, and the Athenaeum Theatre Melbourne. David’s film scripts include STORK, PETERSEN, THE REMOVALISTS, ELIZA FRASER, DON’S PARTY (AFI) Best Screenplay Award and THE CLUB. In 1978 David spent five months as writing professor at University of Aarhus in Denmark. He has just finished working on the screenplay for Peter Weir’s new film GALLIPOLI.

DAVID WILLIAMSON

The Playwright... A mechanical engineer turned Playwright, wrote several University revues before writing his first full length play in 1970 THE COMING OF STORK. His next two plays THE REMOVALISTS and DON’S PARTY were written in 1971 and first performed by the APG. THE REMOVALISTS and DON’S Nimrod in 1971, and Nimrod and David shared the prestigious George Devine Award for new
JOHN BELL
The Director... is well known to Nimrod audiences as actor and director. Sydney University Honours graduate before joining the Old Tote Company in 1963. Associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company 1965—69. Upon returning to Australia he directed the original production of THE LEGEND OF KING O'MALLEY at Jane St. Theatre and then co-founded Nimrod with Ken Horler in 1970. Nimrod productions directed by John include MACBETH, MEASURE FOR MEASURE, MUCH ADO, FLASH JIM VAUX, INNER VOICES, A HARD GOD, THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS, THE VENETIAN TWINS, ORESTEIA, and David Williamson's THE REMOVALISTS, A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS, THE CLUB (which subsequently toured to the Hampstead and Old Vic theatres in London), and TRAVELLING NORTH. Acting performances include Arturo Ui, Uncle Vanya, Satin in LOWER DEPTHS, for the Old Tote; Hamlet, Richard III, Prince Hal in HENRY IV, Hatch in THE SEA, and Volpone for Nimrod; and Cyrano de Bergerac for the Sydney Theatre Company.

LARRY EASTWOOD
The Designer... Co-founder and for seven years production manager and designer for Nimrod. Has designed more than forty productions for Nimrod including HAMLET, THE REMOVALISTS, TOOTH OF CRIME, RICHARD III, MUCH ADO, JACK, COMEDY OF ERRORS, JUMPERS, THE SEA and THE ELOCUTION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN which later transferred to London, New York and San Francisco. Larry’s other theatre design work has included productions for the Old Tote, Melbourne Theatre Company, Ensemble Theatre, and Peter Williams’ productions of TRIBUTE and THE GIN GAME at the Theatre Royal. Larry has recently completed seven months work as Art Director on A TOWN LIKE ALICE for Channel 7, and is currently working on a CABARET television series.

GRAHAM MURRAY
The Lighting Designer... Began theatre career in New Zealand with New Zealand Ballet and Opera Companies as an electrician, before crossing the Tasman to work the Sydney season of BOYS IN THE BAND, followed by 3 years with the Old Tote as Head Electrician and 7 months in the Off Broadway Scene. He toured extensively with Prospect Theatre Company throughout the U.K. and abroad before taking up a position with the Pitlochry Festival Theatre in Scotland as Resident Lighting Designer. Positions then followed with Greenwich Young People’s Theatre as Production Manager for 18 months and numerous West End productions before returning to Australia. In Australia he toured with THE ISLAND and SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD, BOESMAN AND LENA then joined Nimrod in 1976 as Production Manager. For Nimrod he has lit over half of the productions since that date.
KATE FITZPATRICK.  
Graduated NIDA, Theatre —  
Old Tote: Little Murders,  
The Legend of King  
O'Malley, The Importance of  
Being Earnest, Season at  
Sarsparilla, Big Toys. Arts  
Theatre SA: Hamlet,  
MacBeth. Harry M. Miller:  
The Rocky Horror Show.  
Nimrod: Rooted, Hamlet On  
Ice, Shadows of Blood,  
Kennedy's Children,  
Ginge's Last Stand, Ride  
Across Lake Constance.  
AETT: Bedroom Farce.  
Paris Theatre: Visions.  
Sydney Theatre Co: The  
Lady of the Camélias.  
Seymour Centre:  
Britannicus. Television:  
Includes — Red Heap,  
Boney, Norman Lindsay  
Series, Behind The Legend,  
That Was The Year That  
Was, Ben Hall, Trial By  
Marriage, Skyways, The  
Night Nurse, Players to the  
Theatre — Overseas: Played Fagin in  
Oliver in New York, London  
and Tokyo, Mary Stuart &  
Elizabeth The Queen (US  
tour), The Bastard From The  
Bush (London). Theatre in  
Australia includes - Pontius  
Pilate in Jesus Christ  
Superstar. Old Tote: Three-  
penny Opera (Critics Award  
1974), How Could You  
Believe Me... MTC:  
Pericles, Merchant of  

JOHN GREGG was born in  
Tasmania and was a student  
of NIDA in its first year.  
After working with the  
Melbourne Theatre  
Company and doing two  
ABC-TV series Contra-  
bandits and Delta he went to  
London in 1971 where he  
was a member of the  
National Theatre Company  
and appeared in many  
television plays including  
the much discussed BBC-  
TV series The Glittering  
Prizes. He returned in 1978  
to do two programmes A  
Place In The World and The  
Oracle for the ABC. He  
returned to U.K. to do a  
season with the New  
Shakespeare Company, but  
has now settled back here  
permanently with his wife  
and family.  

ROBIN RAMSAY. Theatre  
— Overseas: Played Fagin in  
Oliver in New York, London  
and Tokyo, Mary Stuart &  
Elizabeth The Queen (US  
tour), The Bastard From The  
Bush (London). Theatre in  
Australia includes - Pontius  
Pilate in Jesus Christ  
Superstar. Old Tote: Three-  
penny Opera (Critics Award  
1974), How Could You  
Believe Me... MTC:  
Pericles, Merchant of  

KEVIN SMITH. Interest in  
theatre began with the Black  
Theatre in Redfern and  
while there he did a film­  
maker's course funded by  
the Aboriginal Arts Board.  
After completion he worked  
as a unit assistant manager  
on Phil Noyce's film  
Backroads. Kevin has  
worked as a Project Officer  
with the Melbourne  
Aboriginal Community  
Youth Support Scheme  
organising workshops in  
crafts of various cultures as  
well as drama groups. Kevin  
played Wally in Thomas  
Keneally's Bullies House at  
Nimrod Upstairs in early  
1980.  

Venice, The Government  
Inspector, Henry IV (Critics  
Award 1970). Sydney  
Theatre Co: Cyrano De  
Bergerac, Sunny South,  
Merry Wives of Windsor.  
Nimrod: Martello Towers,  
Rock-Ola, Bastard From The  
Bush (Australian Arts  
Award). Television: Percy  
Granger and Two Girls and  
a Millionaire (BBC-TV), Ed  
Sullivan Show (USA). Film:  
Mad Dog Morgan, Oz, The  
Box, You're The One,  
Gentleman's Halt.
BARBARA STEPHENS.
Theatre credits include —


HENRI SZEPS. Studied drama at the Ensemble Theatre before appearing in musicals, television, as a stand-up comic in the clubs, and two years as Harold in The Boys In The Band.

ALAN WILSON. Theatre —


...anyhow
have a
Winfield 25's

Five
smokes
ahead of
the rest
Before announcing plans for a 1981 Company of Actors, Nimrod decided to ask a few actors how they would define an “Actors Company” from just a group of contract or rep players. An edited transcript of their discussion follows. The actors involved were Cathy Downes, Drew Forsythe, Colin Friels, Jennifer Hagan, John McTernan and Tony Sheldon.

JOHN: Would anyone like to start. Jenny’s had a lot of experience at the MTC and Colin at the SATC and Nimrod and Drew at the Old Tote. Did you ever work in a Company in New Zealand?

CATHY: Yes, I worked with Downstage Theatre.

JOHN: Did you Tony?

TONY: Hunter Valley.

JOHN: Yes and I’ve had a year here, so we’ve all had some experience working in a Company. Who would like to start off and say what they found lacking from that experience?

DREW: What I’ve generally found is that Companies have been too small and so too much work, and too much of the shit work really, tends to fall on the same people, too much of a load. By the second play you’re exhausted.

JENNY: That’s right. Yes that was one of the things on my list, that if you’re rehearsing all day and playing at night, you really get played out in the end, and you have nothing left to contribute.

COLIN: But really there hasn’t been a Company yet. All there’s been is a repertoire of plays or repertory work.

JOHN: Contract players.

JENNY: Well another grievance of a Company, is that people raise hell if they’re doing all the shit work — medium size parts and small parts — and the pickings go to people who are brought in on a once and that creates an awful feeling.

JOHN: So you’re saying that if you want to be in the Company then you want to know in advance some of the roles you’ll be playing, and hopefully those roles will be extending roles.

JENNY: Yes definitely.

CATHY: I remember, John, you saying in a Nimrod meeting last year, that if you have a tight Company, the whole energy is working together as a Company; that you gauge plays on the people that you have in your Company, and vice versa. Then that can be a very extending experience, both in terms of the roles that you play and in becoming familiar with the actors that you’re playing with.

JENNY: Yes, you link with the management, and know where they want to go, instead of with a lot of Companies, they say “We’ll do MacBeth” and then think “My God we haven’t got a Lady MacBeth.”

JOHN: So should those actors in the Company have some say in the policy of that theatre in picking the plays?

COLIN: Absolutely. It’s essential.

TONY: But do actors read as many plays as people whose job it is, say the management, who know more about what’s happening and coming up?

COLIN: Maybe that’s because actors are victims of the whole system. That the agent’s system, the casting system, the whole conventional set up of the theatre and we’re conditioned to do plays that we’re told to do or asked to do, because that’s all that’s happening. It’s just a rep system, because you work day and night just rehearse and play and don’t do anything else. I mean if you’re going to have a Company you’ve got to have a musician, a writer in residence, designer.

TONY: Do you think managements think sometimes in terms of a Company getting their audiences in to see the same people and building a rapport between those Company actors and the audience.

DREW: There’s also an argument against that too. A lot of people say, that people get bored with seeing the same people over and over again. I don’t agree with that argument. I think actors should be versatile enough to do many different roles, in interesting ways, and to appear quite different each time, and the fact that they’re doing that should excite the audience.

CATHY: It’s important in that case that the actors aren’t cast in similar type roles.

COLIN: But that goes back to the fact that you’ve got to be given a breathing space with a Company. I’ve just done 3 plays in a row, by the end of 3 you don’t really want to do another one.

JENNY: There is no input, no recharging.

JOHN: What about a repertoire system, when some of the plays are done again?

COLIN: That can be a very good idea.

DREW: Rehearsed with the same people. Improved upon.

DREW: I’ve only done that once and that was the Opera House opening — we did Three Penny Opera. I found it terrific by the time we did Richard II and got round to doing Three Penny Opera again we were really excited and looking forward to doing it.

JOHN: How much time do you think it takes to form a group of people to get a really ideal working relationship?

DREW: That can vary. I think the best thing that can get a group together is success. For example The Venetian Twins, it was on in 5 weeks and it felt like a success to us.

JOHN: It had a strong Company feel about it.

TONY: I think that’s also dictated by the form of the show — with the Twins there were ten people all making an equal contribution to the show, whereas some shows you have three star parts and six others — that doesn’t help the Company feeling along.

JOHN: Well that’s what I want to bring up. In this group do you need a strong leader?

COLIN: Directors. Yes. Absolutely.

JENNY: You finally need someone (it’s terrific for months and months for us all to contribute) but there’s got to be a time when everybody’s on stage and you need that person out front.

TONY: It’s also a very personal attitude though that a lot of actors don’t like to be directed by other actors — they don’t feel they’re getting direction. They say “I want someone to blame, someone to argue.”

JOHN: Is that fair to blame a director? It is I suppose if that director has imposed a production on you, but if you’ve contributed to that production in an equal part with every other cast member and the director, then you all take the blame or the success equally.

DREW: Yes well I’m not saying that necessarily means you don’t have a director but sometimes (an awful lot) a director has a concept about how we’re going to do this and he’s done so much advance work and comes in on the first day “these are the costumes, this is the set, this is the concept, now you’re all free”… then your responsibility is to make his concept work.

JOHN: So in this ideal Company all the actors would be in on all that pre-work.
1976
TRAVESTIES
THE SPEAKERS
ALL OVER
KENNEDYS CHILDREN
MARTELLO TOWERS
MATES & THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS
ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN
MAD BAD & DANGEROUS TO KNOW
THE RECRUITING OFFICER
THE ELOCUTION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
THE DUCHESS OF MALFI
A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS
DIRTY LINEN
DREW: It should be in the play and then understanding the play so well that if a concept happens it has evolved out of the play and with each member of the cast.

COLIN: But there is no "ideal". You don't really know what a Company is going to be until you start working it. That's why I think it would take a number of years.

TONY: What Drew was saying is actually "Group Developed Theatre". It's what the APG have been doing for ten years. That thing where everybody is in there and probably rewriting as it goes along.

JOHN: But that can really backfire. I don't think theatre works well as a democracy. One man/one vote.

DREW: I resent a bit, that my job is always being decided by other people.

CATHY: Yes I experienced enormous freedom when I was in London for a year and I started a Theatre Company and we were picking or writing our own plays and that was the first time I realised how stifled I'd been by the system. This didn't work either of course because it was a co-op (one man/one woman/one vote) and consequently not enough got done and there were endless discussions and that didn't work either. I mean what do we think of the Nimrod Theatre? It's what the APG have been doing for ten years. It's still not a Company that is being drawn upon for every show.

TONY: It's still 3/4 actors on permanent salary and everybody else brought in. It's still not a Company that is being drawn upon for every show.

JOHN: Is it possible for a theatre in Sydney to work the way that we're talking about? I don't know that it is. It's a great departure for Nimrod to go that way.

CATHY: I don't think it's up to Nimrod to go that way. I think Nimrod is probably working very well in the way it is happening next year?

DREW: Well I think they do.

JOHN: I think we as actors conversely have a responsibility to the theatre. So I guess I'm saying that if I'm treated fairly by a theatre, by the directors of that theatre in terms of my own growth, I'm certainly willing to say "Dinner is served" in a play. I think we have to be open enough to say "I'll be part of the production because I care about the play — I care about this theatre doing it."

COLIN: A company has a duty to an audience then, hasn't it? What I mean is a company can shape an audience — by what your input is and what your goals are — then you can get a wider audience — surely it's possible in a city of 4 million people.

CATHY: It's time Nimrod stopped taking over from the Old Tote. Fulfilling the classical role.

JOHN: I think Nimrod will have to do more than just perpetuate itself. It seems to be doing that very well at the moment but not a lot else. It has an audience. It's putting on things, and they're coming to see them, but it doesn't seem to be forging out in any new area at all.

COLIN: But if you have a company then that's a company's duty.

CATHY: The advantages of working with a company situation as I see them are firstly getting to know your fellow actors for a long period of time, secondly, hopefully having more of a say in what's going on in your theatre, and thirdly getting to play more of a variety of roles than perhaps you would play in other spaces. Also the security of knowing that each role you do is not an audition piece for when you're out of work in four weeks' time, so you can serve the theatre and the play, rather than just serving yourself. Has anyone got any disadvantages?

DREW: ... missing out on films ... not enough money ... I think the answer is that Nimrod needs a lot more money.

JOHN: I think that the people who dole out the money and the audiences who pay at the box office don't realise that they could be seeing a much higher standard, a much better production. A lot of people would say "Well what does it matter — the theatre is full". It matters a great deal to me; the theatre will be full in either case, hopefully, but what those full theatres will be seeing will be of a much higher standard. That's what it's about.

DREW: Exciting the audience and ourselves!

CATHY: Well that is how to excite the audience surely — by exciting yourself.
1977
TREASURE ISLAND
YOUNG MO
INNER VOICES
TRAVESTIES
TWELFTH NIGHT
BANANAS & THE CORONERS REPORT & THE FLAW
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
A STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION
GOING HOME
FANSHEN
JACK
ASHES
THE CLUB
CHRIS WESTWOOD

It is commonly said that Nimrod has sculpted a vision of Australian culture with the writings, productions, talents and energies it has so carefully fostered over the past ten years. But in combing through the decade's work, I can only conclude that the Nimrod vision of Australian culture is synonymous with "male", and find myself agreeing with Simone de Beauvoir's statement that, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth".

In ten years at Nimrod, there have been no women directors of plays (although Cathy Downes directed herself in her one-woman show this year). There have been only twelve plays by women (including three one-acters, one children's play, and three compilations of other people's work) compared to a total of 122 plays by men. It is possible that if two such fundamental aspects of play production - writers and directors - are dominated by men, the proportion of women in other "creative" areas in the theatre will be similarly unequal. Certainly, statistics reflect this: 214 female performers to 514 male in ten years at Nimrod. In those fields in which middle-class women have been encouraged by virtue of a "classical education" for young ladies - such as music and dance and design - I expected to find a good proportion of women. Sadly, the story there is much the same. Only in the so-called "service" areas (stage management, costume making, box office, production assistance, publicity, office staff) are women well presented.

I am not trying to sheet home the entire blame to Nimrod. Most other theatres in Australia have similar or worse records in this Decade of Women. But, like an emulsion, Nimrod has to be shaken up now and then, to keep it flowing.

When I showed the female to male ratio of theatre work to people at Nimrod, some argued that the founders of Nimrod had every right to shape their theatre in whatever form they chose. This argument has a number of flaws. First, it assumes that "the artist" has no social responsibility of any kind, an argument based on the myth that "artists" have some kind of messianic vision, a special creative genius, absolutely independent of their cultural and social environment, which allows them self-indulgence and detachment from the real world. Second, it denies the basic human right of equal opportunity in employment and equal opportunity in having voices heard and ideas expressed. Given Nimrod's "Progressive" reputation and "Egalitarian" policies, one might have expected it to respond to the impact of the women's movement a little more positively than it has. Nimrod may well deny that it is perpetrating a male stronghold and that there is any discrimination, claiming that work is given to the best person available.

Yet creativity is not due to the chance birth of male geni, but rather opportunities afforded people to learn and develop through encouragement, schooling, experience and contact with other artists - all of which would appear to be more available to men than women at Nimrod.

And in all of this, Nimrod unfortunately has been aided and abetted by voices of men such as John Willett, who wrote of Nimrod in the authoritative Plays and Players:

One of the secrets of the theatre's success is that it has not been distracted by... passionately felt side issues, like feminism, but has continued to be ably or authoritatively led. Another secret surely is the intelligent catholic taste which gives the repertoire its variety". (July, 1981)

Syllogistic comments like this only serve to reinforce notions that "able", "authoritative" and "intelligent catholic tastes" are exclusively male prerogatives. Under the weight of such public male comment, it is a wonder that Nimrod has given any woman a chance at all!

In pointing out the top-sidedness of Nimrod's (and Willett's) approach, I am not suggesting that there is a difference between male and female creativity, but that their social experiences are different. Social experience is fundamental to drama, and it is high time that Nimrod stopped refracting the world through male consciousness. An "Australian" vision in theatre is surely as equally female as male. The chance to reveal Nimrod's biases and inadequacies is opportune. The theatre has a sense, right now, of entering a new era. All around it, initiatives to develop women's talents, energies and contributions to theatre are being taken. Yet, as Nimrod launches into its tenth anniversary season and its eleventh year, it runs with an elected Board of ten men, no women. It has no positive plans to use women directors and writers in 1981, even though Nimrod is hosting a Women Directors Workshop in November/December to promote some 8 women as directors on the Australian theatre scene. Clearly, Nimrod is entering its new decade still thinking in male vocabulary, still denying itself fruitful sources of artistic inspiration. I think that unless it does look to women, it may be left, high and dry, sunbaking along with a dessicated collection of smug and complacent consumers who are equally monocular in their vision. What a massive loss to a powerful Australian theatre.
1978

- Treasure Island
- Rock-Ola
- Everyman & Stubble & Marxisms
- Curse of the Starving Class
- Kold Komfort Kaffee
- The Comedy of Errors
- Henry IV
- Metamorphosis
- Giants & The Job
- Kold Komfort Kaffee
- A Visit with the Family
- Gone with Hardy
- Jumpers
STEPHEN SEWELL

Writing about writing is one of the most vacuous activities anyone can engage in. Nevertheless, at the risk of making a fool of myself, I would like to use the opportunity of Nimrod's tenth anniversary to make a few observations which seem pertinent at this moment.

Theatre is a social product, and like all social products will reflect the broad tensions between the participants unless either an internal or external regime of repression is enforced. The hierarchical structure of most companies is an example of the former; the lack of anything but the most mystified discussion of the obvious links between politicians and criminals is evidence of the latter. But it is the principle rather than its violation which concerns me at the moment, and in particular the pernicious notion, sometimes shared by writers, that the content of our work is above criticism. When this is not simply an expression of cowardice or laziness, it becomes the radical assertion of the absolute independence of the play's content from the world, an assertion which robs the play of any communicative power whatsoever, unless it be at the level of those famous Universal Truths which are periodically trooped out to bring discussion to an end.

The assertion that what we have to say is trivial, or simply an opinion among many which can be just as quickly dismissed, is a fundamental attack on our reason for being; and, more than that, a cynical assault on the value of rationality. I am not arguing that all plays are or should be primarily informative or, in the jargon which has been thrust upon us, "intellectual". I am saying that every play is a reflection on the world, and that one has the right to ask "Is it true?". The assumption that one can uncover the truth amounts first and foremost to the assertion that there is a world independent of our minds. Its denial expresses itself neatly in the philistine rejection of content as a valid area of discussion.

If I have established the essential point that criticism and discussion of our work is central to our activity as writers I hope I have succeeded in locating writers in society and in the struggle of ideas. We are not magicians who in the occult act of writing distil truth - Universal or not - from the ingredients of an impenetrable and esoteric world. We have no more right to claim an intuitive grasp of the world than those frauds for whom arrogance is a good substitute for thought. Keynes' contempt for this notion with respect to politicians is just as applicable to writers: "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back". If this is reminiscent of the bankrupt social, political and psychological theories regularly evidenced in Australian play, the blame must in part rest with the writers who have distanced themselves from the debates which are calling increasingly fundamental aspects of our society into question. No writer, for example, has any right to plead ignorance of the issue of sexism, and any play peddling sexist stereotypes must be seen as an intervention of the most reactionary sort. This is not a question of Freedom of Expression or some such hypocritical nonsense any more than Nazi anti-semitic propaganda is. Our ideas don't circulate in an innocent world of their own. Sexist stereotypes are translated into raped women. We are responsible for what we write.

It is a commonplace to observe that the international economic and political system is in crisis. This abstract sounding phrase can be appreciated as meaning more or less massive unemployment, rising inflation, poverty, violence, confusion and instability in government and treasury circles, and war. The least important aspect of ignoring this situation, will be our condemnation to abject irrelevence. The more important aspect - still within the narrow limits of the effect of such a decision on our writing - will be to cut ourselves off from critical thought, to retreat into a moronic world of private symbolism apparently immune to the storm about us and, as I have argued, to cease to fulfil the function which sustains us, that is, to cease to communicate. There is absolutely no reason why we should cease to be writers, but if we are to remain more than hacks or eccentrics, it seems to me clear that we are committed to a deep involvement with the forces which are transforming this society, and to much more besides.
1979
TREASURE ISLAND
MAKASSAR REEF
HANCOCKS LAST HALF HOUR
THE BASTARD FROM THE BUSH
ROMEO & JULIET
THE SEA
AMERICAN BUFFALO
GALILEO
UPSIDE DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD
TRAVELLING NORTH
BETRAYAL
POTIPHARS WIFE + 2
THE VENETIAN TWINS
ON OUR SELECTION
BURLESКО
This issue of this magazine is essentially a statement of Nimrod's pride in the achievements of ten years. To grow within a decade from a small but committed group of idealistic theatre workers operating in a noisy, hot cramped stable loft into what is regarded by many nationally and internationally as Australia's most important theatre company is clearly remarkable.

However to continue to grow, or at least to continue being important, involves constant reappraisal of motive and action in relation to the social and cultural context within which a theatre lives.

The impact that Nimrod made during this last decade was very much a product of the strength and directness with which its attitudes were embodied in its products. With the Tote churning out a tired procession of English, European and American classics, Nimrod was a theatre asserting the reason for its existence. A new Sydney audience developed with the discovery that theatre could be refreshing, immediate and meaningful.

I believe it is more difficult now for our audience to feel Nimrod's attitudes and commitments than it was five years ago. And this, I believe, is because the pattern for our programming seems, season by season, to repeat the same formula.

It is argued that, for the purposes of flexibility, Nimrod should not be limited by a policy or manifesto. But this is only a real argument if that flexibility is being exercised. It seems to me that there has not been a more appropriate time to use our flexibility than at the present.

If we continue to include productions of classics in our repertoire they must be inspired by radical re-interpretations of text and style. They must in themselves justify their inclusion and communicate their relevance to an Australian theatre audience.

If we continue to produce contemporary work from Europe and America, it should be the most contemporary and most challenging of that work.

And if we continue to include either of these two categories of plays in our repertoire it must never be as a priority above new Australian work.

It is the work of 83 Australian writers over ten years that has been the principal contributing factor to Nimrod's success, and yet only about one half of our year's work is Australian. I think Nimrod needs to make a bolder commitment to Australian writers. This involves not just producing more plays but working more closely with writers in developing scripts. If writers are accused of being locked away in ivory towers it is usually because our theatre companies have thrown away the keys. There seems to be little exploration and interchange during the process of play writing. It is no longer seen as remarkable for an Australian to write a good play but it still very much a chance occurrence. And after a writer produces a good first play a few commissions are sprinkled around and the writer is left alone to produce 2nd, 3rd and 4th plays packaged and ready to be fitted into the 4 week rehearsal system. Understandably writers often get confused, bitter or paranoid. Understandably the promise shown in an early play fades and the writer's scope and talent seems to diminish rather than expand.

I feel we must encourage writers to confront social and political issues relevant to Australia today. I don't believe in the division between "entertainment" and theatre which intellectually challenges. I believe it is true of audiences in general and Nimrod's audience in particular that the most rewarding experience in theatre, and the experience that makes you want to return, is one where you feel you have learnt something or where you have been moved to believe in or act upon an idea.

We look forward to a time, especially that there is now a permanent company of actors developing at Nimrod, when the work of our theatre will be as strong and as varied as the personalities and beliefs of every member who contributes to it.

There's a lot to be done. Nimrod can be proud of the achievements of its first ten years, but it mustn't be satisfied.
1980
PIRATES AT THE BARN
BULLIES HOUSE
TRAITORS
THE HOUSE OF THE DEAF MAN
CLOWNEROONIES
CLOUDS
KRAZY FOR YOU
THE CASE OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD
THE ORESTEIA
BACKYARD
INSIDE THE ISLAND
SEXUAL PERVER—SITY IN CHICAGO / REUNION
VOLPONE
CELLULOID HEROES
YOU AND THE NIGHT AND THE HOUSE WINE
by Kim Carpenter, Designer and Co-Artistic Director 1980

In the beginning at number ten Nimrod Street Kings Cross “Nimrod” created for itself an environment that exuded energy and potential excitement. That environment was abstract by its physical misshapeness, choice of yellow foyer walls, arresting poster displays and a distorted performance space for actors and audience.

The physical oddities were declared as a positive contribution to the use and presentation of productions during that time.

Visual memories of the old Nimrod make it difficult to separate the raw ad-hoc image of the building and its decoration from the more deliberate designs on the stage; it seemed one carried through from the other.

Specifically two designs stand out in my memory — Peter Handke’s Kaspar (Designer Martin Sharp) and Sam Shepard’s Tooth of Crime (designer Larry Eastwood) both graphically very confronting. The latter made great use of the rickety staircase leading from the foyer to the auditorium by shunting the audience through a covered tunnel to their seats.

The penchant for defiant primary colours and geometrical patterns as well as rough circus elements constituted the basis of the Nimrod house style in terms of visual identification. This combination of tastes were those of the Directors (I trust) but more particularly Larry Eastwood who was the Designer as well as Production Manager at that time.

The use of strong colours and motifs which evolved during those early years eventually became synonymous with the Nimrod image, leading the way towards graphically identifying the old team with a new environment in Surry Hills.

Martin Sharp’s Mo, Ginger Meggs etc have contributed enormously in consolidating Nimrod’s public image. His use of crisp colours and paper cut-outs have influenced the logo colours and the theatre foyer style, and publications.

Jumping from a kitchen sized stage to a large open studio space took several productions before Directors and Designers began to understand the true problems and possibilities of the new theatre.

The Nimrod stage space appears an exciting challenge to a Designer when seen stripped bare and without any lamps overhanging the stage. To create theatrical illusions at Nimrod is very difficult. The techniques used to great illusionary effect in proscenium theatres usually backfire within the close audience-stage confines of the Nimrod.

Probably the most theatrically contrived and illusionary set has been Volpone where the deliberate fakery of “the set” was used as a key to the style of the production. On a different level Ian Robinson’s set for Travelling North cunningly explored subtle architectural illusions through false perspective and raked levels. This worked convincingly by the precision in the final execution of the set.

The most obvious method of illusion at such close audience proximity is by expanding or contracting the space on an horizontal line. Twelfth Night achieved extreme panoramic space with its continuous slatted walls of graded cream to green colour bands and minimal construction. Inside The Island with its diagonal wharf structure provided a new unexpected juxtaposition of the space relationship. The “Bullie’s House” landscape and sky embraced the auditorium in a simple illusionary sweep.

The Nimrod workshop has grown in staff and developed in its skills to become very advanced in its use of modern techniques and materials suitable for the unconventional theatre space Nimrod is.

Ultimately I feel that in its short life Nimrod has become more aware of the importance of director/designer relationships, and encouraged a more intelligent attitude and appreciation of Design among actors and audiences.
ROCKOLA
Director: Richard Wherrett
Set Designer: Brian Thomson
Costume Designer: Sue Blane

TWELFTH NIGHT
Director: John Bell
Designer: Kim Carpenter

COMEDY OF ERRORS
Director: John Bell
Set Designer: Larry Eastwood
Costume Designer: Vicki Feitscher
NIMROD STREET THEATRE
COMPANY LIMITED

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Artistic Directors/Neil Armfield, John Bell, Kim Carpenter

General Manager/Bruce Pollack

Production Manager/Grahame Murray

Senior Stage Manager/Margie Wright

Stage Managers/Neil Simpson, Lee Anne Donnolley, Anne Heath

Assistant Stage Managers/Susan Goff, Sonia Giuffre

Trainee Technician/Mark Robinson

Master Carpenter/Jeremy Brown

Carpenters/Alan Fleming, Joseph Caruana

Apprentice Carpenter/Wayne Black

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Nimrod Street Theatre Company Limited is a non profit distributing company limited by guarantee.

Nimrod Theatre gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, the New South Wales Government through the Cultural Grants Advisory Council, Winfield Promotions Company, Sydney Committee Limited, Singapore Airlines Limited, Stehar Knitting Mills Pty. Limited, Luxafoam Industries and Broadwave Hairdressers.

Volpone set design by Kim Carpenter. Photograph by John Delacour.
Very, very serious theatre

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

By Marguerite Wells


Director, Carl Woodrow; Design and Lighting, Julie Wood; Production Manager, Jamie McDonald; Administrator, Peter Sutherland.

Cast: Lisa Renyon; Ewa Czajor; Jo Fleming; Inge Krak;
Tony MacGregor; Marcella O’Hare; Mikal Skeates. Professional

Standard Operating Procedure is very, very serious theatre indeed. So serious in fact that the temptation to discuss the issues instead of the production is almost overwhelming. Black theatre it is, with lightning flashes of colour, but never a flash of humour or optimism. Plays Unpleasant were never as unpleasant as this. Audiences say they are coming away bludgeoned, but the the season in Canberra has been extended and is playing to full houses. SOP has created a new Canberra phenomenon. Serious theatre with audience appeal.

It details some of the barbarities which in many lands and cultures have been and still are practised on women in the name of beauty, religion or the rights of men. Footbinding, suttee, the burnign of widows, female circumcision, witchburning, rape as a right and rite of war, rape in the street — all of them, pretty Standard Operating Procedure; all of them exceedingly unpleasant, all of them rarely mentioned or unmentionable. “They tell us of Vietnam where rape was pretty standard SOP. Just the ordinary Joes having a good time. Where women’s bodies were a war reward, a necessary provision like soda pop and ice-cream, to keep the boys healthy and happy”.

SOP slides from the prettiness of legend — the story of the concubine of the Chinese emperor Li Yu who danced on a golden lotus platform, her tiny feet whirling and in whose honour and imitation women began to bind their daughter’s feet; to the agony of the three inch foot, of the broken bones, of the rotting flesh and the running pus; back to the fairytale of Cinderella whose ugly sisters sliced off their toes and heels to fit into the tiny glass slipper.

Motilation is seen as a method of control, of assuring the legitimacy of heirs and the power of men over their property and households. Footbound, housebound, mindbound women. That is the final injustice of all barbarities of SOP. Their common effect, intended or otherwise, is to restrict women’s lives, within the limits of the permitted, the physically possible or the physically safe. It is not the infliction of pain that is the real injustice. Men too, die horribly in war, are tortured for religion’s sake, bear the agony of mutilation in initiation rites; men too are raped. But the threat of rape keeps women indoors; determines who they may talk to, and about what; where they may travel, by what means and with whom; what they may wear, how they may sit, what they may think, what they may wish, what they may dream and what they may attempt. In our society it is mainly self-censorship that girls learn, so early; in many others it is an externally imposed censorship — a censorship of all the activities of life — that is the special tragedy of women. Footbound, housebound, mindbound.

As with all of Carol Woodrow’s work, the visual and sound images are stunning. The thwack of the knife as it slices Cinderella’s fairytale pumpkin — which bleeds for the ugly sisters’ bleeding feet and the bound feet of the women of China; “Stouthearted Men”, sung in a plaintive whisper from a theatre blackout; red chiffon that drapes the emperor’s boudoir, that billows as flames for the burning widow; the Inquisitor, the Torturer and the Nazi, fifteen feet tall, hanging high from the walls, their robes falling to the floor, elongated, distorted and threatening, grotesquely crucified and defiled.

But it is the images of pain that will not go away; the starvation of the unburned widows, cast on the streets, the keening of the woman telling of the excision of her clitoris and labia. These Images from the Background will not be soon forgotten, and with three more plays in the cycle to come, will be a powerful and continuing image in the lives of all who have seen them.

Standard Operating Procedure moves to Sydney in January, and will be there for the Festival of Sydney. Further plays in the series will be Sleeping Beauty, examining the myth of romantic love, Original Sin on other myths about women that have made them despised, and Being about refinduing the lost dream of hope. The whole series is “an attempt to put power and joy into living as individuals, to delineate and then destroy the barriers between men and women, and the world.”

Images from the Background is the fruit of two years of full time unpaid ensemble work, by a remarkable group led by a remarkable director, one who leaves a trail of new theatre companies behind wherever she goes. There are three theatre companies operating in Canberra now which were founded by Carol Woodrow, and they produce some of the most interesting and exciting theatre we see. Images from the Background bids fair to being the masterwork of a career, and a major contribution by Fools Gallery to Australian theatre.
Penrith can boast the best Brecht I've seen this side of the Iron Curtain. In fact, the Q's production of *Happy End* is perhaps the best theatre I've seen in a long time.

Designer Leone Sharp has opened the Q out to its full width to accommodate the projection screens, catwalk scaffolding, and Speakeasy playing space of this Chicago-based Brecht, which brings together the disparate worlds of Shaw's *Major Barbara* and the American musical *Guys and Dolls*.

The story is a bit thin, being about the love affair (if you can call it that) of an underworld hoodlum and a Salvation Army Lieutenant. The Lieutenant, of course, is a woman, *Happy End* is a straight play in that sense. I don't know what the actors in this present production did, except that their creations, while cartoon-line in posture and speech, are thoroughly truthful and convincing. Malcolm Keith's 'The Governor', a dapper Chinese crook, who substitutes "s" for "r" in the traditional vaudevillian manner, is for all that a fearsome and menancing villain. Mr. Keith points a revolver at a member of the audience and shouts "SING"; we all feel the cold chill of threat run through us.

The ensemble work is text-book (except I don't think anyone has written a text-book on the subject). The crowd scenes are excellent, both vocally and visually: the product of discipline and devotion. The fights are balletically realistic; the business, in the songs and elsewhere, compelling and clever.

Among the newcomers to the regular Q-company, Sally McKenzie is most welcome, both as an actress and a singer.
Local celebration

THE STAR SHOW

By Katharine Brisbane

The Star Show by Peter Matheson and John McCallum. Music by Allan McFadden. Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Newcastle, N.S.W. Opened 10th October 1980. Director, Aarne Neeme; set design by John Woodland; costume design by Narelle Everett; slides by Harry Klopcic; Star Hotel riot film by NBN Channel 3, Barry Nancarrow.


Years ago I wrote a review of an end-of-year concert at my daughter's kindergarten — not all that facetiously because, watching the total absorption of the audience, I had a sudden insight into the importance of the audience in the creation of a new dramatic work.

The children were, of course, performing just as children do and I doubt the material was original. It was the empathy of the audience, projecting their knowledge of what was behind the getting up of such an affair, which raised it to a unique and splendid occasion.

I was reminded of that audience at the premiere of a very different work: The Star Show, at the Civic Playhouse, Newcastle, under the inventive direction of Aarne Neeme.

The Star Show, by Peter Matheson and John McCallum, with thumping music by Allen McFadden, is a stirring account of the riot last summer — the night the Star Hotel was closed down. The Star, as one local described it, was Kings Cross in microcosm for the people of Newcastle, with a front bar for sailors and prostitutes, a middle bar for the gays and drag queens, and a back bar for the kids, the unemployed, for anyone who had nowhere to go. The play is set in the back bar where in songs of loneliness interspersed with slides and anecdotes we learn the hotel's 150-year-old history.

Alternating with these vignettes is the comic strip tale of a Chicago hotel which changed hands in a shady deal by a real estate operator with influence in the City Council; and who then leaned on the police to have it closed. The Star, as one local described it, was Kings Cross in microcosm for the people of Newcastle, with a front bar for sailors and prostitutes, a middle bar for the gays and drag queens, and a back bar for the kids, the unemployed, for anyone who had nowhere to go. The play is set in the back bar where in songs of loneliness interspersed with slides and anecdotes we learn the hotel's 150-year-old history.

Supported by the ingenious quartet, the Musical Flags. I particularly liked The Bikie Song, sung by David Wood and Riding, touchingly sung by Myfanwy Morgan.

Such occasions are a celebration, of a sense of community of shared experience and memory. Such is one of the finest qualities of the theatre, giving it a local habitation and a name. But The Star Show understandably attempts to analyse as well as to reincarnate the hotel incident; and to lay blame where it is due on a social occasion is not easy or well mannered. As documentary the show touches tentatively on a lot of sensitive areas, laying most emphasis on the view that the Star was a place where young people could be themselves. But seeing on film a crowd being themselves with rocks and other missiles, upending and burning police vehicles, was at odds with the sentimental idea of the young as 'today's Aborigines'. The theme behind the theme was Newcastle's long-standing suspicion of the police — and that is the real history of the Star Hotel riot.

Nevertheless the text as it stands brings a joy of recognition to its Newcastle audience which an outsider cannot share. And that is what the embattled Hunter Valley Theatre Company needs just now, a recognition of community possession. It may find a wider audience if it can grow and define its message of what the Star Hotel stood for in a working man's town. But for the moment that is not all that important.
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(ie. location)
Part play, part homage

SONGS FROM SIDESHOW ALLEY

by Michele Field


Director. Rodney Fisher; Designer. Ian Robinson; Stage Manager. Geof Rumney; Lighting. Peter Hoderness; Musicians. Andrew de Tilga, John Summers and Peter Deane-Butcher.

Cast: Trixie, Nancye Hayes; Pearl, Maggie Kirkpatrick.

The borderland between Memory Lane and homages is a marsh. Sideshow Alley slogged through this middleground, I thought, while trying to decide where to go. The second half of the show is definitely a homage — a tribute very well paid to the panache of sideshow entertainers. The whip-cracking performance left me wishing that 'showmanship' was all that the evening was supposed to be about, that I could forget the two tough-but-pathetic ladies whose life-stories were the substance of the first act.

Sideshow Alley is a two-person cabaret in the American theatre tradition. (without elaborating. I'd like to insist that there is a club-cabaret tradition and a theatre-cabaret tradition in the United States, and Robyn Archer's script for Sideshow Alley has exactly caught the nuances of the latter. Its only less-than-perfect feature is the occasional banality of the quips between the songs.) Pearl and Trixie are two aging tycoons — or dykoons — of the sideshow circuit, and the first act tries to demonstrate the solidarity that exists between them although their common bond, the business, is wearing thin.

The economic straights of the sideshow-business itself, however, are very much under-played. What we are shown is the impact of a dying business on the personal relationships involved. To my mind, this is a very un-Brechtian emphasis that Robyn Archer didn't intend. Sideshow Alley without the caustic economic criticism sounds too much like Carousel.

All of the rest of the show's faults can be laid either at the feet of the Paris Theatre's architects (the theatre design forces cabaret to be played like British music-hall) or at the miscasting. Nancye Hayes and Maggie Kirkpatrick are not the fifty-year-olds that the script suggests. It was a lost opportunity — these roles should have been given to the oldest and grittiest actresses capable of handling them. It might have been a start in Australian theatre of the sassy, snappy old woman as comedienne — our own Beatrice Lillie or Margaret Rutherford. Instead, as it comes out in this production, Nancye Hayes has been pushed too far towards the pluck and swagger of the young Ethel Merman in Annie Get Your Gun.

The rapport between the three musicians onstage at times overshadows what is supposed to be the solidarity between Pearl and Trixie. Andrew de Teliga, John Summers and Peter Deane-Butcher took to the stage for one song which stole the show on opening night — probably because it was so delightfully stupid, with none of the hectoring-lecturing tones that coloured the women's numbers. The three young men could play at being cute and were charming; however, when Hayes and Kirkpatrick played at being cute, they quickly jeopardized the role of themselves as tough spruikers. The only way to have prevented the boys from upstaging Trixie and Pearl would have been to cast them also as sideshow-alley characters — putting the throw-a-tune act on par with the throw-a-ball concessions.

Nancye Hayes and Maggie Kirkpatrick in Sideshow Alley.
A HARD GOD
Peter Kenna
Direction Nick Enright
Design Bill Haycock
Lighting Design Nigel Levings
PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY production
of Patricia Kennedy in

WINGS
Arthur Kopit
Direction Malcolm Robertson
Design Richard Prins
Lighting Design Keith Edmundson

A NEW MUSICAL
Book by David Allen
Direction Ariette Taylor
Music Glen Henrich
Lyrics Nick Enright
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

PYGMALION
Bernard Shaw
Direction Kevin Palmer
Design Sue Russell
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

Wedekind’s

LULU
SCENES OF SEX, MURDER AND POWER
Adaptation Louis Nowra
Direction Jim Sharman
Set Design Brian Thomson
Costumes Design Luciana Arrighi
Music Sarah de Jong
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

This production tours to the Drama Theatre of Sydney Opera House,
presented by Sydney Theatre Company.

THE GOLDEN VALLEY
Dorothy Hewett
Direction Malcolm Moore
Design Sue Russell
Music Jim Cotter
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

PLUS AT THEATRE 62

UPSIDE DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD
David Allen
Direction Kevin Palmer
Design Ken Wilby
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

FAREWELL
BRISBANE LADIES
Doreen Clarke
Direction Kevin Palmer
Design Sue Russell
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

AS YOU LIKE IT
William Shakespeare
Direction Nick Enright and Michael Fuller
Design Richard Roberts
Lighting Design Nigel Levings
develop. Round and round they prowl in a prison, unable to stretch, explore or and this is why. Insights, ironies, jokes, and the crises are static, revealing only the evident. Williamson, are trapped in the stylistic all the strengths for which one values compassion, concern for moral structure — all the strengths for which one values Williamson, are trapped in the stylistic prison, unable to stretch, explore or develop. Round and round they prowl in a
circle, appearing ever smaller and smaller when they should be getting larger, expanding, imposing their authority. This is a pity, as the dramatist's perception of our society is too valuable to be trivialised in this way. La Boîte's production of Handful, which exacerbating in this spectator the old ambivalent irritation at this phase of Williamson's work, provides the chance to renew acquaintance with a not-quite Theophrastian gallery drawn from the artistic and academic middle class floated to brief and insecure prominence on the crest of the Whittam new wave. As Sally's nightmare perhaps explains, they resemble the inhabitants of a house high on a cliff with a "beautiful aspect", but the cliff is being undermined and they are edging ever closer to doom. Ambition and vitality cut with profound insecurity and self-destruction are validly observed products of a society that exalts and destroys with apparent arbitrariness — apparent if the social perspective that creates psychological patterns is removed from view, as is the case here. How easily comprehensible though, with victims and aggressors all trapped in the same falling nightmare, is the group's almost fated compulsion to deal out stabs in the back; how true that each is subconsciously expecting to be dealt one by their closest intimates. Jill's betrayal of Sally, seemingly the apex of the villainies, is a gesture almost refreshing in its boldness. Mark and Sally are clearly successful because they have united to protect each other's backs, calculatedly pooling betrayals of their friends and lovers as fuel for the running of their own defensive-offensive partnership.

The production does not let the characters rant or display untrammelled Jonsonian buffoonery. From Jennifer Blockidge's remarks about maintaining balance between comedy and seriousness, this is a deliberate decision seeking to impose tonal unity on the play's shifting naturalism. Francine Ormrod's elegant set provides an initial image of this balance, a beautiful and apt piece of design. The overall tone is even; the downward depths are explored and pain registered, but it is not big or full-blooded. The production is read as though the script were a refined tragi-comedy, and although in Handful I don't think Williamson was moving into that area, it is no discredit to treat the play as if it were.

Of the two couples, the McAlister menage is the more satisfying. Bruce Parr's academic yes-man carefully manipulated his clown persona to avoid confrontations, and Dianne Eden's Wendy portrays the gentleness which intrigues the two men, and also the underlying grit which makes her walk out on another botched compromise. Patsy McCarthy's Jill is a tough and basically moral being, self-betrayed as much by a genuine capacity for love, of her brother and of Sally, as by revenge. The Marshall duo are however given a basically low-key reading and this excises colour and gusto from the production. The play here suddenly seems to demand big charismatic personalities; likeable, lyric, self-dramatising compounds of scared ruthlessness and amoral life-force. Their attractiveness becomes that of a pleasant couple, not of embodiments of the unstoppable Will to Power that so fatefully bedazzles their friends — they do not emerge as enough of a handful to warrant the devastation they cause. Whereas the production aims at homogeneity of tone, Handful is perhaps still leaning back towards Don't Party, where grotesque humours attempt to cut loose on a stylised Jonsonian rampage only to be deflected by naturalistic confines. It is a transitional work.
Brilliant

SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU
SCANLAN

by Michael Morley


What is there to say of Max Gillies? Those who know his past work seemed comparatively unsurprised at his performances in the Chekhov and Oakley monologues. But one of the occasional rewards of being a critic is in finding word of mouth confirmed and watching a performer demonstrate the aptness of his or her high reputation. In these two monologues Gillies was the living demonstration of Shakespeare's "he hath indeed better bettered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you about".

Of course one can point to Gillies' precision, his timing, his energy, his ability to suggest with a hitch of the trousers or a shrug of the shoulder a lifetime of awkwardness or emotions thwarted. Some have suggested that the dessicated academic of the Chekhov monologue and the obsessive and manic Scanlan are too alike, the basic situations of the plays too similar to allow for variety. This is simply not true. Of course Oakley's piece, prompted as it was by the Chekhov, employs similar conventions; but it cries out to be set beside the Chekhov so that the differences and contrasts can emerge.

That they did is due primarily of course to Gillies' brilliance but also to Neil Armfield's direction. This is the second of his productions (Inside the Island was the other) I have seen and on this evidence he is possibly the most talented of the younger directors. He has what may sound a self-evident requirement for any director—a sure feel for dramatic structure, for the highs and lows of a piece, for shifts in mood and momentum. In this connection, the understated tenor of the Chekhov monologue was probably his and Gillies' happiest touch. Chekhov's ageing, hen-pecked and repressed bore emerges as a figure both of fun and pathos—an obvious enough combination, but difficult to realise when his catalogue of woes is delivered in a fairly level voice with few explosions. But with such an approach the odd moments of energy or surprise have the force of a custard pie in the audience's face: the clenched fist deliberately lowered rather than slammed on the table to emphasise a point, the sudden peering into the wings at the thought that his domestic vulture might be winging her way over the horizon towards him.

Oakley's Scanlan is a figure of more extreme swings of emotion, of more overtly displayed obsessions, the most obvious of these being his conviction that the minor talent Henry Kendall is really a major one as yet unrecognised. Oddly enough, at a second viewing (specially arranged in a University lecture theatre) Gillies' renditions of Kendall's verses were so effective that many of the audience felt there was indeed a case for a re-appraisal of the poet! And this is one of the major strengths of Oakley's play. Instead of offering up Scanlan simply to ridicule, he uses him to satirise the typical lecturer's ticks and quirks, while at the same time giving him some of the—maybe spurious—dignity that Max Beerbohm bestowed on his obsessive second-hand academic and scholar, Enoch Soames.

There are moments when Oakley's script veers awkwardly between bathos and pathos (most obviously at the end), when the introduction of details like Scanlan's past love affair jumps from the comically seedy to the awkwardly sentimental. But these are minor quibbles when one considers how the author has managed to compress into barely 50 minutes both the portrait of a failure and a satire on all such failures who still refuse to lie down. Scanlan's domestic troubles, his battles to convince himself, his audience and his academic antagonist of Kendall's importance, his quixotic, manic willingness to take things personally, all these are beautifully caught in Gillies' performance; it is comic acting of the highest order, in which the performer catches precisely that combination of thing and person that is the root of the comic.

Max Gillies as Scanlan.
Important things to say

BENT

By Noel Purdon


Cast: Max, John Hargreaves; Rudy, Michael Gow; Wolf, Roland Naumann; SS Captain Guard, Simon Burvill-Holmes; SS Officer, James Laurie; Greta, Wayne Jarratt; Freddie, John Edmund; Horst, Tom Considine; SS Captain, Peter Schwarz. Prisoners, Raymond Jurgens, Russell Manyon.

(Martin Sherman's Bent is a powerful, political, emotionally devastating play about the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis. Its most harrowing scene is the rock-moving, verbal love-making which occurs between the two gay prisoners: Max who has had intercourse with a dead woman to prove he is "straight" and therefore earn the higher badge of "Jew"; and the unashamed, passionate Horst. It is more than an historical document. It reaches deliberately at the consciousness of the modern audience to point out that homosexuals are still oppressed in exactly the same way, by people who would never remotely connect themselves with Nazi ideology. Homosexuals still continue daily to move society's mental rocks meaninglessly from one side of the mental stage to the other.

John Tranter's production is technically excellent. His sense of staging is impeccable. Richard Roberts, who designed the sets, and Nigel Levings, who did lighting, have done everything required of them, and more. There have even been somewhat nervous public forums after the performance, courageously chaired by John Loney, and variously responded to by the cast, the director, and vocal members of the audience. People who have seen the Melbourne production are unanimous that the Adelaide one is better in every way.

So what's wrong with it? Firstly, the director, for all his stage sense, clearly doesn't have a political bone in his body. He encourages important historical material to glossed over, or played for laughs. He is not an intelligent director. Secondly, John Hargreaves, about whom everyone expressed rapturous gratitude for taking the main part of Max (after apparent soul-torturing doubts in Melbourne) simply cannot sustain or convince. Agony becomes petulance, anger spite, confusion sheer dishonesty. Though he may well be capable of it, he does not give an intelligent performance.

The acting honours go to Tom Considine, in a solidly felt, clearly expressed unfolding of the character of Horst. Also acutely observed by the Fine Ensemble are the various cameos of the Berlin gay scene given by Michael Gow, Wayne Jarratt and John Edmund. The S.T.C. in its present constitution deserves great praise for its strong company, and its strong selection of political and sexual material. If it appears frightened to be bold about its recent selection and venues of plays, it should take heart. There is no need to present a temporizing, apologetic face to its public, as if it had important, necessary things to say, but is fearful of conservative reaction.

It had better take a leaf out of Sherman's manuscript. The history of concealment, shame, conciliation and compromise is well documented in Bent. Unless changed radically, made public and supported by a mass of people, it ends in Dachau.
Moving and compassionate

THE ELEPHANT MAN

by Colin Duckworth


This play (or at least, this production of it) contains one of the most moving and compassionate scenes I have ever witnessed in the theatre. After that, any "criticism" pales into insubstantial triviality, but as my reaction was not shared, for example, by a sensitive and intelligent colleague who sat unmoved in the row in front, it might be worth while trying to explain this different response to the first meeting between beauty and the beast, Mrs Kendal and John Merrick.

For one thing, my colleague knew quite a lot already about the monstrous freak, Merrick, and I did not. So the confrontation between the young woman who had been selected for the job because, as an actress she would be able to hide her feelings of disgust, and the victim of neurofibromatosis, with his lopsided slobbering hole for a mouth, soft, spongy cauliflower-like growths all over his head and body, and elephantine arms and leg, was an occasion that not even years of careful viewing of Dr Who monsters had prepared me for. My sensibilities were still open to attack by the fragile attempts of these two ill-matched people to begin their pathetic and painful struggle towards impossible love. So, if you want to maintain your innocence too, put away this review until after you have seen the play. You may react differently, for example, when you know—as I have since

found out—that Merrick never, in fact, met Mrs Kendal. So full marks to Bernard Pomerance, and nuts to Sheridan Morley who has downed the play as a mere series of sketchy little documentary scenes "giving us facts and very little else".

In 1886 John Merrick was rescued from the degradation of being a fairground freak by Frederick Treves, Surgeon-Extraordinary to Queen Victoria, who lodged him comfortably at the London Hospital until he died, still a young man, four years later. Within months of his rescue, Merrick became transformed from
The psychic world
of the actor

A MAN OF MANY PARTS

by Cathy Peake


Director. Rick Billinghurst.

Noah Hope. Frederick Parslow.

Jack Hibberd's A Man of Many Parts is self-consciously situated in that uneasy, shifting psychic world that lies between an actor and his roles. It is an intricate and exhausting play, full of theatrical anecdotes and one which presents its subject both as a sort of moving, three-dimensional cryptic crossword, and as one of the anecdotes.

In general, Noah Hope — failed actor and B. Psych (Split), behaves like a fly-wheel that has lost its governor and which fluctuates between quiescence and runaway activity. His psyche is like a city under archaeological exploration waiting to be translated, restructured or simply read. Especially the latter.

Noah often conducts his search for a 'self' from a large chair with its back to the audience. And the implication that he is parading aspects of a full-blown psychosis for the impersonal probing and inspection of an audience psychiatrist is pronounced and intriguing.

From time to time it is also hard to take. For the drama of the piece tends to be narrowly confined to Noah's tendency to swing, without notice, from wild mania to black depression, and the context for the play seems tucked away in the chaotic biochemistry of a brain where curious dislocations of meaning, time, place and space conjure up images of a very knotty, malfunctioning cerebral cortex indeed.

But that is probably to take Hibberd's own metaphor for the play as 'a theatrical slice of the brain' too seriously. Somewhere inside all this raving, comedy, despair and music there is the feeling that Noah did once feel 'authentic' — though probably despite himself, and certainly a long time ago.

Now he is a lateral thinker of the most extravagant kind, and his oblique flights of ideas — which include conversations with some of the great intellectual figures of the century, make enormous demands on the concentration of his audience.

They also presuppose a sophisticated literary background. Hibberd's writing is full of puns and extremely ornate linguistic jokes of the kind James Joyce and Nabokov make. They don't always translate well on stage. He has chosen to represent his character at a time when it is no longer possible for him to look back or reflect without gross falsification and exaggeration.

And, like the true outsider he is, Noah's real and most pressing problem is how to go forward. In many ways it is as though he wants his life and his stage to be a theatre of epic and action but, instead, finds himself struck with string after string of treacherous, subordinate clauses when what he really needs is a sense of location, and a transitive verb.

Noah's wit is lazerating, acerbic and often self-deprecating and most of his energy is given over to his need for boundaries for himself and his world — a need for the 'edge' of things. But he is also a ham actor, and in Frederick Parslow's hands he becomes an actor playing a ham actor — a curious sight and a curious sound, particularly the latter for the sound shuttles back and forth between intimate asides barely audible in the centre of the auditorium, and raucous shouting, not to mention the odd kookaburra, gun shot and passage from Liszt.

With only a crazy 'metabolism', a tadpole in a wash basin, and a trunk of grimy old stage props to play with, Parslow's performance in his first one-man show is strenuous though not entirely successful. Both he and director Rick Billinghurst seem to have had trouble finding a line for the play, and have settled for a sort of cat and mouse game with the audience and a hit and miss approach to its humour.

When this approach works, Noah emerges with a harsh strength and poignancy, when it doesn't the play falls with a thump into the gruelling and inhospitable world of noise.
What went wrong?

THE SAME SQUARE OF DUST

By Margot Luke


Director, Stephen Barry; Designer, Tony Tripp; Lighting, Duncan Ord; Stage Manager, Leonie Smith.

Cast: Flo, Rosemary Barr; Wyles, Ivan King; Thelma, Liz Horne; Keith Anderson, Alan Cassell; Smithy, Paul Mason.

A sad moment in the annals of the Perth Playhouse: Perth writer Mary Gage's subtle and imaginative play about Charles Kingsford Smith closed after only one week.

It should not have happened. Energetic, though probably misguided advance publicity, wide media coverage, an attractive production with a predominantly good cast. What went wrong?

Throughout there was a basic misunderstanding about the kind of play it is. The Same Square of Dust, even though employing the same mini-scene format as other recent Australian biographical plays, is less free-wheeling, less aggressive — in fact more fragile than its peers.

Advance publicity was not doing it a favour by claiming that "perhaps more so than Breaker Morant, Mary Gage's script could well become the basis of a truly great motion picture". To the intending audience or critic this suggested a hard-hitting, gutsy play, which might rival the current mass-audience heavyweights. In fact, the play is a delicate, often funny, always perceptive study of relationships and attitudes. The critic of the influential West Australian weighed in with a review that managed to miss the point altogether: it blamed the excellent lead, Paul Mason, for playing the character of Kingsford Smith as a loveable opportunist (which was precisely what the author had clearly intended), instead of the cliche the critic had expected "in the mould from which popular heroes are made". The review was headlined "Smithy given a pale image" — enough to put intending patrons off entirely.

The portrait of "Smithy" as a personable and irresponsible larrikin is, in fact, refreshing and honest. The play introduces him with humour and style — in a pub, having stood up a doting girl-friend (later his wife), because he was busy working on a deal to finance his obsession with record-breaking flights. At breakneck speed we are taken through courtship, marriage (Australian-style, with the "mate" proving more important than the wife); the flying triumphs, the divorce, the broken friendship and bitter legal wrangles — to the final drama — Smithy lost, and the estranged mate sacrificing his own life looking for the lost plane.

The episodic treatment was echoed beautifully by Tony Tripp's decorative roll-on roll-off miniature sets, whilst the silver Icarus-figure suspended over the empty stage made its symbolic point gracefully.

Interspersed with the personal confrontations that made up the "private life" of the hero, screened newsreel footage of the public events was used effectively to extend the scope of the play.

Lively support for Paul Mason's taut and nervy Smithy were Rosemary Barr as a raunchy bar-maid with a heart of gold and Ivan King as The Captain, an archetypal Aussie with a streak of laconic pessimistic humour. Alan Cassell as the stolid and disillusioned mate Andy was most impressive — especially in the scene where the plodding, eternally good-guy breaks out into anger and self-assertion. Liz Horne was perhaps too much the child-bride, starting wide-eyed and flapperish, and growing into waspish petulance.

The lesson to be learnt from the failure of this venture is probably that subtlety will only be tolerated if it is wrapped up in pretentious "arty" treatment (which this play avoids); and that episodic biography is only acceptable if it is presented in the now standard grotesque comic-strip format, preferably with offensive or libellous potential to give it sensation value. The Same Square of Dust is an understated play, which might have done better in a smaller theatre, aimed at a more realistically defined audience.

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Late Night Show: Twilight Zone by Stephen Holt. Commences Jan 8.
HER MAJESTY’S THEATRE (2123411)
The Best Little Whore House in Texas by Larry King and Peter Masterson; directed by Jerry Yoder; with Lorraine Bayly, Alfred Sandor and Mona Richardson. Until Jan 31.
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (262526)
THE KING O’MALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (333817)
The Stables Theatre: A Very Good Year by Bob Ellis; directed by Mick Rodger; with music by Patrick Flynn. Dec 3-21.
KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (921415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson’s Point: The Robin Hood Show by Perry Quinton and Paul Chubb; directed by Perry Quinton; with Leonore Smith, Michael Ferguson and Ross Hohnen. Until Christmas.
LIVING FLAME LUNCHTIME THEATRE (3571200)
Revolving Tinkle by N  F Simpson; directed by Peter Whitford; with Joan Bruce, Elaine Lee and Russell Newman. Until Dec 5.
MARIAN STREET THEATRE (4983166)
MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (9776585)
At the Loft, a musical review with The Toppano family and Lorrae Desmond. Until Jan 26.
NEW THEATRE (5193403)
We Still Call Home Australia by Foveaux Kirby and Peter Stephens; directed by Ian Tasker; musical direction by John Short. Throughout December.
Colonial Experience by Walter Cooper; directed by Frank McNamara. Commences in New Year.
NIMROD THEATRE (6995003)
Upstairs: Celluloid Heroes by David Williamson; directed by John Bell; with Kate Fitzpatrick, Robin Ramsay, Kevin Smith, Barbara Stephens, Peter Sumner, Henri Szept and Alan Wilson. Dec 2-Jan 11.
Judgement by Barry Collins; directed by Bill Glott; with Malcolm Robertson. Commences Jan 7.
Late Night Show: The Heartache and Sorrow Show with Cathy Downes and Jenny Ludlam. Dec 5-27.
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 until Dec 14.

PARK ROYAL CANBERRA

THE ROCKS PLAYERS (699 3503)

STM JAMES PLAYHOUSE
SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
Such Is Life by Peter Barclay and Ken London, Colin Allen, Bryan Jones and Jan 10-23.

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)

ST JAMES PLAYHOUSE
SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
Female Teenage Reflections created by the cast and directed by Barry Hayes. Until end Jan.

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SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (34 8018)

I'm Getting My Act Together And Taking It On The Road; director, Allen Harvey. Hobart in late Dec and touring Tas in Jan.

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)


For entries contact Anne Campbell on (049) 64470.

VIC

THEATRE

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543 2828)

Alice Through The Looking Glass by Mixed Company. To Dec 12.

Aladdin And His Wonderful Lamp adapted by Frank Howsen; director, Marie Cumisky; music by Robert Gavin. Jan 5-25.

AREN A THEATRE (24 9667)

School programme commences in February.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)

Front Theatre: Cape Kelly's Road Show with the Ensemble; director, Mick Lathouris; choreographer, Bob Thornycroft. Throughout Dec to Jan. Death Et Al., (the two plays Request Concert and Quick Death To Infinity) by Richard Murphett; with Margaret Cameron, Bob Thornycroft, and Mark Minchin. Dec 11-24.

ARTS COUNCIL (529 4355)

Touring programme commences in Feb.

COMEDY CAFE THEATRE

RESTAURANT (419 2869)


Upstairs: Doing His Thing by Barry Dickens; starring Barry Dickens. Dec-Jan.

DRAMA RESOURCE CENTRE (347 5649)

To D or Not to D by TIE Team. Touring schools until Dec 17. School programme commences in Feb.

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)

We're Not Trying To Be Provocative It's Just The Way We Are by Los Trios Ring Barkus and Elsa Davis. Dec-Jan.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 3211)

Evita, a musical based on the life story of Eva Peron; director, Harold Prince; choreographer, Larry Fuller; composer, Andrew Lloyd Webber; Lyrics by Tim Rice; musical director, Peter Casey. Dec-Jan.

LA MAMA THEATRE (347 6085)

Eros in Satyrplay by Daniel Kahans. To Dec 7.

LA FORFEIT RESTAURANT (572 1394)


LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6225)

The King Size Whittles. Throughout Dec.

Momma's Little Horror Show director, Nigel Triffitt. Jan 15. Upstairs: An assortment of different acts from The Mini Buskettes to Los Trios Ring Barkus.

THE MILL THEATRE COMPANY (22 2318)

Community Access Workshops: Mill Night, Run Of The Mill, and Mill Club. MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)

Athenaum Theatre: The Man Who Came To Dinner by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman; director, Simon Chilver; designer, Anne Fraser. To Jan 24.

Athenaem II: Demolition Job by Gordon Graham; director, Judith Alexander; designer, Christopher Smith. To Jan 24.

Russell Street: Just One Last Dance by Robert Hewitt; director, John Sumner; designer, Tanya McCallin. Dec 10-Feb 7.

MOUNTUBEANK (376 7364)

Touring secondary schools in the metropolitan area, throughout Dec: Hanging Out director, Alison Richards. OPEN STAGE (347 7505)

Ghosts by Ibsen; director, Darryl Emerson; presented by Theatre Spam. To Dec 10-20.

PLAYBO Y THEATRE COMPANY (63 4888)

Upstairs: Hosanna! by Michel Tremblay; director, Murray Copland; with Robert Essex and Vernon Wells. To Dec 20.

Downstairs: Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World by David Allen; director, Murray Copland; with Lindy Davies, Carrillo Gaftner, Kirsty Child and Peter Paulson. To Dec 13.

UNIVERSAL WORKSHOP (419 3411)

Max Gillies in two one-man shows: Smoking Is A Health Hazard and Scanlan by Barry Oakley. Throughout Dec.

WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE COMPANY (370 7034)

Girls devised and performed by Linda Waters. Touring different venues Dec and Jan.

School For Clowns director, David Swann. Dec 5-18.

Just a Simple Bloke director, Phil Thomson. Opens in Dec.

MAJOR AMATEUR COMPANIES

Basis Theatre Group (762 1082)

Clayton Theatre Group (878 1702)

Heidelberg Rep. (49 2262)

Malvern Theatre Company (211 0020)

Pumpkin Theatre (42 8237)

Williamstown Little Theatre (528 4267)

1812 Theatre (796 8624)

DANCE

NATIONAL THEATRE (534 0221)

Faust by Charles Gounod. presented by the Globe Opera Company. Dec 3, 4, 5, 6.

Marilyn Byrne Ballet School. Dec 8-10.


The Victorian Ballet School. Dec 14-16.

Kew Citizen's Band. Dec 19.

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 2911)

Performances by varied ballet schools throughout Dec.

Australian Ballet School presents a graduation performance. Throughout Dec.

For entries contact Connie Kramer on 267 5938.

WA

THEATRE

DOLPHIN THEATRE (325 3399)

University Dramatic Society: Cinderella pantomime. From Jan 9.

HAYMAN THEATRE (350 7026)

WA Theatre Company and Theatrego-round presents Mr Ugg And The Bionic Budgie writer and director, Tony Nicholls; with Barrie Barkla and a seven foot bionic budgie.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)


Charlie's Aunt by Brandon Thompson; director, Raymond Omedee; with Glen Hitchcock, Rosemary Barr, Ivan King, Vick Hawkins.Jan 6-24.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL (381 2403)

Vanities by Jack Heifner; director, Peter Morris; with Leith Taylor, Alisa Piper, Jenny Davis. From Nov 19.

THE MAGIC MIRROR THEATRE COMPANY

Margaret River Show Band by John Aitken; director, Mike Morris. From Dec 1.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE (325 3500)

Oliver director, Stephen Barry; with Margaret Ford and Edgar Metcalfe. Nov 20-Dec 20.

For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639.

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February 1981 issue includes:

Theatre into the '80s
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THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD No.
28.

Name ........................................
Address ........................................
P code ........................................

1. Eruptated on Southern footwear (5)
2. Coward's just deserts? (8)
3. Steely choice of play (2, 3, 9)
4. This always gives the first woman the right to another helping (8)
5. Pom touring the east in a Shakespeare play (6)
6. Similar to a strange sauna logo (5)
7. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be ----" (Wordsworth) (5)
8. Spoon with the beaver (5)
9. A novice following the rodent in the plant — how brotherly! (9)
10. Red Una put in a tizzy by the poet (6)
11. Ditch a plane (model one) for the heir (8)
12. The undiscerning throw out India's mint rice (14)
13. He protects the horned beasts wandering around a swamp of note (8)
14. Five hundred beers consumed in the valleys (5)

Down

1. Making one come up against an obstruction (12)
2. A number pronounced above, we hear (9)
3. Play a tune in time with drums, trumpets and horns (5)
4. Removes the dishes and departs (6, 3)
5. There are three points about the chief of police that are sick-making (9)
6. You dined late, it's said, having become thin (9)
7. Bee-buzz (5)
8. Shylock might have been 18 with them (5, 7)
9. Gear for approaching the house? (9)
10. Trimmer way to share pile (5)
11. Pub's bound to hop up North (5)
12. Purity bewitching siren (5)
13. Sound attempt to publicise the union (5)
14. Southern smoothie with a wad of notes (4)

The winner of last month's crossword was Mr Scott Davies of The Spit, Sydney, N.S.W. The first correct entry drawn on Dec. 27 will receive one year's free subscription to Theatre Australia.