Theatre Australia: Australia's magazine of the performing arts 5(6) February 1981

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ADelaide dance theatre — expanding their operations

where is opera heading in the eighties?

Ray Barrett as Robbo in the ABC's Sporting Chance

Tv Drama 1981
The Sydney Theatre Company presents

THE MAN FROM MUKINUPIN
by DOROTHY HEWETT

Music composed by
JIM COTTER

Directed by
RODNEY FISHER

Starring (in alphabetical order):
RUTH CRACKNELL
MAGGIE DENCE
JUDI FARR
COLIN FRIELS
JOHN GADEN
RON HADDRIK
JANE HARDERS
NONI HAZLEHURST

Sets by
SHAUN GURTON

Lighting by
NIGEL LEVINGS

Costumes by
ANNA SENIOR

Musical direction by
SARAH DE JONG

Design co-ordination by
MELODY COOPER

Choreography by
CHRISTINE KOLTAI

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE Drama Theatre
February 5 to March 18
DEPARTMENTS
3/COMMENT
4/INFO
9/WHISPERS RUMOURS AND FACTS/Norman Kessell
45/GUIDE/Theatre Opera Dance

SPOTLIGHT
10/ARMFIELD — ADELAIDE'S BIG GAMBLE
13/1981 PERTH FESTIVAL — A GOOD ONE
15/THE CHOIR
16/AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE — EXPANDING ITS OPERATION/Michael Morley

FEATURE
18/TELEVISION DRAMA 1981/Michael Hohensee

FILM
24/ THE CLUB, FATTY FINN/Elizabeth Riddell

INTERNATIONAL
25/USA/CHARMED CIRCLE/Karl Levet
26/UK/OLD ACTORS NEVER DIE/Irving Wardle
27/ITI FUTURE HAPPENINGS ABROAD

DANCE
28/ANNA KARENINA AND CINDERELLA/William Shoubridge

OPERA
31/GYPSY BARON AND THE FUTURE FOR OPERA/Ken Healey

REVIEWS
33/ACT/Marguerite Wells
34/NSW/CELLULOID HEROES, A VERY GOOD YEAR/John McCallum
35/THE PRECIOUS WOMAN/Michelle Field
36/A SHAKESPEARE COMPANY/Dennis Biggins
37/GOLDEN PATHWAY ANNUAL/Tony Barclay
38/YOU, THE NIGHT AND THE HOUSE WINE/Barry O'Connor
39/QLD/ERROL FLYNN/Jeremy Pidgman
CRUSHED BY DESIRE/Don Batchelor
40/SA/A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY, TALLEY'S FOLLY, THE CHRISTIAN BROTHER/Michael Morley
41/VIC/THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER/Colin Duckworth
42/NED KELLY'S SISTER'S TRAVELLING CIRCUS/Suzanne Spunner
43/WA/VANITIES/Cliff Gillam

BOOKS
44/TRAVELLING NORTH/John McCallum
errol bray's
the choir

performed by david atkins simon burke tyler coppin jim holt peter kowitz tony sheldon david slingsby director neil armfield designer eamon d'arcy lighting peter smith in association with shopfront theatre at nimrod
Assessment — not ASIO

Artistic worth is a difficult quality to assess, but to do so is an activity which reviewers, critics, academics, artists, producers and entrepreneurs all attempt, for differing reasons. In this age of subsidy quantitative assessment is also something that funding bodies have the responsibility to undertake, especially when the ever increasing demands for money have to be met by a diminishing yearly total.

In the theatre world it is well known that funding bodies, state and federal, scrutinise very carefully the financial progress of theatre companies and relate grants to economic management and good housekeeping; the permanent staff of agencies like the Australia Council. Theatre Board have between them a high level of knowledge and qualifications in the areas of economics and accounting. But what of the artistic side of an artist's or company's work; how is that audited?

For the last three years the Theatre Board has been working at a scheme of assessment which involves some 230 personnel around the country. This group is composed of theatre practitioners, directors, critics and "intelligent members of the general public"; a different two or three of them attend each production of every subsidised theatre company and then file reports to the Theatre Board. At the end of the year the Australia Council staff work through the reports and, this year for the first time, send a general summary, in end of the year the Australia Council staff file reports to the Theatre Board. At the end of the year the Australia Council staff work through the reports and, this year for the first time, send a general summary, in confidence, to the company concerned for the company to dismiss him as an appeasement to the Australia Council. The Board assessment's criticism of Marian Street any criticism was apparently not of what was done, but of how well or otherwise it was done. They say they did not request or in any way seek to influence the dismissal of Alastair Duncan.

But however well motivated and effective the assessment scheme may be — and apparently most theatre companies have given very positive responses to it, requesting only more detail — the anonymity of the assessors does leave a substantial area open to attack from people who may feel wronged by the reports.

The reasons for not revealing any names are partly obvious; like restaurant reviewers, assessors want to see a production or company under normal circumstances and not be wined or seduced into approval. Equally, the Theatre Board staff argue, who would consent to be an assessor if theatre companies knew what they were up to?

Even a single list of all assessors' names, with no details of attendances at specific productions, available only on request, could be too dangerous the Theatre Board believe. Although certain members of the Theatre Board are themselves assessable practitioners and do have full knowledge of the identities of all assessors.

Certainly protection of assessors is important, but such a degree of secrecy could lead to accusations of a Theatre Board ASIO; of a government body being less than open and above board; and any number of suspicions about the incompetence and prejudice of assessors.

The Theatre Board must be applauded for and encouraged in its efforts to measure artistic quality in the fairest and best way, but it is to be hoped that for its own sake, it takes every precaution against anything that could be seen to be secretive or underhand.

One does not doubt the integrity of the Theatre Board, but the lives of companies and people are at stake, and it is important that justice should not only be done, but also be seen to be done.

In fact the Theatre Board had told Marian Street a year in advance that they were planning to phase out their funding after 1980, but relented on application and put the company under review rather than on notice. The Theatre Board make a point of saying they do not try to influence a theatre company's artistic policy, but make their assessment in terms of the stated policy of the theatre. In the case of Marian Street any criticism was apparently not of what was done, but of how well or otherwise it was done. They say they did not request or in any way seek to influence the dismissal of Alastair Duncan.

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The Amazing Momma's Little Horror Show
Photo: G. Harrison.

**INFO**

**NIGEL TRIFFIT'S ELECTRIFYING ODYSSEY RETURNS**

Momma's Little Horror Show, the highly successful adult puppet spectacular has returned to the Last Laugh in Melbourne, for a sixteen week season. The show attained almost mythical status after its last season there; it still holds the Last Laugh's box office record and hundreds of people were turned away.

Momma's was originally created by Nigel Triffit in 1976 at the now defunct Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, the board of which has made available the props and puppets for the new season. In Hobart it was originally only forty minutes long, and grew to full length for its tour of Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Indonesia. Triffit calls this version Momma's Mk 6 and says every detail has been fine tuned with some twelve minutes of new sequences added.

The rebuilding and rehearsing of Momma's has taken six months and has also resulted in the formation of a new company, The Australian Puppet Theatre, which may lay claim to being the adult puppet company. It has reunited members of the old Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, many of whom were no longer working in puppetry: Frank Italiano, Patti de Fois (Pat Woollocott), Winston Appleyard and Fred Wallace.

After producing Wildstars at the Edinburgh Festival for the Australian Dance Theatre, Nigel Triffit met up with John Pinder in Amsterdam where they planned the new season (and Triffit managed to get teargassed in a riot). Following Melbourne an extensive European tour is planned, but not yet finalised.

A particular coup for Triffit; ADT's Wildstars will be running in Melbourne concurrently with Momma's in late Feb.

**MORE MUKINUPIN**

With productions last year in Perth and Adelaide, Dorothy Hewett's Man From Mukinupin starts 1981 with two productions opening within a week of each other this month. The Sydney Theatre Company's, directed by Rodney Fisher starts on February 5, and the Melbourne Theatre Company's on February 11, directed by Judith Alexander.

Rodney Fisher is an experienced Hewett director, and feels that Mukinupin is to date her most mature poetic drama, because she delves not only into her recent experience, but into the background and mythology of her childhood in the wheatbelt of WA. It therefore has the depth of grassroots knowledge and feeling as well as the full range of poetry and experience.

Fisher feels he has learnt from the history of the show to date, that it is less of a musical than has been understood in other productions; the music is more used to extend the images, and springs out of the action. Some songs were especially written in Perth to fill out the musical idea, and Rodney Fisher is dropping one new one — a duet between Jack and Mercy — and returning a duet for Polly and Cecil back to a solo for Cecil. He would like the audiences to see there's a level in the play beyond the obvious one of music, and light and dark, for him this play, more than any of Hewett's previous ones, captures that moment of puberty, when the innocence of childhood is clouded by a new awareness and all the terrors that go with it.

Judith Alexander is new to directing Dorothy Hewett, but is happy to be backed up by a woman playwright, designer, Anna French, composer, Elizabeth Rule, and the female predominance in the cast. This wasn't, however, a policy decision, each was chosen individually.

In Sydney Noni Hazelhurst will recreate her original performance as Polly/Lilly, Colin Friels plays Jack. Harry and the cast includes John Gaden, Ruth Cracknell and Ron Haddrick.

**NEXT ADELAIDE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR**

Australian stage director Elijah Moshinsky has been appointed Artistic Director of the 1984 Adelaide Festival. He will take up his appointment at the end of the '82 Festival. By announcing the appointment so early the Festival Board are in effect giving Moshinsky officially accredited status to begin the planning and negotiation well in advance.

Elijah Moshinsky's most recent connection with Adelaide was as producer of the AO's Boris Godunov which was presented at the Festival Theatre in November. He also produced Wozzeck for the AO which premiered at the 1976 Festival.

He is a graduate of Melbourne University, and lectured for three years in History at Monash. In 1970 he went to study for a doctorate at Oxford and directed with the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Society. General Director of the AO which premiered at the 1976 Festival, he will take up his appointment at the end of the '82 Festival.

By announcing the appointment so early Moshinsky formally accredited status to the Festival Theatre. He is a graduate of Melbourne University, and lectured for three years in History at Monash. In 1970 he went to study for a doctorate at Oxford and directed with the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Society. General Director of the AO which premiered at the 1976 Festival, he will take up his appointment at the end of the '82 Festival.

Elijah Moshinsky, composer, Elizabeth Rule, and the female predominance in the cast. This wasn't, however, a policy decision, each was chosen individually.

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Elijah Moshinsky

**THEATRE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1981**
ENSEMBLE 21ST ANNIVERSARY

Sydney's Ensemble Theatre celebrated its twenty fifth birthday in January with the opening of its latest production, Deeds. The company is still in the converted boathed it started in, in Milson's Point, but the sketch shows how architect Alan Williams sees the new look Ensemble, for which fund raising is in progress at the moment.

Hayes Gordon, one of the zealots who started the second oldest rep company in Australia, is still its artistic director, and claims that in 1958 these original enthusiasts "felt the need to fix".

"Audiences were malnourished on barely pap. Talents were draining away from Australia. Godot refused to arrive with brand new theatres and heaps of acting roles. Our own artistic standards justified the perennial apologia... 'But we're only a young country'. In time each of these issues has improved — even if the artists had to provide our own theatres. There should be no doubt that the Ensemble contributed substantially towards these improvements."

THE DRAMA STUDIO

The Drama Studio Sydney Ltd (formerly the Nimrod Acting School), is now entering its fifth year of successful operations. The school incorporates three approaches to an actor's training: the Stanislavski method, which is explored in the acting class, and forms the basis for work on texts; Rudolf Laban, through whose observations of movement European modern dance found direction — his findings have been applied to actors by Yat Malmgren, who plays Peron's mistress, will be coming home to Sydney as a fully-fledged actress — she last worked there as a receptionist at the Kingsgate Hotel. Having done a little amateur acting she asked Larry Fuller, while he and Hal Prince were staying at the Kingsgate during the auditions, how she would go. Although they had officially closed they agreed to see her, and Laura went straight into a major role.

Like everywhere else the bookings for Sydney are rolling in and had reached 50,000 by the first week of January (opening night is February 14), which meant that already forty performances were fully booked. London producer David Land will be at the Sydney opening along with writer Tim Rice; Hal Prince may be able to make it, and confirmation is still awaited on whether Robert Stigwood will be there. If all goes well Evita should run for about one year at the Sydney Her Majesty's.

QLD OPERA RUMBLINGS

The early eighties for Opera in Brisbane see a new beginning. The old Queensland Opera Company has, in the last month, formally closed and is attempting to become a new company and take up residence in the new Cultural Centre. The move into Sydney for the final year he also directed All's Well That Ends Well for the BBC Shakespeare series and will be doing A Midsummer Night's Dream this year.

Jim Sharman is also very pleased at Elijah Moshinsky's appointment, having made clear from the start that he would only be involved for one Festival.
MAGPIE STATE THEATRE-IN-EDUCATION COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

State Theatre Company
Adelaide Festival Centre
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Director Malcolm Moore
Assistant Director Kelvin Harman
Writer/Researcher John Lonie
Actors Marilyn Allen
Caroline Baker
Helene Burden
Maree Cochrane
Kelvin Harman
Geoffrey Revel
Igor Sas
Paul Sommer

Presenting five new programs for children throughout South Australia in 1981 plus world premiere of Dorothy Hewett's GOLDEN VALLEY at the Playhouse for Come Out 81 Festival.

Magpie tours with the assistance of Australian National Railways
(Winner of the 1980 Business in the Arts Award for the best Sponsorship of the Arts outside the Metropolitan areas of the Capital Cities).
AWARD TO ROBYN ARCHER

The Sydney Critics Circle award for 1980 went to Robyn Archer — presented at the ceremony on January 19th at the Theatre Royal. As she is overseas, Rodney Fisher collected the award on her behalf, as Director of Archer's Songs From Side-show Alley. She won the award for writing Tonight Lola Blau and A Star Is Born.

Very close contenders for the Award were John Bell, followed by Noni Hazlehurst and George Hutchinson/Lex Marinos. Also nominated were Neil Armfield and Henri Szeps.

The members of the Circle are: Henry Kippax (Chairman), John West, Katharine Brisbane, Robert Page, Norman Kessell, Michael Le Moignan, Harry Robinson, Taffy Davies, Bill Courciere and Frank Harris.

NIMROD CHANGES

It's not only the departure of Neil Armfield (see Spotlight) and the arrival of Aubrey Mellor as the latest artistic director, that is causing changes at Nimrod, there's movement right through the company.

Margie Wright, previously Senior Stage Manager, has replaced Grahame Murray (another defector to the State Theatre Company of SA) as Production Manager. Margie left the Flinders stage management course to go to the Hunter Valley Theatre Company in Newcastle and then moved to Nimrod four years ago. Since then she has worked on most of their shows Upstairs and Downstairs, including the tour of Elocution of Benjamin Franklin with Gordon Chater. Replacing her as Senior Stage Manager is John Woodland, also lately from the HVTc, and latterly from Flinders University.

Christine Doutty has taken over from Ailsa Carpenter in the Publicity Department; she comes from five years publicity work in Sydney, mainly in the media — film and recording, and originally from New Zealand.

NIMROD AND PAUL ILES

Ailsa Carpenter writes:

In all the words that have been written and publicly spoken re Nimrod's tenth birthday celebration, the name of Paul Iles, their General Manager for three of those ten years, has not been mentioned. I appreciate that the emphasis has been on those who started the theatre but nevertheless when summing up the history of Nimrod, Paul Iles' huge contribution to their success should be in the record books.

I quote from Harry Kippax's article (Theatre Australia Dec/Jan) "Success flowed, above all, from sheer entrepreneurial enterprise, nerve and flair, etc." These words particularly apply to Paul — his touring of productions overseas put the name of Nimrod on the international map, an exiting step forward for all those artistically involved and for all Australian theatre generally.

As the profession's national magazine I think this a fitting place to record thanks to an adventurous visionary.

AUSTRALIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

This Australian song-and-dance man is the smart new logo for the Australian Drama Festival, to be held in Adelaide from April 2-20. More than thirty companies from all over Australia will be taking part in this biennial event, which is billed as "a celebration of indigenous Australian drama, and a promotion of our multi-cultural identity". Unlike the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the ADF is a home-grown event, with all the productions written, directed and performed by Australians old and new.

The Festival programme will be announced early this month, and will include street, conventional, historical, pub, ethnic, late night, kids, Aboriginal, wimins, and music theatre in a variety of venues around the Festival city.

There will be a full-time playwright-in-residence working with a group of young people throughout the Festival, and a daylong Forum discussion on Easter Sunday with a number of well-known and controversial speakers. Topics for discussion include "The Smell of the Crowd" (or Audience Generation), "Yeah, but waddya do for a Real Job?" (or Training for the Future) and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" (or Theatre In and For the Future).

The Festival will culminate with a riotous weekend bash, including an 'event' at a winery, a grand bush dance and a closing night showcase of avant garde entertainment!
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- DOWNRIVER
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- EARNEST IN LOVE
- THE FANTASTICKS
- FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
- FOLLIES
- A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM
- GUYS AND DOLLS
- HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
- HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING
- I DO I DO
- JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
- JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS
- KISMET
- LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET
- A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
- THE MOST HAPPY FELLA
- THE MUSIC MAN
- ONCE UPON A MATTRESS
- PACIFIC OVERTURES
- THE PAJAMA GAME
- PHILEMON
- PINOCCHIO
- PIPPIN
- RIVERWIND
- THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM
- 1776
- STARTING HERE STARTING NOW
- THE STINGIEST MAN IN TOWN
- TOM SAWYER
- WHERE'S CHARLEY
- WORKING

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By Norman Kessel

Noel (Let's Hear It For The Musical) Ferrier's long-promised inaugural revival of White Horse Inn is due to surface at last, but only just before next Christmas. Sponsored by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, it will open a 17-week season at Sydney's Regent Theatre on November 30, immediately following the Australian Ballet's season there with Swan Lake.

White Horse Inn will be one of the Trust's major operations for 1981, others being the Australia-wide tour of David Williamson's somewhat flawed Celluloid Heroes, the long-awaited Australian production of Whose Life Is It, Anyway? and a visit to Sydney and Queensland by the Australian Dance Theatre. In Sydney the ADT will stage its elaborate production, Wildstars, but this is too complicated to tackle on tour. So Queensland will be seeing other items from the company's repertoire. Queensland will also see a revival of The Gin Game with Leonard Teale in the role of the crotchety old man originally played here by Ron Haddrick.

Still on the Trust drawing board are a Sydney season and a tour with the Q Theatre's big 1980 success, Paradise Regained, for which a suitable venue is still being sought; the London successes Stage Struck (by Simon Gray) awaiting the simultaneous availability of the right cast and the right theatre, and Amadeus (by Peter Shaffer) about which talks are in progress on the possibility of bringing out the full London National Theatre production. If this cannot be organised, the Trust will stage an all-Australian production, but neither of the latter two plays are likely to be seen till early 1982.

Another very interesting possibility for the Trust is a new Athol Fugard play, A Lesson From Aloys, which opened on Broadway last November to ecstatic reviews - "Easily the outstanding play of the season, maybe several seasons"; "An eloquent, passionate drama about the human cost of social injustice"; "Maybe the best play yet from this author".
Robert Page assessed the recent STC turmoil.

The State Theatre Company of South Australia has been in some turmoil for a few months now; a turmoil exacerbated by repeated attacks from the press. First it was announced that Nick Enright would not "exercise his option to extend his contract beyond mid 1981" and later that Kevin Palmer was to follow suit.

There were rumours that even Paul Iles, generally considered Australia's most brilliant and innovative administrator, was unsafe in the general manager's seat and that he might make the spill of those at the top in the STC complete.

But out of it all has emerged a plan of greater audacity than many could have imagined. One of Australia's youngest directors, Neil Armfield, currently of Nimrod, has been appointed as single artistic supremo. So daring is it that, with the Board's necessary compliance, it has all the hallmarks of an Iles coup.

It was he who first spotted Armfield at Sydney University when he was directing Bartholomew Fair for SUDS and brought him to the attention of the Nimrod directorate. "You could say Paul has been a key figure," admits Armfield, "so long as that doesn't carry the connotation of anything shonky." Iles remains as General Manager at STC, but one feels he is now more out on a limb than ever before in his career.

In Adelaide the risks are all the greater. South Australia is significantly left out of the Sydney-Melbourne axis. Despite claims to being the Athens of the South and have unquestionably had the dynamism to establish the major arts festival of the southern hemisphere, it has so far failed to turn the cultural axis into a triangle.

Perhaps it takes its art too seriously; setting them on a pedestal which, far from making them secure, forces upon them impossible ideals which sound reasoning would suggest were impossible to attain, by and large, even back in classical times.

The place has been compared to a renaissance city state where wealth allows largesse. But the city patrons of the arts squat on the committees, bastions of conservatism and bourgeois values. Sadly the burghers seem unable to judge what they indulge. Christopher Hunt suspected that the Festival was no argument against bourgeois thinking, rather it confirmed it. So long as internationally prestigious avant garde artists only visit Adelaide once every two years, and then not for too long, all is well. One thinks of the impact the Berliner Ensemble made on British theatre in 1956 and feels that the same thing in Adelaide would have had little lasting influence.

The local press aligns itself with the same viewpoint. It is at its most dangerous when it sets itself up — as it incessantly does — as guardian of the city's culture (see box).

The burghers and the press in consort have been proved wrong by history in most of the major scandals. It was they who put Patrick White off playwrighting for over a decade; they who withdrew The One Day of the Year; and they who were responsible for the martyrdom of St Christopher (Hunt). Now it seems the press must take a deal of the responsibility for the exit of Enright and Palmer. A major fault was seen to be their emphasis or Australian content — a policy which in fact followed the tide of the rest of the country. In this case their hasty trial by the press and premature condemnation brought Richard Wherrett to the defence, arguing that "the evolution of new policies and their realisation in depth takes time —
certainty more than one season or six months” (The Advertiser, Letters 4.12.80.).

Ministers read the papers, and even if the artistic directors jumped and were not pushed, the blood letting to appease the body politic has happened.

Whatever the vices or virtues of the outgoing regime, what they were not given was time, yet if the STC is not to fall into disarray again before the end of 1981 it is time that must be given to Neil Armfield. Soundly, his contract (in line with Wherrett’s views) gives him three years — but the question is rather of how long the town will allow him to settle into the job.

Who is this twenty-five year old whose meteoric rise has outstripped even the bravest speculations (it’s hard to believe that it’s less than eighteen months since he directed his first professional production)? Armfield strikes one as a person with a wisdom beyond his years, counteracted only slightly by a youthful glee which is betrayed every now and then in a boyish grin. He sums himself up well: “I’m fairly calm, I don’t get thrown, though I find it hard to make decisions (he pondered the STC offer for a month) and I sometimes go under a bit. I have a passion for enjoying myself — but I don’t do that easily.”

As a director he is noted for productions of great style (the pleasure in perfection), but as one senior critic put it, an ability which tends to gloss over the faults in a play rather than confront and overcome them. His reputation is of someone who works well with actors and writers and he sees that ability as the key to success.

“I think the most valuable work comes from a group of people who share interests to the extent where they can challenge each other. In the rehearsal situation where the responsibility is shared by all the actors, the director, designer and the writer combined — when you’ve got that working, when the actors are performing and they know where they’re heading for — in some sense they own the performance.”

So in Adelaide he wants to challenge the idea of the one-man-band it has been in the past. “It has happened too often that a single person has been at the top — and because they’re in the limelight and responsible they feel frightened. The more the focus is on you the less you can afford to take risks.”

Armfield is no arrogant young egotist out for the main chance. On the contrary he admits his lack of experience and is looking to share the responsibility of the company the way he shares the responsibility of a production. “I’m not the kind of person who can operate by myself; I don’t know enough to begin with, I haven’t read enough, I haven’t done enough and I haven’t got enough

(Continued page 30)
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1981 Perth Festival: A good one

In previous years, and especially those alternate ones when Adelaide is also festivaling, the Festival of Perth has been the first, but not the only venue for its international guests. Perth has been the fanfare and the opening night for many — such as Derek Jacobi and the Old Vic Company, the New York Acting Company, Cathy Downes, Spike Milligan and Gisela May — who have then gone on to national tours in as many state capitals as possible. This year, perhaps in an effort to draw more people to Perth itself and give the Festival a greater exclusiveness, the rest of the country will not be getting the chance to see some of the major attractions — a great sadness, when adding on the price of an air fare would put the cost of a few nights at the theatre well out of most people’s reach.

One of the highlights of the Festival, and the Festival only, will be the return of the Old Vic Theatre Company — not with the embarassingly successful O’Toole Macbeth, but The Merchant of Venice and, for light relief, Trelawney of the Wells by Pinero. In 1979 the company was something of a disappointment, bringing out no solid production, but three rather patronising, festival fare “entertainments” — pastiche, semi-documentary readings on Byron, starring Jacobi, the Grand Tour and Sidney Smith. These did the national round, to lukewarm receptions, but the far more interesting and well received (in London) productions of this year will sadly not venture out of WA.

Devotees of Fawlty Towers will be especially disappointed, as the enormously versatile Prunella Scales is keeping husband Timothy West company on this tour, and has taken over the role of Portia (previously played by Maureen O’Brien) in The Merchant, while he plays Shylock. The two of them will also be performing a late night show at the Octagon Theatre, called Off and On — a light-hearted look at entertainers in public and private. If that sounds like a hard-working tour, it may be that a change is as good as a rest for Prunella Scales who, on top of the role of wife and mother of two, has been starring with Leonard Rossiter in the long running comedy Make and Break in the West End ever since finishing the third episode of Fawlty Towers. Apparently the series was extremely hard to make, taking absolute control to give the impression of chaotic frenzy, and Cleese was a hard task-master, insisting on absolute fidelity to his script.

Since Timothy West was last in Perth with the Old Vic, the company has undergone several changes, not the least of which was to make him artistic director in place of Toby Robertson. That shake-up was due to financial problems, and though West washed his hands of the production he must subsequently have been quietly thankful for the crowds that Peter O’Toole drew as Macbeth, for the Old Vic was hard hit in the latest British Arts Council cutbacks — so much so that their touring activities may have to be severely curtailed.

It is confusing to see that the National Theatre will be presenting Peter Shaffer’s latest work, Amadeus.
at the Festival, but no, it is not the
London production with Paul Sco­
field coming out. Shaffer himself,
though, is to be present for the WA
National's production which will star
Edgar Metcalfe as Salieri and Robert
van Mackelenberg as Mozart.

Amadeus caused a certain amount
of controversy when it opened in
London in 1979, because it presents
Mozart not only as a musical genius,
divinely inspired, but also as an
infantile, foul-mouthed urchin. Like
the publicity about The Romans in
Britain, though, this did nothing but
entice the public and the production is
still booked out in the NT's Olivier
Theatre. Debate then started on
whether the play was indeed a master­
piece, as critics such as Bernard Levin
claimed, or merely a middlebrow,
popular spectacular, as many thought
Equus had been.

Amadeus continues the discussion
Shaffer started in Royal Hunt of the
Sun and then Equus, as to the
existence of some kind of god, pagan,
pantheistic or now, apparently,
Christian. It also keeps the same
structure as the previous two; the older
man, acting as commentator, who is
searching for meaning in life, believes

he finds it embodied in a younger man,
but is forced in the situation to destroy
the very thing he seeks. In this case the
mediocre, but pious composer Salieri
believes that Mozart is divinely but
unfairly gifted, and so destroys him as
a revenge on his unjust god.

To give added irony, Amadeus in
Perth will be part of a double bill, the
other half of which will be Salieri's
own short opera Prima La Musica Poi
le Parole — perhaps a description of
the evening as a whole.

Carrying on the dramatic concern
with power, money and divinity from
The Merchant of Venice and Amadeus
will be Peter Wilson's production of
Faust with the Western Australian
Theatre Company. Wilson, recently
artistic director of the late Tasmanian
Puppet Theatre, will be using life-size
puppets and contemporary and classi­
cal synthesised music. Some very
different puppets will be appearing in
the Marionette Theatre's new pro­
duction of The Magic Pudding, a new
adaptation by Eleanor Whitcombe;
and Perth actress Margaret Anketell
will be starring as aviatrix Emily
Stilson in the Arthur Kopit play
Wings.

Alex Buzo's latest play, Duff, is
being premiered at the Festival,
commissioned by the Friends of the
Festival especially for the Hole in the
Wall. Buzo's last play, Big River, was
commissioned and premiered at the
Adelaide Festival and earned the
writer and Melbourne Theatre Com­
pany, quite unfairly, nothing but
scorn. Although the play went on to a
very successful season in Melbourne,
it's projected Sydney tour was dropped
like a stone. At that time Buzo said he
would no longer be writing modern
urban comedies, but Duff seems to
belie this, being set in a motel lobby
which has been converted into a home
for Matt and Liz Duff; their ill­
assorted guests provide the humour
and action of the piece.

I Colombarioni from Italy will
provide further farce at the Festival —
two modern day clowns who use
commedia dell'arte as a basis. On the
other side of the coin the Yugoslavian
Zagreb Theatre Company will take
from the Sydney Festival to Perth
their war epic The Liberation of
Skopje.

In addition there will be light­
hearted one man evenings from
American Tom Lehrer, Australian
Keith Michell and Canadian Craig
Russell, with his amazing impersona­
tions of the great female filmstars;
British comedian Mike Harding is
appearing in concert, as is Irish harpist
Mary O'Hara; and Marian Mont­
gomery and Richard Rodney Bennett
will be performing their Just Friends
evening of music, song and chat.

The 1981 Festival of Perth promises
to be one of the best yet, with a good
balance of light and solid theatre,
serious and comic work and top
performers from home and overseas.
It is a shame indeed that so very few
will be able to take advantage of this
excellent programming; perhaps if the
same limitations are to be imposed in
1982, it might be worth the Festival
(and certainly its potential audience)'
while to arrange some cheap package
with the domestic airlines.
The Choir — The Power and Pathos of Oppression

TA interviews playwright ERROL BRAY.

At a Playwrights' Conference committee meeting sometime in January 1980, the then artistic director Terence Clarke made an unusual request; formal backing for the workshopping of a play which some might find offensive. It involved homosexuality, castration and all its characters were orphan choirboys.

The Choir, by Errol Bray, like Shaffer's Equus or Martin Sherman's Bent (which similarly emerged from the American Playwrights' Conference) is one of those plays instantly recognisable for its strength and dramatic power. In Canberra the first workshop performance confirmed it, and proved also that the play could be successfully performed by adults — and indeed by being so add a reverberation, a depth of psychological analysis and perhaps most importantly just enough of a sense of distance, where children might give it a realism too harrowing to be effective.

Within a month of Canberra, David Marr wrote a full page story on the play for the National Times headed "Discovered at last: Errol Bray — our best since Williamson" — Spears' West End and Broadway airings and the emergence of Louis Nowra, it would seem, notwithstanding. Nimrod, with some justification before their world premiere in January, claimed that it was "one of Australia's most eagerly awaited theatrical events", and almost without precedent have given above-the-title billing to a playwright for his first professional production.

Through Neil Armfield's direction of the workshops and now this full production only a handful of lines have been changed — testimony to the astonishing completeness of the script from the outset. Extraordinarily too, for what is a one act play running only eighty minutes, it is standing alone and in Nimrod's main theatre. As Bray wryly remarks, though, "No one is going to ask for any more."

Errol Bray's involvement in theatre properly began at the age of thirty when he entered the University of New South Wales' Drama Department and graduated in 1976. His main interest was educational drama — he had a book, Are We Heroes?, published on the subject in the same year — and with a few outside engagements such as dramatic criticism for Nation Review, his abiding interest has been his Shopfront Theatre for children. Incidentally, it was one of the kids a year or two back who brought up the historical fact, then unknown to Bray, of castration to preserve the soprano voice of young males.

For all the short, sharp, shock of the play — someone in the Playwrights' Conference compared its impact to a kick in the groin — he sees its metaphor as not shocking enough. Needless to say his view of our society, and particularly its educational, but also punitive or mental health, institutions, is bleak. "The damage done to the emotional life by institutions is far worse than that done by castration."

Bray sees the play as an outcry against the pain he feels is so prevalent in the world; a pain he claims to be so sensitive to that he cannot visit classrooms and even less, staffrooms. "I could more easily accept a fascist regime" he says, "then the way things are. Hitler oppressing the Jews is horrific, but more easily fought against and therefore less intellectually frightening than a lot of what happens around us, because it is so insidious."

The point made with the force of a meat-axe is of the "exchange con" — balls for voices, in the education system regimentation for spurious qualifications, and in the world at large work for illusory goals such as the chimeras presented by the advertising industry. He follows the radical reformist ideals of Austrian educator Ivan Illich, in his wanting to dissociate education — "life experience learning" from institutions; to offer choice in place of the "exchange con". A romantic idealist, perhaps, but he believes such ideals are alive and working at his beloved Shopfront.

For Bray then, the motivating idea is not merely to create a succes de scandale, though it seems set to bring him overnight recognition. He realises that stirring the deepest male anxieties — fears of castration and the inverted (perverted) mother figure deadlier than the male — is the basis of the play's impact. An impact dramatically increased by the sparseness of the writing, the sharpness of each scene and the tautness of the structure.

Errol Bray, pushing forty, stocky and avuncular, is a passionate man. His other plays have so far been seen as too emotional — "is the theatre not the place for emotions?" he asks — but may now gain productions. Two short plays The Fittest and Whom will be toured by Shopfront next year, but The Clinic ("more horrific than The Choir!") about nurses in a mental hospital, Sink! on the oppression of women and Babysitters ("which I think is my best so far") a play about death and incorporating an affair between a forty year old woman teacher and a twelve year old boy, all await being picked up by producers.

All his plays, he says, are about oppression — all are strong stuff even for this day and age. But encapsulated even in The Choir is Bray's answer to the problems of the world — the simple good of love and caring. It's something he shares with the kids at his theatre.

Deep down one suspects there is a fair degree of ambition in this man, described by a student as "a great teddy bear". But his passions when forged by his undoubtedly strong dramatic sense make for theatre, as director Neil Armfield put it, "which has such confidence in why it's there."
Australian Dance Theatre — extending its activities

by Michael Morley

The sixteen-strong Australian Dance Theatre arrived back from its tour to Edinburgh and Europe on a Friday; at 9.30 on Monday morning they were back in their rehearsal rooms in Adelaide — not to assess the results of the tour or slide gradually back into things, but hard at work for their coming seasons in Melbourne and Adelaide.

There are probably few more de-romanticising sights than a dance company in rehearsal. Gone are the carefully lit, remotely graceful bodies of the stage performance; in their place, sweat, effort, concentration and a collection of people who look as if they are dressed in throwouts from a bankrupt theatrical costumier's. It's a bit like watching a vigorous football workout — but, instead of set moves being practised, new routines, changes of steps and rhythms are constantly being asked of the dancers.

The Company's style and image are a reflection of the style and aims not only of its director but also of the members of the ensemble; this is no anonymous group controlled and fashioned solely by director Jonathan Taylor. Four years ago there was something of a vacuum in dance in this country: now, Taylor feels that the Company is filling ground that the Australian Ballet vacated ten years ago — and how effectively can be gauged by critical response both here and in Europe. The significance of the Company's invitation to Edinburgh this year should be obvious. It is, Taylor hopes, the first step towards similar tours by the Company; already there is talk of a tour to Europe in 1982 and interest from Milan and America.

Taylor is candid about the reactions to the Company from audiences and critics. The scoreline reads: one bad, two kind, two favourable, one very good. Overall assessment? "They thought we were better than they thought we were going to be." And even the negative criticism he found more helpful than the Australian equivalent: "Here, it's either smash hit or dismal failure — nothing in between and not much criticism to build on."

At the same time, the Company is also extending its activities into other areas within Australia. There's a TV film (co-produced by BBC and ABC), begun in Mildura and finished in Edinburgh, which goes to air in late winter in England, late autumn in Australia. It has an Australian producer (Brian Adams) and a British director (Colin Nears). As well, the ABC will be filming wife Ariette's Filthy Children later this year — a slightly awkward project for the wardrobe, as all the children, refusing to stay at their previous size, need costumes a size up.

The touring and resident commitments of the Company are demanding: country tours of Tasmania, Victoria and SA, three seasons in Adelaide, three in Melbourne. And the repertoire is equally wide-ranging — nine or ten world premieres each year, around thirty works in the repertoire, new ballets by dancers in the Company. This last area is something Taylor clearly feels strongly about. The works can range from six-minute exercise/works-in-progress, to twenty-minute fully-developed programmes. "I lay down no real set guidelines," says Taylor. "It's important to let the new choreographers find their own feet and make their own mistakes. And one hopes the audience will do the same. The views of dance in this country are not flexible enough — the audience often looks for a storyline where there is none. The choreographer is a bit like the playwright: the playwright has plenty of words but has to find out how best to put them together. Dance is more like poetry that plays with words, shifting them round, watching the images bounce off each other."

When one looks at the size of the ADT, it is sobering to realise how much it has achieved with comparatively small resources — an admini-

Joseph Scoglio and Alain Israel in Flibbertigibbet. Photo: D B Simmonds.

strategic staff, for instance, of only five. Even more sobering are the economics of the operation. Here is a company which undertakes an exhausting programme each year, where the dancers are hardly ever away from the rehearsal and performance situation. And yet no dancer is on the average national weekly wage of $240.00; the top ones get $220.00. When one reflects that a moderate rugby league player could pick that up in an afternoon, a professional golfer win or lose it on one putt without turning a hair and a tennis player toss it down the drain with two broken racquets, one begins to see where priorities lie. BP are providing some sponsorship this year for the Company; maybe a few of those cigarette companies might like to shift some of their funds in the direction of a cultural and physical activity which is just as demanding as most sports?

Alain Israel in Wildstars. Photo: Alex Wilson.

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL
Theatre Board Grants, 1981:
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Choreographers/Designers/Directors' Development: Assistance to artists of proven potential for personal development projects within Australia, as choreographers, designers or directors.

Community/Regional Theatre: A number of grants are available for development of community/regional theatres. Programs submitted must have both local and State Government financial support. Any assistance given would be strictly on a reducing basis over a period of up to five years by which time the project would have to be fully sustained from other sources.

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Overseas Travel/Study: Assistance to professional theatre personnel to travel overseas for work or study programs unavailable in Australia. A small number of grants are available for outstanding applicants—a maximum of $2,000 for any one grant.

Training: Assistance to professional companies for the implementation of basic and advanced training programs within Australia. Priority will be given to programs providing widespread access to theatre professionals.

For details and application forms contact:
The Secretary Theatre Board Australia Council P.O. Box 302 NORTH SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2060 Telephone: (02) 922 2122

Closing Date: 15 February, 1981—Decision advised by 30 April, 1981.

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Further information can be obtained from the Secretary, Goulburn College of Advanced Education, McDermott Drive, Goulburn, 2580. Telephone (048) 21 4811

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Major deals for ABC

Big things are afoot for ABC-TV who look set to make some major co-production deals with American and British based interests shortly.

According to head of drama Geoff Daniels, who was tripping off to those countries early this year, the ABC is picking its way through all the offers inspired, he says, by the success of *Timeless Land* which was sold to Paramount last year.

He has hinted at a sizeable link-up worth millions of dollars over a number of years with a New York company, but would say little else until negotiations had been completed. It's planned that co-productions will make up about 50 per cent of the output of ABC-TV's Forest studios which the ABC recently acquired from Avon — it was originally a warehouse which the ABC transformed — after years of leasing. The all film production at Forest, just north of Sydney, supplies about 20 per cent of all ABC-TV drama.

They should have just finished *Sporting Chance*, a 10 one-hour series about an investigative sports journalist. He's played by Ray Barrett, and his offside by Liddy Clark. It's scheduled to go to air in June.

Then Forest, with British interests, gets stuck into *Coral Island*, a children's series with location filming in Western Samoa. It should be completed by July next year and Forest producers then turn to *1915*, based on Roger MacDonald's book of the same name which deals with two country boys who grow up together and go off to Gallipoli. It will be made as seven or eight one-hour series.

That should bring the film studios Ray Barrett and Liddy Clark in ABC-TV's Sporting Chance.
— now the biggest in Australia in continuous production, says Daniels — up to January 1982. What's produced from then on depends on some of those proposed co-production deals.

A co-production recently completed and which goes to air in March as seven one-hours is Levkas Man. Based on the Hammond Innes novel, it was shot in Greece with an Australian crew and stars Robert Coleby, Marius Goring and Takis Emanuel.

A locally-made series, of which we had a taster over Christmas, is Menotti, starring Ivar Kants as a parish priest who sees his role as a social one rather than pastoral. The 13-part show will be screened late in April.

The Melbourne arm of ABC-TV drama has already made about 80 per cent of the nine-part series based on the three books by Alan Marshall: I Can Jump Puddles, This is the Grass and How Beautiful are the Feet. The series has been made as a contribution to the International Year of Disabled Persons. Melbourne are also into a number of children's series. They include Patwork Hero, Marsh Family, both six-half-hours, and in the 1981/82 production year they're scheduled to make the series, Come Midnight Monday, about a group of children who take over a disused railway and some of the rolling stock. Melbourne is also looking at a 26 half-hours centred on the inmates of a children's home.

Also planned for next year is a 90-minute telemovie, The Leonski Murders, as well as a trilogy, of 75-minute episodes, on the life of Australian composer Percy Grainger. Being prepared in Melbourne is a 10 one-hour series called Degrees of Change, which is based on a mother and daughter attending the same university. They've just completed the trilogy Outbreak of Love, with Rowena Wallace and Lawrence Held and in Sydney they've just finished another trilogy, Intimate Strangers with Carmen Duncan, Kit Taylor and Tony Bonner in the lead roles.

In Sydney ABC-TV is currently preparing as a four-parter the Louis Stone novel Jonah. Set at the turn of the century it's a study of a crippled boy who eventually runs his own shoe store. Also coming up for production is Conferenceville, an adaptation into three one-hours by Frank Moorhouse of his own book about a group attending a Canberra conference.

Also scheduled is a six one-hour series called The Hollow Woodheap, based on the book by David Forrest which follows the adventures of a country boy who joins a Brisbane city bank. Just finished is Wedding Tales, one of a trilogy of plays to concentrate on Jewish humour. Wedding Tales, by Ben Lewin and starring Barry Otto, tells of an Australian who returns home after working as an economist with the US government. He has some humourous run-ins with his family who want to marry him off to a good Jewish girl, but become outraged when he turns an affectionate eye in the direction of the Chinese babysitter!

The ABC, who want to continue to keep their hand in with the one off play, are commissioning six scripts by Australian playwrights. The plays, all one-hours, are being made specifically to celebrate the ABC's 50th year in 1982. To date Louis Nowra and Thomas Keneally are at the preparation stage.

Also planned is a new series of Spring and Fall as a follow up to the six social dramas which were highly acclaimed last year. From ABC-TV's light entertainment department we should see another series of Trial By Marriage, but that depends on the availability of Jackie Weaver who's currently in the stage production of They're Playing Our Song with John Waters.

There could also be a third series of Home Sweet Home (a second series was completed in December), one of ABC's highest rating shows which starred John Bluthal as the Italian-born Australian taxi driver.
A Sweeney for the Streets of Sydney, Prisoner in trousers, and some comedy on Ten.

Up until about a month or so ago everyone it seemed — except executive producer Jock Blair — was naming likely candidates to play the lead in the $1.3 million mini series Sarah Dane being made by co-producers South Australian Film Corporation for Network Ten.

Speculation was finally laid to rest when Blair chose Adelaide actress Nina Landis for the heroine in the adaptation of Catherine Gaskin's novel about a convict woman who struggles for acceptance into Sydney society in the late 18th century.

But then, according to one report, Nina Landis pulled out, so presumably Blair had to do some quick thinking — and juggling. By the time you read this someone else should have slotted into the role, for production of the eight one-hour episodes should have got into full swing this month with screening planned for late this year or early in 1982. Ten must be crossing their fingers about the show's future for their last venture into the mini series area with Water Under the Bridge was without doubt a ratings disaster.

Ten have also committed themselves to two other costly series: Punishment, a no-holds-barred look at life in a men's prison, and Bellamy, yet another police series. Both shows, made by the Grundy Organisation, are 26 one-hour episodes.

Bellamy, we're told, could be paralleled to Britain's cop show The Sweeney and America's Streets of San Francisco. And if it is anywhere near as successful as those two, no one should be complaining, least of all Ten.

Writer Ron McLean was talking about his Bellamy concept almost three years ago and late last year a two-hour telemovie cum pilot was made. Production of the first episodes, with John Stanton as Bellamy and Tim Elston as his offsider, Senior Detective Mitchell, began in December last.

The series will be shot on film on locations in and around Sydney. Executive producer Don Battye says it's "rough and tough, and crammed with action and adventure".

Adam Garnett plays a 13-year-old newsboy befriended by Bellamy, and Sally Conabere plays his girlfriend. James Condon is Inspector Daley, chief of the special crime squad for whom Bellamy and Mitchell work.

In the telemovie other parts are played by John Hamblin, Brian Young, Sean Scully, Martin Harris and many, many more.

If you're beginning to think that this is just another Australian cop show, but from Sydney this time, John Stanton has been quoted as saying "we're humanising the police far more than we did ten years ago". Grundy's did try the "humanising" treatment about four years ago with King's Men, but that died very quickly on the streets of King's Cross!

This year we're going to get another serve of life behind bars. However, Ten's Prisoner series, made by Grundy's in Melbourne and on air for two years now, is almost certain to outlive their newest prison drama Punishment, made in Sydney and due for screening this month.

We'll have no more Punishment after the 26 episodes which are set in fictitious Longridge Gaol mocked up in Ten's Sydney studios with outside filming at East Sydney Technical College and Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital.

Singer/comedian Barry Crocker is the governor of Longridge, "an academic bent on reform rather than punishment". Apparently his methods are resented by the old guard officers, especially chief warden Jack Hudson played by Ken Wayne.

Other officers are played by Ralph Cotterill, Brian Wenzel and Ross Thompson. Playing those behind the bars are Jon Ewing, Michael Smith, Mike Preston and Brian Harrison. Female roles are played by Julie McGregor, Anne Haddy, Cornelia Frances, Penne Hackforth-Jones and Kris McQuade.

The word is that the networks, over the past six months or so, have been inundated with ideas for satirical shows. And this month John Eastway...
(of the Gunston shows) moves into Ten's Sydney studios to make a pilot. Ratbags. Executive producer is filmmaker Hal McElroy and the writers include Geoff Atherden, Morris Gleitzman and Trevor Farrant. Featuring Robyn Moase and John Derum it will be a topical comedy show and if accepted by the network will screen weekly.

In Melbourne Ten have made another series (eight half-hours) of Are You Being Served, starring Britain's John Inman and our own June Bronhill. The first series rated well in number of television awards for their excellence and some kudos for the network, they haven't seen fit to launch into anything else adventurous.

However, they do have up their sleeves two children's adventure dramas, Falcon Island and Secret Valley. Sad to say that they both appear to be in the goodies v baddies category, without too much substance involved.

Falcon Island is a series of 13 by 30 minutes. It was written by Joan Ambrose and made by the Perth Institute of Film and TV with backing from the Nine network, the Australian Film Commission and Channel Nine Perth. It's about three children — two 12-year-old boys and an eight-year-old girl — who become involved in a search for an old Dutch wreck off the WA coastline. This is all set against a controversial sand-mining venture and a plan to smuggle gold.

Alan Cassell plays the lead baddie and Peter Maxwell directed the series filmed, in the main, in and around Rottnest Island. Nine are claiming it's the most expensive children's drama ever shot for television, but they won't say how much it has all cost. With so many production companies keeping

World War II ends on Nine! — amidst a sea of soap

The Eastern States Nine network haven't been exactly innovative in recent years with their contribution to local drama. They've relied almost exclusively on their two soap operas, The Sullivans and The Young Doctors, to carry the flag.

And if we point the finger at Nine for their lack of inspiration, they'll quickly point out that last year was tops as far as they're concerned and as a network they make an across the board commitment to all areas of television (well, who doesn't?) including sport, variety, comedy and chat shows, backed up, of course, by production of the two soapies which were both first screened within a week of one another in 1976.

A few years back Nine did dabble in a series of six telemovies in a co-production venture with Film Australia, and although they captured a
quiet about production costs it would seem to be a futile claim.

Secret Valley has had a chequered existence. Produced by Roger Mirams (of Lost Islands fame) of the Grundy Organisation for the Nine network it took on a new title, The Ghost Town Gang, until a bush fire swept through the set located at the Smoky Dawson Ranch north of Sydney. Reverting to its original title, the two hours in the can have been broken down to four half-hour episodes and it appears destined to become a much longer series.

Basically Secret Valley centres on a group of kids who set out to save old group of kids who set out to save an old man’s property from grasping land developers. There’s a long list of child actors in the show, including Mark Spain, Michael McGlinchey and Kelly Dingwall. Adult actors include Max Cullen, John Hamblin, Hugh Keays Byrne and Peter Gwynne.

Probably the most significant thing about to happen in The Sullivans in 1981 is that the end of World War Two is nigh. During the latter half of the year the family and their contemporaries will have to adjust to peacetime.

Although the war-time element, on which the show was initially based, will be removed, the show will continue to revolve round the family. Dave Sullivan (played by Paul Cronin) now a widower, will be back on civvy street. He’ll be embroiled in a new romance and the Sullivan’s first grandchild will be introduced.

The Young Doctors goes into its fifth year, too. More outside broadcasting is planned for the series set in the Albert Memorial Hospital. It continues to be staffed by the good-looking set and still retains its popularity round the country, mainly with children I suspect.

Paul Hogan’s inimitable style will undoubtedly bring in top ratings points for Nine again this year. Hogan, who has no contract with the network (“just a handshake”), is very much a law unto himself, he only made three specials last year and at this stage Nine have no idea what’s planned for 1981. Hoges maintains “I’m just basically lazy”.

A Town Like Alice is Seven’s dramatic flagship—but will it get the ratings?

The seven network must be a little apprehensive about the reception on air of their latest drama A Town Like Alice, probably in May.

That’s not to say the six-hour television version of the Nevil Shute novel is not worthy of praise, more that the viewing public appears to have lost some of its enthusiasm for mini series.

Seven, of course, inspired their opposition into the area of mini series when they achieved tremendous ratings with Against the Wind. However, their follow-up, The Last Outlaw, screened last year, did not rate anywhere near so well. And only late last year the Ten network burned their fingers with Water Under the Bridge, a well-produced series, but one which failed dismally on the scorecard. The film version of Alice, made in 1956 and which starred Peter Finch and Virginia McKenna, only took in a part of the novel — the wartime period in Malaya. In Seven’s version — they’re not sure at this point how it will be broken down into episodes — producer Henry Crawford and director David Stevens also include the outback story after the war ends.

Major investors are Seven, with the Australian Film Commission, the Victorian Film Commission and the BBC also contributing. Much talent was brought together for the series which cost about $1.25 million with location shooting in Malaya, Sydney and Broken Hill.

The series has a collection of fine actors and actresses with Helen Morse as Jean Paget and Bryan Brown as Joe Harmon. They’re supported by Britain’s Gordon Jackson (of Upstairs, Downstairs), Dorothy Allison, veteran American actor Yuki Shimoda, New Zealand’s Pat Evison, Maggie Dence, Anna Volska, Maurie Fields, Peter Collingwood and a host of others.
For those under 40 who don’t know the story, Jean Paget, a young English girl who lives in Malaya, is taken prisoner by the Japanese shortly before the fall of Singapore. After trekking round Malaya with a group of captives, many of whom die off along the way, she strikes up a friendship with Australian Joe Harmon who steals food for the wandering prisoners. He is eventually captured, too, and crucified. After the war Jean discovers Joe didn’t die and comes to Australia in search of him. Meanwhile he’s gone to England to find her. They eventually meet up in Cairns, but find it difficult to bridge the gap of many years separation.

During the making of Alice cast and crew were airlifted to the island of Langkawi off north-east Malaysia for the wartime sequences, and despite tropical illnesses, strange food and leeches, production stayed on schedule for the five week’s shoot.

Even if all this effort to produce a creditable, worthwhile series does not pay off in local terms, it’s almost assured of a number of overseas sales.

While production of their soap operas, Cop Shop and Skyways, continue in Melbourne, in Sydney Seven, more than any other network, persevere with situation comedies. Last year they hit the jackpot with Kingswood Country, written and produced by Gary Reilly and Tony Sattler, the duo who make up RS Productions. RS, of course, started on

Theatre Australia February 1981 23

Norman Gunston in his specially equipped DC-3 in Seven’s Gunston’s Australia.
Harold Hopkins and Graham Kennedy in The Club.

Up-There-Cazaly Action

The Club is a big, vigorous, funny, noisy, tense film entertaining on its two levels of boardroom politics and playing-field action photographed to the dramatic ultimate. It happens to be about a club in the Victorian Football League but the approach of the director, Bruce Beresford, could equally well be applied to behind-the-scenes and up-front activities in any company, organised charity or arts administrative committee. This is the way people operate — lying, manipulating, adapting, pushing a line, occasionally moved by sympathy or even boredom into giving way to the right, occasionally letting good come out of evil.

Beresford, who following Breaker Morant and this film (not to mention The Getting of Wisdom and Don's Party, and overlooking The Money Movers) must be seen as Australia's leading director — Fred Schepisi having removed himself from the scene, if only temporarily — has pulled The Club off the stage where it began and into the open by two means: a few changes in emphasis from the original and the truly inspired camera of Don McAlpine. The Club on stage was all talk — you are not going to get a VFL grand final into a theatre — and in its way the cinema version is also all talk, but it is photographed talk. McAlpine has gone to most ingenious lengths to keep everything lively, and some of it exciting and actually beautiful.

The chief people in The Club are Laurie the coach; Gerry the manager; Ted the president; Jock the ex-president, former coach and former player; Danny the captain, and the expensive new player worth $120,000, played respectively by Jack Thompson, Alan Cassell, Graham Kennedy, Frank Wilson, Harold Hopkins and John Howard. The Collingwood Football Club supplied itself, its club-rooms and many of its supporters. Without Collingwood, the producer, Matt Carroll says, there would have been no film, and I can believe it. The South Australian Film Corporation and the NSW ditto supplied the money and Roadshow is distributing. They should all be very happy about the product.

Williamson and Beresford have a lot in common; that is, they are interested in people reacting to each other, and that is what The Club is about. The coach has not won a grand final, the president is financially embarrassed and trying to pull a success out of a hat, the ex-president is consumed with vanity, the manager plays both sides against the middle, the captain is on his last season, the new player is confused, loses confidence, and sits on his money, sulking. The performers are all amazingly good: Thompson again produces for his extrovert Laurie that touch of ruefulness, of uncertainty that he has used to soften the hard gloss on many of his roles; Kennedy proves again that contrary to his television history he is a master of the subtle ploy; Cassell is marvellously snide as the manager. These characters, and Danny, are developed in the script and direction. I am less certain of John Howard's new player. Nor is Frank Wilson's tendency to mug entirely under control. The two or three women who briefly appear do not make much impact, nor are they required to: Breaker Morant was about men's business, and so is The Club.

Assuming that the enormous number of people held captive every weekend by Australian Rules will also want to see the extraordinary game — how about those dinky little shorts and sun-top sweaters? — on screen, The Club should not lack audiences. They will have to stay alert to follow the politics, but presumably the Up-There -Cazaly action (and song) will be worth the strain.

Fatty Finn

Some deductions may be made of the attitude film makers bring to children's films from the fact that the cast list issued to the press on the occasion of the Fatty Finn preview featured 22 adults and not one child, although the film is full of children, some of them quite talented. Other documents issued at the time revealed the name of the young star: Ben Oxenbould. The production notes mention the name of one other child actor in passing, but that's it. The rest of the material is concerned, at length, with the adventures on the set of such television "celebrities" as Bert Newton, Lorraine Bayly, Brian Blain, Judi Farr, Gerard Kennedy etc. whose faces come and go in a flash.

The Fatty Finn fun is very forced, and is derived not from the natural hazards of children's life but from a series of elaborately constructed stunts, such as frog races and goat races and Fatty's efforts to obtain a crystal set so that he can hear Don Bradman play cricket against England. There is some hyped-up "gang" warfare of a sort but on the whole the plot and the incidents that finally bring Fatty out on top are not very funny. Ben Oxenbould does remarkably well with stodgy material. The film, taken from material used by the late Syd Nicholls in his long-running comic strip of the same name, was directed by Maurice Murphy on location in Glebe and financed by the Children's Film Corporation.
Charmed Circle

by Karl Levett

The Circle Repertory Company is one of the strongest of the theatre companies that give variety and depth to New York theatre. It is a non-profit institutional company and one of the few groups in the English-speaking world where playwrights-in-residence create for specific actors.

This nurturing of playwrights is bringing a happy harvest to the Circle Repertory. Already the Circle has produced works by David Mamet, Robert Patrick, Sam Shepard, Milan Stitt and Albert Innuarato. The Circle provides a venue for the working through of new plays with a continuing project-in-progress series for new and established playwrights. But probably just as importantly it allows them a place to fail — and to fail with some grace.

Two recent products from the Circle Repertory illustrate the process and benefits of this policy of nourishment. In the Circle’s small Off-Broadway home at Sheridan Square was The Diviners by a 24-year-old playwright Jim Leonard Jr. On Broadway, Lanford Wilson’s The Fifth of July stars Christopher Reeve (of Superman fame) in the central role. It began at the Circle two years ago and here arrives on the Great White Way trimmed and tightened. Mr. Leonard Jr. is a freshman in the Circle’s School of Encouragement; Mr. Wilson stands as a triumphant graduate, laurel-crowned.

The Diviners is Jim Leonard Jr.‘s first professional production. With this play he won the 1980 American College Theatre Festival New Playwriting Contest. Last season it was a Circle Repertory Project-in-Progress. Mr. Leonard Jr. hails from Indiana and The Diviners is set in a small Indiana town in the 1930’s. The title’s double meaning refers to a retarded boy’s gift for diving water and a lapsed preacher who comes to the town.

It is very much a young man’s play. The central theme is manipulated and predictable; rustic symbolism runs rife. But along the way Mr. Leonard Jr. demonstrates a detail for country dialogue and a feel for genuine characterisation. The result is an effective theatre piece where you forgive the play’s ambitious but flawed thrust to savour the interesting things that happen along the way. The Circle’s production is cohesive and convincing, helped greatly by John Lee Beatty’s bleachers-in-a-barn setting. Let’s hope Mr. Leonard Jr. shows his gratitude for all this kindly treatment with some worthy efforts in future years.

Lanford Wilson is a founding member of the Circle Repertory and now among its most valuable assets. Over the years he has provided the Circle with a string of plays, including The Rimers of Eldritch and The Hot L Baltimore. Last season the Circle Repertory’s production of his Talley’s Folly came to Broadway and captured the Pulitzer Prize. The success of Talley’s Folly has given the impetus to present The Fifth of July, which actually was written before Talley’s Folly and presented at the Circle in July 1978. The two plays are part of a trilogy concerning the Talley family in Lebanon, Missouri. The remaining play The War in Lebanon will be presented as part of the Circle’s repertoire this season.

Where Talley’s Folly is a small, shining two-character piece, in The Fifth of July Mr. Wilson has been much more ambitious. Not only has he created a Chekhovian-type ensemble of characters, but also he is pursuing the big themes of survival and renewal in a contemporary American setting.

On a wide, white-washed verandah that Mark Twain would have loved we meet Wilson’s set of survivors. Ken Talley, who has lost both legs in Vietnam and is home to make a new life as a teacher in Lebanon; Jed, his lover; Aunt Sally, whom we saw as the young girl in Talley’s Folly, now carrying her late husband’s ashes around in a chocolate box; two of Ken’s former Berkeley confederates: Gwen, a dizzy copper heiress and John, her cool and calculating husband; Wes, a musician who is to help Gwen become a rock star; June, Ken’s sister and a former radical, and Shirley, June’s 13-year-old daughter and “the last of the Talleys”.

Wilson’s delineation of character through sharp, often funny, dialogue, plus well placed monologues shows a writer at the top of his craft. It is also an actor’s play where each is given a splendid opportunity to take the ball and run. It is disappointing then that such an attractive and well-fashioned play is resolved with such neatness and sudden optimism to rob it of some of its impact. The serious themes developed in the play call for something more open-ended; ambiguity and paradox are seen throughout the play and should be more evident at its closing.

Also the Broadway presentation lacks cohesion. Marshall W. Mason, the director (he’s also the Director of the Circle Repertory and its driving force), has been unable to gain the ensemble balance and pacing to make a satisfying sum of the parts. A couple of the performances are first class — Joyce Reehling’s June and Jeff Daniel’s Jed. For Swoosie Kurtz as Gwen nothing succeeds like excess and while she gets every laugh and supplies much of the play’s energy, she almost swamps the balance of Mr. Wilson’s craft. Christopher Reeve as Ken should provide the weighted centre of the play, but while he is certainly adequate, he lacks the physical and vocal presence that might have kept the play on a more even keel.

The avowed aim of the Circle Repertory is the “rediscovery of lyric realism as the native voice of American Theatre” and The Fifth of July is as good an example of “lyric realism” as the Circle has given us. While admiring the Circle’s single-minded vision,
the concept of "lyric realism" does leave some nagging doubts: is it not the preservation of a past form? could it not become its own straitjacket?

The Circle has recently announced an exchange programme with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Readings of plays by Circle playwrights including Lanford Wilson have taken place at the Abbey. With the careful nurturing the Circle Repertory is providing American playwrights it may some day bequeath a theatrical legacy to rival that of its Irish colleague.

The Facts of Life

The presence of The Fifth of July on Broadway is an encouraging sign, for while "serious drama" exists in many forms Off-Broadway, in the glare of Broadway's bright lights examples of the species can usually be counted on one hand — or less. Three recent offerings indicate the nature of the struggle.

Arthur Miller's new play The American Clock has already given up the ghost, clobbered to death by the New York Times critic, Frank Rich. Mr Rich's principal complaint was that the Broadway presentation of the play was not up to an earlier version seen at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. This may be true, but from the evidence on Broadway, it would seem that either version would be of interest to theatre-goers. This is Miller back on firm autobiographical ground: the devastating effect of the Depression on his family. Miller's ambition is to encompass the Depression in toto, but when the family goes out of focus, the play becomes diffuse, heavy footed and sentimental. Still the play offers some powerful scenes and it is hoped that The American Clock will reappear somewhere for tinkering and re-examination.

Hugh Leonard had a considerable success on Broadway two seasons ago with Da. In A Life he has taken a character from the previous play, the acid-tongued civil servant Drumm, and shows us Drumm reviewing his life upon learning he has a terminal illness. Like Da it uses a flashback technique, young stand-ins for the memory sequences, and a graceful flow of Irish wit to keep the play's machinery well oiled. Roy Dotrice as Drumm wonderfully catches the coldness and the disappointment of the man, while still reveling in deliciously tart sallies. This is a small, neat play about a life that was small and much too neat by half.

Neatness does not apply to Athol Fugard's A Lesson From Aloe, without ever mentioning the image the play evokes a burnt-out and never-ending plain. Mr Fugard is back in his misbegotten South Africa giving his starkest picture to date. This time there are only three characters: a middle-aged Afrikaner, his wife recently from a mental home and their friend, a black political leader just released from jail and ready to flee to England. Slowly with gentleness and dignity, Fugard strips the layers from all three to show the innocence of each victim. Fugard achieves this by some remarkable writing, with never a hint of the melodramatic and conveying quietly a long gut-tearing cry of despair. As the Afrikaner, Harris Yulin gives a superb performance and shows he is one very able American actor who is continually widening his depth and range. As director as well as playwright, Athol Fugard knows exactly what he is doing.

Peter Shaffer's Amadeus has joined the struggling band. It has Ian McKellen in the Schofield role, with Tim Curry and Jane Seymour as Mr and Mrs Wolfgang M. Perhaps with this boost Broadway audiences will no longer be able to totally avoid the facts of life.

Old actors never die

By Irving Wardle

In this season of cut-price holidays in rain-lashed resorts and stock-unloading stampedes along the high street, it is usual for theatre critics to curl up by the fireside and compile balance sheets on the past year's trade. I confess I have not the heart for this job. For me, 1980 was overwhelmingly a year of death.

Among young and old alike, more irreplaceable talents have vanished than in any previous year I can remember. David Mercer, Ken Tynan, Norman Marshall, Richard Beckinsale, Robert Kidd (who directed Middle-Aged Spread during his last illness), Ben Travers (writing to the last days before his death in mid-December): this is only the beginning of a list which has left behind more bare ruined choirs than the Arts Council's latest savage round of theatrical cuts.

Amazingly, but as always, the great actors have been spared. Our old actresses die; but the names of our leading actors have remained unchanged since the 1940's. Gielgud, Olivier, Redgrave, Scofield, are all still around, and more or less still in work. Not to mention Ralph Richardson, whom, if we followed the Chinese custom,
would long ago have been designated a living artistic treasure. To its lasting credit, the National Theatre has taken pains to cherish Richardson as if he were a Stradivarius, and never more so than in the production of David Storey's *Early Days* which has briefly transferred to the West End before moving to Toronto and Washington. With no disrespect to Storey, this haunting little piece demands attention above all for the opportunities it gives to its leading actor. In its muted 100 minutes, we meet an old politician living out his retirement with his coldly des­pairing daughter and her stone-faced company director husband. Played by anyone else, the character of Sir Richard Kitchen, known to the world as Britain's longest serving Minister for Health, might seem no more than a hole in the air. What did he say in the interview that wrecked his career? How did he destroy the wife for whom he now claims undying love? Why mention his career? What are his competing loyalties to Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, and DW Griffith; and *Illuminations* (Lyric, Hammersmith) a genre piece on the Labour Party's annual Blackpool conference by the Guardian's political columnist Peter Jenkins, whose choice of the Edwardian well-made play structure conveys the inadvertent impression that despite all the talk of social collapse everything is still as safe as houses. Robert David MacDonald's *Don Juan* (Round House) which formed the occasion for the highly esteemed Glasgow Citizen's Theatre's first London appearance, proved such a dose of self-intoxicated sub-Anouilh verbal posturing that - even in the present dearth of interesting new material - one would gladly have traded it for a Moliere revival.

**ITI**

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**THE ACTOR'S CENTRE, 193 Wardour Street, LONDON.** A pilot scheme conducted last spring with a variety of classes and other activities proved a great success, and resulted in the permanent centre being established. It provides an educational and social centre for thousands of actors based in London and those who visit the capital from the regions and abroad.

**WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL THEATRE ALLIANCE** will offer two playwriting awards for women playwrights. The APHRA BEHN AWARD - For one full length play by a woman playwright. The MARGARET MAYO—RGA AWARD — For two related short plays by one woman playwright. Winners will receive public readings of their winning plays during WITA's Festival 1981, honoured consisting of their festival attendance, written introduction to play publishers, and certificating denoting their awards.

**THIRD WORLD THEATRE FESTIVAL AND COLLOQUY.** The Korean Centre for the ITI is organising this International Festival in Seoul. It aims to examine the present conditions of Third World Theatre and attempt to indicate its future course developments under the influence of the traditions of world theatre. 20—30 March 1981.

**5th INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THEATRE CRITICS.** The Yugoslav ITI Centre and the Association of Theatre Critics are in the process of planning this symposium to be held in Novi Sad in May 1982, during the 26th Yugoslav theatre festival.

The symposium will last for three days and the theme will be "The Theatrical Production and the Language of Criticism". The organising body, STERIJINO POZORJE, will pay accommodation costs at Novi Sad for all participants who deliver papers. An outline of the proposed paper, which should not last longer than ten minutes (5 typed pages) should be sent to: Mr Dorian Sokolje, Director, Ms Katarina Cirje-Petric, Secretary, STERIJINO POZORJE, Zmaj Jovina 22/1, 21000 Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. Further particulars from Australian Centre ITI. Outlines wanted by the end of March 1981.

**TRAINING OF THEATRE CRITICS**

There are plans to organise an ITI seminar on the training of theatre critics in Toronto, Canada, April 1981. The American National Playwrights Conference includes a 4-week professional workshop for theatre critics and for journalists with an interest in the performing arts. August, 1981.

**NINETEENTH BIENNAL ITI CONGRESS.** Organised by the Spanish Centre, Madrid, 31 May — 6 June 1981. Prospective Australian delegates please apply to ITI, Sydney.
Anna Karenina and Cinderella

The last time I saw Valentina Kozlova was with the Bolshoi in Levrovsky's socialist realism fairytale, The Stone Flower. Appearing as the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, she had to perform, seriously, as a piece of dancing malachite. If you could imagine a sort of gum Josephine Baker, that is what she came across as, bourree-ing and back-bending amidst a haze of clunky corps de ballet eurythmics. I don't know what it was supposed to prepare me for, but it didn't prepare me for seeing her in Anna Karenina. It didn't prepare her, come to that.

Kozlova, fresh from defecting, dancing in the Australian Ballet's Anna Karenina, suffers from the difficulties that any performer used to one style has to suffer when transplanted into another. Seeing Kozlova dance Anna is to see someone trying to stretch their abilities without really caring whether the material, but 1 think not. The trouble is she has cast her out. None of that happened with Kozlova, nothing snapped. The paroxysm of movement remained studied and schooled, and, therefore, it all looked dead and rather shoddy because here you were seeing the choreography as its threadbare self and nothing could be perceived beyond it.

Apart from that, Anna Karenina remains the dead duck it was last year, with the corps as lame as ever and the minor roles as sketchy and etiolated as they were then. Prokovsky has made some small changes here and there (including extra appearances by the principals in the sequestered second act) but these remain in the manner of some minor carpentry in a badly constructed house. With its extravagant dressage and multitudinous sets Anna has a certain plumage and weight, but the ballet will not last.

Last year's revival of Frederick Ashton's Cinderella by the Australian Ballet was a welcome event not so much because the work was worth reviving, but because it gave a chance for an analysis of various elements of the Company: their varying strengths and abilities and, by extension, a consideration of the health of the AB as a whole.

Although I feel that Ashton's Cinderella is probably the best of the extant versions I don't consider it one of his best works. It was created in 1948 and while it did in effect strengthen the position of the then Sadlers Wells Theatre Ballet and did bring recognition to Ashton, it remains an early and patchy work. There are moments in the ballet (I'm thinking particularly of the Act 1 scene 2 divertissement of the Fairies; where the choreography is downright messy and contrived). No one can ever make sufficient design sense of the scene for the "star-fairies" and the female corps de ballet this time around, made them look like a huddle of seamstresses.

But the difficulties go further than that. There seems to be a curious lack of backbone in Ashton's version — it is a search for wonderment and magic without any moral point and this regulates it to the realms of an extended divertissement.

One gave up trying to enjoy the ballet as a story, letting it go its own daffy way and settled back to watch the dancers battling with the choreography and their technique.

The first night cast of Lois Strike (Cinderella) and Gary Norman (Prince) flurried its way from happy melodrama to vague gestures in the Ballroom scene and icky bathos in the final love scene. The big pas de deux in Act 2 took an eon to get finished and was a chastening lesson in cold detachment and absence of magic. Neither of them were in top form. Norman had a couple of nasty slips on his first entrance, and though not entirely his fault they made him even more earthbound and clawlike thereafter. Lois Strike will never be a satisfactory image of a hard-done-by ingenue living in a fantasy; it is not her style and it shows. She never 'gave' anything extra in her dancing of the part, every enchainement had a palpitating inefficiency and an emphatic finish which robbed it of any flow.

The cast of Sheree Rainey's Dinkle Baker was more coherent but still lacking in any humanity although it was graced by a lovely sense of wonderment in the central pas de deux, lilting and ecstatic, it was the core of brightness around which a lot of their other dancing acting fell off into shadow. Rainey was convincing as the little drab of the first scene in the ballet but this promising ballerina whose foot is sickled in pause (and always leads with her jaw) has got to get rid of an ugly stiffness in her arms and back.

Lynette Mann and Paul de Masson worked very hard at what they were doing, but frankly I think both of them were badly cast; romantic leads are not really their style either. Both of them are good allegro dancers, sharp, secure and responsive to the music, but slow them down and expect them to give substance to a vague romantic dreaminess and they look apologetic and affected. Mann especially is a great character dancer and one who is (or can be) the best in the Company when it comes to comedy roles. Her technique gets purer and more secure with every performance she gives, but selection for her roles must be made carefully, put her in the wrong one and she (or he for that matter) will merely look diffident and lost.

Michaela Kirkaldie along with the absent Marilyn Rowe is the only Company dancer with the technique and stage assurance (not to mention the looks) capable of essaying the major dramatic ballerina roles (Giselle, Odette and...
Aurora). For unedgy execution, flow and characterisation, her partnering with the ever reliable Kelvin Coe was the best of all the castings. Wonderment, pathos, humour and sentiment were all correctly blended in their interpretation and it made the ballet with all its faults live.

Kelvin Coe has been such a familiar face over the years that one can easily take his gifts for granted. He is one of the last of the 'old' school of male dancers (by which I mean the Michael Somes/John Gilpin school), correct placement, clean execution and a fully stretched line in solo and a rock steady arm in partnering has made him the greatest choreographic asset the AB has.

Joanne Michel on the other hand, is one of the up and coming ballerinas in the Company. Throughout Cinderella's run she played the Fairy Godmother, not a role that needs great acting gifts but one that demands a strong technique. She still retains a pure manner of ever advancing security but her bodily image has nothing as yet personal stamped upon it. There is a strict classroom look about it that will need more performances to shape into a statement of style.

Space precludes any extended comment on the four soloists in the Fairies of the Four Seasons divertissement in Cinderella Act I, except to say that all of them worked avidly to get across individual character in each season while blurring the choreography that, on its own, can be sufficient to communicate.

Taken by and large, with the faults of Cinderella's choreography taken into account and the empty recesses of the story ever before one's eyes, the Company is strong in quite a few fields, but the strengths are spread rather thinly and the AB should take more trouble with its revivals and recap the sagging parts of them. It should also work on individual weaknesses within its Company as well as capitalising on its strengths — not to pasteurise and homogenise everything they do but to give itself more poise and daring in whatever it decides to tackle.
ideas. But I’ve got some ideas and I think I can listen well.” Such honesty has always proved for him the best policy. “If you manufacture answers because you’re afraid of admitting to not having an answer, you’re in real trouble.”

His concern to share will make the idea of associate directors a pressing one — having learnt from Nimrod not to attempt to direct more than four shows a year himself. “If I was going to SA thinking that I was going to be planning the season wholly by myself and the running of the company rested purely on my ability I’d never go there.”

As things stand he will be joining two stalwarts of the company he is leaving — Paul lies the GM and Grahame Murray, the production manager. Though all will build on an experience that was pretty wonderful, of a company whose arrogance and showmanship in the best sense, allows it to be a very welcoming place for the public.” But he is not going to make the mistake of imposing the Nimrod style on the STC.

He wants a character of its own to emerge and believes in a significant “cultural coming together” with himself, the STC people, and with Jim Sharman and then Elijah Moshinsky being on hand for the next two festivals.

One of the possibilities he sees is that a group of actors is more likely to remain together in Adelaide than in Melbourne or Sydney where many theatres, television and film companies are vying for their services, “and I believe that the quality of work will be such that almost any actor would be happy to work there over a period of time.”

It is possible too that with support Armfield could be the one to turn the cultural axis of Melbourne and Sydney into a triangle. he wants a decent exchange system so that “the productions that we might not want to do in SA ourselves, but which an audience may want to see, can come from the Melbourne and Sydney Theatre Companies, and so that we can take our work there.”

He speaks of an open, honest company — one which will as a policy encourage people to involve themselves in its work, especially young directors and playwrights. Open, he says, but without that sense of enforced heartiness which characterised Colin George’s regime; “Looking at one another just after breakfast and doing calisthenics” is not his way. But the Nimrod idea of weekly company meetings he will be adopting.

With almost six months to go before he takes the helm obviously very little is finalised at this stage, but Armfield is convinced that with “a group of people with good imaginations and good heads, people who know why they are there, anything is possible.”

Many have directed at a younger age than Armfield (Brook did his first London production at the age of eighteen), but few have been given such a prestigious and highly subsidised company to command at the age of twenty-five. With just a little time and the forbearance of the press, what must be seen as one of the greatest gambles of Australian theatre for some time, has a chance of paying off and putting the theatre company in the forefront; thus making such so far questionable claims a reality.

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LIEDER SOUTHERN REGIONAL THEATRE

Goldsmith Street, GOULBURN (048) 21 5868
Director: John Spicer
A semi-professional company assisted by the Theatre Board of the Australia Council (a statutory body of the Commonwealth Government)

Feb. 18th to 21st. 25th to 28th
WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION. Agatha Christie.
April 1st to 4th. 8th to 11th
DONT DRINK THE WATER. Woody Allen
May 27th to 30th. June 3rd to 6th. 10th to 13th
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM. Shakespeare

“A town less than a tenth the size of Canberra is fortunate to be able to muster such a team, production after production” — Canberra Times.
“The number of good actors who live in, or can be coaxed to this large country town is remarkable” — Theatre Australia
“I never cease to be amazed at the way John Spicer is able to draw the best from his cast in each play” — Evening Post.
by Ken Healey

After being part of a capacity audience just a week before Christmas at Canberra Opera's The Gypsy Baron, I recommend that medals be struck for producer John Milson and musical director Warren Bebbington. Only those who were not familiar with the work were grudging in their praise, but then they little knew what a Canberra pit orchestra. Musically the evening was always more ready than rough, with the chorus impressing as a stylish, full-voiced protagonist. Bebbington, a musicologist and choral conductor from the Canberra School of Music is neither a flamboyant nor a rhythmically exciting conductor. But he is thorough and sympatico, a welcome newcomer.

The operetta's best-known tunes are familiar to those over forty as 'One Day When We Were Young,' and 'Open Road. Open Sky'. The fact that both became popular with re-written lyrics is soon understood; the former song, a duet for the Baron and his gypsy princess, Saffi, is actually an avian taxonomy — an exhaustive list of the feathered friends that witnessed the woodland wedding. That we refrained from laughing at the well-enunciated lyrics is a tribute to singers Geoffrey Harris and Heather Snedden. Of interest possibly to devotees of the trivia of the Austro-Hungarian wars of the mid-18th century, the story is without romanticism — a sort of provincial John Copley who-will-one-day-be-a-primo-uomo.

Gregory Yurisich, revelling in the rare chance to do some character acting, was a ruddy, hirsute, but athletic pig farmer, Zsupan. His Ballad of a Returned Soldier was one of the better sung solo items of the night, and marked the end of a curious tendency of producer John Milson to stand his singers four-square, downstage centre for their solos in earlier acts.

Fran Bosly looked and sounded charming as Arsenio (think of Adèle if still trying to transfer from Die Fledermaus), while Heather Snedden was undaunted by her first act costume (an awkward, hooped skirt), singing and acting with passion as Saffi. The cruelly placed high notes of her big song, 'There is no Man on Earth', sounded shrill and uncomfortable, leading me, I commend producer Elijah Moshinsky's work with opera singers in the Australian Opera's current realisation of Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream. He shows that singers can be directed to do much more than stand and deliver. Unfortunately, for my taste at least, he prolongs the era of the tyranny of the director in most of the Mischief
detail.
Despite its Victorian excesses, the AO Dream is an excellent example of how dramatic values have risen in the work of our opera companies during the 70s. May there be no reactionary devaluation of that dramatic currency.

As if to demonstrate by citing an opposite, I believe that an indication of what opera can do is obliquely given by reference to the aims of Rex Cramphorn and his Shakespeare Company, seen in Sydney in Measure for Measure and The Two Gentlemen of Verona late in 1980.

That company worked from a starting point of reverence for text. At times a rare clarity emerged, especially in The Two Gentlemen: more often one felt that this was an noble enterprise with limited prospects. Such a loving devotion to details of text has no corresponding place in opera: it is the supra-textual sweep of Shakespeare that inspired Verdi and Boito to their miracle of compression in Otello.

Not disregard for text, but inspiration enlarging upon the already broad sweep of the conflict of protagonists — that is the sort of thing that opera libretti are best made from.

Among our established composers only Larry Sitsky has shown a determination and a skill requisite for the task of writing major operas in Australia. Like Louis Nowra, Sitsky does not look to the wallaby, the wombat, or the okker for his subject matter. We can only await the treatment afforded his latest work, The Gollem, commissioned by the Australian Opera, and delivered to that company last year.

It is probably with the younger composers, those of Brian Howard’s generation, that the brightest operatic hopes lie. They should be encouraged to write small-scale works for the regional companies, with funding adequate to encourage the best talent available for innovative work.

As it happens, I note with concern that both Victoria State Opera, where Richard Divall made his reputation with baroque works, and State Opera South Australia, where music theatre provided ready company identification, have both been forced by increasing subsidy to chase audiences by offering more standard operas.

Both overseas, where I saw productions by the Met, New York City Opera, Covent Garden, ENO, and Scottish Opera during 1980, and at the Australian Opera I trust that the growing interest of non-government sponsors will enable us to see appropriately lavish productions of the 19th and early 20th century classics, directed and designed in a manner befitting the 80s. By and large the better singers have shown themselves capable of being directed. And we need those singers.

The most convincing acting, backed by nothing better than faulty vocal technique, will never last on the operatic stage. Those of us who have watched the apprenticeship served by such singers as Marilyn Richardson, Joan Carden, and Donald Shanks know that opera stars are likely to take ten years to reach a peak after they are capable of sustaining leading roles.

In the field of operatic design I am constantly dismayed at the frequency with which Australian talent is passed over in favour of mediocrity from abroad. In selecting artistic directors for our subsidised legitimate theatres we have at last begun to overcome this posture of cultural cringe. Will opera, as it does so often, once again lag behind? By all means let us have Truscott and Brian Thomson return, and let us learn from designers of the calibre of Svoboda and even Ralph Koltai (whose Tannahuser for the AO I abhorred). In the main, however, the special relationship that exists between director and designer needs to be fostered among local talent. Only then will an Australian style, arising inevitably because of our geographical isolation, be nurtured instead of being allowed to grow haphazardly.

It if is taken seriously by those presenting it, and not used merely as a vehicle for extravagance and show, opera should become a vital limb of our living theatre. There is something almost sacred about a performer standing on a stage and, instead of speaking, beginning to sing. For me the members of Silk sing with their style, arising inevitably because of our geographical isolation, be nurtured instead of being allowed to grow haphazardly.

Which companies should be seeking out new composers and librettists? All of them, of course. But innovation is perilously expensive for the national companies. Although one hopes and expects the AO to take Sitsky’s commissioned opera seriously in terms of resources and numbers of performances (the same composer’s short opera Lenz was shabbily treated in the latter respect), nevertheless, it is inescapable that the future of non-standard operas, whether Australian or not and from whatever era, lies with the regional companies which should be able more frequently to take some risk at the box-office in return for probable artistic kudos.
showing real promise

sleeping beauty
travesties

by marguerite wells

sleeping beauty: the second of a series of images from the background devised by the fools gallery theatre company; reid house theatre workshop. opened 26 november 1980.
director, carol woodrow; art work, design and lighting, julie wood; productions manager, roland manderson; costumes, sadie armstrong.
cast: lisa benyon, ewa crajor, jo fleming, inge klar, jamie mcdonald; tony mcgregor, marcella o'hare, milkal skeates.
(professional)
director, rodney delaney, set design, peter harris; stage manager, ken boucher; lighting design, lee shipley.
cast: henry carr, les asmussen; tristan tzara, john warnock; james joyce, john cuffe; Bennett, Gordon sheldon; gwendojen; tamara ross; Cecil; Joan Murray; Nadya; Pat Hutchinson; lenin, Martin reighan.
(professional)

in the goldfish bowl that constitutes canberra theatre, there has been a major environmental shift. where formerly there was one fully professional theatre, the jigsaw company (who did mainly tie work and rarely leapt to the public eye) now there are three. fools gallery have been working underground for two years, surfacing only to produce a remarkable rendition of Alice in Wonderland in 1979, as a money-spinner. now the second image in their four-play series, images from the background has opened in canberra and moved to the festival of sydney. fortune theatre, for several years relegated to the canberra theatre foyer at lunch times, has grown up to the extent that it is now allowed to play in the playhouse at nights. fortune's former hard core of ex-rep stalwarts has softened (under financial blackmail) to admit new local actors and imported professionals, and with a parade of imported directors this year has produced a season that promises well for a reasonable, though not stunning, regional theatre company in the future. the really good local actors who used to work with the Australian theatre workshop and occasionally with canberra rep. have slid over to fortune, leaving rep to the give-your-daughter-a-whirl-on-the-stage-mrs-worthington role that it has for many years prided itself on not being relegated to.

the theatrical division of labour is becoming increasingly obvious; rep for a nice night out seeing your friends enjoying themselves treading the boards in a little piece of dramatic frippery; fortune for a brilliance. in canberra's goldfish bowl this is not true, and the theatrical brain-drain caused by the increasing popularity and quality of fortune productions has left rep with a quality control problem on its hands.

within fortune productions too, however, there is a very marked variation in standard, ranging, in travesties, from a couple of rather wooden performances to the light-handed brilliance of les asmussen's characterisation of tristan tzara. the superb idea of coupling the importance of Being Earnest and travesties in a season, thus showing up the many parallels, parodies and petty plagiarisms, gave the season a real intellectual and 'literary' fascination that neither play would have on its own. there were technical problems; the "replays" when Henry Carr's brain slips and has to be forced to replay a flashback more in line with reality than with senile mauldering, often did not work. it was not clear until the third replay what was happening; when these did not work they constituted (in a stoppard play?) moments of tedium. But it was a pleasant production which showed real promise of a future studded with fewer long, long evenings at home in the notorious canberra silent nights.

fools gallery's sleeping beauty is a worthy successor to standard operating procedure (ta december/january), and a startling contrast. compared with the deadly seriousness of sop, sleeping beauty is a very funny and at times almost good humoured expose of the "the myths of romantic love and family relationships, as perpetuated by popular cultures ancient and modern". it is a pretty production so pretty that the attraction of the myths the play is debunking, becomes more compelling than ever. sleeping beauty's glass coffin (in perspex and surmounted by a chocolate-box pink bow) was, for instance, excruciatingly pretty. fools gallery's world is full of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of the messianic power of
Dramas fit for heroes

**CELLULOID HEROES**

*by John McCallum*

*Celluloid Heroes* by David Williamson Nimrod Theatre, Sydney. Opened 2 December 1980. Director, John Bell; Designer, Larry Eastwood; Lighting designer, Graham Murray. Cast: Al Shannon, Peter Sumner; Mike Fontaine, John Gregg; Brett Rodgers; Alan Wilson; Gary Brady, Henri Steph; Maggie Murnane, Kate Fitzpatrick; Alison Mockay, Barbara Stephano, Nestor Snell, Robin Ramsay; Dick Birakool, Kevin Smith. (Professional)

*Missing Heroes* (A Very Good Year) by Bob Ellis. The Stables, Kings Cross, Sydney. Opened 9 December 1980. Director, Mick Rodger; Designer, Mike Bridges; Music director, Mervyn Drake; Choreographer, David Atkin.

For people who believe that a country needs heroes, or, with Les Murray, that "men must have legends else they will die or strangeness" - the beginning of December in Sydney last year was a fascinating time. Two plays - one called *Celluloid Heroes*, the other subtitled *Missing Heroes*. Two writers whose relationship is sort of legendary (although perhaps not sitting-round-the-campfire material - "Did you ever hear the story of Williamson and Ellis in Bali?" - a hush descends, broken only by the clinking of flagons of rough red.) Two openings (attended by heroes) - one celebrating ten years of Nimrod, with Young Mo jumping out of a cake; and the other on the day John Lennon was shot. As we descended into the foyer after Travelling North - to be enjoyed for different qualities. Some reviewers have complained that the plot is contrived, the characters cartoon-like, and that it is inappropriate to write a farce with ideas in it (like aboriginal rights). Bad luck Dario Fo. Williamson has always worked on the borderline between naturalism and satire. Even his "naturalism" is odd. (There's this young footballer, see, and he gives this old sagn of a cigarette, except it's not a real cigarette, it's dope. Well it seems as how when this footballer was young his sister...). When he's writing overt satire, as he is in *Celluloid Heroes*, it is absurd to ask that the characters be "fully-rounded" or the plot realistically credible.

The confusion arises because, like Aristophanes (who once brought Eriptides on stage as a character) and William Young Mo jumping out of a cake; and the strangeness, the beginning of December in Sydney last year was a fascinating time. Two plays - one called *Celluloid Heroes*, the other subtitled *Missing Heroes*. Two writers whose relationship is sort of legendary (although perhaps not sitting-round-the-campfire material - "Did you ever hear the story of Williamson and Ellis in Bali?" - a hush descends, broken only by the clinking of flagons of rough red.) Two openings (attended by heroes) - one celebrating ten years of Nimrod, with Young Mo jumping out of a cake; and the other on the day John Lennon was shot. As we descended into the foyer after Travelling North - to be enjoyed for different qualities. Some reviewers have complained that the plot is contrived, the characters cartoon-like, and that it is inappropriate to write a farce with ideas in it (like aboriginal rights). Bad luck Dario Fo. Williamson has always worked on the borderline between naturalism and satire. Even his "naturalism" is odd. (There's this young footballer, see, and he gives this old sagn of a cigarette, except it's not a real cigarette, it's dope. Well it seems as how when this footballer was young his sister...). When he's writing overt satire, as he is in *Celluloid Heroes*, it is absurd to ask that the characters be "fully-rounded" or the plot realistically credible.

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A very bold move

THE PRECIOUS WOMAN

by Michele Field

The Precious Woman by Louis Nowra, Sydney Theatre Company at Sydney Opera House. Opened November 11, 1980. Director, Richard Wherrett; Assistant Director, Louis Nowra; Designer, Luciana Arrighi; Lighting Designer, Tony Youlden; Composer, Sarah de Jong; Choreographer, Marguerite Pepper; Stage Managers, Julie Warn and Fiona Williams. Cast: Su-ling, Robyn Nevin; Deng, Vic Rooney; Bao, Brandon Burke; Dai Ya, Noni Hazlehurst; Chi Yu, Kevin Miles; Nanny, Janice Finn; Kwei, Bill McCluskey; Zhou, Craig Ashley; Wa, Robin Row­­erring; Patricia Simpson, Gillian Jones; Fu, Alan Tobin; Mr Simpson, Norman Kaye; Gardener, Andrew Tigh; Rebel, Ned Manning. (Professional)

The Precious Woman may be Nowra's most uncertain play. The deft use of times and places that seem "exotic" to Australian audiences is something of a distinction with Nowra, but in this play there is a stiltedness that reminds us of its bastardy, neither here nor there. In its self-consciousness there are shades of Yeats' work well. There is the devious but not unkindly king, there is a club-footed tyrant which the actors are never sure they are handling well.

Traitors is the only other Australian play this past year which compares to The Precious Woman for its attempt to reverse the trend toward reducing plot to situation or even to attitude. The Precious Woman tries to hold a lot of plot - a plot halfway between Shakespeare's histories and the Oresteia, I thought. But almost inevitably, as the plot thickens the characterisations are diluted. And it is the stereotyped characters which are the play's greatest weakness. There is the devious but not unkindly king, there is a club-footed tyrant of a son who succeeds him, there is a seventeen-year-old Englishwoman straight out of Somerset Maugham (a missionary's daughter turned whore), there is a maid servant who sings liltingly while she dances with her mistress' dress, there is the faithful nanny with a wiry frame that's all too similar to Mary Poppins.

The one role that reached beyond the stereotype was Su-ling, the Madam Mao figure. But, like the mother in Nowra's previous play Inside the Island, the role of Su-ling collapses at the end of the play. In the last fifteen minutes of both plays the women must emerge as heroic figures - without friends, without the props of husbands, children and hirelings. But just at this point Nowra cuts them down to size by making them pathetic. Still, Nowra has written two very full roles for women in these plays - much more than Australian actresses are usually offered.

The weakness of the end of The Precious Woman is its likeness to the end of Cyrano, which Louis Nowra translated for the Sydney Theatre Company earlier this year. In The Precious Woman, the audience's reaction to the final tableau should be the reverse of Cyrano's. The dying swaggart, supported in a woman's arms, is the villain here, but that Pieta posture makes it hard for an audience to reorient its sympathies.

Su-ling is played by Robyn Nevin, and her best performance comes in the Mother Courage bits in the second act. The Precious Woman tells the story of a revolution and an equally successful counter-revolution. But these cataclysms have even less onstage action than the clashing of swords in Cyrano. There are Brechtian insinuations of the carnage, but if you follow the actors' gaze the war is always being fought somewhere halfway up the auditorium.

I personally would have liked more production, not only of the obvious sort that Cyrano had, but also some backup to the play's interesting symbols. For example, the gibbons which live in the trees around the place of Su-ling's exile and torment her - that's a wonderful symbol but it needs to be realised, even if only in a soundtrack offset of gibbons screeching. On the other hand, those symbols to which the production did try to give substance were visualised awkwardly. The ghost of Su-ling's husband emerging from the surf, or the peasant girl who is forced to play her fiddle while her village burns, were both, as images, too pointed and heavy-handed. As mentions on the printed page, such images work well enough, but even a short appearance of a ghost onstage can be cumbersome in a way that the author and the director didn't anticipate.

Louis Nowra now seems to be going for blunt-endedness. It is a very bold move - the kind of move which most playwrights make much later in their careers than this point in Nowra's. It is not a move towards simplicity, as it seemed to some critics. Or, at least, the simplicity paradoxically makes the lines much harder for all but the best actors to speak. Some reviewers of the play disparaged it for not having enough "gist", not having a more elaborate argument. But this is the point - that it does without a thesis as much as it does without scenery.

Yet these manoeuvres leave the actors disoriented, I think. I cannot recollect any actor in Cyrano casting about for the emphasis within his lines. But the lines in Cyrano were more elaborate and dictated more to an actor. As I was reading the script of The Precious Woman, I imagined that many of the lines were going to be delivered in dry voices, eyes towards the end of the auditorium. But it didn't turn out that way, and my impression was that most of the actors were stabbing for emphases that weren't there.

Richard Wherrett's first season with the Sydney Theatre Company has come full circle. We are still a long way from productions like The Dead Class and The Lower Depths, which seem more complicated because of the relationship they develop with their audiences, both alienating and attracting. But at least the Sydney Theatre Company has come to maturity in one short year, moving with an unbowed spirit from the relentlessly frivolous production of The Sunny South to a play which is both serious and topical. Although The Precious Woman is a bit rough hewn, I was convinced while watching it that it is the sort of play from which the Sydney Theatre Company will eventually earn its reputation.
To be congratulated

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA
MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by Dennis Biggins

The Two Gentlemen of Verona by William Shakespeare is a Shakespeare Company Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre, Sydney. Opened 7 November, 1980. Director, Rex Cramporn; Design and Lighting, the Company.


In the November, 1980 Theatre Australia Rex Cramporn explained the aims of, approaches used and discoveries made by his experimental A Shakespeare Company.

Some of the fruits of their endeavours were displayed in performances of The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Measure for Measure in the Everest Theatre at the Seymour Centre during November and December. I must say at the outset that I found the Company’s work deeply interesting, and revelatory of Shakespeare’s art in ways unparalleled by any other production of his plays that I have seen.

The actors performed on a square-black thrust stage, against a background of black curtains, with two entrance spaces. At centre back there was a small balcony for Two Gentlemen, which was replaced for Measure by a small rostrum, with a portable bench and two stools for use as required. Nothing else at all. Costumes were similarly spare: mostly light-coloured tunics or blouses, slacks, ankle-length shifts, slip-on shoes or knee boots. The tunics or blouses, slacks, ankle-length shifts were similarly spare: mostly light-coloured (uniform and harsh white lighting throughout both productions).

No concessions were made, then, to any audience expectations of traditional or modernist Shakespearian staging. On the level of interpretation the Company’s approach was even more ascetic, most notably in its “unimposed directorial style”, and in its casting against gender and type, with male actors in female roles and older actors playing younger characters, or vice versa. Although these methods resulted in absorbing accounts of both plays, for various reasons they worked better with Two Gentlemen than with Measure.

One of the paradoxes of reversed casting that emerged from this Two Gentlemen was that it was harder to accept female actors as men than vice versa. And not because of the more obvious physical differences between the sexes. The heroines of Two Gentlemen are drawn in the courtly-love/romance traditional of feminine perfection; their beauty merely mirrors their spiritual qualities. This was perhaps one reason, notwithstanding the excellent ensemble work of this company, that the performances of Ron Haddrick as Julia and John Goden as Silvia stood out as delicate, sensitive and totally decorous, in the strict sense of that term: they conveyed the essence of their characters. On the other hand, Arthur Dignam as Julia’s waiting-woman Lucetta was a little too fluttery and campy, seeking more in the character than was there (for example, in the scene in which Lucetta advises Julia on her proposed journey in male disguise to seek out the errant Proteus, Mr Dignam was anguished, whereas the text surely indicates playfulness).

As the symbolically named heroes (“Valentine” denotes a faithful lover; Proteus was a shape-changing Greek sea-god), Jennifer Hagan and Drew Forsythe gracefully complemented the work of Messrs Haddrick and Goden. The greatest threat to the coherence of this production came from Kerry Walker as a young, pert and cheeky Speed, Valentine’s man-servant, and Ruth Cracknell’s Launce, whose scene with his dog Crab, expertly manipulating an appreciative audience’s responses, was very funny, and appeared highly subversive of romance sentimentality. As Crab, Shorty (unjustly relegated to the “Thanks to” page of the programme) beautifully caught the reigning spirit of the production: subdued eloquence.

Whereas the production of Two Gentlemen evolved over most of the nearly six months’ working life of the company, that of Measure, as Mr Camphorn reported in the November, 1980 Theatre Australia, was allotted only a few weeks, and was largely cast along conventional lines. The difference was apparent, not in the quality of performance but rather in the impact of the presentation.

Halfway through Measure there are such marked shifts in poetic and dramatic tone that it is difficult for an audience to keep the whole play in focus. “This production,” said the programme, “does not attempt to resolve any of the inner contradictions that may or may not exist within this text. The attempt has been simply to present the play in its fullness”.

The performances of the key-roles highlighted the absence of a controlling interpretative focus. My initial impression of Arthur Dignam’s Duke was of unease - in the actor, rather than in the character. He delivered his lines in a curiously chopped-up, jerky way, and seemed generally at odds with his role. As the play went on, however, it appeared that this was an uneasy Duke: that is, Mr Dignam was stressing the human, rather than the symbolic aspect of the character; not the omnipotent Ruler standing in for Divine Providence, but the frail man who could later be afflicted by a slanderous Lucio, and who could finally ask Isabella to marry him - and be accepted.

Drew Forsythe, on the other hand, went all out for the inhuman self-control of the symbolically named Angelo - “this outward-sainted deputy” as Claudio calls him. This was a well-disciplined and carefully spoken, but rather under-dimensional performance.

Kerry Walker trod a middle path between these approaches: her Isabella began quietly, but gathered force as it progressed, and there was some fine power and excitement in her exchanges with Claudio and with Angelo in the play’s first half. And the final scene in which, though as yet unaware that Claudio still lived, she pleaded for Angelo’s life, was quietly yet genuinely moving. These were, however, isolated discharges of dramatic energy in what was too often a low-voltage presentation of the Duke-Angelo-Isabella relationships.

The one notable failure in this Measure was Ruth Cracknell’s Lucio. Here the reversed casting simply did not work, despite the intelligent resource Miss Cracknell brought to the role. The swagger and the asperity were there, but Lucio lives in his aggressively masculine sexual tawdriness, which colours all he says and does, and to convey this a male actor is necessary.

Some general conclusions emerge from
my impressions of these two productions. Firstly, that the approaches adopted had the salutary effect of making audiences listen to the dialogue above all else. Secondly, the burden of interpretation, both in planning and in performance, fell almost totally upon the acting. The actors rose admirably to this challenge: in both plays there was some of the finest verse-speaking that I have heard from Australian actors. The deliberate economy of movement and gesture had two effects: one, again to throw the onus of presentation onto the voice; another, to make the groupings of and spacings between characters, and the emblematic movements (notably using the diagonals and periphery of the stage), especially significant.

The whole enterprise seems admirable; Mr Crampmorn and his company are to be congratulated, and I for one, hope to see more work of this kind.

**Laughs at the expense of credibility**

**GOLDEN PATHWAY THROUGH EUROPE**

by Anthony Barclay


Director, Brian Young; Designer, Yoshi Tosa; Producer, Judith Johnson; Assistant to Director, Zeka Nestor; Production Assistant, Michael Gillett; Light Design, Mel Conder; Stage Manager, John Blankenship.

Cast: Herman, Alex Pinder; Chuck, Roger Carroll; Sonny, Judy Ferris; Joan, Kati Edwards; Malcolm, Harold Jones; Ron, Frank Haines; Diana, Jenny Ludlam.

(Professional)

It is hard to disagree with Leslie Rees' claim that Rod Milgate's first play, *A Refined Look at Existence* (1966) was the "progenitor of the New Wave in Sydney" theatre. That was early in the Jane Street history and was pointing the direction of things to come: *King O'Malley, Don's Party* and Nimrod. Of course much has changed since those heady days, and, in its own way, Milgate's third play *Golden Pathway Through Europe* reflects those changes. *A Refined Look At Existence* was sheer theatrical delight, strenuously anti-naturalistic, drawing adventurously on Euripides' Bacchae and not a little of the absurdity of Ionesco. In retrospect some of it seems a little naive but it was exuberant stuff then. *Golden Pathway Through Europe* is muted by contrast; a well made play, solidly based in realism, with a tendency to reach for laughs at the expense of credibility.

*Golden Pathway* is set in the outskirts of Paris where we meet three married couples - American, Australia, New Zealand - and one seedy hotel boy. Simply the tour bus has broken down and, in the early dawn hours, the couples take to the hotel for the day. Brian Young managed an excellent opening as the six characters struggled onto the stage replete with all the exemplary inanities one all too often encounters in American and Anzacs on the Grand Tour. Tired, over burdened with luggage and bigotry it was all very funny. But this moment did not last for long and the scene degenerated into a minor encyclopaedia of tourist jokes and "language problems" that left one cringing as much as the real thing does. It might have been a good idea to introduce us to the couples this way but it had about as much bite as a night of slides at your relatives.

However, the action thankfully shifts to the couples' various bedrooms and dramatic interest is refocused. Firstly, Chuck and Sonny, the American couple, then Malcolm and Joan the Australians and finally Diana and Ron the New Zealanders are put under closer inspection and the initial substance returns. Or at least returns at various moments. The point of all this is that the European experience is no great holiday from life, indeed home grown problems assert themselves with a vengeance. With the Americans it is Chuck's alcoholism and Sonny's desperate attempts to prevent its recurrence. That scene started well with solid acting from Roger Carroll and Judy Ferris: it moved neatly between domesticity and growing unease. But the climax - a long, agony filled outburst from Sonny - though powerful lost its point. It could have been pruned back without loss.

Harold Jones' Malcolm was the best piece of acting: restrained yet full of subtle tones, a testimony of devotion and repression with a quiet cry of anguish. Kati Edwards' Joan was as comic as the part demanded but I found it all too much. OK that such a monster might hoard bags full of bread and jam left-overs all over Europe but too, too much when she talks about the properties in Victoria and Queensland and selling the terraces in Kings Cross!

The best piece of writing was reserved for the young New Zealand couple, Diana and Ron. A couple whose sexual attraction is a mask to not inconsiderable incompatibilities. Jenny Ludlam and Frank Haines gave fine performances in this all too familiar situation; nagging and seduction make for interesting comedy. Finally, Alex Pinder's Herman, the dumb-smart hotel boy, added fine touches of humour to the evening.

At this time of writing the Ensemble are yet another of Sydney's theatres to face the problems of trying to rebuild and accommodate the demands of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Hopefully by the time this goes to press the matter will have been solved in the theatre's favour. It would be nothing less than a tragedy to lose or see in any way restricted the activities of this country's second oldest professional theatre company.
Unselfconsciously old-fashioned

YOU AND THE NIGHT AND THE HOUSE WINE

By Barry O'Connor

You and the Night and the House Wine written, devised and acted by Robyn Moase, Deidre Rubenstein, Tony Sheldon and Tony Taylor; musical direction and piano, Max Lambert; designer, Robert Kirk; lighting design, Margie Wright; stage manager, Anne Heath.

You and the Night and the House Wine are the ingredients for a late night party at the Nimrod Downstairs. It's the kind of party you'd hate to be invited to - wouldn't you? After cramming you into a small dark space, where you jostle with eighty other people and juggle carafes of vino at ricketty cafe tables, four hosts intimidate you into enjoying yourself, prowling up and down along two sides of the claustrophobic space. There are games, puzzles and quizzes, with prizes to be won; there are songs to singalong to; and a serialised pantomime of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" to hold your interest if you find the two hours of NONSTOP FUN hard to bear.

In effect You and the Night and the House Wine is a riotous night of endless energy and entertainment, with four beautiful and talented people who seem dedicated to keeping alive the tradition of the old Philip Street Revues. This is the kind of show that, despite the recently growing interest in cabaret (see August TA), Sydney hasn't seen for a long time. I wondered that I hadn't entered a time capsule. Messrs. Taylor and Sheldon and Misses Rubenstein and Moase looked and sounded as though they'd taken one step beyond some time ago, and have been dancing to Porter and Gershwin ever since. This is not contrived nostalgia, it is simply unselfconsciously old-fashioned. Much of the material, while expertly executed, is of a chestnut brown hue. Jokes about Bob and Dolly Dyer (remember them?) and quaintly naughty additions to Snow White about drugs, are just two examples.

The standard of the performance, however, is very high, and the actors are well suited to coping with the various demands of melodrama, song and dance, revue skit, and fourway harmony - all very ably assisted by Max Lambert, the musical director and pianist. Much of the evening is one long shared joke, but unexpected poignancy is to be found in a sketch about Santa Claus' lonely and neglected wife; a Punch and Judy presentation of Judy Garland's career; and, Tony Taylor's moving rendition of "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas". The voices, limbs and faces work well together. Tony Sheldon's turn as a stand-up comic, telling the one about "The Man who comes into a bar with a beautiful woman on his arm..." is a tour de force. Deidre Rubenstein's Blues version of a Christmas carol is a show-stopper. Robyn Moase must have the most beautiful legs in the world.

Great fun this, but I'd have liked less Luna Park and more sophistication.
Blurred intentions and bad taste

ERROL FLYNN'S GREAT BIG ADVENTURE BOOK FOR BOYS

by Jeremy Ridgman


Director, Malcolm Blaylock; Musical director, David Pyle; Designer, Luke Roberts; Choreographer, Kristen Bell; Stage Manager, Elizabeth Davis.

Cast: Errol Flynn, Stephen Hadden, Lois Tudor, Christine Hooper and with Stephen Billet, Narelle Hooper, Suzanne Marshall, Anna McCrossan, Stephen Preston, Rosamund Vidgen, Michael Williams.

(Pro/iam)

Unhappy indeed is the land that has need of heroes and yet the search goes on, however dubious the qualifications of the candidates. Rob George's Errol Flynn is formulaic myth-making biog-drama, with shades of Let's Twist Again (presented here last season), not the least evident of which is the central portrait of a vulnerable anti-hero masquerading as a misogynist lout — or is it the other way around? Being a respected writer of educational scripts, Mr George is, I am sure, an honourable man, but in both plays he skates on thin ice with his rootin-tootin, loveable, all-Ozzie bastard and I am afraid the Leviathan-like lumberings of the latter have the play crashing through into the murky depths of blurred intentions and sheer bad taste.

It is difficult to be constructive about an embittered study when the play's female roles consist of four all-singing, all-dancing beauties who occasionally come forward to play cartoon caricatures, and a bespectacled, career-woman journalist who only manages to prove that she has soul by fancying Flynn in the final reel and whose main job is to give the play its investigative narrative structure. Hence, lines such as: "Flynn: You know me! Lois: I don't think I do, yet." — which might as well read, "I feel a second act coming on!"

In the closing moments, Flynn makes a fool of himself at the Oscar presentations (presumably something new in those days) by coming on drunk and ends up delivering a long complaint against the world that has disfigured him. Moving as the monologue is, and superbly handled by Stephen Hadden to cap an intelligent performance, it is not enough to tip the balance against the horrors of Flynn's earlier behaviour or the generally celebratory tone of the play as a whole. As in Let's Twist Again, the vast, apocalyptic tirade serves as a moral get-out clause rather than a dialectical enriching of the play's issues and also hints at the dramatic bankruptcy of the biographical narrative strain in our theatre.

The play's strength lies in the opportunities it offers an inventive director and a lively, multi-talented cast, both of which it gets here. On a lavish set of second rate art deco and New Guinea tat, Malcolm Blaylock's cast of nine move through inventively choreographed routines, witty cameos and a dresser's nightmare of costume changes, all with poise and sparkle. Stephen Preston, a man of a thousand accents, shines in a rapid series of sword fights, as a different villain in each. It's fast, flashy stuff. But I'm not sure that I learnt any more than I did from a comment by Flynn's daughter in a recent press interview concerning her childhood memories of her then fifty year old father.

"Dad used to sit me on his knee... He was a real tease and was always pulling my skirt." Lucky girl.

A good bang-up finish

CRUSHED BY DESIRE

by Don Batchelor

The QTC is now in recess preparing for what looks like a highly entertaining 1981. The Company is justly proud of the success of its 1980 drive for subscribers, and talks of them as a "family". In their final offering for 1980, Crushed By Desire, there is no doubt that the family felt very much at home. They were ready and eager for the theatrical confection the show offers, everything was done to fold them to the Company's ample bosom, and the response was warm and fulsome.

I arrived at the SGIO Theatre with the bus-loads of subscribers who are so superbly catered for by the QTC child-minding service. This scheme, which provides a free bus to and from a child-minding centre for selected evenings during any season, is just one example of caring for the subscriber family.

A less successful touch was the recorded "compliments of the season" message from QTC Director Alan Edwards, delivered in pampering tones which suggested our mental age might have been eleven.

The show was directed with wit and vitality by John Milson whose talent for musical theatre has been well demonstrated in Brisbane. Graham MacLean's design dressed the play in crisp stylish garb. Wilson had thoughtfully included Brian Stacey's musicians in the action where possible which enhanced an already good ensemble feeling.

There was some engaging singing by Gaye MacFarlane and Margery Fonde, and an old trouper's performance of an old trouper by Raymond Duparc.

But the highlights of a pleasant evening were Geoff Cartwright's incisive comic timing as Inspector Corcoran which is further evidence of his range, and an outstanding performance by Duncan Wass (Sir Garfield Squeeze) who with the ease that requires great skill evoked the ambience of the music hall in the ice-blue formality of the SGIO Theatre.

All told a good bang-up finish to the year.
Comedies of boredom and loneliness

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY
TALLEY’S FOLLY
THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

by Michael Morley


Cast: Islayev, John Saunders; Anna, Myra Noblet; Natalya, Anna Volska; Kolya, Brett Bugdanski or Joseph Santi; Vera, Susan Lyons or Vanessa Downing; Michel, Robert Alexander; Herr Schaaf, Peter Schwartz; Belyayev, Philip Qost or James Laurie; Lizaveta, Maree D’Arcy; Matvei, B-J Cole; Bolshintsov, Peter Cummins; Dr Shipigelsky, Wayne Bell.

Talley’s Folly by Lanford Wilson. The Stage Company at The Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. Opened November 26, 1980. Director, John Noble; Designer, Bruce McKendry; Stage Manager, Bruce McKendry.

Cast: Matt Friedman, Wayne Bell; Sally Talley, Deborah Little.


While it is now common to view Turgenev as a forerunner to Chekhov, there is a sense in which both his prose work and his plays are a step further on. For if Chekhov can be said to be the chronicler of boredom and the portrayer of the past and the present as a continuum, Turgenev is more the anatomist of boredom, a dissector of moods and qualities. He shows us the past behind the present. The central characters in Month in the Country are both the products of their past. But their present reactions and feelings are either - as in the case of Natalya - so immediate and out of proportion that the past need never have happened or - as in the case of Rakitin - so fashioned by past experience and tuned to what he expects from the present, that anything new and unexpected can only evoke past bitterness and the unsavoury tastes of bewilderment and self-disgust.

Nick Enright’s production rightly concentrated on the Natalya Rakitin relationship, but tended rather to see these two as the serious core of the piece, while allowing the subsidiary characters to slip into caricature. There was a feeling that characters like Rakitin and Shipigelsky should have been less muted, more energised - especially in the case of the latter.

This is not to suggest that Robert Alexander’s reading of Rakitin was inappropriate or superficial - quite the contrary. His scenes with Anna Volska encompassed a range of moods from the ironic to the intense, the quizzical to the humorous, and Anna Volska’s Natalya was quite simply the best performance from an actress on this stage in ages.

The comic atmosphere of the whole play went for less than it should.

The idea of a group of characters, isolated and seeking for something in themselves and in their situation also provides the central motif for Lanford Wilson’s play Talley’s Folly; though in this case, as it is only a two-hander, the audience comes closer to the effects of loneliness and lack of direction on individual lives - here, the 31 year old nurse Sally Talley from the mid-West, and the 43 year old accountant Matt Friedman from St Louis. Both are loners, both seeking contact, both bearing the scars of the past; but prepared, especially in Matt’s case, to place hope in the future.

The time is 1944 and after a year’s absence, punctuated on his part by numerous letters, Matt has driven down to Lebanon to persuade Sally of what he has already persuaded himself - that he is the right thing for her. The play charts the progress of the characters’ move towards awareness of their own longings and towards contact with another human being. It is funny, moving, cleverly - maybe even too cleverly - constructed and basically fairly conventional.

Wayne Bell’s Matt is typical without being caricatured: Jewish, self-aware, and masking his uncertainty with an array of conversational tricks and impersonations, he is an engaging creation. And the shifts in writing - from the sharp to the soft, the humorous to the mournful - are well caught in his performance. Debbie Little’s Sally is equally impressive, though one would have thought she’d have been a catch in any community, let alone Lebanon, Missouri.

However she perfectly captures the character’s sense of pain and uncertainty, her brittleness, her caring, her matter-of-factness. In fact it is these qualities that make the play so rewarding: Wilson does not restrict his characters to two or three moods or qualities. They shift back and forth and the dialogue reflects neatly and effectively the emotional tensions between the two. It’s an ultimately encouraging play and though the two performers deserve major credit, John Noble’s direction, allowing them and the play time to catch the rhythms and Bruce McKendry’s beautifully dilapidated boathouse (the folly of the title) with its fretwork and stained glass windows, both contribute to a fine evening.

No space to do other than say that John Noble’s Christian Brother lost nothing in comparison with Peter Carroll’s famous reading - no mean achievement, this.
A problematic success

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

by Colin Duckworth


Cast: Mrs. Ernest W. Stanley, Rosie Sturgess; Miss Preen, Marion Edward; Richard Stanley, Patrick Frost; June Stanley, Vivien Davies; John, Michael Edgar; Sarah, Anne Charleston; Mr. Stanley, Anthony Hawkins; Maggie Cutler, Linden Wilkinson; Dr. Bradley, David Ravenswood, Sheridan Whiteside, Frank Thring; Harriet Stanley, Jacqueline Kelleher; Bert Jefferson, Rod Mullinar; Lorraine Sheldon, Kerry McGuire; Beverly Carlton, Frederick Parslow; Banjo, Gary Down; and with Johnny Quinn, Michael Rowan, and Trevor Harward.

Director, Simon Chilvers; designer Anne Fraser; lighting design, Murray Taylor.

(Professional)

If this production was successful, it was perhaps not for the obvious reasons. When one is dealing with a script as well tried and popular as this one, and with an actor as skilled and talented as Frank Thring, one is clearly into the fine-tuning phase right away; and a certain off-centred fuzziness, a sense of disparity between what one should have been seeing and hearing, and the actual performance, was evident throughout, stemming partly from the manifest differences between the real-life Alexander Woollcott and his facsimile Sheridan Whiteside, as personified by Mr. Thring.

Admittedly, it is not easy to characterise a living model as diverse and self-contradictory as critic/dramatist Woollcott seems to have been: unusually sociable, agreeable, sentimental, warm, affectionate, tender, loyal and generous; but also capricious, wilful, spoiled, impatient and acerbic. The problem for the actor is to reveal all the latter less than lovable qualities, and yet remain patently worthy of the affection of his friends and sympathy of the spectators. Mr Thring's dark satanic leer and uncompromisingly irascible cha-

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racterisation of Whiteside made it hard to believe that he could be inspired by any emotion deeper than unalloyed self-interest.

Arch-critic and lecturer Sheridan Whiteside, having for once accepted an invitation to dine in a private home whilst on one of his Blue Rinse Circuits, sustains unspecified (but potentially ruinous for his host) injuries to his back stalls area by slipping on the icy front doorstep. Wheelchair-ridden on the orders of the local GP, there he must remain for the duration of the play.

It is the installation of this tentacular paraplegic Buddha-figure into the domesticity of the very ordinary, albeit well-off Stanley family, in smalltown Ohio, that provides the comedy. The plot, on the other hand, is set in motion by Whiteside's irreplaceable PA/Secretary, Maggie (whose attractiveness and unruffled efficiency are convincingly portrayed by Linden Wilkinson). Her enforced stay quickly develops into a love affair with Bert, a journalist anxious to interview the great Whiteside. The conflict between Whiteside's determination not to lose his secretary and Maggie's equal determination not to be tricked begins when she tries to transfer her allegiance from her media lord-and-master to her new-found love, reaching the intensity of a pseudo-feudal power struggle. All is fair in this love-and-war intrigue, as Whiteside and Maggie engage mercenaries of doubtful loyalty to assist or hamper the course of true love.

The whole situation is based on an improbability: anyone who, like Whiteside, wields enough influence to get star actors, actresses and TV teams to visit him in the cultural outback of Erewhon, Ohio, would certainly send for the best of medical advice from New York, or even charter an aeroplane to take him back home. But if he did that, there would be no play, no love story.

The problem of maintaining the spectator's interest in the outcome has to be
resolved partly by the attractiveness of the lovers (Rod Mullinar matches Linden Wilkinson here, in freshness and sincerity); partly by the sheer obnoxiousness of Mr. Stanley and the nauseating defence of Mrs. Stanley (not quite strongly enough brought out); and mainly by the characterisation of the central role. Is he to be a villain (arch) and cad (unmitigated) or to have a velvety hand in his spiked iron glove? A Rex Harrison would have given him glimmers of endearing qualities — as Monty Woolley did in the film version.

The two most outstanding and memorable portrayals, apart from the strong but one-dimensional performance of Mr. Thring, came from Kerry McGuire as the outrageously colourful and (she hopes) castable actress, Lorraine Sheldon, and Frederick Parslow, whose Beverley Carlton was witty, acerbic and charming enough to make him a clear contender for the main part, should Mr. Thring ever have the unwanted misfortune to break a leg. Gary Down’s Harpo-like Banjo was a great, if slightly forced, delight.

**Crisp and pacey**

**NED KELLY’S SISTER’S TRAVELLING CIRCUS**

by Suzanne Spunner


Cast: Kate Kelly, Valerie Levkowicz; Russ Moran, Peter King; Johnny Masters (Ned Kelly), Danny Nash; Mike Singleton, Richard Healy; Maggie Gray, Leslie Caust; Finbar O’Toole, Denis Moore; plus some twenty other characters shared amongst the cast.

On 11 November 1880 Ned Kelly was hanged. Meanwhile his sister Kate was on that same evening, performing, with a motley collection of theatrical n’er do wells, scenes from her brother’s life and death. Whether it was sibling pride or rivalry that motivated her, she hawked the show throughout Victoria telling the “true” story with the “real” armour and so the canonisation of the Irish Working Class hero began. Kate’s desire to tell the Irish side of the story was no doubt genuine, but it was leavened by a shrewd commercial sense; and it could similarly be argued that the APG decision to commission London based Australian writer Frank Hatherley to write yet another Kellyana piece for the Kelly Centenary was equally patriotically and commercially inspired.

I had seen Hatherley’s previous work and juxtaposes the two presented realities. In both plays Hatherley uses the device of the outsider “stranger to the part”, who in the course of the action is revealed to be “real”. In The Ripper Show, it was Jack himself who played himself, and in Kate Kelly’s Show it is Finbar O’Toole who is the only real Irish patriot. Again in both cases what this “stranger” does is to upset the fragile correspondence between the realities and in so doing reveal the limits to which the other characters will go in their “play”. It is obviously a very effective way of provoking dramatic conflict. It is also potentially politically reflective but risks disrupting the stylistic skin of the play to the point where the focus dissipates.

In this production the increasing emphasis on Finbar’s impending capture by the police for his Republican activities certainly revealed what a posturing British lackey Johnny Masters/Ned Kelly was, and forced Kate to finally take a stand for Ireland and Freedom, but it meant that the play became decidedly romantic and the critique of the hero figure was sacrificed.

Ned Kelly’s Sister’s Travelling Circus marks the end of the Ensemble’s first year and it is undeniably their best production. Its success lay in the beautifully crisp and pacey direction of Nick Lathouris and Bob Thorneycroft; the spacious and sparsely elegant set or rather lack of sets, and the perspicacity of the casting which exploited strengths and masked weaknesses. Finally and it may seem a small point but it is not, it was a musical and the actors sang well, and together.

It must be a tribute to the directors, and to the Ensemble’s long-awaited “ensemble-ness” that with the exception of Peter King (who was well cast as a hammy actor), it would be impossible to choose the best performance of the show. Danny Nash’s Ned and Valerie Levkowicz’s Kate were well observed and sustained, while Richard Healy, Lesley Caust and Denis Moore created some fifteen rapid fire cameos between them, and of these Healy’s Mayor and Moore’s Finbar were memorable.
A fast-paced and intelligent production

**VANITIES**

by Cliff Gillam


Director, Peter Morris; Designer, William Dowd; Stage Managers, Richard Hartley and Jake Newby.

Cast: Mary, Leith Taylor; Joanne, Jenny Davis; Kathy, Ailsa Piper.

There are not, to my knowledge, very many full-length plays which offer only three female parts. _Vanities_ does, and while one could hardly pretend that any one of the parts offers much of a challenge for any skilled actress, at least an opportunity is there for three actresses to stretch out and show their skills. The play traces the lives of three high-school friends from their first days in high school through college in the late sixties to maturity in the mid-seventies. Apart from a preoccupation in the second act with the arcana of the American college system's tradition of Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities, the sad scramble of the three girls to grow up in terms of ideals already out-dated as the culture around them moves with increasing momentum is engagingly and sympathetically chronicled by the writer Heifner. And he is canny enough to have worked in both the pathos and the sure-fire running gag which guarantees the kind of commercial success this play has enjoyed in America.

To note that only one of the characters undergoes any real development during the course of the action, and that the ending of the play offers the audience a gratuitous mystery about "the way she lives now" is probably, given the mass-audience the play seeks, to cavil unnecessarily.

The Hole-in-the-Wall production was distinguished by some fast-paced, intelligent direction, and excellent design, as well as by three very finely-tuned performances. Director Peter Morris, confronting the problem of registering a decade of aging in his cast, and the problem of Southern American accents, proved more than adequate to both. I was unable to understand the decision made to re-run the first minute of Act Two at the post-interval opening of Act Three until I realized that such a move allowed for the third on-stage make-up and costume change in front of the vanities (dressing-tables) which dominated the set. Even so, I still thought the move a little heavy-handed, the one error of judgement in an otherwise good directorial job.

As Kathy, high-school cheer-leader, college sorority organiser, and drop-out phys-ed teacher in seventies New York, Ailsa Piper had the most demanding of the three roles, insofar as the character does develop. She gave a well-observed and sensitive performance, managing the play's crucial scene, when Kathy at the end of Act Two realizes that she has "no direction home", with an understanding delicacy. As Mary, whose sexual drive and desire for independence lead her too soon to a sophisticated loneliness, Leith Taylor was excellent, fleshing out a fairly stock character with emotional nuance and performance style won from great skill and long experience. As Jo-anne, conservative stay-at-home "home-maker" too frightened to encounter the truth of the emptiness of her realized fantasy of home and family, Jenny Davis was superb. The interplay between all three actresses in the last act, when Jo-anne's and Mary's extremes clash against Kathy's exploratory truth-to-self, was superb, a delight to watch.

All told, the Hole's production of _Vanities_ must be counted a directorial and performance success, making of an essentially thin play an engaging, accessible, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, night in the theatre.
Travelling North, by David Williamson. Currency press, r.r.p. $4.75.

I have some trouble critically reviewing David Williamson’s plays because when I sit down to read them I get so immersed in the action and the world of the play that I completely forget to be analytical. This is a very nice problem for a critic to have. I was going to say, for example, that Williamson is not nearly as naturalistic as everybody seems to think. The gags, the nearly farcical situations, and, in Travelling North, the sometimes revue-like montage of scenes are, as Brian Kiernan once pointed out, not usually thought of as components of a naturalistic style.

I was going to say something about Travelling North being the beginning of a new mature period in his writing. Freed from the limitations of continuous action, and covering a much wider range of social and personal experiences than any single previous play, Travelling North brings a new human and political dimension to Williamson’s comment on the Australian scene. The individual conflicts between Frank and Frances and their children reflect general political conflicts. The play compares the old guard, idealistic radicalism of Frank’s generation and the new materially self-interested generation, of their children, who elect Whitlam but who have ironically lost the old idealism. Frank expects great things of Whitlam but knows that he himself is too old to take any part in the new era. It is nice that he lives long enough to vote in 1972.

And I was going to say something about the social map of Australian life drawn by Williamson over the last 10 years. While Frank and Frances are preparing to fall in love, elsewhere in Melbourne Robbie is fighting political battles in his Department and worrying about his towing tank. As Frances’ children try to persuade her not to go with Frank, Don Henderson, in Lower Plenty, is dressing up for his party. Three years later, on the night of the next election, Frank will die; Graham, in Jugglers Three, will just have returned from Vietnam; and, as Frances travels further north, Andrew Collins’ career as a novelist will be taking off — blessed by the Whitlam period which Frank, Don and the rest expected. The fact that Williamson’s plays can invite this sort of odd, real-world speculation is a tribute to their great social authenticity and richness. Like Frank on a personal level, Williamson draws together the threads of Australian social and political life in the early 70s and makes sense of it all.

But as I started to re-read Travelling North these thoughts departed. The excitingly fragmented action draws you along — exploring the hopes, needs and responsibilities of two generations of Australians. So I’m not going to review it, but simply say that if you were one of the very few who missed the ubiquitous Nimrod production then you will want to read it, and if you saw the show, then go out and buy the book.
ACT

THEATRE

CANBERRA THEATRE (49-7600)
Adelaide Festival Trust/Canberra Theatre Trust presents: *Habeas Corpus* by Alan Bennett; with Frank Thornton. February 10—14.

THEATRE 3 (47-4222)
Canberra Repertory: *Count Dracula* by Ted Tiller; Director, Pam Rosenberg; Design, Russell Brown; Special effects, Tony Ashcroft. February 18—March 14.

COMBINED THEATRES
Opening on Broadway written and devised by Trevor Finley; Director, Lorraine Francis; Producer, Mark Emerson. January tour of south-west Victoria closes February 7 at Theatre 3.

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (47-4222)
Festival of Perth; Canberra Theatre Trust presents: *Steps, Notes and Squeaks* with Svetlana Berisova. Feb 17—21.

PLAYHOUSE (49-6488)

For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 49 7600.

NSW

THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357-6611)
School Tours:

*Jim Stopford, Reptiles of Australia* for infants and primary; Orange from Feb. 2 and metropolitan area from Feb. 9.

*Norman Berg, Puppets and Puppetry* for infants and primary. From Feb. 9.

Jennifer Hope, mime artist for infants, primary and secondary; Riverian from Feb. 9.

*Mr Jupiter's Childrens’ Theatre* (mime, drama) for infants and primary; South Coast from Feb. 9.

*Jan Carter, for infants and primary, North Coast and Hunter* from Feb. 9.


BONDI PAVILION THEATRE
(30-7211)

THE DRAMA STUDIO SYDNEY
(692 0555)
Solo a group created work directed by Tim Robins. Feb. 4—14.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929-8877)
Deeds by Howard Brenton, Ken Campbell, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare; directed by Brian Young. Until end Feb.

FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT
(358 1988)
With Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Lorain; directed by George Carden. Throughout Feb.

GENESIANS THEATRE (55 5641)
End of the Beginning directed by Barry Hayes; *Bedtime Story* directed by Pamela Whalan; and *Hall of Healing* directed by Margaret Rieneke. Until Feb. 14.

*The Vigil* by Ladislav Fodor; directed by Colleen Clifford. Commences Feb. 28.

Fools Gallery (264 7988)
Cleveland Street Performance Space: *Sleeping Beauty*, devised by the company; director, Carol Woodrow. To Feb. 7.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
*Evita* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice; directed by Harold Prince; with Jennifer Murphy, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alvarez. Commences Feb. 14.

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526)
Company in rehearsal.

KIRRIBILLY PUB THEATRE (92 1415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point: *The Private Eye Show* by Perry Quinton and Paul Chubb; music by Adrian Morgan; lyrics by PP Cranney; directed by Perry Quinton; with Zoe Bertram, Jane Hamilton, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson. Throughout Feb.

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498-3166)
*A Bed Full of Foreigners* by Dave Freeman; directed by Peter Williams. Commences Feb. 4.

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE
Pardon Our Privates directed by Peggy Mortimer; with Ron Frazer, Maggie Stuart, and Lee Young. Commences Feb. 4.

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
Colonial Experience by Walter Cooper; directed by Frank McNamara; with Peter Talmaes and Marty O'Neill. Throughout Feb.

NIMROD THEATRE (699-5003)

NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)
Theodore, for primary schools and *The Theatre Australia February 1981* 45
Unheard World of Jasper Lawson for secondary schools; both directed by Ian Watson; with Nola Colefax, David London, Colin Allen, Bill Eggerking and Rosemary Lenzo. Throughout Feb.

Q THEATRE (047 21-5735)

Privates on Parade by Peter Nichols. At Penrith from Feb. 17.

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (069 25 2052)

Contact theatre for details.

THE ROCKS PLAYERS (569-0223)

Cnr. Marion & Renwick Sts., Leichhardt:

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)

Shopfront Theatre Touring Company touring metropolitan and country areas with The Tale Play directed by Don Munro and The Third World Horror Show directed by Michael Webb.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (20 588)

Drama Theatre, SOH. The Man From Mukinupin by Dorothy Hewett; directed by Rodney Fisher, with Ruth Cracknell, Maggie Dence, Judi Farr, Colin Friels, John Gaden, Ron Haddrick, Jane Harders and Noni Hazlehurst. Commences Feb. 5.

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

Celluloid Heroes by David Williamson; directed by John Bell; with Peter Summer, Henri Szeps, Kate Fitzpatrick, Robin Ramsay, Kevin Smith and Barbara Stephens. Until Feb. 21.

QLD THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (362344)

The Birthday Party by Harold Pinter; director, Fred Wessley; designer, Greg Katahanas. Feb 5-Mar 14.

Fantastic Fairground by Bernard Goss; director, Sandra Hines. From Feb 14.

LA BOITE THEATRE (361622)

The Runaway Man by Mick Barnes; director, David Bell. From Feb 13.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 5177)

SGIO: Annie by Thomas Meehan, Charles Strouse, Martin Charinn; director, Alan Edwards.

TN COMPANY (3525133)

Hamlet by William Shakespeare; director, Bryan Nason; with Geoff Cartwright, Judith Anderson, Jennifer Blockside.

For entries contact Don Batchelor on 356 9311.

Q THEATRE (2235651)

89 Halifax St:

For entries contact Edwin Reif on 267 5988.

TAS THEATRE

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (348018)


THEATRE ROYAL (346266)


For entries contact Anne Campbell on (049) 674470.

SA THEATRE

CORE THEATRE COMPANY (2723036)

Touring Metropolitan area:
The Silicone Chip On Your Shoulder Show by Allen Lyne. Feb 1-14. The SHERIDAN THEATRE

The Caretaker by Harold Pinter; director, Wenda Matthews. Feb 24-Mar 7.

LA MAMA THEATRE

crawford Lane, Hindmarsh:
The Caretaker by Harold Pinter; director, Bruno Knez. Feb 23-Mar 7.

STAGE COMPANY

Space Theatre Festival Centre:
Kiss Me Goodnight Sergeant Major by Brian Debnam. To Feb 28.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (515151)

Theatre 62, Hilton:
Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World by David Allen; director, Kevin Palmer; designer, Ken Wilby; Lighting, Nigel Leving. Feb 11-28.

The Playhouse, Festival Centre:
A Hard God by Peter Kenna; director, Nick Enright; designer, Bill Haycock; Lighting, Nigel Leving. Feb 12-28.

TROUPE

Unley Town Hall:
Backward by Jan Balodic; director, Keith Gallash. Feb 12-Mar 7.

Banana Bender by Barry Dickins; director, Keith Gallash and Richard Collins.

OPERA

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (20 588)

Opera Theatre & Concert Hall SOH. The Rape of Lucretia by Benjamin Britten; conducted by David Kram; produced by Moffat Oxenbould. Otello by Verdi; conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario and produced by George Ogilvie.

The Beggar's Opera by John Gay and adapted by Bonynge and Gamley; conducted by Richard Bonynge; produced and designed by Anthony Besch and John Stoddart. Commences Feb. 7.

La Boheme by Puccini; conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario, produced by Andrew Sinclair and designed by Tom Lingwood. Commences Feb. 10.

DANCE

THE SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)


ARMS THEATRE (362344)

The Birthday Party by Harold Pinter; director, Fred Wessley; designer, Greg Katahanas. Feb 5-Mar 14.

Fantastic Fairground by Bernard Goss; director, Sandra Hines. From Feb 14.

LA BOITE THEATRE (361622)

The Runaway Man by Mick Barnes; director, David Bell. From Feb 13.

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TN COMPANY (3525133)

Hamlet by William Shakespeare; director, Bryan Nason; with Geoff Cartwright, Judith Anderson, Jennifer Blockside.

For entries contact Don Batchelor on 356 9311.
Touring Upper Primary and Lower and Kindergarten: effects and music from the Lightening Creek Trio.


Original comedy entertainment with Rod Quantom. 

Touring College and University Campuses: Education Ensembles; directed by Mark Shirrefs. Feb. 1 to 28.


Australian contemporary dance company (341-8462)

Australian contemporary dance company (341-8462)

The Old Vic Theatre Company presents:
- Trelawny Of The Wells by Sir Arthur Pinero; director, Timothy West. Feb 20-27.

Hole in the Wall (381 2403)

OCTAGON THEATRE
Off And On with Timothy West and Prunella Scales. Feb 21, 24-27.


PERTH ACTOR'S COMPANY

REGAL THEATRE (381 6288)

The Marionette Theatre of Australia presents: The Magic Pudding by Norman Lindsay and Eleanor Whitcombe; director, Richard Bradshaw. Feb 4-21.

UNIVERSITY OF WA

WA THEATRE COMPANY (350 7026)
Hayman Theatre: Faust written and directed by Peter Wilson. Feb 7-28.
THE CHOIR by ERROL BRAY from March 18
BLEEDIN' BUTTERFLIES by DOREEN CLARKE from April 2
I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE by BERNICE RUBENS from April 29
DANCE OF DEATH by AUGUST STRINDBERG from May 21
LETTERS HOME by ROSE LEIMAN GOLDEMBERG from June 10

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