Regional Theatre Alternatives
Women and Theatre
The State of Opera

Special Film Issue

Keith Michell's Oz Peer Gynt
THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

presents

HAMLET

by William Shakespeare

Directed by
WILLIAM GASKILL

Designed by
HAYDEN GRIFFIN

CAST:
in alphabetical order

TIM BURNS
BRANDON BURKE
STUART CAMPBELL
JOHN CLAYTON
RALPH COTTERILL
PETER COUSENS
MAX CULLEN
DIANA DAVIDSON
KATE FITZPATRICK
JOHN GADEN
ALEXANDER HAY
NONI HAIZLEHURST,
LAWRENCE HELD
NEIL REDFERN
GEORGE SPARTELS
ANDREW TIGHE
and
COLIN FRIELS as Hamlet

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Australian Drama Festival
Australian Drama Festival

This month Adelaide’s “other” biennial festival takes place, the Australian Drama Festival. Although this is only its second showing the success of the first in 1979 and the scale of this year’s is enough to make it a major event in the theatre calendar and not an insignificant alternative to the Adelaide Festival of the Arts.

The raison d’etre of the first ADF was proclaimed by Max Wearing, its then Chairman, to be “to celebrate the emergence of indigenous Australian drama and to foster its development, and because we want to emphasise the continuities in our drama tradition.” The first half of the statement may have been a little dated even then — like colour television in Australia, indigenous drama when it got going took off swiftly and never looked back — but the latter part stands as a good description of the 1981 programme. As well as the dozen world premières of new Aus works and baker’s dozen of South Australian premieres, the productions include golden oldies like Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll, And The Big Men Fly all over our far-flung continent — not only in the capital cities but in the suburbs and regions too — it is highly desirable that the regions too — it is highly desirable that the Australian theatre at all levels.

Yet its non-theatrical activities follow a tried and tested format. A day long forum session on Easter Sunday includes discussion topics “Yeah, but waddya do for a real job”, “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow”, and “The smell of the crowd” with speakers such as Graeme Blundell, Leonard Radic, John Pinder, Ruth Cracknell (and even yours truly). Tapes of the 1979 Festival Forum will be played by Radio 5UV on four Monday nights as a prelude to this. Another discussion, entitled “The Great Debate” will be held on April 6 when leading politicians and arts representatives will thrash out Government Arts Policy.

Drama in other media includes three radio plays, which evolved from a radio drama workshop held by the Association of Community Theatres, being broadcast for the Festival by Radio 5UVM and a week-long Australian Movie Festival at the Capri Cinema. This will be showing most of the major successes of the past couple of years as well as Caddie, Picnic at Hanging Rock and the classics Dad And Dave Come To Town and On Our Selection — all in the interests of the policy of reflecting continuity. This will also be served by the Performing Arts Collection’s audio-visual survey of the history of broadcasting and radio drama in Australia in which can be heard Roy Rene, Jack Davey, Rod Taylor as Tarzan, Leonard Teale as Superman, some of the world’s longest running serial, Dr Paul, and the valiant Portia in Portia Faces Life.

Apart from the 44 theatre companies and the 350-odd performances they will be giving, the second Australian Drama Festival shows every indication of being the engaging and extensive event its promoters expect. Its wide-ranging definition of things dramatic should give it broad appeal and prove its value as a true celebration of Australian dramatic development.
INFO

PRAM FACTORY BACK IN BUSINESS

The Pram Factory went through a low phase last year with its building being auctioned from under it and the new Ensemble failing to inject new life into production. This year it seems all set to take off again, and, in a vast document distributed by Thorburn, Steer Public Relations and Marketing Consultants, says it will be "presenting to theatre goers a completely new direction in innovative and experimental theatre". All this will be under the leadership of the last original member of the APG collective, John Timlin.

The major thrust of work is the Directors' Programme which will help five directors mount projects of their choice and the five picked have in common a concern with exploiting the possibilities of unusual texts. The first two, Roger Pulvers and David Kendall have opened their productions; yet to come are Richard Murphett's Bedbug Celebration by John Blay, Val Kirwan's further work on dramatising her own novel The Art of Lobster Whistling and film-maker Peter Friedrich's Artaud at Rodez.

The Pram has Tim Robertson as writer-in-residence, will be running another playwriting competition and has a series of Sunday afternoon performances and playreadings in the Back Theatre.

The Australia Council Theatre Board has granted the Pram $70,000 for the first half of '81; the Victorian Ministry for the Arts has increased the Group's subsidy to $105,000 this year and the Literature Board is making contributions of $5,960 to the writing projects.

SORRY MAXINE

I feel beholden to point out on behalf of Gordon Chater, who was enormously appreciative of her efficiency, artistic sensibility and goodwill, that Maxine Le Guier was the stage manager for the production of The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin throughout Australia as well as London, San Francisco and the New York opening, not Margie Wright as reported in your February issue of Theatre Australia.

Richard Wherrett.

MTC MOVES TO SPONSORSHIP

The Melbourne Theatre Company is appealing to business organisations for money to help maintain its present level of production and professionalism as government subsidies are not keeping pace with inflation. In 1981 the MTC is receiving $779,000 from the Australia Council and $430,000 from the Victorian State Government. While the federal grant is up $51,000 from 1980 the state subsidy has remained the same.

The Melbourne Theatre Company operates three performing spaces and it will also occupy the Playhouse Theatre when the Victorian Arts Centre in St Kilda Road is completed, for 40 weeks of the year, which will further stretch the company's resources.

Companies are being asked to sponsor individual plays by paying $12,000, for which they will receive certain advantages such as credits in MTC advertising, space in programmes and block theatre bookings. Because the MTC considers its financial situation to be extremely serious it has employed a consultant to elicit support from private enterprise. Sponsorship kits are being sent to 150 major companies with offices in Melbourne.

MTC director, John Sumner said "Our subsidies are falling further and further behind out requirements. We are Australia's leading theatre company in terms of the number of productions we present a year, the number of people we employ and the number of seats we sell. Yet in 1981 subsidies will only make up about 36 percent of our projected total income, compared with 46 percent five years ago."

Perhaps the MTC will be the pace-setter in an area that has long been neglected in Australia. While there is some support for opera and a little for dance from the private sector, theatre has only received dribs and drabs, and it's time something serious effort was put into convincing Australian and Australian-based companies that supporting culture is at least as worthwhile as supporting sport.

DONALD SMITH RETIRES

The world famous Australian tenor, Donald Smith OBE, has retired from the operatic stage and the Australian Opera.

Mr Smith's letter of Friday February 13 to

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the AO says his retirement is for health and personal reasons and it also acknowledges his current amicable and rewarding relationship and long association with the company. The AO’s Musical Director, Richard Bonyng and the Board paid tribute to the great contribution Donald Smith has made to the growth and popularisation of opera in Australia and the Australian Opera in particular over the past 25 years.

His retirement is sudden and immediate, resulting in cast changes in a number of works, particularly *Masnadieri*, which Donald Smith made so successful. The Italian tenor Angelo Marenzi is making guest appearances with the AO in the role of Carlo in *Masnadieri*, he stepped into the role at very short notice, undertaking to learn it in only three weeks as well as carrying out the necessary rehearsals for mounting the opera in Canberra and Adelaide. Marenzi caused a sensation in January and February at the Sydney Opera House when he made his Australian Debut as Verdi’s Otello, alongside Joan Sutherland as Desdemona.

**NEW DRAMA BOOK LAUNCHED**

The Melbourne launching of Currency Press’s latest book, *Contemporary Australian Drama* was held on February 19 at the Palais Theatre. Ex-Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck KG, GCVO, K St J made the journey from Perth to launch the 500-page collection of dramatic criticism.

The book is a unique collection of the best work in the field since 1955: its 40 contributors include Katherine Brisbane, R F Brissenden, Bruce Grant, Dorothy Hewett, Jack Hibberd, Geoffrey Hutton, H G Kippax and Margaret Williams.

Sir Paul himself is the author of twelve books of history, poetry and studies in Australian political administration, the latest of which is *Diplomatic Witness* (1980), a frank account of his experiences in the Department of External Affairs (1941-47). But he is also well remembered in WA as a drama critic and in theatre circles there as a director and playwright.

In the ‘30s as a senior journalist on the West Australian, he established the position of drama critic on that paper under the byline “Polygon” and initiated the West Australian Drama Festival, a competition held among amateur groups annually until the ‘60s. In his autobiography, *Mucking About*, Sir Paul Hasluck says “If there had been available in those days the sort of money for the theatre that was made available in grants from public funds in later years, I might have left journalism...”

But the war came and Hasluck was seconded to the Department of External Affairs; he then went to the United Nations Security Council, later entered parliament, becoming Foreign Minister, and finally Governor General, from which post he retired in 1974.

**THEATRE SOUTH ’81 SEASON**

Corks popped, cubes flashed and greetings ejaculated, inaugurating Theatre South’s 1981 season, which they hope to direct towards some 6,000 mature and some 18,000 child audiences. Williamson, Ayckbourn and Synge are on the bill.

The Lord Mayor of Wollongong pledged the city’s support of this infant professional company which made a strong beginning last year with their own exciting adaptation of Moliere’s *Tartuffe* — titled *The Conman* — the retiring Vice Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, expressed the University’s backing for Theatre South’s enterprise.

Des Davis the artistic director of Theatre South spoke of his role as the captain of a community theatre with aspirations for contributing to the tourist attraction of Wollongong by producing plays which might tempt people from out of Wollongong to bus down as they do in Ontario Canada for Stratford and the other Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Shaw Festival. Mr Davis had himself run a theatre in the regions of Ontario — this
was the very respectable Carousel Players based in the town of St Catherines.

It was good to see a theatre getting so much moral (and one hopes monetary) support in these repressive times.

Barry O'Connor

BLEEDIN' BUTTERFLIES AT PLAYBOX

Playbox Theatre Company's next production, opening on April 7, is Bleedin' Butterflies by Adelaide writer Doreen Clarke. A play by a woman about women it's appropriately being directed by Roz Horin; she comments on the play as she sees it.

"Bleedin' Butterflies is a play about survival, it is about economic survival and survival in the broadest sense of spiritual and social survival. It is set in the 1930's during the Depression and the action takes place in a camp for the unemployed and homeless set up along the Canning River just outside Perth.

"The Play particularly explores the options for survival that were open to women given the patriarchal structure of the society we live in. It takes as its main focus three quite different women; a young, middle-class girl from Adelaide, an older and much rougher and tougher woman from the East End of London and a middle aged hardworking, Australian country woman, the mother of a retarded youth. We see how through the levelling experience of the Depression these women are forced to enter into each other's desperate lives and are in fact enriched by the experience.

"But the play also reveals that for their own survival the women must subjugate themselves to a male protector/husband and hope that he has enough good will not to leave them stranded — like bleedin' madonna butterflies. The play explores also the way in which men are handicapped by their sex role conditioning and looks at what happens to the male who fails to live up to what is expected of men.

"It is in times of crisis that values and truths are ultimately revealed and Doreen Clarke has made an apt choice in using the Depression for a vehicle to analyse the values and power structure of patriarchal society."

DEAR MONKEY!

Adrian Guthrie of Grapevine Theatre Productions has been working in Sydney to mount a production based on the stories of Monkey — a kind of Chinese folk hero somewhere between Charlie Chaplin and Cassius Clay — a walking-talking-ego with springs in this feet.

The pilot to the show brought together the basic comedy team: Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy and their Master on the mystical journey to India, Tripitaka — played by Stewart Charlmers, Su Cruickshank, Mark Hembrow and Bill Doblo respectively, if not respectfully. It was shown at the Sydney Opera House Cinema on March 20. The show will have a cast of ten when it is presented later in the year in a new venue near Sydney's Chinatown.

A lot of traditional Chinese folk theatre is based on the "Hsi-yu chi" — but Dear Monkey owes more to the commedia dell' arte and the Marx Brothers than Peking Opera. It's an interesting mix-up of cultures — and comedy unties knots and builds bridges no matter what the colour of your money.

Some brilliantly effective masks have been created by David McKie for Dear Monkey?

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by Norman Kessell

With two talented performers alternating in the demanding eponymous role in the musical *Evita*, it was inevitable, albeit unfortunate, that comparison would be made. I'm not buying into that — especially as I have seen only Jennifer Murphy's performance and not that of Mariette Rups — but I did get another interesting angle from Peter Carroll, who plays Peron. Thinking of the many stars who now refuse to accept engagements of longer than six months, I asked him if he was finding it a strain to keep up on what is his longest run so far. (His several seasons, here and overseas, in Ron Blair's *The Christian Brothers* were separated by longish intervals.) He agreed the role demanded constant concentration, but said he was helped enormously by having two leading ladies. "Their performances are so fundamentally different each change is like a refresher course for me," he said. So while the two performances may appear identical from out front, they ain't necessarily so.

Plans for Stage I of Sydney's new *Ensemble Theatre* have been approved by North Sydney Council and at time of writing were awaiting Environment and Planning Department okay, then a final nod from council for a start to be made. Stage I will be built around the existing structure and performances will continue uninterrupted. However, when Stage II begins — about a year later, the company hopes — the theatre will go dark for about six months. What a glorious and exciting re-opening that will be in 1987?

Folk singer Thea Rowe sat in the second row for the *Sydney Theatre Company* production of Dorothy Hewett's *The Man from Mukinupin*. A woman next to her, at first sight of the Drysdalean barreness of Shaun Curton's setting, exclaimed: "Oh dear, I'm afraid we're going to be smothered in dust!". How's that for realism?

Incidentally, Miss Rowe recently disposed of her extensive wardrobe of mostly authentic period stage costumes, some of them going to STC designer Anna Senior, and she was delighted to see two of them adapted for use in *Mukinupin* — the white dress worn by Noni Hazlehurst in the opening scene and the coat by Ruth Cracknell in the second act.

Still on *Mukinupin*, a relative was dismayed to find in a matinee audience a large contingent of elderly Americans from the *Queen Elizabeth II*. She feared the worst and she did hear one visitor say she'd "like to read a translation" and another who "didn't like the swearing", but was delighted by the rapt attention and warm response of the party as a whole. A deserved compliment to author, director and cast.

Calling all amateur dramatic societies in NSW. They are invited to participate in a one-act play festival to be held at Sutherland Civic Centre's 900-seat theatre on May 29-30. Entries close April 14 with Mrs Caroline Storey on 528 7800 or PO Box 61, Jannali, 2226. Mrs Storey and her husband, experienced festival organisers, would have liked to write personal invitations to each group, but were unable to find any consolidated list of the State's many amateur companies. A worthwhile chore for the NSW Arts Council, perhaps? The Storeys hope later to make the festival Australia-wide.

The *Actors Company*, put out of action a year ago by the stringent new fire safety regulations, is alive, well and "resting", director Sonia Lester assures me. After selling off its assets and paying all its debts, the company vacated its Ultimo premises on February 4. Remaining members are looking now for ways to supplement the considerable contribution made to the Sydney theatre scene in the company's heyday. Sonia says this could range from staging the right play at the right moment to sponsoring a single artist — actor, singer or musician. "If our future is to be mainly supportive, we will still feel that we have played out part," she added.

Sandra Bates, author of *When In Rome*, the very successful opener of this year's Festival of Sydney Playwrights, has been concentrating on final rewrites of her second play, which she hopes to have workshopped soon. As yet untitled, it is about a chemist who takes a stand against tranquillisers. Two of this year's four festival programmes won immediate return seasons — *When In Rome* two weeks at Phillip Street Theatre and Justin Fleming's *Hammer* five weeks at The Ensemble. Another good score and a tribute to the acumen of the selectors.

Met actress Pamela Gibbons in our local shopping arcade. Carrying her pretty eight-months-old daughter, Loren, she said she is well, beginning to work again and looking forward to an early full return to her showbiz career.

More or less as you read this, Sydney's *Ensemble Theatre* will be opening — on April 2 — Hayes Gordon's production of Neil Simon's *You Ought To Be In Pictures*. Hayes will also direct Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*, listed for this year, but not necessarily immediately after the Simon play.

Now on a world tour with two engaging programmes — *The Robert Burns Story* and *Two For A Theatre* — Scottish-born John Cairney and his New Zealand wife, Alannah O'Sullivan, are, like two of the characters they portray, Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Osbourne, looking for a country in which eventually to settle. First choice at the moment is British Colombia, with New Zealand second. They didn't see much of Australia on their short visit to Sydney, but are planning to see other parts during a three months tour later this year or early next year.

The admirable *Players Theatre Company* battles bravely on to establish the pleasant little theatre at Bondi Pavilion as a viable venue. Currently playing is *Ruth and Augustus Goetz' The Heiress* for a limited season, to be followed on May 13 by a revival of the company's excellent production of *James Goldman's The Lion In Winter*. Elsewhere, Dionysia Productions will, from July 9 to 19 present the company in a revival of *Henry IV Part I* at the Sir John Clancy Auditorium, University of NSW. All three productions are aimed at HSC students, 10,000 of whom saw the last-named in one week last year, but all are open to the general public.

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**THEATRE AUSTRALIA APRIL 1981** 9
Towards the end of a fairly rambling interview, Australian actor, writer, singer, director, designer and now playwright Keith Michell suddenly describes himself as "one of nature's visitors". He is talking about the lack of permanence in an actor's life and it comes as a wry and revealing remark from a man who, perhaps in spite of himself, plays his cards very close to his chest.

Though his press scrapbooks run to eight volumes or more, and he is clearly no novice to media curiosity about the spirit which moves him through such diverse channels, he remains a curious and nearly impenetrable mixture of the amiable and the reserved.

At present he is in Australia to play the lead for the Melbourne Theatre Company in his own adaptation of Peer Gynt - a Nordic classic by Henrik Ibsen whom, he says, one of his Chichester colleagues once described as "all ghoulies, ghosties and gonnorrhoea".

He laughs at this, and is quick to add that the transmogrification of Peer Gynt into Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime has meant the opportunity to inject a considerable amount of indigenous humour into the script. Peer Gynt is an odyssey of self-discovery provoking its eponymous hero into a series of adventures and roles, each of which explores his dilemma about fact and fiction. The Australian character, Pete McGynty, retains the bouquet of the original Peer - a raunchy, selfish, adventurous, prideful youth who ages without maturing until reality is forced upon him.

From his early abduction of a young bride on her wedding day, through his piratical adventures in the United States, the Pacific, Europe and the Middle East to his return home to Australia in old age, Pete is haunted by the dreams and myths of his young manhood. His search for identity leads him through flirtations with power, wealth, sensuality, history and madness until he eventually finds redemption.

Keith Michell says the idea of the play has always appealed to him: "Peer Gynt is also about someone who leaves his country and goes abroad he becomes an expatriate and then returns again.

"It always seemed a very good idea for an Australia subject. Now, in Europe, people tend to be either immigrants or refugees. The expatriate is much more likely to come from this side of the world."

The translation of Peer Gynt has posed more than a few problems and its author believes that Ibsen wrote much more colloquially than many of his more conservative and 'respectful' translators realised.

"Ibsen wrote in rhyming patterns, if not in rhyming couplets, and the very long sermon which occurs towards the
end of the play reads like an excerpt from Banjo Patterson," he says.

He has updated the play which now opens in the 1950s and runs right up to the present. And while Pete McGynty is a dealer in drugs and ammunitions as opposed to Peer Gynt's activities as a slave trader and manufacturer of heathen images, Keith Michell's adaptation has retained the 'dream-time' aspect of the play, the flights of fancy, and the ambiguities of a 'journey which may or may not be a fabrication of the kind Billy Liar was wont to make'.

Its Scandinavian hinterland of shadowy creatures and hobs have been replaced by local bunyips and night-spirits.

Keith Michell's fascination with Peer Gynt also dates back to the 1950s when he first performed it for ABC radio in Adelaide.

At first his intention was to write a musical based on the Ibsen, but, he says, he was so taken by its parallels with contemporary Australia that he abandoned that idea in favour of its present form.

The Keith Michell talents are indeed versatile. Originally trained as an art student, his first art exhibition was held in 1959 and since then he has exhibited several times in London and New York.

His work includes a limited book edition containing lithographs illustrating Shakespeare's sonnets and a collection of paintings, now in London, based on Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime.

But he is still best known as an actor. Born and educated in Adelaide, he first went to the UK in 1949 and studied at the Old Vic Theatre School. He then joined the Young Vic Theatre Company and made his first West End appearance in And So To Bed in 1951.

Since then he has starred in a wide variety of theatrical events, including the enormously popular television series of The Six Wives of Henry VIII.

But it is his recent success as a pop star in Captain Beaky and his Band which signals the latest change in direction for the artist. Captain Beaky is an entertainment package for children which has simultaneously found something like cult status with adults.

A Captain Beaky single and LP record featuring Keith Michell climbed to the top of the charts in the UK recently, and the book of Captain Beaky poems by Jeremy Lloyd and illustrated by Keith Michell has become a best-seller in England.

In Perth for the Festival recently, he was delighted when large sections of the audience sang along with the orchestral bits of Captain Beaky at the Festival Concert.

All this, he says, has meant that he is now more frequently recognised in the street as Captain Beaky than as Henry VIII — which won him an American Emmy award not so long ago, and when he returns to London he will be plunging into a whole Beaky industry that includes greeting cards, children's books and diaries.

Meanwhile, however, it is Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime with a cast of nineteen, and music especially composed for it by Bruce Smeaton which will be occupying his time.
David Allen's new play Buckley's, described as "entertainment with music — and politics...", opens on April 4. It represents something of a departure for him, with its combinations of music, movement and dance, and for the State Theatre Company, which has set aside an extended period of workshops and rehearsals for the work.

Such an approach, he feels, is essential to what is a collaboration between himself, Ariette Taylor, Glen Henrich (music) and Nick Enright (lyrics). Already changes to the first draft have been made, and the opportunity to test the written (or devised) scene in rehearsal, to change and rearrange, is something he values. After the success last year of the depression show On The Wallaby, Buckley's is, in part, an attempt to treat the present day subjects of unemployment and the search for a job and a direction in a similar musical form.

The title sums up the opportunities for those out of work — Buckley's chance; and, Allen feels, "the word has a kind of aggressive quality to it which would be appropriate for a musical. The piece is really about a group of people who, in social and economic terms, have no chance at all. Yet it's not a piece about unemployment as such. The trouble about doing a contemporary piece is that it could be very documentary — lots of statistics etc. and we feel in a way that this would not be appropriate for a company musical. And there are other companies and groups doing that sort of thing — hard hitting, more direct."

Allen and Ariette Taylor both did a fair amount of research and backgrounding before he set down to the actual writing. They visited unemployment centres, spoke to various organisations, walked the streets and talked with those directly affected — the young unemployed. Understandably, given their respective backgrounds, Taylor's and Allen's approaches are somewhat different.

"Ariette came up with a lot of images, she starts with visual things. As an example, when people are out of work, they tend to lie in bed all day; the effort of actually moving becomes extreme. And images like this grew and developed as we talked about them. So we've got a couple of rather nice scenes out of this: there's one in a greenhouse, in a nursery with a kind of restrained orgy — sense of the heat and all that, and pot growing there. And these two suburban ladies are, well, 'wakened erotically' in this situation."

He does not see the piece as a revue; for him it is closer to something like a picaresque novel — lots of different scenes, but with a connecting structure by one central character who keeps on appearing. "Act I is set in various locations, and though it seems to be disjointive, in Act II it actually all comes together. The unifying factor is a building, which houses a men's hostel, a job centre, the headquarters of the police vice and drug squad and a massage parlour — just like one of those many old houses in Adelaide."

(The last observation is more than somewhat tongue-in-cheek.)

David Allen's own mental workbench must look a bit like that theatrical setting at present: he's also at work on a play for Hartley CAE about the college's founder — "a fascinating character, though I'm not sure whether the play will turn out to be quite what they expected." He then goes to Tasmania, to be writer-in-residence for Salamanca for three months from July; and he has also started work on a film script, now into its second draft. And as for the idea for this second play being done by the STC? He's clearly pleased by this: "before I felt very much an outsider in this place, but now the atmosphere is marvellous. I do think that at the moment the most interesting theatre in Adelaide is going on at the STC. That's what makes it so interesting here."
WAYS TO SHEAR A SHEEP

Community theatre at the mill

Regional and community theatre is taking many varied forms as it grows in quantity and importance. We look at the development of two very different regional theatre companies...

In the former Returned Soldiers and Sailors Woollen and Worsted Mill on the banks of the Barwon River in Geelong, community theatre has found an original home and style. The Mill, as it is affectionately known to local residents, now houses the Art and Design and Drama School of Deakin University, and a full-time professional theatre company under the directorship of James McCaughey.

Deakin's Senior Lecturer in Drama. The Mill Community Theatre is a group of eight actors and community theatre workers who support a diverse range of theatre activities. The company's work is community oriented — Saturday morning classes for children, workshops for the handicapped, the aged, and unemployed kids; programmes for women at the Corio Leisure Centre, classes for drama teachers, drama workshops for HSC students and schools performances. In addition the company also gives shelter and support to a TIE team, The Woolly Jumpers.

But perhaps the most successful of the group's community activities are the regular Thursday Mill Nights which draw some seventy people to the Mill each week for an evening of participatory theatre games and workshops interleaved with performances and showings of work in progress by the Company, and performances by visiting artists and companies.

Since The Mill Community Theatre opened in 1978, the Company has staged at least two professional seasons each year. These fall into two categories, plays of interest to the community; Trojan Women, Ubu, The Tennis Play by Company writer William Henderson, and various Brecht productions, The Chalk Circle and The Exception and the Rule; and plays created for the community from the history of Geelong.

It is this cycle of Geelong history plays which could be said to be the signature of the Company's unique and innovatory theatrical style. The first of these and their inaugural production was The Wool Game. It was a group devised, participatory documentary theatre piece based on the history of the Victorian Woollen and Cloth Manufacturing Company's Mill from 1865 till 1922, and was written from research by Phillip Gardner on the company's records.

Like many theatres created out of refurbished industrial sites the spatial quality and ambience of The Mill is very special. The conversion of the space into a theatre involved putting in lighting, heating and lining the ceiling, but there is no stage and only minimal flexible seating. The result is that the integrity of the space has been retained. For company director, James McCaughey, "It is important that when people come to the Mill they don't say 'This is a theatre'. Instead they'll say, 'Isn't this interesting, I wonder what will happen here'. This is an interesting space with a rich history. We want to respect that."

The Wool Game set the tone for future Mill productions. When the audience entered they were issued with the necessary equipment for the journey to the goldfields by various enterprising purveyors in the foyer, and then taken by perilous bullock dray to the diggings located in the theatre. Once there some of them even discovered gold on the spot where they were sitting and later fought as vigorously as their fellow miners to evade the licence hunts.

The third production The Clyde covered the events leading up to the Eureka Stockade. In The Burning of Bentley's Hotel the audience was first outfitted with the necessary equipment and supplies for the journey to the goldfields by various enterprising purveyors in the foyer, and then taken by perilous bullock dray to the diggings located in the theatre. Once there some of them even discovered gold on the spot where they were sitting and later fought as vigorously as their fellow miners to evade the licence hunts.

The third production The Clyde...
Company Station arose when Weston Bate drew the Company's attention to the voluminous records and papers of The Clyde Company, a Scottish-Tasmanian syndicate formed to take out a lease on land in the Moorabool Valley. By the time the audience entered and were seated on overflowing wool bales generously lent by local pastoralists, they had already viewed various active tableaux depicting aspects of the Clyde Company's decision to settle the district.

The Company's most recent production, staged in February this year, was a significant departure from its predecessors. It was the first of the cycle to be staged outside The Mill and in fact was the opening production of the Blakiston Theatre at the new Geelong Performing Arts Centre. Like its immediate predecessor it is based on The Clyde Company Papers but for the first time written by one writer. The Company commissioned *Ladies of Fortune* from Melbourne playwright Colin Ryan, author of *The Spalding Family Album*. His brief was to create a play from the diary of Miss Ann Drysdale, which was among the Clyde Company Press.

Miss Drysdale, together with her partner Miss Caroline Newcombe, took out a lease on a sheep run at Boronggoop in 1840. The diaries form the backbone of the play to which Ryan added imaginary incidents and characters; however a playwright would need to go far to find better characters than these redoubtable women. Miss Drysdale was going on fifty when she made the perilous journey from Scotland to the colonies where she faced the vicissitudes of heat, bushfires, blacks and scepticism of other settlers. Her partner Miss Newcomb was some twenty years younger and had already been to Australia for some time working as John Batman's governess in Tasmania. Their task and the trials they encountered were no different from those of other settlers; what makes them different and therefore dramatically interesting was the fact that they were single women in a world dominated by men.

Like the previous Mill productions the excitement lies as much in the inventive transformational style or direction as it does in the uniqueness of the material. Using simple costumes and no set save a beautiful painted floorcloth depicting a map of the Geelong region, the ten actors and the composer Felix Maher create boldly a panoply of sound textures, from baaing sheep to crackling bushfires and a corresponding range of physical images from vast dinner tables to punting skiffs and horse drawn carriages. The result is a highly evocative form of theatre which challenges the imagination and sharpens the senses as each new event or scene is transformed before you into the next without the distractions of set and prop changes.

The structure of the play is simple and follows chronologically the lives of the women, however the addition of two parallel female characters, Mrs Lackland (Margaret Rickards) and her niece, Lucy (Rosalind Hill) provide high comic relief in their twittery femininity, to the staunch and dour Miss Drysdale and her Wesleyan partner. Between them the six men play some twenty male characters — seamen, squatters, miners, shepherds and doctors of medicine and religion. It is therefore not surprising that, with the exception of Paul Chapple's portrayal of the squatter, Mr Armstrong, the acting honours go to the four women and particularly to Meredith Rogers and Karen Paton in the leading roles. The scenes between them of comradely endeavour and sisterly affection have a delicately observed and heroic quality. My only misgiving about the production was the ending — it seemed structurally and aesthetically dissatisfying that a play about two strong and interesting women should end with a weak and uninteresting man, particularly as the contrasts it alluded to had already been well canvassed in the body of the play.
Riverina Trucking Co.
-at the crossroads

Just over a year ago, arriving in Wagga to take up the reins as the Riverina Trucking Company’s third artistic director, Peter Barclay expressed his conviction that he regarded the RTC as capable of achieving standards comparable to those enjoyed by audiences in the capital cities.

This conviction fuelled my own observation, recorded in the April 1980 issue of Theatre Australia, that Barclay’s first task in the Riverina “must to be re-establish faith in the RTC as a centre for vital professional theatre”, and that time alone would serve to show whether this ideal could be achieved.

Well, there can be no doubt that Barclay’s first year with the RTC has renewed public confidence in the Company as a headquarters for vital theatre. Even the most cynical of theatre watchers — and Wagga has its percentage of these pessimists — must concede that Barclay’s 1980 blend of world premiere productions (The Pariah Dog, Such is Life), recent plays (Loot, Boys Own McBeth) and popular shows (Grease, On Our Selection) defined an innovatory trend, reflected in increased attendances and a consequent upswing in box-office receipts — the best in the RTC’s history.

There can be little doubt, too, that the RTC schedule for the first half of 1981 will continue this prescription. The season begins with the world premiere of Steven Berkoff’s West, the sequel to East (which toured Australia to capacity audiences in 1978), and continues with Piaf, Pam Gems’ study of the rise and falls of Edith Piaf, and a new production of The Rocky Horror Show. Sandwiched between these varied offerings the RTC will undertake its first interstate tour by sending last season’s one-man show Such Is Life to Adelaide for a two-week run as part of the Adelaide Drama Festival with special assistance from the NSW Division of Cultural Activities. Additionally, the RTC will host performances in Wagga by Sydney’s Kinetic Energy Dance Company (late-night performances during the run of West) and Errol Bray’s Shopfront Theatre.

What will happen beyond these events is as yet unknown, since Peter Barclay will shortly leave the RTC and move north to Townsville as co-artistic director (with RTC founder and first artistic director Terry O’Connell) of the Central and Northern Queensland Theatre Company, a move that will throw the RTC into at least temporary uncertainty while the Board faces the task of screening applicants to secure a new artistic director.

Peter Barclay himself is at pains to ensure that the RTC is ticking over as smoothly as possible before he leaves. Yet the giant problem facing this company is funding. Currently the RTC is at the crossroads in terms of securing ongoing State and Federal funding. Barclay describes as “a life and death question” the urgent need to establish supplementary local funding. The issue is complicated by the absence in the Riverina of large corporations or manufacturers among its locally based industries. Further, the Wagga City Council, in sharp contrast to the councils of central and northern Queensland, has shown itself disinclined this year to provide support for its regional theatre company.

It doesn’t seem to matter than the RTC generates an annual turnover for local business in excess of $100,000. “We acknowledge the RTC is a small professional company. At the same time its input is considerable, in terms of the amount spent locally. Yet we should be realistic. The amount of $100,000 is barely adequate to support the kind of theatre I believe is right for this area.”

As I see it, funding lethargy may spell the crucial difference between attracting a director of imagination and ability on the one hand, or a director of workmanlike skills and limited vision on the other hand. Barclay’s will be a hard act to follow, because he has used his experience as assistant director at Nimrod astutely in tapping into the international theatre scene. His coup with West is an eloquent case in point — Barclay worked with Berkoff at the Nimrod during 1978 — and there is no reason to suppose this quality in his work will diminish. Lucky Townsville.

“Why should regional companies be deprived of the opportunities available to metropolitan-based companies?” asks Barclay. The antidote lies in funding, initially at local council level, followed by tandem funding from State and Federal sources. The Wagga community must quickly assess whether it wishes to see its regional professional theatre flourish, or suffer a lingering and dishonourable decline. Perhaps, a leaf may be taken from central and northern Queensland project, where there has been cooperation between councils in the region.

Peter Barclay has brought the RTC to the point where its policies are clear cut and its artistic recipe successful. For this theatre to survive in innovative and vital terms, an immediate expression of tangible local support is needed.
A FILM WRITER REFLECTS . . .

The straight line on the cardiograph went on and on without blips, unending. "I appear to be dead," said Ellis, peevd. "Ar, it always goes like this," said the Chinese doctor and kicked it in the side. The blips erratically returned.

The chimp then—on increasingly moribund machinery—tested Ellis's quaking envelope of mortal flesh for lung clots, brain clots, galliplo cholesterol, Taurina Spa poisoning and cancer. That night amid chest pains, choking breath...
Ellis looked at his eyes. They were blank, inquisitive, sincere.

"Sing Happy Birthday," said Ellis's cheerful Satanic chiropractor, "and push against me with your left leg."

"Happy birthday to you," warbled Ellis. "Happy birthday to you, aagh!"

"Ah," exclaimed his tormentor. "As I suspected. You're switching."

"On top of heart lag and a hiatus hernia do I need switching?" asked Ellis without hope. "What's switching?"

"The musical side of your brain and the mathematical side of your brain are alternating their vital functions. And you're becoming very confused." This monster then took Ellis by the nose. "Shouldn't take a minute to fix," He twisted the nose. "It's probably the result of emotional stress."

A millennium of implacable glaciers crumbled slowly inside Ellis's head. "Cripes," he thought, "if he cures me of this poetic disfunction I might never write again." What a wonderful thought. Switching, he decided, clearly explained everybody he knew. Then something snapped inside his head. Goodnight, sweet prince, and flights of starlets.

That night, as the tape recorder munching away at his vitals and his wrecked nose exuded blood, Ellis witnessed in waking dream all the propositions he had been made in the movies. "It's about this girl," said John Bell, "who wins the Archibald Prize and on the prize money flies to swinging, international South Africa, and there, on his lion farm, meets Marcello Mastroianni, a handsome widower, whose little son is then kidnapped by the Mau Mau. "It's about the travelling actors," said Peter Weir, "who are actually more like the Manson family, and they come to this slag heap in the vast Australian outback, which they decide to make their temple."

"But this," muttered Ellis, "is but a parable of our relationship."

"But listen, wait till you hear the punchline."

"It's about this blind detective," said Bill Harmon with great authority, "who because he is blind has a superior sense of hearing and smell, and only you can write it."

"We're cutting the climax from Newsfront," said Noyce, "because it's a crowd scene, and we're run out of money."

"We're cutting Anna out of In Search of Anna," said Esben Storm, "because we've run out of money."

"We're filming The Tempest," said John Bell, "and setting it in the Australian outback. And Ariel is an Aborigine."

"Switching," thought Ellis, "the whole bloody lot of them are switching. Twenty minutes each with a chiropractor, a hundred bloodied noses, and the film industry would be saved... Ah no, it wouldn't."

Ellis turned over. The pounding increased.
WILL THE BOOM BOOMERANG?

The current expansion in the movie industry is assessed by Elizabeth Riddell.

Living on the brink seems to be the natural state of every film industry, in whatever country, and Australia is no exception. It looked for a long time as if we would be permanently relegated to the position of useful backdrop — with certain benefits for technicians and bit players — for stories, directors and performers from the United States.

This is what has happened to the film industry in the UK. And since the resurgence of the film industry in Australia, roughly ten years ago, there have been some grimly barren seasons. It appeared to some that the only thing that could keep the film scene alive and healthy would be the injection of a lot of willing money, and that this money could be obtained only by means of a tax-saving incentive system, to encourage investors.

Well, up rode the cavalry in the nick of time: as of October 1980 the government dangled a carrot in front of film investors — 150% of capital expenditure in the acquisition of the initial copyright in new Australian films is eligible for write-off in the first year of expenditure. There is also an exemption from income tax of an amount of net earnings by an investor in such a film up to 50% of his or her investment. This is very encouraging to producers — all they need now is a good lawyer. Incidentally, there will be a burgeoning of lawyers who understand the industry, just as there has been a burgeoning of lawyers specialising in copyright.

Certain fears have been expressed to the effect that easy money may produce a crop of bad films, but there is still enough risk in the financial structures to make potential investors wary of handing over Aunt Dorothy's legacy without looking carefully at the project.

The budgets will be bigger this year, but not big enough to lead to excess. Producers in Australia are used to bringing in their films at under $1 million, funded as they have mainly been by the Australian Film Commission, the State commissions/corporations and the distributing-investing houses of Roadshow, Hoyts and Greater Union. In future the extra money that can make the quality difference for location, crew and equipment will come from the private investor.

Among the films in various stages of pre-production, production and editing all the finest Australian talent is represented except for Fred Schepisi, who has directed, and is now editing, a US Western called Barbarosa, featuring Willie Nelson. Schepisi's Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith was misunderstood and unappreciated by the local press and highly praised in the UK and US. So Schepisi naturally went where he is understood and valued. Doubtless he will be back.

In the meantime, every season has its star, and the current star is Bruce Beresford, for Breaker Morant. Beresford is directing Puberty Blues (Joan Long producing) with a cast of young people on Cronulla Beach. They are rather a different lot from his schoolgirls in The Getting of Wisdom. Next he will make The Fortress, from the novel by Gabriel Lord, about a teacher kidnapped with her children from a country school.

But the most superficial survey of the local scene would not be complete without a note on Margaret Fink, whose My Brilliant Career was, and is significantly successful, with interesting reviews from overseas critics and a nomination for costume...
design in the Academy Awards. Ms Fink has several pots boiling at once: 
For Love Alone, from the novel by the distinguished writer Christina Stead, with the possibility that Evan Jones (Wake in Fright) will do the script; Eden's Lost from the novel by Summer Locke Elliot directed by Gillian Armstrong from Seymour's script; a film she calls a "hard core romance, very classy", with a script by Bill Harding; a mini-series for Digby Wolfe at Channel 10 about the relationship, rather than the events, concerning Sir John Kerr and Gough Whitlam, script by David Williamson; and "an epic by Bill Harding, impossible to categorise" — her words — which she would like to see directed by Jim Sharan or Ken Russell.

In 1980 two new film making partnerships emerged. The first was the Rupert Murdoch-Robert Stigwood combination calling itself R&R, whose first project was Gallipoli directed by Peter Weir. The second is the Adams-Packer Film Productions Ltd (Philip Adams, advertising man and funny writer and Kerry Packer of Australian Consolidated Press, White Industries, quarter horses, ski resorts etc.) which will make We of the Never Never and The Dunera Boys, the story of the Jews on the hell ship Dunera, who eventually made it to Australia.

Phil Adam is also producer of Alex Stitt's animated film, Grendel, Grendel, Grendel the story of the "singing, dancing, joke-telling, highly entertaining monster", a favourite with children and a cult figure for adults, from John Gardner's novel.

Other films of interest now at some stage of manufacture, are Starstruck, a rock musical produced by David Elfick and Richard Brennan, directed by Gilliam Armstrong, written by Steve MacLean; Hoodwink, produced by Pom Oliver and Errol Sullivan, directed by Claude Whatham from the UK, a crime drama with John Hargreaves and Judy Davis; Winter of our Dreams produced by Richard Mason, directed by John Duigan with Bryan Brown and Judy Davis; Doctors and Nurses with a cast of children directed by Maurice Murphy of Fatty Finn; Double Deal directed by Brian Kavanagh with the visiting Frenchman Louis Jourdan and Angela Punch McGregor; The Man From Snowy River, a Michael Edgley project; Capricornia, from the Xavier Herbert epic, directed by John Heyer; The Killing of Angel Street, produced by Anthony Buckley and directed by Donald Crombie with Elizabeth Alexandra; Heatwave, directed by Phil Noyce, set in Sydney's Kings Cross and produced by Hilary Linstead; A Burning Man, produced by the McElroy brothers from a script by Kit Denton; The Year of Living Dangerously, again the McElroys, directed by Peter Weir from Christopher Koch's novel of the same name; Relatives, produced by Henri Safran with Anthony Bowman as writer/director.

Partners, a Tim Burstall film with a David Williamson script; Best of Friends, a comedy produced by Tom Jeffrey, directed by Michael Robertson; Monkey Grip, from Helen Garner's novel about addiction, produced by Pat Lovell, directed by Ken Cameron; Mad Max II, directed by George Miller.

In New Zealand Andrew Brown, a New Zealander who has been extremely successful in Britain, has produced Beyond Reasonable Doubt, directed by John Laing with David Hemmings and John Hargreaves, and Bad Blood (formerly called The Shooting) with Mark Shivas (of television's Glittering Prizes) directing and Jack Thompson and Carol Burns in the principal roles. Both these films could be called crime dramas, both were shot on location, both are based on fact.

A writer in New York magazine, very impressed by Breaker Morant, asks, "What are the future prospects and perils? Will the boom boomerang?" and answers its own queries with the warning that we should stick to our "artistic upward curve" and avoid being overtaken by a foreign capital invasion of a "seductive film-making country where the accent is on making good movies rather than a fast buck". There speaks the voice of one side of the industry.

The other side is for making "international" films with a mixed cast of English, Australians, Americans and whoever else happens along, against landscapes not identifiable Australian, with interiors that could be anywhere in the world. One rather shaming footnote to this attitude is that two films, Harlequin and Mad Max, are reported to have been dubbed with American accented voices to make them more acceptable to, or easier on the ears of, Americans. In fact the Australian films that have succeeded abroad — and we have to succeed abroad where the millions of movie goers are located — are those that stayed recognisably national in character.

The other question to vex Australian film makers will come when a director — for instance, Shivas or Russell — is wanted because of his special style, or a non-Australian actor is thought necessary, and Equity may be unsympathetic. But every other industry has to live with union regulations as amicably as possible, so why not the film industry?
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Australian Film Commission
David Williamson

On writing for film

David Williamson is best known as this country's most successful playwright, but he is also a prolific screen writer, producing both original screen plays and adapting his own stage work for the cinema. He spoke to Theatre Australia about his writing, the differences between the two media and the differing attitudes to writers of the two industries.

Film work...

My first screen play was the adaptation of Stork to The Coming of Stork for Tim Burstall in 1970. Then came the Libido segment for The Family Man directed by David Baker — in which I urged him to use Jack Thomson, whom I had thought excellent in Wake In Fright. Peterson came next; that was an original screen play. It got a very mixed critical response, and in retrospect it probably was a little heavy-handed, but it was a sincere attempt to look at an ocker with aspirations in a society where there's only one class system - an educational one. Because there were some sex scenes and some violence it got a caning from the more sensitive critics — who were waiting for Picnic at Hanging Rock, but it hadn't come along yet.

I was commissioned to write another screen play by Hexagon and Burstall which I called The Toy Man, but it wasn't shot then because they thought it was a bit of a downer and didn't have a happy ending. It concerned a small toy manufacturer caught in personal and financial problems and it tried to chart his attempts to behave responsibly in crisis situations. It's now been resurrected by Tim (Burstall), who started shooting it this week under the new name of Partners, but it is really a companion piece to Peterson.

Following that was the adaptation of The Removalists and then Don's Party. Then an original film script, Eliza Fraser. And then I started working on Gallipoli with Peter Weir about four years ago and that's a project that's simmered off and on continuously. It went through about seven or eight drafts until it was shot last year. And most recently was The Club.

The differences in writing for film and stage...

A much higher percent of the impact of a film is visual. You've got the great, flat canvas in a painter's sense, in front of you, and you'd be misusing the medium if you didn't utilise that potential for detail. Dialogue in a movie is important, but not as important as on stage; on screen it is functional, terse and short to allow those visual details to occur. But perhaps the most vital writer's function is the overall narrative structuring of a screen play — which scene follows what is more important than the actual dialogue. Of course there you're always collaborating with the director whose interest is also in structure.

The stage can use a far greater amount of language as a performance vehicle for actors. A three-dimensional actor can be there and use his body and vocal equipment to make a performance out of quite intricate language. A prime example of that is Tom Stoppard who provides an intricate musical score in language for a virtuoso performance from an actor.

With a play you work away and then give the finished product to a theatre while with a screen play you wouldn't start on one without a commission although there are commissions for stage plays too. I was commissioned to write Celluloid Heroes for the Nimrod tenth anniversary and there was a certain pressure to make it light and bright — which may not have been a good thing in retrospect.

The process of play to film...

The major thing is the loss of verbal complexity. I'm always acutely aware that a 90 minute film, if it's to look at
all filmic, can only have half the dialogue that a 90 minute play can have. Hopefully that’s replaced by well integrated visual material, but essentially you’re going to see a very different thing on screen to what has gone before on stage.

For instance a lot of the moral shadings and fine tunings of The Club on stage couldn’t go into the film or it would have become dreadfully boring. I learnt that lesson very early when I saw American Masterpiece Theatre, which lovingly recreated masterpiece plays on film without a word dropped. I saw The Iceman Cometh with the best cast imaginable, yet suddenly those three-dimensional performers were two-dimensional cyphers moving across a screen and that magnificent play just couldn’t carry with all the verbal detail retained. Film can’t give you inventive use of dialogue — its strength is realistic story-telling. For instance a quasi-naturalistic playwright like David Mamet uses arresting speech rhythms and inflexions which make his language like a musical score, but it couldn’t work on screen; it would seem utterly overblown and not realistic at all.

Critics said of The Club that the film had intellectually downgraded the play, but that’s a lack of awareness of the difference between the two media. On stage it could be seen as about power struggles generally and on film it became about the workings of a football club. You saw footballers sweating and straining as they trained and that’s very real. On stage the dialogue can legitimately be faked up a little in emphasis and level of articulate, while on film it had to come down to make it credible and realistic.

Galipolli...

Galipolli was the closest and longest collaboration I’ve had with any one director. We tended to have exhaustive and exhausting sessions of three days or so together then I’d go and write a draft, or Peter would go away and rework bits of previous drafts with some rough dialogue to show the sort of thing he wanted and then I’d run it all through the typewriter. My original brief was a two page treatment that Peter had written so the official accreditation is screen play by me from a story by Peter Weir and not only one, but four lines for them.

At the moment the fine cutting and post synching are being done. I’m working with Peter on dialogue for when characters are off stage — it’s amazing what you can do with synching when their backs are turned. I’m too close to make any objective assessment, but I think it’s looking terrific; in terms of a wedding between strong but simple narrative and visual complexity I think it’s got a terrific balance.

Being involved in a film like that is a much more complex and harrowing process than theatre. The writer starts at the inception and follows it through to some extent right up to post synching. You live with a film for far longer in that way. I was on location in Egypt because there were some scenes that couldn’t be scripted until we found the location, so I had to go over and write accordingly. It’s certainly a much more exacting and sprawling assignment than a stage play; Travelling North and Celluloid Heroes were both written during the period I was working on Galipolli.

Celluloid Heroes and the film industry...

I think Breaker Morant is an excellent film and Jack Thomson’s performance is superb, but for the whole nation to go mad because we won a Supporting Actor prize at Cannes is a little unrealistic. There’s a part of my nature — the satirist side of me — that wants to deflate excess, and I thought, “the film industry’s getting too big for its boots, I’ll have a go at it.”

I suppose I felt too, as all writers do, that they’ve suffered at the hands of the film industry, I haven’t met one writer that’s ever worked in film that hasn’t felt he’s been ripped apart and used and abused — whereas my experience in theatre has been just the opposite. You feel that you’re an important person in theatre; your skills are respected; directors do take a lot of care trying to get your concept onto the stage. Not many writers can cope with the sudden change of status in conceding that the director is the key man in the film and that they are in a sense just a functionary. That balance is largely true because film is such a visual experience and, crudely, the job of the director is to avoid all visual

The cast of Don’s Party — the movie
cliches, the job of the writer is to avoid cliches of dialogue and both have to avoid structural cliches. The writer doesn’t have that vital role of overall ringmaster if you like, and he feels powerless. After all, he can be sacked at any minute and a new writer brought in.

I meant Celluloid Heroes to be a good natured act of revenge, but obviously it wasn’t as good natured as it should have been — although the writer in it, the paranoid Nestor Snell, is just as reprehensible as anyone else in the film.

Of course it’s about a terribly bad film — it was prophetic in that when it was written there were tax loopholes, but now there are enormous tax loopholes and there are going to be films like that shot. The Club, for instance, had to be shot before the 30th June; the script was ready but the production had to be hurried up because there were taxes involved.

Problems facing Australian screen writers...
The main problem is the one of having to realise that under the set-up we’ve got, films in Australia are director-based and the writer has no power in that situation. They either have to learn to co-operate with the director and be realistic about their role, or try to set up an alternative system like Johnny Dingwall (who wrote Sunday Too Far Away), who is trying to produce his own film now, or like Bob Ellis and Anne Brooksbank did to some extent with Maybe This Time. But if you take that second course you’re doing it at your own risk because a creative director has skills that you ignore at your peril. There’s no easy path for a film writer anywhere in the world and certainly not in Australia. It’s a matter of learning to live with your role which is quite distinct from that of a writer in theatre or in prose writing.

There is a fear amongst writers that because of the money flowing into the industry, overseas writers will be used by Australian producers and directors. It’s very irritating because there is writing talent in this country that’s not being properly utilised in screen play writing. It’s sheer affront on the part of producers and directors to think they have international talent as a class and that writers haven’t.

Learning a country is not something overseas writers can do easily. I would no sooner go to the West Coast and start trying to write American dialogue rhythms without living there a long while than I would fly to the moon. Dialogue rhythms are very idiosyncratic to a locality and if you want to get the right feel of a place you have to use a writer who is indigenous to the country — there is no other way. Beresford is to be commended in his next project, Fortress; he stuck out for Gordon Graham against the Murdoch organisation who wanted to import someone. Tim Burstall, though, has decided to use an overseas writer for the script of Kangaroo, dismissing any local writer. I think he could have at least asked for a treatment from someone like David Allen who’s written a very fine play — Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World — on the subject. And the NSW Film Commission are funding it. The Australian Writers’ Guild think there should be a responsibility on funding bodies to make their films as Australian as possible — because it’s our tax money that’s paying for them.

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Bruce Beresford is one of our most acclaimed film directors, particularly following the recent international success of Breaker Morant. More than any other director he has specialised in adapting Australian plays for cinema, including Breaker Morant, but also Williamson's Don's Party and The Club. His other major works, The Getting of Wisdom and Money Movers, along with his two current projects, Puberty Blues and Fortress, have all been adapted from novels.

Beresford spoke to Theatre Australia about his work in film, its relationship to the stage and his own modus operandi.

**Directing for theatre and film...**

The two fields are so very different, it's not just a matter of being able to direct actors well. Historically the number of directors who have made the transition is very very few. Elia Kazan is the only one who springs to mind with a high degree of success. Hal Prince came onto the set of Puberty Blues the other day — he's made a couple of movies, one of which was never released — and I asked him if he was going to make any more. He said "Never. Everything I do on stage I think of in that kind of format, where it all happens there and the audience is here and there's no shifting of distance. But the minute you're cutting in and out of focus I can't pace it or time it any more. I haven't got that kind of control. And then the cutting alters it again and I'm just lost."

Everyone in Australia thinks that all theatre directors should direct a movie and all movie directors should go out in a sinking boat — no one thinks movie directors should go near a theatre, but I'm terribly interested in all that. It would give me the opportunity to work with actors which is primarily what I like doing; I like the idea of moving them on a stage, that kind of fixed thing where it's a
completely different sort of challenge. There are a lot of plays I've been intrigued by, that I wouldn't like to film but I would like to do on stage — particularly Pinter plays, I don't think any of them have been well filmed.

People used to film plays as silent movies, which always struck me as totally ratbaggy; they'd take something which worked on stage because of the dialogue and the way it was spoken and do it with the same actors. Crazy. Then when sound came in they started shooting it from the point of view of a theatre audience and it went back all over again. You've got to rethink them. In a movie the one thing you don't have is the actual presence of the actors which is such a plus on stage. Once that's gone you're making up for it with close up, camera angles, cutting, sudden revelations — all those elements of film technique.

Adapting plays for film...

I do like dialogue and I do like characters and it just happened that Williamson had written two plays that attracted me. Though when it came to The Club I wished I didn't like it so much; there were terrible problems.

If you're filming a play and faced with the problem of doing it in one room the demands are that much greater. Don's Party is a prime example; you can't say, "we'll go out here and give the audience a breathing space," you come in every day and say, "Jesus, we're still in this room, what can I do to hold the audience's atten-

tion now we've seen it from every corner and the same people are still in the same room still talking." That's why other directors turned it down. We used the swimming pool and the backyard, but that was as far as you could go. Williamson did originally try shifting it round more but it was impossible because it's set around the television and the election night party and dramatically you'd have ruined it. That's the problem with any play, you've got to be very careful not to destroy the very thing that made it work.

With The Club the critics complained that the film had lost the wider reference that the play had, but there's no way that the reality of film isn't going to make things more specific. In the play it all had to be set in the boardroom to get it on stage at all, which made the piece more of a metaphor for power politics generally. But in the film you had to set it more realistically; to keep it enclosed in the boardroom would have been absurd. I'm not even sure that Williamson ever intended those allusions that a lot of people have read into the play. I think that good writers like him hit on certain human truths in any case and just the fineness of his writing will put them there without him sitting down and thinking, aha, this is a metaphor for...

In any movie that's adapted from anything, play or novel, any holes in the plot will show up dreadfully. You could read a novel and enjoy it, but if you make it a film you have to paper over the cracks because of the medium's inescapable penchant for realism. Maybe it's because you see everything so clearly and in such detail — that's why fantasy films so rarely work. The screen gives such vigour and immediacy, although thematically it still extends.

The process of adaptation...

Working with Williamson usually has been fairly easy; he's got a good sense of what'll work in a film. With The Club I made a number of suggestions and he came up with a draft which used some, ignored some and came up with some much better ideas. Then we'd go through that draft together and make comments — I think we went through three or four drafts. In the first place he cut the dialogue too extensively — one draft I
timed at 55 minutes! Usually you’re always cutting because writers put in far too much.

For Breaker Morant, I wrote the whole screenplay. The South Australian Film Corporation had wanted to make a film of Breaker Morant for a long time and at first they had a script which was an adaptation of Kit Denton’s novel. It was the Breaker’s whole life and just a montage of short scenes from which, to me, nothing emerged except confusion. Then I heard of Kenneth Ross’s play, which was on in Melbourne, and we finally bought the rights to that. I wasn’t mad about it, but it solved the problem of the way of doing it. The trial here was the central event and brought out all aspects of the man’s life. I went to London to do research in the Army Museum and worked in the Mitchell Library here and wrote a screenplay in which bits of the play came into the courtroom scenes. Strangely, even the Kitchener scenes and the summing up speech are not in the play. The summing up is basically the original thing; it’s a dangerously long chunk — six minutes — for an audience to sit through, and if Jack (Thomson) hadn’t done it so brilliantly you would have had to throw it away.

The writers...

If writers feel downgraded by the movie process they should push to direct films themselves — as I’ve urged Williamson to do. Though there have been a large number of cases where very distinguished screen writers did direct movies or their own scripts and they just haven’t worked. I think it’s because their lack of film technique confuses them about what’s going to work on screen. They put in too many words, they repeat things they’ve already said and tend to say things that could be told visually.

For instance in The Getting of Wisdom there was one scene where the younger girl moves into the room with the older one. In the screen play Eleanor Witcomb had the girl go in and the two of them have a long conversation. I cut it out and Eleanor said “What’s going to happen, then?” I said “Nothing. They’re going to walk into the room and look at each other; end of scene.” She didn’t think it could possibly work, but it did and that said absolutely all of it. No writer would ever think of doing that, they would always put it into words.

Actors....

Generally it’s a matter of casting them properly. I have a vision of what they should look like and be like and I cast them very carefully and once you’ve done that it’s seven eighths over. I just talk to them about what sort of performance I want.

The work process...

I can see it all finished when I start. I know exactly what it’ll be like. I know how every frame, cut and visual will be; doing it is just a rope job. It still takes a long time to get the script so I can achieve that — it’s like having a movie projected in my head. When I’m working people say, “Why are we doing that again? It’s just the same.” But it’s not the same. I have a very fixed vision of what it is and it has to match exactly or it’s wrong. I get very frustrated if for some reason or other I have to drop something. Once or twice I’ve had an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43
Most writers have learnt to live with this kind of statement. Some have even learnt to come back with a line such as "you call this living?". For the Australian Film and Television School, this year more than any other, is the one to establish the role of the writer in the eyes of the public.

Aware that for too long the writer, particularly in the fields of film and television production, has been regarded as the chap who pops the script through the letter-box and then disappears while others bring his work to life, the School has given top priority to the training, fostering and promoting of Australian writers. It has announced key appointments in the field of training for writers and has brought together all its writing training programmes within a newly created Writers' Centre.

The Writers' Centre, located opposite the AFTS studios in Sydney, is a compact office complex accommodating staff and fulltime students of the writing workshop. It offers a venue for courses held in Sydney and is available as a drop-in centre for writers at all levels of skill and experience. It will co-ordinate the present Screenwriting Course within the Fulltime Programme and several courses offered by the Open Programme in subjects such as script and narration writing, documentary writing and writing for television. Such courses are offered from time to time in all main population centres.

Normally the School has a compliment of four fulltime writers developing their skills in screenwriting in workshops. This year this number has been increased to eight through short term placings and with the assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council. Students differ vastly in age and background but they all have the one uniting, burning ambition to improve their craft, producing high quality scripts for the Australian industry.

By way of further innovation, 1981 will see some major training in the writing component of the Fulltime Programme, in that students of the Screenwriting Course will be much more involved in the main stream of the Programme, with active involvement in general studies, screen studies, actor/director workshops and other training activities which they will share with the students of the three-year Diploma course in film and television production. Under this proposal, the previous writer-in-residence nature of the course will be mainly confined to the second half of the year.

For their part, the Diploma students will this year join their writing colleagues for regular weekly workshops in script analysis and they will also have the availability of the Writers' Centre personnel for script consultancy.

The Writers' Centre also houses a consultancy to service, advise, instruct and encourage writers, wherever they may be. In practical terms, the consultancy organizes writing workshops in which the practical production, using actors and television studios, is an essential component. Already a successful two months course has been conducted in Sydney. As a result, several relatively inexperienced writers have developed and improved their skills to the extent that the School is planning a further course for them, based on an intensive one-to-one level of tuition.

In Adelaide, the Writers' Centre commenced a similar high level, carefully constructed writing course in March and has already begun a monthly consultancy with four professional writers in South Australia, aimed to direct their skills into producing high quality television drama. Victoria and Western Australia's needs in the writing areas are at this moment being assessed and with a firm commitment to serve these needs by the School.

The School announced three key appointments to the Writers Centre:

Following a long vacancy and an
international search conducted with the assistance of the Australian Writers' Guild, the appointment was made of Keith Thompson as Head of the Writing Workshop.

High Stuckey was appointed to a part-time position as Lecturer in Writing; a new position was created of Writing Consultant within the Open Programme, and this has been filled by Austin Steele.

They will co-opt other experienced writers both local and overseas to join the Centre for short periods and be available to offer advice and training in their particular field of specialization.

Laura Jones, the creator of The Oracle serial on ABC-TV, is currently helping Keith Thompson in providing a script consultancy to the students of the Fulltime Programme, while Ron Blair and Michael Cove are assisting Austin Steele with the Open Programme workshop in Sydney.

In July, the doyen of British comedy, Barry Took will arrive at the School for two months as writer in residence. Took's credits include BBC Radio's Around the Horne, Beyond our Ken and The Glums in Take It From Here, and television's The Army Game, Bootsie and Snudge, and more recently Monty Python's Flying Circus and Father Dear Father. He will visit all those areas where writers need feedback and where his talents as a writer and a gifted communicator will be best received. His visit has been made possible largely by assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Storry Walton, the Director of the AFTS, said "The concept of the Writing Centre in Australia is an exciting one. A place where writers can get together to exchange views, to learn more of their craft, but also a place that will give to writers, wherever they may be, the services that they may need. We hope to offer expertise without vested interest."

Austin Steele said of the Centre "It will be a channel for the interchange of ideas; a bridge between producers and managements on one hand and writers on the other, providing a service to managements as well as to writers. We aim to keep everybody abreast not only of techniques but also of markets, both locally and overseas.

"The Centre has the potential to be a focal point — a clearing house, and we want people to know that they can call on us for help and advice whether or not they are currently professional writers. It may be the small town dentist with one script in the bottom drawer of his desk who could become a fine screenwriters if he knew where to turn for guidance.

"For the more experienced writer, the Film and Television School has a wealth of human and physical resources in its staff, its library, studios and theatres."

Within the School there has been a general enthusiastic welcome for the Writers' Centre. "We need good scripts" is the cry of the producers. "Good, we can write them" is the answer from 10 Lyponpark Road, the home of the Writers' Centre. From now on, the jibe "script writer eh? What do you do for a living?" could become an old and hackneyed joke, as the Australian writer takes his rightful place in the entertainment industry.

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1981 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE and THEATRE FORUM
Imagine if, when you went to the theatre, you invariably saw plays written by women, directed by women, designed by women, with women performers outnumbering male actors about five to one. Would you not perhaps feel that you were getting a rather skewed view of the world? That the social experience of women, as it might be reflected in the theatre, is not that of men, even if the blurbs enticing you to come to the theatre described the play (as they so often do) as "universal"? That the ideas in such theatres might only represent the interests of some of the audience? That theatres were legitimising "absolute truths" because those "truths" were the truths of those in power? That all manner of myths about those not equally represented (in this hypothetical case, men) were being perpetuated because men were not able to argue against them?

Perhaps, if you answered "yes" to these questions, you might understand what brought some 60 women together in a dark theatre on a series of bright afternoons in August last year, in response to an invitation from Jude Kuring and me. Maybe you would identify with the wide range of reactions that day to a set of similar questions: anger, frustration, resentment, a sense of being artistically stunted, intellectually gagged. Above all, though, there was optimism, goodwill, energy for changing a situation in which women are grossly underrepresented in statistical terms in areas of creative control, or misrepresented in areas of creative portrayal.

At those early meetings, we settled our aims (trying to encompass the breadth of our professional theatre experience as writers, performers, technicians, administrators, directors, designers, researchers, etc):

* to widen decision-making opportunities in all aspects of theatre including writing, funding, performance, technical, production, management, design and composition, by ensuring that women are equally represented and in a position to effect equal opportunity policies
* to encourage women directors, and to give them experience, which will also foster different points-of-view and interpretations of roles from men
* to encourage women writers to write for and about women and thereby create a greater range of themes, plots and non-stereotypical roles for women performers
* to provide an often denied opportunity for women to work together in an atmosphere of mutual self-respect in order to develop, refine and extend their ideas and craft, in a critical but supportive manner
* to give public representation, promotion of, and support for the work of women in the performing arts.

Michele Fawdon suggested a benefit concert, which would help us overcome some of the conditioned competitiveness between those for whom there is a limited field, to get to know each other, to put some money in the kitty until we heard the outcome of our application for a Limited Life Grant from the Theatre Board. The benefit was enormously popular, celebratory, exhilarating. In December, the Theatre Board announced a grant of $107,000 to embark upon our aims. The concept of Limited Life Grants, in general, is bold and challenging; they support the essential nature of theatre — that it is a collaborative art form.
particularly the concept fits well with our perceived necessity to challenge collectively the representation (in both senses) of women in theatre. The Theatre Board took up this challenge, and during the year we will be working on a number of means to achieve our aims: playreadings, workshops, intensive groups working to a theme, pre-production activity.

In February, the Women and Theatre Project ran a series of free playreadings of new works by Australian women writers. While it is up to theatre critics to review them, it is nevertheless worth noting that the response was overwhelming. We turned away between 50 and 150 people at each reading, some of whom had to come far (Cronulla, Wollongong, Newcastle) or against great odds (“I have never driven across the Bridge before, but desperately wanted to come”; “My children are at home without a babysitter”). Perhaps some of the major theatres might learn from this exercise, for though our more cynical critics argue that audiences for these readings are “artificial, one off audiences”, they are readings, not productions, and they are plays unheard of before. It does suggest a hunger for writing/directing/acting by women. We will continue to read new works throughout the year, and run another series of public readings in December.

Meantime, the first of the intensive groups begins work together in early March, running through until May. Nine full-timers (Valerie Bader, Beverly Blankenship, Suzanne Dudley, Penny Hope, Gillian Hyde, Deborah Kennedy, Chrissie Koltai, Jenny Ludlam and Lorae Perry), a musician-in-residence (Sarah de Jong) and three major tutors (Dascha Blahova, Jude Kuring and Jannice Slater) will work on new form and content for women in theatre through comedy and music. A second intensive project for another group of women will run later in the year.

We have allocated our first round of development monies to Fay Mokotow to workshop and develop Alison Lyssa’s play Pinball; to Kerry Dwyer, Elizabeth Drake and Gillian Jones to develop her two works Passengers In Overcoats and Anorexia Sometimes; to Cathy Downes to write, within a country and western framework, an expose of the cultural propaganda condoned through this form of expression; to Chrissie Koltai and Jenny Ludlam for a play on prostitution. A second round will follow later in the year.

In March, we begin workshops covering an enormous range of ideas and activities from “Dealing With Agents” to “Contracts and Copyright”; from examining the portrayal of women on stage and screen to movement skills; from “Applying For Grants” to stage fights; from mask work to commedia dell’arte.

The response to the energy and ideas of the group has been so strong that we have been forced, reluctantly, to close our numbers for new membership. If we did not, meetings would be so unwieldy that we would not be able to learn the process of decision-making as well as do it effectively; our workshops would be so over-crowded as to be useless. We feel that already, we are having some effect on awareness in theatre companies of the rights of women. We know that, at the end of the year, we will have made major inroads on the problems facing women in a male-dominated society.
Missing the artistic process

by Irving Wardle

We must have a keen interest in the lives of the artists over here, otherwise writers and managers would stop battering their heads against the old biographical stone wall; namely that the main reason for remembering such lives — the artistic process itself — is the one thing that cannot be shown on stage.

Attempts to get around this have advanced beyond the "Hello Hazlitt, how's Wordsworth?" stage, but still without cracking the central riddle. Even from *Amadeus* you don't learn much about Mozart the composer, without whose work Peter Shaffer would never have bothered to write the play. And now witness Edna O'Brien's *Virginia*, a hit of last year's Ontario Festival, glitteringly transferred to the Haymarket as a double homing for our best comic actress, Maggie Smith, and her director Robin Phillips.

I'll say this for the show: it's a cut above the West End's last raid on the literary twenties in Peter Luke's *Bloomsbury*, a vulgar celebrity roundup for those who might have confused Mrs Woolf with the author of *Orlando's Magic Pyjamas*. What we get from Miss O'Brien is an intimate portrait clearly based on close reading of the voluminous Bloomsbury archives; and directed to spectators who can snap up every glancing reference to Nessa, Clive, Lytton, Maynard, and Buffles, and who do not need to be told that she spent much of her time operating a printing press — much less that she ever sat down to write a book.

Instead, we get snapshots of her social and domestic life, underpinned by the fear of madness and a loathing for sexual intercourse. A high speed tour of childhood (vindictively characterising her father as selfish and stingy) leads on to her escape to Gordon Square where free life and free speech begin when Lytton...
Union, and disdainfully agreeing to tear up an anti-Leninist cartoon.

Barker writes complementary scenes rather than fully articulated plots; and his technique of moving supernumary figures (such as a KGB snooper or a Parliamentary tea lady) into central position effectively transposes a socialist viewpoint into dramatic practice. It yields some richly ambiguous passages, as where Bela celebrates his decision to quit Russia by stomping on a floral tribute to Stalin, only to be shamed by a cry from the outraged gardener: "That's my art!" But of the key scenes outlined above, neither does much to support the idea of the vigilant State censorship implied by Paul Freeman's performance of the grimly suspicious artist; and it is left to Gerald Scarfe's demonically brilliant back projections to convey just what the truth is that he is so keen to impart.

Classical Clambake

by Karl Levett

The presentation of classic plays in America is a continuing puzzle. Advanced education (or what you will) has certainly created a desire for American Theatre companies to mount such plays as well as sufficient audience to pay attention and ticket money. Nothing, however, in the theatrical training of most American actors — let alone American directors — prepares for the demands and discipline of classical theatre.

The result is an ambition — but without any of the means to achieve it. One hand generously gives, while the other just as promptly takes away. The best one can hope for is a spontaneity or a freshness of vision that will replace the conventional values. With each new production one keeps hoping that this will be the one to break the barrier, to shed the new light. On recent evidence Godot will probably arrive before this happens.

Shakespeare is the most revered; ergo, he has to suffer the most slings and arrows of inept productions. Three samples have recently been on view in New York.

The newly-formed Lincoln Center Theatre Company promised a Macbeth with vibrant young leads — a love story at last — plus the theatrical debut of famed conductor and opera director, Sarah Caldwell. The Vivian Beaumont Theatre is a large and difficult space, but it was hoped Ms Caldwell might conquer this. There are a couple of pleasing operatic touches, such as Macbeth's coronation, but Ms Caldwell has chosen a set that puts a curse on the whole production — a sort of "Son of Sweeney Todd" with a high iron bridge and steep flight of steps (the Bridge of Sighs and the Steps of Ambition?). For the sleepwalking scene, there's a conveniently wheeled on spiral staircase that would certainly qualify as a sleepwalker's nightmare.

Macbeth is Philip Arglin who came to recent fame as the Elephant Man. His performance is classic only as an example of too much, too soon. Along with other deficiencies is a curiously inexpressive face — a tale told by a blinking countenance, signifying nothing. Maureen Anderman, a versatile and attractive actress, is Lady Macbeth. While she has a much stronger grip on her role, eventually she too is exposed by insufficient experience of every kind.

The Circle Repertory's Twelfth Night basks in sunny lighting and a aura of naive goodwill. As directed by playwright David Mamet, it is comic book Shakespeare, with complete disregard (or ignorance) of the play's shadows. There is a commendable emphasis of clarity of meaning, but as a result there are pauses you could drive a large vehicle through and a pace that is funereal. This could possibly be the reason that Malvolio is dressed as an undertaker.

Indeed the costumes are symptomatic of the production's hit and miss attitude. The ragbag of styles include Westpoint, Treasure Island, Amtrak Railroad, The Rivals, Bohemia, and Radio City Music Hall. Feste is in Fifties Collegiate and the pacing allowed for ruminating on "Feste Goes To College".

The one stillpoint in all this confusion is Lindsay Crouse's Viola. Even dressed as a refugee from Radio City, she charms. Pert and petite, she is like a latter-day Helen Hayes, providing a credence to the sophomoric goings-on around her. Malvolio is played by the Circle Rep's Artistic Director, Marshall W Mason, and on the evidence shown here a lock should
Theater Company's second season is A Midsummer Night's Dream. Last season BAM, under the direction of David Jones (late of the London's RSC), looked as if it could be a turning point in the building of an American classical company. How dismaying to return this year to find that many of the more talented company members have gone and been replaced by much lesser mortals. We have the spectre of a distinguished English director contending with inexperienced American actors in pulling the four threads of the Dream together. Midsummer madness becomes midwinter sadness. Miscasting abounds and the only really satisfactory performance is Brian Murray's Oberon.

The performance brought forth questions tumbling over each other: Where have all the actors gone? Why? Was it money? Was it the discipline? Were these the best actors available as replacements for a repertory company? If they are, where do we go from here? Whatever the answers, it's a distressing business.

ITI
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Secretary: Alison Lyssa

WELCOME!
The present ITI Board members, Ruth Cracknell, Jeffrey Joynton-Smith, Harry Kippax, and Hal Lashwood, decided at their last meeting to invite the following active theatre professionals to join the Board, in order that it be representative of the various branches of theatre, according to the ITI Charter:

Keith Bain, choreographer
Elizabeth Butcher/John Clark, theatre training
John Gaden, actor-director
Shaun Gurton, designer
Sarah de Jong, composer
Louis Nowra, playwright-dramaturg
Robert Page, editor-producer-lecturer

They have all accepted the invitation and we welcome their future help and advice.

As from now the playwright, Alison Lyssa, succeeds the actress, Glenda Linscott, as Secretary/Editor of the Australian Centre. Glenda has left for an extended visit to the UK Bon Voyage!

COMIC POSTERS WANTED
Bulgaria's House of Humour and Satire is mounting an exhibition of COMEDY POSTERS during May, 1981. The institute, dedicated to the "popularization of the Humour of Nations", would like to display Australian posters of comedy productions — new and old. Please send contributions from your theatre to Stefan Furtounov, Director, House of Humour and Satire, PO Box 104, 5300 Gabrovo, Bulgaria.

THE LIVING THEATRE
Directors Julian Beck and Judith Malina announce a US tour of the Living Theatre, Autumn 1981-Winter 1982. The works in repertory are Ernst Toller's Masse-Mensch (Man And The Masses) an adaptation of Prometheus, and a revival of Antigone (the Brecht version). All productions are designed for proscenium stage. Residencies will include lectures, workshops, and films of earlier Living Theatre works, such as Paradise Now and The Brig. For information:

The Living Theatre, Box 774, Times Square Sta.
New York, N.Y. 10036
Tel: (212) 929-1526

STUDENTS ABROAD
Some Dutch theatre students are organized in the working group, "Drama International", aiming to give information to academy students on dramatic education abroad, festivals, congresses and other activities in the field of amateur, students and professional theatre. They do this to stimulate the students to go abroad and to take cognizance of other views on drama.

To be able to do this they require information on dramatic schools in Australia. All kinds of info will be welcome, like brochures about festivals, leaflets about drama schools, descriptions of your own experiences and those of others, etc.

Their address is: Janskerkhof 18, Postbus 470
3500 AR Utrecht
NETHERLANDS.
Women's Films
by Elizabeth Riddell

The Australian Film Institute's presentation of a package of five films by women, all backed by the Women's Film Fund (administered by the Creative Development Branch of the Australian Film Commission) should help convince exhibitors that local short features not only deserve commercial showing, but would do their audience figures some good.

The films run between 20 minutes and 39 minutes and share a common factor - although differing widely in subject and style - in that they do effectively what they set out to do. They also share a quite noticeable strength and firmness of direction, in other words, a command of the medium. (There is one exception to this.)

The Moving Pictures package is made up of Consolation Prize, Flamingo Park, Age Before Beauty, Climbers and Pins and Needles, presented in that order. All are graded G except for Consolation Prize which rates an M. Which brings me at once to Consolation Prize, the exception mentioned above. This is a funny little film, but its fun is predictable, and it suffers, like the character of Sally Shambles which it seems to find lovable, from too much of everything. Sally is a clown with genuinely Chaplinesque failed-life-of-the-party attributes, but 23 minutes stretches the joke too far and too often. Sally is played by Rivka Hartman who also wrote, directed and part-edited Consolation Prize. The film is a perfect illustration of the axiom that more is less. Perhaps someone was needed to tell the exuberantly talented Rivka Hartman when to stop.

Clytie Jessup's first Australian film, Flamingo Park, is more a celebration than an exploration, almost all strong colour and movement and sound, with mercifully brief excursions into explanation and assertion. Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee, whose business of designing and making wildly beautiful clothes is the subject of the 20 minute film, are no better at explaining themselves than are most artists, who usually sound banal and confused when trying to discuss the how and why of what they do. Clytie Jessup's production and direction expresses her experience as an artist and an actress as well as her talent as a filmmaker. The film has great pace and verve, and the camera work of the dress parade (by Martha Ansara, Jan Kenny, Tom Cowan and Erica Addis) makes a splendid contrast to the quiet, prosaic glimpse of women knitting and of Linda Jackson laying out her fabric jigsaws.

There could be nothing less like Flamingo Park or Consolation Prize than Age Before Beauty, a look (which does not remind me of any other film, but of a book called The View In Winter by Ronald Blythe, published last year) at what people think of ageing women, and what the ageing women think of people thinking that way. It is produced by Susan Lambert, a director of the Sydney Filmmakers Cooperative and a former member of the editorial board of Spare Rib, and directed by Sarah Gibson, a former teacher in alternative high schools. Together they made Size 10 which won a Blue Ribbon award at the 1979 American Film Festival, and many documentaries including the experimental Behind Closed Doors. Old age for women in Australia, and perhaps everywhere, is a bad joke - because women are conditioned to think of themselves as failures once they lose their physical attractiveness, and old age as "shameful". The Gibson-Lamert film is positive, entertaining, sophisticated (for want of a better word) perceptive, sometimes funny and on the whole cheerful, and it is extremely well made. It may not be one that a commercial exhibitor would choose first from this package, but as Jeni Thornley wrote in Film News, there will be plenty of people of all ages who will want to see it.

Rosalind Gillespie's Climbers (29 minutes) is an original and beautiful film, the antithesis of everything people think of when they are confronted with a ballet film. She has made a drama in which the actors do not speak or strike attitudes or move about a stage, but simply dance within an environment created by camera, lighting and a few simple tricks of costume, all in close-up, minutely recorded so that each stretched toe or grimace is a step in the story. The film uses the ascent of Mount Everest by a party of Japanese women in 1975 as a metaphor for women's struggle for liberation. The choreography is by Margaret Barr, with whose dance group Rosalind Gillespie studied, to the music of "Mountains and Rivers Without End", by Alan Hovhaness. Lighting camera are by Martha Ansara (again). The lead dancer is exquisite Lin Kahn but all the dancers, male and female, are commendable. Climbers was awarded a richly-deserved Silver Plaque at the 1980 Chicago International Dance Film Festival and was screened at the 1980 Sorrento Film Festival (where the theme was Australian films) and the International Festival of Music and Choreography at Besancon, France.

Of the five films, the one that has received the most publicity and will continue to receive the most, because of the built-in sympathy it will command and because this is the International Year of the Disabled, is Genni Batterham's Pins and Needles (38 minutes) written and produced by Genni and directed by Barbara Chobocky, who has a good track record in short features. Pins and Needles is an almost-honest film, but it has aspects of self-indulgence that, for instance, Stepping Out (reviewed earlier) has not. Both films are about malfunction of the body and brain. Pins and Needles has already demonstrated its success by picking up awards at film festivals in the US and Canada.

With these five films, reviewers (and the public) are faced with, again, film as an art or craft form and film with a message, or a point of view if message is too loaded a word. But the two may be combined, and I have to say that I think Climbers is the one to have done it best.
OPERA

The States of Opera

by Justin Macdonnell

How history in the arts repeats itself!
In introducing the opera section in the 1977 Performing Arts Year Book I had cause to remark:
“1977 was a remarkable year in many ways for opera in Australia. Taken from one point of view, it resembles nothing so much as births and deaths column. Three of the four major companies changed direction in some quite fundamental way.”

Looking back on 1980 and forward to the prospects for 1981, it is beginning to seem, as someone once almost said of Australian television, not so much that we have had five years of opera in Australia but one year five times over.

The combination of gloom and optimism current in 1977 still persists and neither element is likely to prevail lightly.

In May last year the committee appointed to inquire into the state of opera and music theatre in Australia brought down its excellent report. It was widely acclaimed at the time and could certainly stand as a model of its type for detail, lucidity and farsightedness. It even looked for a moment as though it might signal a new age of coherent planning and cooperation in the most storm-tossed area of the performing arts in this country. The cheers soon died away.

To date, although the report has been adopted in principle by the Australia Council, it has not been considered by Federal cabinet and, accordingly, its financial implications for improved funding of companies (with one major unnerving exception) remain dormant.

That exception is the Victoria State Opera (VSO) where after a rather unsavoury display of brinkmanship which must have left them quite breathless, they have secured what are euphemistically termed “guarantees against loss” from both the Council and the Victorian government up to the level of $135,000 each year, while they bring the VSO close to the funding recommended in the Report, are quite contrary to the intention of the Committee of Inquiry in urging that the opera scene should advance as a whole rather than in the very piecemeal fashion which is so clearly occurring. It is contrary too, to the strong spirit of co-operation between companies through which one had hoped to see an orderly development of all opera in Australia based on an agreed partnership between state and federal funding authorities.

What, in essence, occurred is that rightly or wrongly the VSO believed that they had received an undertaking from both the Australia Council and the Victorian government that they would receive in 1981 the level of funding to develop the company into the full-time year-round operation which had been recommended in the Report. It remains a mystery why the VSO should have told any such thing when every other company was firmly given to understand that no action could be taken until federal cabinet had considered and, hopefully, adopted the Report.

What undertaking the Victorian government gives on its own behalf to a state company is entirely its own business and one can only applaud it for acting so promptly in recognition of the Report. But for officers of the Council to have unilaterally made such a statement is a clear breach of the understanding which they had with all other companies. Equally, it is bizarre to think that they would have done so knowing that in the circumstances prevailing at the time, they could not honour it except by disadvantaging other opera companies.

The result is that Rafferty’s rules prevailed.

The VSO proceeded to programme 1981 on the basis of this ‘advice’. All other companies proceeded on the opposite assumption, namely, that in 1981 it was unlikely that the funding aspects of the Report could be implemented since officers of the Council had made it abundantly clear to them that in order to do so the federal government would have to make a specific additional subvention for this purpose.

All hopes for an orderly co-operative development perished once it was demonstrated that by creating a sufficient crisis it proved possible for any one company to work outside the agreed system and ensure not only that they could get their own way but also that someone else would lose in the process. In this case it was the Australian Opera whose grant from the Victorian government was reduced in actual dollar terms from $270,000 in 1980 to $200,000 in 1981. Although one is not suggesting that the government simply transferred $70,000 from one company to the other, clearly in the balancing of the books that is, in effect, what has happened and, moreover, in a manner entirely at odds with the principle of “due notice” of reduction of funding which has been one of the few stable elements available for companies in forward planning.

It is ironic that the VSO steamroller tactics were enacted against the background of the sad demise of their northern cousins, the Queensland Opera Company, which had for so long been led by John Thompson, a gentleman who always “played the game” and who personally moulded an efficient ensemble chronically underfunded and overstretched.

In February of last year the state government had installed a new Board and, giving them a “once off” grant of $150,000, charged them with the responsibility of re-organising the company and preparing a set of recommendations for its future. Late in the year that Board petitioned the government to terminate its affairs and the Queensland Opera Company ceased to exist.

A steering committee consisting of representatives of the former Board of the Opera, together with representatives of the largely amateur-based but very energetic Queensland Light Opera, with an independent chairman are currently deliberating the future prospects for professional opera in that state.

It is understood that funds have been set aside for a revival of activity and the state
government continues to restate its determination to have a professional opera company capable of performing in the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, currently under construction on the south bank of the Brisbane River, the opening of which in September 1982 is menacingly close if a new company is to be formed from scratch.

But it is not only funding matters that have been adversely affected by the neglect of the Report.

Excellent proposals in it for an advanced training programme for young singers — desperately needed in the light of the present shambles in which singing teaching and opera training in conservatoria and music schools find themselves — are no further advanced. The stimulating ideas for an investment fund to promote the production and performance of new musicals and other forms of music theatre have fallen — as far as one can tell — on very stony ground indeed. A similar fate has befallen the suggestion that the Australian Opera might broaden its own repertoire by including a judicious selection of musicals and operetta.

Despite several high-level meetings between the chief protagonists, the fate of the Sydney and Melbourne-based Elizabethan Trust orchestras — key elements in the future of opera in this country — is not much closer to solution. It is reasonable to suppose, that at some time in the future still to be determined, the Sydney orchestra will, without excessive dislocation come under the umbrella of the Australian Opera as logic dictates it should always have been.

On the other hand in Melbourne — as with all things operatic in that city — the case is far from clear. The Australian Ballet, the Victorian State Opera and the Australian Opera — all of whom have major vested interests in the question — continue to be locked in dispute as to who gets what in the carve-up. The original recommendation had been that the orchestra go to the Ballet. This proposal not only disturbed the VSO who saw themselves doomed forever to perform with "scratch bands" but was unacceptable to the players themselves doomed to perform a limited balletic repertoire on endless tours.

No real solution is in sight. The final wash up will, no doubt, be a patchwork of compromise in which the major casualty will, as always, be performing standards.

If things have stagnated underfoot, change at the top has been very much in the air. Both Western Australian and South Australian companies have acquired new musical directors in the persons of Gerald Krug and Denis Vaughan respectively, while Myer Fredman, who had been responsible for putting Adelaide's State Opera on the map has gone to head the Opera School at the NSW Conservatorium. It is to be hoped that he will be able to bring some much needed order and professional status to the troubled institution to the benefit of opera as a whole.

Each of these was effected in an orderly dignified fashion. On the only other hand, no single appointment within the arts in Australia can ever have been accompanied by such a blaze of publicity as has heralded the engagement of the new General Manager of the Australian Opera. After fifteen months of what would have been a totally rudderless existence, it had not been for the urban and stonily sensitive presence of Ken Tribe as management coordinator, and after a series of stops and starts, which no matter how they are glossed over remain a farce, a decision has been made. Every stage of the negotiations was conducted in the glare of media scrutiny. Every successive contender's name was publicly noise abroad in a series of "leaks" which in their ingenuity, frequency and potential to embarrass not only the company but the applicants recalled in a macabre way the dying days of the McMahon government. Finally Mr Patrick Veitch from the Metropolitan Opera in New York was awarded the "prize", if prize it be.

For once no stranger to these shores and the inner workings of the company he is to administer, Mr Veitch comes with an intimate understanding of many of the most acute problems which currently affect it, namely its public image, its marketing, fund-raising and planning strategies — especially as they affect its seasons outside of Sydney — and its ability to hold its own in an entertainment industry of increasing complexity and competition.

There is an early indication of this very fact. At the somewhat lugubrious press conference called to "announce" what anyone who had cared to read the preceeding week's newspapers already knew, viz his appointment, Mr Veitch stated, amongst other things, that he wished to give high priority to the question of making opera performance more widely available to the public through the medium of television. Nothing particularly new in that. Managements in all the performing arts have been paying lip-service to that idea since the IAC inquiry pointed out to them that television existed, though, to be fair, the Australian Opera has made efforts in that direction - a couple of them even moderately successful.

But wonder of wonders, Mr Veitch also talks about the changing technology of television production including the rapid emergence of the home video-cassette industry and its potential not only as a means of high quality entertainment in the home but also as a potential source of revenue for his company!

If he succeeds, in that alone he will have justified his appointment.

Regrettably, however, he has more to accomplish than this: Despite a plethora of reports and counter-reports, some less temperate than others, essential structural problems remain: In a recent rebuttal of the Opera report, the Board of the Australian Opera clearly telegraphed that like the restored Bourbon after Napoleon they had "learned nothing and forgotten nothing".

The media representatives who attended the press conference for Veitch and the public who read and listened to them were no doubt heartened to hear the profuse expressions of goodwill between the General Manager-designate, the Musical Director and the Chairman and fully realise, I believe, that no elaboration of future working relations between them, contractual agreements or company structure will mean anything without that goodwill. But until such time as it is demonstrated to the opera-going public and to the satisfaction, ultimately, of the taxpayer, these sentiments can only be measured beside the many similar professions heard over the past five years, some of which have proven to be not entirely in accordance with the facts. One can only wish them well and hope, genuinely, that things have changed.

On the other hand, the end of the Western Australian Opera Company has over the past year and despite acute isolation and a small population, demonstrated that it can draw a substantial audience to its work. No doubt its occupancy of the recently refurbished His Majesty's Theatre will do much to stimulate this process further as will the appointment of its experienced Music Director, Gerald Krug. The company opened its new home with what, in the event, proved to be a rather indifferent production of La Traviata but one which drew capacity houses from an otherwise opera-starved Perth. If, as seems likely, the company can use its plateau of present achievement to further develop its musical and dramatic standards, there is no reason why it should not thrive. A 1981 repertoire which includes such popular pieces as La Boheme, The Tales of Hoffmann and Fidelio should give it a fine opportunity to do so.

In South Australia the situation remains both stable and yet potentially of concern. Every two years the State Opera has excelled in producing as a highlight of the Adelaide Festival a major modern masterpiece in a way which has turned not only Australian but international attention to
it. There is no reason to suppose that the 1982 Festival will be any different.

In the intervening periods, however, despite some good work and always fascinating choice of programme, it is no secret that the company has experienced a decline in its audience from a highpoint in 1977/78. I am not one of those who would automatically attribute this solely to the unusual nature of some of the works presented over the past four years such as Werther, One Man Show and Land of Smiles, although the management itself has assembled some impressive statistics to support this view. In accordance with them, the company has programmed in 1981 a much more "conservative" season of Carmen, Barber of Seville, La Boheme and a revival of their highly successful HMS Pinafore. It will be interesting to see the extent to which this shift of emphasis (since the company has always programmed a selection of such pieces) will make to box office receipts.

The Melbourne situation, as mentioned previously, is the most complicated in the country. Complicated in the first instance by the fact that the Australian Opera maintains a major presence there which in 1981 will total ten productions over two seasons including five new to Melbourne audiences with the VSO producing five (three new) for a total of fifteen productions (eight new) as compared with Sydney's two seasons of sixteen productions (seven new). In the widest terms, no one could seriously claim that Melbourne is not being well-served as used certainly to be the case not long ago. But is it now too much?

The VSO have publicly argued that it is and that Melbourne's potential audience is not yet large or diversified enough to justify it. The low rate of subscription renewals for the 1981 season would, on the face of it, support this view. It is, however, conceivable that at least a proportion of the shortfall reflects the very real dis-satisfaction felt by subscribers in 1979 and 1980 over the constantly changing patterns of subscription available to them, seating difficulties and problems encountered with the introduction of computerised subscription handling.

Perhaps these have induced audiences to seek smaller packages of performances or even single ticket purchases. The fact that it has not been possible for either company to fix a firm date for their occupancy of the venues within the Victorian Arts Centre has, no doubt, not helped their marketing drives. A couple of straw polls have indicated that it is probably a combination of all of these factors but it is clear that a much more sustained marketing campaign over a longer period was required to develop Sydney audiences to the level which someone seems to have assumed can happen virtually overnight in Melbourne. Events seem likely to prove that person wrong.

The situation in Melbourne is unique also in that the VSO alone of the state companies grew up in the shadow of the Australian Opera's large scale annual visits. In order to achieve an increased public profile and, because joint subscriptions with state companies were the order of the day, it entered into a liaison of convenience which has become something of an enforced marriage from which neither party can easily withdraw without potentially upsetting the whole apple cart. A divorce at this stage could have funding implications for both. The Australian Opera needs a substantial presence in Melbourne in order to justify its public subsidy and, to a lesser extent its sponsorship commitments, as well as to earn box office and to practice the economies of scale necessary to enable it to programme a sufficient number of new productions annually in both cities which will make its subscription packages attractive and diverse enough to retain its audience base.

The VSO, if it withdrew entirely from the arrangement would not only lose a guaranteed proportion of the joint box office but would find itself, at the very moment of crucial growth, in competition with the Australian Opera for the same audience. While it might win the local "sympathy vote" to a certain extent, it is doubtful if it could match its larger and more established colleague in sheer promotional muscle or expertise.

It's a vicious circle and one can only hope that goodwill may prevail. Both companies have so much to offer Melbourne and its audiences. The Victorian State Opera under Richard Divall has been responsible for the introduction of many works which would otherwise not have been seen, including in Sydney. Idomeneo. Pelléas and Mélisande and The Pearl Fishers have been significant coups for a small emerging stagione company. On the other hand the Australian Opera has borne the brunt of expense in time and money in developing an audience there and there is no doubt that its own standards would suffer if it were cut off, prematurely, from its second base.

Ultimately, however, the ony real test can be "pro bono publico" and this attitude appears to have become a little lost in the melee.

To sum up. Let us hope that in 1981 we may at least see a serious consideration of the Opera Report and, despite personal differences, that its positive recommendations may prevail; that someone comes firmly to grips with the "Melbourne situation" at both operatic and orchestral levels; that for the benefit of all Australians, 74% of whom indicated in the Australia Council's ANOP survey that they supported the presence in our society of publicly funded opera and operetta, we may see the beginnings of a genuine partnership between opera and television (whether through the public or private sectors) and the emergence of a confident basis for development in the next ten years.

Edward Woodward as Porter in the State Opera's highly successful HMS Pinafore.
Boheme and Beggar’s Opera

by Ken Healey

A god’s eye view from one of the best seats in the stalls during the Australian Opera’s summer season at the Sydney Opera House calls up the imagery of Revelation. Alpha and Omega, operatically speaking, are surely first and last nights respectively. Having added the closing performance of La Boheme to the final Don Giovanni (reviewed last month), I pronounced the AO an Omega company. This incarnation of a Boheme, the sets and costumes of which have clothed a legion of singers since it first appeared in 1970, is the most satisfying of the many I have seen. Without any single element of greatness — apart from that provided by Puccini — it demonstrates the wisdom of casting a masterwork from strength, entrusting it to a thoughtful producer, and inviting a true maestro into the pit. Conductor Cillario here provided the musical coherence that he was still seeking on the first night of Otello in January. Lacking a sufficient body of strings to produce ravishing orchestral sounds, he showed why he is regarded as a singer’s conductor; every big emotional moment was picked out with nuance of orchestral colour and texture. It remained only for the singers to supply the musical foreground. Cillario even allows singers their traditional breaks for applause without seeming to destroy the integrity of Puccini’s score; no mean achievement. Producer Andrew Sinclair showed his quality with a bustling, exciting stage picture at the Cafe Momus; kept the memorable high jinks of the four bohemians in the garret just before Mimi’s final, tragic entrance, and restored a traditional ending by having her expire in bed. Earlier versions played in this wonderfully Parisian set of designer Lingwood had offended the conservative taste by positioning Mimi in a chair for her last consumptive gasp.

In what is ultimately a singers’ opera, we were fortunate in our Mimi, Glens Fowles, who first created the role in this series of productions in 1970. A beautiful young woman with a clear lyric voice, she is no more a naturally gifted actor than her Rudolfo, Anson Austin. But finding a better looking pair with voices of appropriate weight, and willing to take direction would be unlikely in any opera house. Fowles is now at her best in the lower register, where she can achieve a ghostly eeriness without mixing in lots of chest tones. Unhappily, she mars her top by employing a jaw-induced vibrato, particularly upsetting in the love duets with Austin, as his upper register has grown in strength and beauty, far from the BBC chorus voice which he used to put under such strain in romantic opera.

For Boheme to succeed at the level of this performance, all of the other (one hesitates to say minor) principals must be right for their roles. The deeper voiced men, Allman, Shanks and Myers, are a trio of vocal heavyweights who might threaten dramatic buoyancy, not to mention musical balance. That they do not do so is cause for celebration. Wearing copious straight brown hair and a thick, slightly drooping moustache, Robert Allman gave us a Latin Marcello, part Italian, part French. In this opera in Australia, the blend is near to perfect. The power of his voice, the strength of his physique, and the eloquence of his ciaspaline shrug were adequate defence against the onslaughts of his sparrow of a Musetta, Rhonda Bruce. In age, voice type, and stage persona she is the Musetta closest to ideal type in a mixed group which, since 1970, has included Beryl Furlan, Etela Piha, Susanne Steele and Elizabeth Fretwell.

So fully has bass Donald Shanks assumed the role of the philosopher Colline that I can now hardly imagine anyone else portraying it. Andrew Sinclair’s production of Raymond Myers as a histrionic, medium-camp musician, Schauard, was deft. We were also given a diverting Jewish landlord, grumbling for his rent, by David Solomon, and an Alcindoro holding back from caricature in the person of Pieter van der Stolk.

For me the single flat spot in the production, and probably in the opera itself, occurs in the third act, in the snow at La Barriere d’Enfer. Lingwood nicely muted the stage picture, placing it behind a fine black gauze, and there stood Fowles and Austin, singing in dramatic bleakness. Puccini’s librettists ask us to believe that Rudolfo, who alone knows that Mimi is dying, affects tedium and jealousy to break the liaison. His real motive is guilt that the cold and squalor of his room is hastening her deterioration.

Great operas like La Boheme withstand mediocre presentation, becoming wondrous in a very good performance such as this one. What to say about The Beggar’s Opera? Should we see it as a slight piece, long since mute as political satire, fit to provide a challenging stage for a company of actors some of whom can sing a little, in the hands of a lively director and an inventive designer? Can it provide a skeleton for a vaster body of music?

Even Boheme all but disappeared when shrunken by Ross McGregor at Canberra Rep a few years ago into a vehicle for a cigar-smoking slut of a Mimi, accompanied by piano, flute and cello. Richard Bonynge has in a sense turned the opera into a vehicle for a political statement, unrolling his fables of de Mille, Tchaikowsky, Decca and mammon. I am afraid that it will not bear scrutiny in this enlargement, where every beggar’s pox mark is a Vesuvius ample larva’d by the products of Helena Rubenstein.

In a context such as this transmogrification of The Beggar’s Opera...
it would be too easy to caricature Richard Bonynge and the entire enterprise. I shall try to avoid this. In my experience modernisation in an expensive production of a minor piece of music theatre of an earlier age can work, and thus be justified.

In damming Mr Bonynge’s attempt to enter that league, one must be sure what one is attacking. Commercial interest, first. Sydney got this “Rich Man’s Talkfest” because Bonynge and Decca had a recording contract for it, scheduled for March, 1981. Not one of the Australian cast was invited to grace that occasion, and our eyes and ears have told us that we did not witness, by serendipity, a satellite production which turned out to be worthy in its own right.

With the honourable exception of Ron Stevens, trained on the commercial stage, the Australian Opera’s principals and chorus members were exploited in this production. They do not act any better than the fair-average-quality amateur performers whom I see constantly in Canberra. And those with heavy voices, such as Heather Begg (Mrs Peachum) cannot enunciate the text clearly through fatness of operatic tone. The lavish wrong-headedness of the concept imploded on the redoubtable John Pringle, whose innate nobility of bearing in these surroundings transformed his highwayman Macheath into a precursor of the white-collar criminal.

There is no need to describe the Hollywood wrap-around given to the story any more than to catalogue the added tunes in the inflated score. If treating the piece as a film scenario had been properly thought through, it may have worked. As it was, we were left with tokenism, wasteful lavishness, and a metacommot in the ending which says it all.

There is black cynicism in the celebrated double ending of John Gay’s Beggar’s Opera, when Macheath escapes the gallows. Brecht intensified it in The Threepenny Opera, and Dario Fo shows how it can still make a telling political point in The Accidental Death of an Anarchist. This adaptation by Besch-Stoddart cops out neatly it seems, with Holywood demanding a happy ending. Political cynicism, presented as dark comedy, has slithered into commercial pragmatism.

The musicians also have to audition two women singers, proteges of their respective patrons. The Count’s innamorata, Eleanora has had recent successes in Spain — she performed one item more than six times in an evening, is a genius at improvising, and only likes large parts. As Eleanora, Gwen Annear has ample opportunity to display her splendid voice, rich and silken as ever. Even when she is guying and parodying melodramatic vocal styles, it is clear she is absolutely at home with intricate trills and ornaments, and taxing high-register melisma.

I wrote elsewhere of Patsy Hemingway’s consummate acting ability as Cherubino in Figaro (1979 Perth Festival), and here, in a chic red wig, as the Prince’s favourite Tonina, she revels in the stereotypes required for her audition: her pseudo-French is appropriately schoolgirlish, and her expressive eyes are not the least enchanting asset of the demented girl in prison. Above mezzo-forte I thought I detected some shrillness of tone in her “stuttering” aria, but then I suspect that the whole cast mistakenly felt the less than packed house to be unresponsive, and tended to exaggerate stage “business” (such as the thumb-sucking and falsetto passages when Eleanora makes the men pretend to be children), and to “over-sing”, so as to liven us up.

John Wood and Ian Cousins are thoroughly professional and musical singers, as was shown by the precise intonation and ensemble in their opening duet. Yet perhaps feeling it necessary to ginger up the action, they overdid the light clowning and surreptitious tippling, and I felt this was reflected in a tendency to overact with the voice as well.

But all was redeemed, despite one or two moments of vocal imbalance, by outstanding singing in the closing quartet, which also struck me as far Salieri’s best piece of writing in the work. Maestro and Poetas will collaborate on the libretto, while the ladies will refrain from upstaging each other. Full marks also to Mike Cole as their (unintentionally) dozy, and long-suffering accompanist, whose harpsichord playing deftly alternates, and double (in stereo) with John Hind’s.

Prima la musica

by Andrew Hunwick

Prima la musica, poi le parole (Music First, Words Afterwards) is one of 41 operas by Antonio Salieri (1750-1825), a prolific composer, famous in his day, and reputed to have poisoned Mozart out of jealousy. The work had its premiere on 7 February 1786, and has been revived exactly 175 years later, in a special production by Adrian Slack, for the Festival of Perth as the first part of a double-bill (part two is the Shaffer play Amadeus).

"By their works shall ye know them", quotes musical director John Hind’s informative programme note; if so, on the evidence of this "theatrical diversion", Salieri must have been gracious and elegant, but a shade superficial - I doubt whether musically he could hold a candle to Michael Haydn, let alone Josef, or "immortal Mozart", and I did wonder whether this highly committed performance made the piece seem better than it really is.

Despite the music’s undoubted charm, and although the work contains only one act, I confess to having found it overflowing in spots, especially some recitatives — I’m not sure whether the fault lies in the music, or in the libretto by Giambattista Casti, which relies on the sketchiest of plots to provide opportunities for making fun of eighteenth century musical styles, and sending up extracts from numerous operas (some by Mozart).

A composer and his librettist are at loggerheads; Maestro has already written the music for a new opera, and informs Poetas that higher authority requires his libretto to be completed in four days — not a difficult task, Maestro suggests, since the words don’t matter anyway. He himself writes noisy musical passages to please the public, who are also diverted in opera by "spectacle". Therefore, since the words will by either inaudible or ignored, they can be nonsensical; any old words will do, provided they rhyme. Incidentally, Maestro also demands 90% of the fee.

The Count’s innamorata Eleanora has had recent successes in Spain — she performed one item more than six times in an evening, is a genius at improvising, and only likes large parts. As Eleanora, Gwen Annear has ample opportunity to display her splendid voice, rich and silken as ever. Even when she is guying and parodying melodramatic vocal styles, it is clear she is absolutely at home with intricate trills and ornaments, and taxing high-register melisma.

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Festival of dance

One of the most encouraging aspects of the recent Festival of Dance held in the Seymour Centre as part of the Sydney Festival was the capacity attendance of enthusiastic and critical audiences. On some nights there was room to spare; on others there were up to 50 or more people turned away at the door.

I expect that advertising had something to do with this, seeing that publicity for the venture was under the blanket control of the Sydney Festival Committee, but, more to the point, it is becoming increasingly apparent that more and more people are taking an interest in the smaller offshoots of the dance scene.

We have at the moment, only one group that could by any stretch of the imagination be called "post modern" and that is the Dance Exchange run by Nanette Hassall and Russell Dumas. Both of them have a history of classical and modern technique but both want to forge ahead into areas of construction and form that they see as new.

They don't use movement as an end in itself, but rather as its own subject matter, the distinction being that one frames feats and technique, while the other delineates situations and processes unique to dance and its language. The Dance Exchange doesn't capitalise on technique, they have it to varying degrees but the focus is on small gesture, gesture pinpointed and movement defined. The pull of an arm, the stretch of a leg, repeated gestures and so on. You might think that anyone could perform it and perhaps they can.

Take for example a piece presented by the Dance Exchange at the Festival, going by the deliberately bland name of New Work. It delivers three people going through simple, basic steps like walking, standing still and opening out the arms while in the background three closed circuit TV cameras present aspects of those same gestures, creating in fact a movement image fugue or canon. What we are meant to grasp is the development of structure in a fugue. The concept, that is the means to that end, fades away into underexposure.

The trouble with the Dance Exchange works, especially for the new audiences that they say they want to develop is that they are seldom moving. One can appreciate a well structured dance piece, and admire the cerebral content in it, but unless it illustrates something new in a sufficiently fresh manner it cannot and does not linger in the memory. Perhaps the Dance Exchange doesn't want to be a pioneer in new forms; maybe they're not interested in moving an audience or making them remember what they're seeing — it could be that the day of disposible dance has arrived.

Under the Skin starts off in a very ordinary living rom, with a very ordinary couple going through the motions, speaking bits of dialogue, telling each other about the breakdown of their relationship and then crazily (and not very convincingly) veering off into a windswept forest visited by a motley bunch of wraiths, dream images and general crazies.

The words too interject sporadically into the fabric of the two people joining and disconnecting with small ensemble dances, lyric, heaving solos and meandering groups. It is a france-like discussion into fantasy and parable of idsaffection and alienation, shot through with that diaphanous sense of ancient wisdom that we get in Tippet's Midsommer Marriage.

As it turns out the words, and the situations that we come across are more illuminating in themselves than the whole or individual aspect of the dance as such. But then, this is something of what Human Veins is after, the movement is not an end in itself, it is a product included (astutely so) to deepen the perception of the entire work and them.

Under the Skin was one of the highlights of the Festival. With a bit of ruthless editing and some rethinking of sequence at the end of the first half it will be a potent receptacle for some of the ideas going in to make up that cumulative masterwork.

Kai Tai Chan's One Extra Company is an eclectic group, bringing in dancers, musicians, designers and so on whenever they feel the urge and necessity to present something for public viewing. The company's raison d'etre is to amalgamate as many strands as possible to create a different form of theatre. It goes for narrative, humour, romance, social comment and so forth. Sometimes its work is engrossing because it has found just the right mix and the right subject to treat so that none of the strands stand out or are at odds with the piece as a whole. At other times, when the collaborations are wrongly blended, the pieces emerge as a jigsaw puzzle wherein none of the pieces fit and the whole doesn't make any sense.

A case in point would have to be the company's contribution to the Dance Festival. It was indeed lucky to have such performers as Patrick Harding-Imer and Anne Frankenhauser from the London Contemporary Dance Theatre or a choreographer like Graeme Watson (who with his ballet Though No Thought created one of the most concise, inventive and moving works ever seen from him).

When Harding-Imer and Frankenhauser took to the stage in Robert Cohen's Forest or Jane Dudley's Harmonica Breakdown, we could revel in wonderfully well constructed ballets being given good performances, but what will happen when the One Extra next perform? Will any of this be built upon? I doubt it and it would seem that the Company is playing only an entrepreneurial role these days.

Don Asker's company, Human Veins, also wants to expand boundaries of theatre. It now has a group of dancers who might stick together for longer than a couple of months and so will be able to extend their ideas and imaginations into "new" fields.

The first work they created as a body was Asker's the Year of the Monkey, a full length elaboration on material and ideas that came to light in this country in Monkeys in a Cage for the Australian Ballet and Everyman's Troth for the Sydney Dance Company. In Year... Asker utilised half spoken sounds, ululations and clicks in addition to his winding, tumbling and stamping dance vocabulary to identify half-expressed primal moods, emotions and situations.

In his latest work Under the Skin, also a part of the Festival, he has ventured into fully formed words and even whole passages of soliloquy and dialogue as well as the presence of live musicians all being a part of the performance.

I get the feeling that all of Asker's works in the past and now the present, full length piece are all accumulations towards a great masterwork of the future, somewhat in the manner of Kei Takei's monolithic passion play Light. This is due to the dogged determination with which he pursues his themes (mentioned above) and turns them into veritable obsessions.
actor who's been drunk and I haven't been able to shoot him in the close-up I'd planned, and for me it almost destroys the whole fabric of the movie.

The state of the industry...
Although I think the Writers' Guild is right to push Australian screen writers I'm in favour of absolute freedom to bring in anyone you want. If a thousand directors from England wanted to come and work here, I'd say "good on 'em", because it's a competitive business and ultimately the only ones who'll get work are those that are good and make audiences happy.

I'm not worried about the new tax concessions — although there will be a lot of bad films, there will be a lot of good ones too because people will be trained, they'll be given opportunities which will always throw up a lot of talent. As it is this new boom will probably only last a couple of years and then the level of production will drop to something more realistic.

In England now, where they're not doing anything, there are hardly any good directors. If we get closed shop unions like they have and an industry where young people and new ideas can't get in, then it'll atrophy. In America, the top people of say Paramount get all the film school films from all round the States and look at them and if they see one they like they get hold of the director and give him a feature to do. that's how the guy who did *Elephant Man* got it — he was a student.

The future...
*Breaker Morant* brought me an awful lot of offers — mostly scripts which I haven't had time to read because I've been doing *Puberty Blues*. I'm doing a film in September called *Fortress* for Stigwood; it's based on an appalling novel which means a lot of work on the script, but it's a good idea. It's a kidnap story, and I think we'll shoot it in Queensland. After that I don't know, though there are a lot of things I'm interested in doing. There are at least three movies I'm very keen to do, but whether I can get them done I don't know — and that's quite apart from any scripts that might arrive. Basically I just enjoy making films, of all kinds; it's like a tremendous hobby, and sometimes I still can't believe I get paid to do it.
The Australian Dance Theatre's performances at this year's Festival of Perth confirmed the company's reputation as the best group of dancers in Australia, and showed off some of the repertoire that has helped create that reputation.

The man largely responsible for this excellence in dance is Jonathon Taylor, ADT's artistic director. He is a talented choreographer and hardworking man of the theatre who has done a lot of good things for dance in Australia since he arrived in Adelaide from London early in 1977 to resuscitate the old ADT.

Taylor brought from his old company, Ballet Rambert, two fine dancers in Julia Blakie and Joseph Scoglio who, as Ballet Mistress and Associate Artistic Director respectively, have been invaluable in providing the daily backup Taylor has needed to build the company to its present strength.

For four years Taylor has been working at the difficult task of building in Australia a modern dance repertoire that is artistically and commercially successful and, in addition, one that nurtures his 16-dancer company as a whole. Through his close association with the Rambert company he has been able to build into ADT's new repertoire world-class ballets by Christopher Bruce and Norman Morrice. As well as continuing to work with the Rambert stable, Taylor has used Australian choreographers like Jacqui Carroll, and given dancers like Scoglio the opportunity to continue to develop as choreographers.

Wildstars, Taylor's full length spectacular which has drawn enthusiastic audiences everywhere it's been performed, including last year's Edinburgh Festival, was the company's first choice for the Perth Festival. However, it takes four days to set up, and with a season of only six nights, Taylor decided to offer instead a spread of eight works over two programmes.

Injuries caused last-minute changes to the shaping of both programmes, and so on opening night at His Majesty's Theatre we saw an odd mix of two comic works by Taylor, *Tis Godly Sport* and *Flibbertigibbet*, and two powerful Christopher Bruce pieces, *Black Angels* and *Labyrinth*.

*Labyrinth*, Bruce's most recent work on the company, looked stylish and important in the generous dimensions of His Majesty's stage. It's a powerful evocation of the Cretan minotaur legend, structured around a sonorous electronic score by Morton Subotnik, and lit by the masterly Bill Akers. Like *Black Angels* it's full of strong writing for the men, and the male dancers particular John Nobbs and Don Secumb, showed the technical polish and intelligent grasp of content that characterises the company as a whole.

Joe Scoglio's *Winter by Spring*, a recent work using Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, opened the second programme. Beautifully lit warm earth colours dominated the design and reinforced the impact of Scoglio's big, unhurried dance phrases. His ability to create and maintain the dynamics of ensemble writing to evoke Mahler's music and the poems is a skill rare in contemporary choreographers. He also seems to have the gift of pushing his dancers through to new areas of technical achievement.

Another recent work, Taylor's marvellous neo-classical piece set to Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*, closed the second programme. I had seen it first at the beginning of its life early last year at the Adelaide Festival, when the dancers were still tentative and the shape of the dance writing was dominated by the power and beauty of the score.

In the Perth performances, the music still retained its power, but the dancers were fully in charge of Taylor's writing, notably in a long and quicksilver-paced pas de deux at the heart of the work, full of wickedly complex lifts and enchainements.

Ron van den Bergh, who went to the ADT from the WA Ballet Company early in 1980, and Margaret Wilson, were stunningly good in a bravura piece of romantic dancing that, for classiness, outshone anything I've seen from Australian dancers in years.

The best of Taylor's dancers have got the speed, stamina and flash of successful athletes, and the powerful technical abilities that come from a strong classical training allied with a tough schooling in the Martha Graham technique. At its high points, the repertoire Taylor is building nurtures and extends all dancers and in turn gives choreographers access to a bunch of fine, hard working professionals structured by powerful and creative management into a palpable whole.

ADT's 1981 touring schedule will give the company full national exposure for the first time - in addition to the usual Victorian and South Australian seasons, they'll be appearing in Brisbane and Sydney in the second half of the year. Given half-way decent promotion and publicity, the company should attract all those who enjoy home-grown theatrical excellence, as well as the hardcore dance buggs who support their own companies.
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Cold, not chilling

COUNT DRACULA

by Marguerite Wells

Count Dracula by Ted Tiller. Canberra Repertory Society at Theatre 3, 18 February to 14 March 1981. Director, Pamela Rosenberg; Stage Manager, Pat Davis; Set Designer, Russell Brown. (Pro) Am

John Waters as Dracula made my stomach turn to warm pink sludge, trickle down my legs and out my toes. Quite an unusual theatrical effect and very hard to duplicate or rival. At Theatre Three the bat that dive-bombed me had an almost equally great, though qualitatively different, effect; whence it came and whither went who knows but the Director of Special Effects? It was certainly a triumph of bathood, though lacking the scent of sulphur or brimstone. Definitely not a bat out of hell. The green flames that suffused the fireplace whenever Dracula was about to appear, the fog that heralded his coming, the batly shadow on the curtain were all good of their kind, but a trifle half-hearted and basically jovial. The howling of the wolves approached electrifying, but the overall good humour of the production earthed it. Of course it's a comedy, but any comedy benefits from dramatic relief — a few genuine shivers down the spine go a long way. Even Renfield's explanation that he was without shoes because bare feet gave him a prehensile grip — a statement loaded with shuddersome foreboding — was passed over lightly.

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Here is a play that cries out for the heavy ham, for sepulchral tones of voice, cackles of fiendish laughter and thrilling shivers of music. Instead it was a drawing room comedy, all good, clean, Noel Coward stuff with urbane English gentlemen politely contending with chaps who really weren't quite the thing, what? So much potential comedy lost when the villain chappies were really only a trifle warped and foreign when they could have been hilariously, melodramatically terrifying.

Gary Prichard was a nice Dracula, subtle Germanic accent excellently sustained, good presence and appearance, very, very suave — a perfect Transylvanian gentleman of the old school. Threateningly well fed, for a vampire. But not chilling. Just cold. The first two acts, dominated by urbane gentlemen, lacked spice, but as vampirehood took over the Heroine of the piece, (Jenny Ongley, as Mina), the excitement began to mount. Her switches from vampire lady, red in fang and claw, to sappy, goody-goody English rose were excellently drawn, and were slightly reminiscent of the John Waters Dracula, which left you barracking wholeheartedly for the vampires.

In a way the whole play is potentially a splendid exercise in developing sympathies across cultures: the vampires are so much more real and human than the stuffy, out-out defenders of the right. Terry Hornby as renfield, the (literally) bloodthirsty henchman of Dracula, was the other piece of excitement in the production, but he too, though probably the most sympathetic character of all, was pleasantly eccentric, not chilling.

Trish Williams as the horsey, dotty English gentlewman was also entertainingly eccentric, but less endearingly so than the dangerously mad Renfield.

Altogether, a nice night out, though, even among the somewhat limited theatrical offerings of Canberra, by no means a must.
Crackling with energy

ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

by Anthony Barclay


Opened 11 February, 1981.

Director, Brent McGregor; Designer, Stephen Curtis; Lighting Designer, Jonathan Ciddor; Stage Manager, Lee-Anne Donnelly.

Cast: Fool, George Whaley; Inspector Bertozzo, Tony Taylor; Inspector Possami, Paul Mason; Superintendent, Martin Harris; Constables, Robert Gillinan; Maria Feletti, Deborah Kennedy.

Professional)

Accidental Death of an Anarchist provides Sydney theatre audiences with their second exposure within eight months to the fascinating theatre style of Italy's Dario Fo. Last July the New Theatre gave us a reasonably good production of Fo's We Can't Pay we Won't Pay and that production at least set people talking about this most interesting writer of political farce.

Nimrod Downstairs is not exactly the kind of stand-up performance area that Fo might have in mind - his audiences are more specifically students, workers and housewives and the space can be pretty much what-you-will, where-you-will. Generally this was an excellent production in terms of pace and rhythm, with marvellous acting from George Whaley and Martin Harris and a perfectly grotty green and cream set from Stephen Curtis.

There is much we can take from Fo and some things we simply cannot. As the programme notes rightly point out this is not "great" theatre, and certainly, indeed thankfully, Fo is not a political theorist of any complexity. Issues tend to be clear cut and according to our persuasions so do our sympathies, Power and authority and their many abuses of the individual are the stuff of Fo's theatre. The good and the bad fall into distinct categories...the Fool is granted a la Groucho a wildly "heroic" freedom (that has little to do with grim reality) and the authorities, here the goon-squad police, are reduced to fools. But that is the very nature of farce and in Accidental Death we have as many ideas flung at us as comic routines.

Beyond this point though I found the various Australian, Italian parallels rather stretched, to say the least. Universal brotherhood between Sydney and Milan is just not on. Yes one can think of several Pinelli type incidents with our cops over the last decade but this production's well-intended sideswipes (at, say, the Kerr-Whitlam debacle) struck me as strained.

There was little to fault in the production. The first act was a little lukewarm in parts, if anything there was a tendency to overstrain the comic routines to the point of tension; occasionally the actors were not easy, such material might ideally appear effortless. Tony Taylor's Bertozzo was wonderfully hypertense to Paul Mason's Constables, both blandly thick as the proverbial brick. Paul Mason had the worst of it in the first act and seemed not entirely suited to this style of theatre — but Mason has on other occasions given us evidence of his qualities as an actor, and he warmed to the part in the riotous second act. Deborah Kennedy as the journalist Maria Feletti was left at home with a busy air of bossiness and righteousness that she maintained down to her absurdly stiffened gait and posture.

But really it was Harris and Whaley who gave the production the style it needed. Martin Harris' Superintendent was an inspired piece of acting. Indeed if parallels worked it was via his jaw-protruding, slow thinking but (no paradox here) cunning Ocker cop that the point was made...no need for side-wipes when we had this. The sight and sound of Harris in full flight (with Whaley conducting) singing the anarchist's "The whole world is my home" will remain for me one of the most memorable features of this production. In common with Whaley, Harris sustained the comic illusion throughout.

Which brings us to George Whaley's Fool. This was masterfully sustained; athletic, alive to every nuance both on and off stage, ever precise in timing of delivery and movement. It's a pity we don't see more of Whaley on stage. One remembers the similar authority he brought to Sir Archibald Jumper in Stoppard's Jumpers at Nimrod in December 1978.

Brent McGregor deserves the final applause for his sense of pace that (apart from the odd moment in the first act) kept the whole thing crackling with the energy good farce requires. It may not have been done in the volatile context of the street but it was enough to tell us that Dario Fo is worth getting one's teeth into.
Makes you think about existence

HAMMER
by Barry O'Connor
Director, Doug Anderson; Lighting, Peter Critchley; Stage Manager, John Blankenship.
Cast: Frank, Peter Cudlipp; Grandmother, Kati Edwards; Warder, George Leppard; Natalie, Helen McGrath; William, Terry Meller; Sansbury, Judge. Brett Nevill; Simon, Greg Saunders; Maurice, Don Swonnell.

(Professional)

Hammer transferred from Phillip Street to the Ensemble after a successful debut at this year's Festival of Sydney Playwrights. And it's not hard to see why Justin Fleming's first produced play should be given wider notice. Hammer is a very provocative work; so disturbing in fact that it forces us to view the story of a madman's trying to free himself from the nets of social convention. It's an uncomfortable dramatisation of some of Shakespeare's most memorable scenes of plodding naturalism in the latter half of Act I. However, the sound of the crashing aeroplane is a haunting refrain which reminds us of the impetus of the plot.

Brett Nevill was excellent as the schoolteacher Sansbury. Greg Saunders showed promise, and sometimes mastery, as Simon, the elusive main role. Excellent support came from the rest of the cast, particularly from Helen McGrath as the girlfriend (and almost fifth victim) Natalie. Peter Cudlipp's portrait of plausible villainy in Frank Miles was most memorable.

Hammer is enough to want to see more from Justin Fleming.

Transformation to theatre of war

PRIVATES ON PARADE
by Barry O'Connor
Privates On Parade by Peter Nichols. Q Theatre, Penrith NSW. Opened February 1981.
Director, Arthur Dicks; Designer, Leone Sharp; Musical Director, Phillip Scott.
Cast: Bishop, Terry Brady; Bonny, Alan Breb; Lee, Michael Cordeiro; Dennis, Robert Davis; Cameron, Michael Freeway; Sylva, Laura Gabriel; Drummond, Ron Hackett; Flack, Anthony Ingersent; Pianist, Phillip Scott; Flowers, Stephen Thomas; Young-Love, Jack Youens; Cheng, Tony Zeane.

(Professional)

Privates On Parade, the Royal Shakespeare Company's success of some five years back, is having its Sydney premiere at the Q Theatre's Penrith space, which has been magically transformed into a theatre of war. Camouflage nets enrobe the auditorium, containing actors and audience within the one experience. There is a thrust stage with seating on three sides, and a curtain on which are painted wonderfully hokey palm trees and chunky bamboo lettering which spell out S.A.D.U.S.E.A. That stands for "Song and Dance Unit, South East Asia".

The place is Malaya and the time 1948, the first of twelve years of what euphemistically became known as "A State of Emergency", but which in reality was the first of the Viet Nam style wars. I expected the Peter Nichols of Joe Egg and The Freeway to have made more of this theme, but he doesn't. Instead we have the Nichols of Forget-Me-Not-Lane, with a touch of The National Health.

In two acts and eleven song and dance numbers, Nichols chronicles the lives and loves of this rum ENSA unit. The homosexuals and their parasites; a bullying sergeant major who is running guns to the other side; a chee-chee cabaret girl; and a commanding officer who leads his unlikely company to disaster, with a walking cane in one hand and Bunyan in the other. Strongest of them all is Acting Capt Terri Dennis, a raving queen who is both sympathetic and screaming; and Robert Davis makes him stunningly right for the role, in which he succeeds most when he tries less. Capt Dennis is a demanding part for a company play which boasts the Q's usual ensemble strengths. Of Mr Davis' camp impersonations — Vera Lynn, Carmen Miranda, Marlene Dietrich, and Noel Coward — it was his Noel I liked most.
Simply the actor

SOLO
by Colette Rayment

Solo, a programme of solo performances written, devised and acted by the third year students of The Drama Studio (formerly Nimrod Acting Classes) Seymour Centre, Downstairs, Sydney. Opened February 4, 1981.

Director, Tim Robins; Assistant, Anthony Knight; Stage Manager, Ian McKellar.

In the Drama Studio’s presentation of some twenty-seven self-contained solos - they cannot be called monologues since the audience is clearly invited, by conjuring in two amusing figures — a nervous, self-indulgent Palings attendant, hounded by a woman wanting a Pergolese recording, and a whimsical psychiatrist who delights in his female paktient’s bursts of alter ego as he urges her in her hypnotic trance to “entertain” him.

Josiphe Leo’s varied characterisations of Rosalie, a naive country lass; Manela, a prophet of doom and muscat wine; and Mrs Eddy, an ethereal Christian Scientist were both intelligently contrived and well acted. The tour de force of the evening was Michael Meagher’s presentation of a Randwick race caller: commentator aptly named Ken Parnell. As a piece of Australiana it was accurate, amusing and, to those who have been known to frequent the turf, exciting.

In their study of characterisation the majority of students sought to depict individuals from the adolescent world of police and parental oppression, drugs, dating, sex (heterosexual and homosexual), rape, unemployment, with some excursions into prisons, doctors’ rooms and hospitals — all of which were efficiently presented with a minimum of props and a delightful absence of set. Some students, however, showed signs of a broader life experience and or imagination in their convincing presentations of senility and old age, religious and racial fanaticism, eccentricity and banality. Range of characterisation ability was more evident with some actors, such as Glenda McPhee, Anne-Marie Gale and Michael Meagher, than with others who tended to present the same personality in the guise of this or that profession or occupation.

Generally, however, the students’ self-proclaimed aims — to study the basis of characterisation and the effect of relationships on a character — were realised. A movement of the finger, a jerk of the body, a stony silence and still body would succinctly indicate to the audience what kind of reaction the character portrayed is “receiving” from the imagined person whom he or she is loving, brainwashing, persecuting, etc. In their direction of the students, Tim Robins and Anthony Knight exploited these subtleties to the full — a mandatory substitute when the show is no conglomerate of skills but simply the actor himself — solo.

"Minnie" by Anne-Marie Gale

Style and precision

ANNIE
HOME
by Jeremy Ridgman/State Rep


Director, Alan Edwards; Designer, James Ridewood and Graham MacLean; Stage Manager, Ellen Kennedy; Sound, Peter Freeman.

Cast: Annie, Dranne Burns, or Teresa Harbuttle; Miss Hannigan, Bev Schei; Oliver Warbucks, David Cleland; Dagnar Harbuttle, Susan Wilkinson; Jane Daley, Danielle Denny; Katy Hampers, Bettina Leevers; Mark Peaun, Jack Webster; Daveen Stickle; Peter Noble; Lyn Treadgold; Sally Robertson; Margery Ford; Karen Crone; Jacqui Hall; Duncan Wasi; Kate Richter; Stephen Haddan; Frank Lloyd; David Leith; Hugh Munro; Anthony McGill; Lyn Moorfoot; Jack Webster.

(Professional)


Director, John Milson; Designer, John Milson; Production Manager, Margaret Savage.

Cast: Harry, Alan Endicott; Jack, Greg Gesch; Marie, Kaye Stevenson; Kathleen, Betty Ross; Alfred, Steven Hamilton.

It has oft-times been the task of the musical to convince us that however little gold we may have in the bank, every cloud had a silver lining. Annie, in this respect, if not in terms of inventiveness, is the American musical par excellence. Depression needn’t be depressing, it hammers home, and with such gaga ingenuousness that one needs occasionally to pinch oneself to remember some of the cutting ironies that characterised Hollywood musicals actually written during that first depression, such as the exquisitely satirical Gold-diggers of’33.

Someone’s tongue may have edged into his cheek with the idea of a Roosevelt in the thrall of both a bald capitalist and a cute foundling who, we learn, inspires the New Deal with a song and a winning smile, but otherwise Annie is unadulterated schmaltz. Give a winsome orphan a rich foster father and unite her with her pooch and the economic decline of the West fades into insignificance.

The music is bright and catchy without being memorable. Innovative or witty it
clear, crisp but monotone

HAMLET
THE RUNAWAY MAN

by Veronica Kelly


Director, Bryan Nason; Design, Bryan Nason, Paul Hasler, John Deshon.

Cast: Claudius, Leo Woerner; Gertrude, Jennifer Blockidge; Hamlet, Geoff Cartwright; Polonius, Laurence Hodge; Ophelia, Judith Anderson; Laertes, Malcolm Cork (Guildenstern), Geoff Cartwright (Hamlet) and Robert Arthur (Horatio) in TN's Hamlet. Photo: Chris Ellis.

Certainly is not: Weill, Bart or Sondheim might never have existed. However, with Jack Webster's untringly inventive choreography, it provides the QTC cast with more than a few opportunities for a smart routine. Bev Shean and Duncan Wasse are superb as the loveably wicked Hannigans and excels in their "Easy Street" number. David Clendinning makes an imposing Warbucks and moves easily from mellow baritone solo to song and dance duet.

Teresa Harbottle (one of two alternating Annies) is a real find, an enormous talent with perhaps an occasionally overemotional voice. Despite the lack of the revolve, the production moves along smartly, frequently shimmering with sophistication and style.

The Brisbane Actors' Company have surfaced again with David Storey's Home and, on this showing, one wishes they would bob up more often. In the confines of the new Edward Street Theatre, they have explored this rare and subtle chamber piece with astringent clarity. Emotions, memories and levels of communication flutter desperately as four souls, shorn of hope, bear their imperfectly healing wounds. Spare, elliptical, wry, the play is unique in the Storey canon and John Milson's production, tuned to precision, explores its poetry with assurance.

Alan Endicott and Greg Gesch's performances balance beautifully, the one stauncl, florid, occasionally blistering, the other gentle, watery, his pensive anxiety surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture. The strident tone of the two women counterpoint the men's self-surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture. The strident tone of the two women counterpoint the men's self-surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture. The strident tone of the two women counterpoint the men's self-surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture. The strident tone of the two women counterpoint the men's self-surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture. The strident tone of the two women counterpoint the men's self-surfacing from time to time in an expertly understated gesture.

Patrick Reed; Horatio, Robert Arthur; with Michael McCaffrey, Malcolm Cork, Johnny Rush, Ross Daniels, James Porter, Paul Sugars, Paul Hasler, Lloyd King, Toby Simkin, Carmel Mungavin, Anne-Marie Martin, Andrea Crouch, Sharon Corazzoli, Peter Rankings.

(Professional)

The Runaway Man by Mick Barnes. La Boite, Brisbane Qld. Opened February 13, 1981.

Director, Designer, David Bell.

(Amateur)

In a brightly refurbished Twelfth Night auditorium a dazzlingly lit white platform thrusts forward over the usually forbidding chasm between stage and audience. The setting suggests a desire on the part of the TN Company and its new artistic director, Bryan Nason, to reach out to audiences with their first offering of the year, Hamlet. With a cast of uneven experience, the production endeavours to give a clear reading of the sprawly classic, which is indeed commendably easy to both see and hear.

The text is cut back to three hours and displayed in an austere black and white staging concept, with a general absence of non-representational effects. However the splashes of colour and interest suggested in the costuming do not carry over into the non-representational effects. However the splashes of colour and interest suggested in the costuming do not carry over into the non-representational effects. However the splashes of colour and interest suggested in the costuming do not carry over into the non-representational effects. However the splashes of colour and interest suggested in the costuming do not carry over into the non-representational effects.

The drawback is its one dimensional approach levels out the main role to the general uncommitted reading. While the portrait is clear and sparkling, it lacks many of the colours and most of the structure which gives depth and purpose. More is demanded of the great Hamlets than is seen here, but the achievement leaves no doubt that more is capable of being given. The production overall is a black and white sketch of the play with the concomitant virtues of clarity and crispness. The drawback is its one-dimensionality; an unwillingness to launch into a blazing, committed interpretation which really takes off from that platform and seizes the nerves and imagination of the audience.

La Boite's offering, The Runaway Man, takes place in a very finished set of the front room - should that be living area? - of a smart brick house somewhere in, presumably, the western suburbs. The
programme however informs us that the play itself is not finished, this being the third rewrite with others anticipated. My contribution to the fourth version is a suggestion to cut all selfconscious actor-to-audience addresses, as few things are more truly alienating than to be informed by an actor that he knows we're out there.

The play is a portrait of a middle-class, middle-aged marriage, assuming the significant life crises to commence at age 35. Joe, a journalist, makes various attempts to kill himself for reasons which neither he nor anyone else can explain.

If you like bright uncritical whimsy about the physical and metaphysical fantasies of the middle class male, battling such problems as urges to tell look-at-me-mummy funny stories, to be unfaithful to his wife, and to kill himself, then this is the play for you. It's not for me, unless version four becomes considerably more serious and more detached about its subject, and thus able to be considerably funnier about it. Better luck next time. Good cast of young actors, firm design and direction.

THEATRE /NT

Found the laughs

ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR

by Paul Cowdy


Director: Robert Kimber; Lighting: Tony Soszinski; Stage Manager: Les Brownell.

Cast: Jane, Kathy Clothier; Sidney, Terry Kenwrick; Ronald, Richard Creswick; Marion, Jessica Knight; Geoffrey, David Molesworth; Eva, Ann Warburton.

(Pro/Am)

Motivating Darwin's philistine and small population to forgo television, casino and pub for theatre, requires some commercial forethought. And as Alan Ayckbourn said, there is a "marked preference for comedy when it comes to play going."

So with the return after a year's absence of South Australian Robert Kimber as Artistic Director of the Darwin Theatre Group, its first production of the 1981 season was looking for the laughs — and found them.

The play was Ayckbourn's Absurd Person Singular — the "offstage" comedy that first played at the Scarborough Theatre with Richard Briers in the lead role of Sidney Hopcroft, the smug, success story character that eventually has every one dancing to his tune.

Terry Kenwrick seemed to have modelled the role on the Briers' style — with a hint of the Chaplinesque — as Sidney, putting in an agile and appropriately stupid performance. Kathy Clothier, as his wife Jane, worked too hard at her part, giving her a little too much exuberance at times, but she had the audience with her in her solo pieces as a panic-stricken, house-proud little woman. Her high pitched noises of anxiety on being trapped without shoes as guests arrived, raised the first real guffaws. From that moment on, Jane had the affection of the audience.

Jessica Knight was well cast as Marion, the well bred, alcoholic wife of the Bank Branch Manager, Ronald, played by Richard Creswick. Jessica breezed through her performance effortlessly and was well supported by Creswick who remained abstracted throughout, without appearing unbelievably vague. He has been a forceful character on stage before — as the psychiatrist in Orton's black comedy What the Butler Saw, and it would have been a temptation for him to play the role. That he resisted that — even after being electrocuted during the farcical suicide attempts of Eva (Ann Warburton) in Act 2 — is to his credit.

A few hostile faces among the women members of the audience at the beginning of Act 2, showed that Dave Molesworth, as Eva's husband Geoffrey, had pitched his speech of male self-justification — "do you think I enjoy being some kind of sexual Flying Dutchman?" — at the right level. But he was less convincing as the lecher when swooping inuendo with his male colleagues. Ann Warburton's manic drift from one suicide attempt to another as her fellow players frustrated her efforts, without conscious knowledge of her intentions, had good timing and pace.

Ayckbourn's script keeps up the action but some of the visible farce requires the players to be on cue without seeming to hover. However Eva's first appearance on stage came over as nervousness rather than the neuroticism that Ayckbourn intended. It was a body language problem that requires study of neurotic movement.

Ayckbourn draws attention to a sense of collective guilt among audiences who are enjoying themselves and says that the play's final scene in which all dance to the party game mentality of Sidney and Jane, is deliberately serious.

Robert Kimber used lighting effectively to drop the curtain on a "danse macabre", but for some reason the audience laughed too long, showing that the macabre did not come through clearly enough. Perhaps it was a mistake to have the players link arms and congo through the curtain calls.

The three kitchens of the play require the right props to convey further insights into the three inhabiting couples and the sets achieved this without unnecessary fuss or technology, backed by bold strokes of abstract kitchen colour.

It was an evening which set out to be enjoyable rather than demanding and with more serious work scheduled for later in the season and an eye to future audiences, it was a good start. Kimber says he wanted to make people laugh, and he did, well supported by his players. The Group's next production is South Australian writer, Dorren Clarke's Bleedin' Butterflies. That will prove more demanding.
Realistic in the best sense

A HARD GOD

by Marlis Thiersch


Director, Nick Enright; Designer, Bill Haycock; Lighting, Nigel Leavings; Stage Manager, Malcolm Leech.

Cast: Dan, Edwin Hodgeman; Joe, James Laurie; Aggie, Monica Maughan; Jack, Philip Quast; Martin, Kevin Miles; Paddy, John Saunders; Monica, Barbara West. (Professional)

In contrast to the Adelaide Advertiser's critic, who derogated the production as "proficient but uninspired", I found the revival of this renowned and important Australian play a profoundly moving, as well as very entertaining, theatrical experience.

A Hard God was written in the early seventies as part of a trilogy of plays by one of our more respected playwrights. The play has been toured nationally, is published as a book by Currency Press and has for a number of years been on the school syllabus in several states, as well as being shown on ABC television. It is Peter Kenna's thirteenth play. The action portrays, not without humorous touches, a very troubled time in the lives of an Australian-Irish Catholic family in Sydney in the later 1940s.

We were part of the audience on one of the State Theatre Company's regular "criticism" nights. After the performance the director, Nick Enright, invited the Sydney author on stage to comment on the production and to react to questions about the play.

When questions were not immediately forthcoming, Peter Kenna acted as the fluent monologist he cheerfully called himself by first explaining his reasons for the play's unusual construction. Instead of using a subplot, a more conventional technique, he deliberately split the action into simultaneously staged halves. The plot starts with Joe going off to a Catholic Youth meeting, leaving his father reading the paper, trying to overcome his fataly failing eyesight by ludicrously placing his chair on top of the table to be nearer the light. From then on the older and younger generations are shown in turn acting out their dilemmas on different sides of the stage. Significantly Joe does not appear "at home" again until the final scene.

The excellently designed and lighted two-level set gave more prominence to the struggle of the two boys than the original and very limited area at the old Nimrod Street Theatre in Sydney had permitted in 1973. There the senior Cassidy's living room drama was central and concentrated on the late Gloria Dawn, forgettably real as Aggie. In this new production the backyard where the two boys meet, become friends and finally part, was cleverly set slightly lower than the lounge of the western suburbs family home.

After their initial scene together, when James Laurie and Philip Quast loomed rather large in their outsize period overcoats, their sensitive and well directed playing of the homosexual incident in the lives of Jo and Jack made one quite forget that they were not the adolescents the author had in mind.

The most memorable performance in this production was given by Ted Hodgeman who held the audience's attention and won their total sympathy for the gentle but strong pater familias of the Cassidy tribe of three brothers. Monica Maughan's Aggie was in the first part deliberately underplayed but then splendidly gained in stature until she predominated in the tragic reconciliation of the ending.

Peter Kenna elucidated some of the play's meanings for today's Adelaide playgoers, characterising it as being about Catholicism. Conceived as two examples of how cruelly hard God is, how difficult to understand, so that no one can fathom his ways and the purpose of suffering, Kenna in this play shows the Church's view of homosexuality and the conditioning of the
Church for the time of disasters such as lost love, incurable marital breakups, and destruction by cancer.

The play is at once very realistic in the best sense of that ambiguous word and truly localised as well as being, for this very reason, universal and certainly not a naturalistic play. Its two time sequences, going backwards and forwards, assure that. And the action is confined to bare essentials: the other Cassidy children are going backwards and forwards, assure very reason, universal and certainly not a text, love, incurable marital breakups, and reality. David Allen fixes and fictionalises point of firmament and fundament, climb that. And the action is confined to bare naturalistic play. Its two time sequences, only serve to raise irrelevant factual questions. One of the brothers’ wives is only a manic voice off-stage, while Martin’s religious Monica represents an extreme catholicism which is all the more false when confronted with Aggie’s sincere doubts that make her the audience identification character who ultimately triumphs.

Perception and presumption

UPSIDE DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

RED LIGHT SQUARE

by Gus Worby


Director, Kevin Palmer; designer, Ken Wilby. Cast: Lawrence, Tim Robertson; Frieda, Marilyn Allen; Jack, Tom Considine; Victoria, Vanessa Downing.


Australia must be the most discovered place on earth. Even before it was touched by the pink mistletoe men it was “known” and needed by them—a presence conjured from a fear of absence. The mass at the bottom of the map was both a mirror image of the North and a vanishing point. The image repeats itself in many ways in the modern fiction, film and theatre of Australia, from Karmer’s On The Beach to Carey’s The Cartographers. In this context, Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World is another scrap of map.

Two writers, in search of the meeting point of firmament and fundament, climb down, pick-a-back, to test their “other” reality. David Allen fixes and fictionalises D H Lawrence fixing Australia. In an assortment of self-contained encounters, flashbacks, fragments and variations, the piece uses Lawrence’s stay here to speculate on the effect of time, travel and place on the sensibility of the writer, and the strength of his apparent convictions. In this case the matter is sexual and political equality.

The title is apt inasmuch as it suggests that the play relies on inversion for much of its effect. Allen tumbles Lawrence, Lawrence refuses to be mates with Jack, Jack fronts Freida., Freida turns on Lawrence and Lawrence (I suspect) takes Allen with him when he labours “up” to America with a promise which sounds like a threat: “If I ever come back here again, I’ll stay.” At the end of it all, however, we are left with Jack, the Australian, and his wife, exposed but still unexplored. Upside Down, then, is a precarious combination of perception and presumption. When it works, it has an element of daring; when it doesn’t, it patronises. This is perhaps a sign of the times, an “early” play, and... showbiz!

There is a “popular” quality about the writing and the playing style—a little of what you fancy (wink, wink) which makes the whole event accessible. The documentary fragments, the blatant fictions, the comic speculation and routines, the domestic observation, bristle around the figure of Lawrence, making him both signpost and curiosity. Clearly there is fun in the liberties taken with a character who takes himself seriously—the Pom in the Panama trapped in the trappings of his own creation. The sideshow battles between foreigners on foreign soil is also entertaining. The audience recognised in Frieda (Lawrence’s “ultimate reality”) someone “of” the place, if not from it. They clearly followed her lead.

The production was not so successful, however, in taking the other tack, the one which leads to a tight, paranoiac Lawrence, or to a Frieda tortured by the cry of absent children. Both of these qualities are there in some measure in Allen’s sparse writing. Instead, Tim Robertson chose a harrased, slightly crumpled, counter-punching vulnerability for Lawrence, which won hearts but telegraphed defeat. Marilyn Allen’s frontal attack thus became an inevitable force in the production. This basic, but not sensuous, sexuality and aristocratic men powered Kevin Palmer’s vigorous and generally well-planned production. But the play is a four-hander, and the representative Australians, Jack and Victoria, seemed more subordinate than needs be this time around. Jack and his politics, for example, were treated like the troublesome blowfly which lit upon Lawrence in the opening moments of the production—a minor buzz.

It is to the credit of Tom Considine and Vanessa Downing that they establish their credentials without fuss; Ms Downing in a fine ensemble scene of dahlias, chess and “plaisir d’amour” in the first half of the evening, and Considine in his second-half beery diatribe on “action”.

The city needs late night theatrical entertainment and there has been an enthusiastic, if small, audience for Red Light Square, which featured B-J Cole, Sue Lyons and pianist, Michael Morley, in a singing, talking, dancing piece which they devised with John Lonie (Maggie’s researcher and writer) and directors, Margaret Davis and Michael Fuller. The approach to the material varies—from the traditional cabaret music and lyrics by Brecht, Brel, Dessau, and a first-rate song “Whores in the Songs about Whore” by Nick Enright, to dramatic monologues (biographies, really) telling the real stories of real girls in real trouble and of a society which keeps them there.

There is no pretension, a ton of hard work and style in the work of Cole and Lyons. The show lacked a little jazz, lacked the intimacy of club contact and atmosphere and made itself a trifle holy at times—but it also made its point, earned a laugh and a tear and pleased a good many patrons. There should be more of it.
MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

by Colin Duckworth


Director, Michael Blakemore; Designer, Tanya McCallin; Music, George Dreyfus; Lighting design, Jamie Lewis.

Cast: Seth Beckwith, Frederick Parsons; Amos Ames and Chantysman, David Ravenswood; Louisa Ames, Anne Phelan; Minnie, Juliana Allan; Lavinia Mannon, Sally McKenzie; Hazel Niles, Sally Cahill; Captain Peter Niles, Patrick Frost; Christine Mannon, Pat Bishop; Captain Adam Brant, Rod Mullinar; Brigadier General Ezra Mannon, John Lee; Emma Borden, Bernadette Gibson; Mrs Hills, Babs McMillan; Joseph Borden, Stuart Finch; Everett Hills D.D., Michael Edgar; Doctor Joseph Blake, Douglas Hedge; Orin Mannon, John Howard; Abner Small, Michael Edgar; Ira Mackel, Douglas Hedge; Joe Silva, Stuart Finch.

(Professional)

It was a relief to read Eric Bentley's comment (with particular reference to Mourning Becomes Electra) that O'Neill seems profound and turns out on further inspection to be silly, as it is indeed very difficult to forgive O'Neill for trivializing the Electra myth into a melodramatic bourgeois drama. Laudable though his aim was, to create a modern type of tragedy, he misdirected it by retaining the straightjacket of classical analogy whilst at the same time omitting the basic element of any such analogy: the Gods. A mixture of naive Freudianism and Zolaesque genetic determinism is no substitute for the awesome mechanism of divine retribution.

An enlightening comparison would be, not with the Electra of Giraudoux and Sartre (who both retained the Gods but reduced their stature in a similar attempt to create Man-centred tragedy), but with Tony Harrison's remarkable adaptation of Racine, Phaedra Britannica. He chooses a setting contemporary with that of Mourning Becomes Electra, but British India gives him the opportunity to retain the essential divine dimension; as Memsaib (Phaedra) says, 'India, you see it all, watching the haughty stoop, the mighty fall. Your gods possess dark powers no man can flout.'

But for this supernatural element, Phaedra/Memsaib would have become just an oversexed, dissatisfied woman. This is precisely what O'Neill reduces Clytemnestra/Christine to. It must be said that Pat Bishop, even with lines like "Promise me, no more cowardly romantic scruples!" which sound as though a Japanese had translated them from the Russian, remained stubbornly suburban in this role, which demands a subtle blend of evil, charm, and utterly ruthless menace in order to raise her behaviour above that required for inclusion in Truth.

O'Neill's theory of modern tragedy, then, and his conception of the characters, has a profound effect on performance, and that is our concern here. Part One is an intractable text from the actors' points of view. Even Sally McKenzie, whose Electra Lavinia developed into a characterization of great depth and power in Part Two, was reduced to the hostile mutism of a Berkeley campus student in Part One. It is in the second part, (Acts IV and V of The Haunted and The Haunted) that both she and Orin Orestes are allowed to become authentic entities, released from the pseudo-classical trammels of Part One.

After the guffaws and titters that greeted the dramatic highlights of Part One (and not only at the Young Persons' evening), caused by the disparity between the ordinariness of the characters and the burden of mythical overtones they were expected to bear, the cast must have found Part Two rather less excruciating. Here there were some splendid scenes and gripping, credible drama. Rod Mullinar's Brant, John Howard's Orin, Patrick Frost's Peter and Sally Cahill's Hazel, were able to create the kind of flow, rapport and tension that one would expect under Michael Blakemore's direction.

Much credit for the visual success of the production must go to Tanya McCallin, for her sparse stylised, unnaturalistic, but flexible and impressive set, which rolled its vast walls back and forth swiftly and easily for the interior and exterior scenes — leaving too narrow a space for the latter at times, but nevertheless most pleasing.
One more voice to the general cheer

MAN FROM MUKINUPIN

by Suzanne Spunner

The Man from Mukinupin by Dorothy Hewett.
Melbourne Theatre Company, Russell Street, Theatre.

Director, Judith Alexander; Designer, Anna French;
Music composed by Elizabeth Rule; Musical Staging.
Joe Latona; Musical Director, Graham Clarke;
Lighting Designer, Jamie Lewis.

Cast: Jack Harry Tuesday, Chris Orchard; Polly
Perkins Touch of Tar, Vivien Davies; Miss Clarry
Hummer: The Widow Tuesday, Rosie Sturgess; Miss
Clemmy Hummer, Marion Edward; Edie Perkins,
Beverley Dunn; Eek Zeek Perkins, Anthony Hawkins;
Mercy Monteello, Marie Redshaw; Cecil Brunner;
Max Monteello: The Flasher, John Bowman.

(Professional)

The Man from Mukinupin was commissioned for the sequncentennial celebrations of and premiered in Perth last year. By the end of this year it will have been produced in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, in an unprecedented progress from the West to the East. It has already been hailed as Hewett’s best play and must be ranked alongside The Doll and Stretch of the Imagination as an Australian classic.

After seeing the MTC production, and almost inspite of it, I can only add one more voice to the general cheer.

From all accounts the Perth production under Hewett’s guidance and with Noni Hazlehurst and Richard Tulloch in the lead roles has been definitive, so far, and certainly the Melbourne production presented no challenge — even to hearsay. No other Australian playwright can draw so effortlessly on such a store of language and reference, and from lyric poetry to local slang, and move between Dylan Thomas and Shakespeare by way of The Boyfriend, encompassing vaudeville and tragedy on the way, let alone end up with a popular and accessible play.

In the past Hewett has freely acknowledged her problems with the structure of her plays, but in The Man from Mukinupin she has solved the structure by an apt borrowing of the tried and true shape of the well made and well worn. Again she has been quoted as saying that in each work she has sought the appropriate form. The Man from Mukinupin in its recreation of an innocent Australia on the edge of experience, is highly suited to the conventional romantic form in which it is cast. By the simple Shakespearean comic device of splitting the play into two parallel worlds and the characters into their alter egos, she is able to not only deal with the extremities of beauty and darkness, which have always attracted her, but also resolve...
The harvest of war has been reaped, but only the storing will tell at what cost. If the play has a loving sense of place and region it also has a loving sense of theatre, and particularly the social conditions in which particular popular forms grow, flourish and die. In this sense the play does for popular theatre what *Newsfront* did for popular Australian cinema: remind us of how much we have lost, and equally why we had to lose it. Both works show a way forward by showing so clearly where we have been.

Given that the play invites a reading on at least these levels and suggests many more, it is incumbent on the director and the actors that the complexities at the heart of its apparent simplicity are found and explored. It is also a remarkably appealing and touching piece, so almost no matter what you did an audience would come with you. In this production it seemed that the line of least resistance and the easiest effect was chosen to the detriment of the richness that could have been revealed. Only in Beverley Dunn's stunningly intelligent and caring recreation of Mrs Perkins, the grocer's wife and recitationiste extraordinaire, was it possible to see what might have been the depths of the other characters had they been so generously interpreted.

Certainly this production was entertaining, but the limitations of the approach made many of the darker scenes uncomfortably melodramatic, whereas more subtle treatment could have perceived the philosophical contradictions and retain a simple structure.

I felt when watching the play that the prodigal daughter had come home to celebrate a place loved in the past, and that she had chosen the past of that place to inhabit, because it was the only resolvable place. Thus, at many levels the play enacts Hewett's journey home, at the same time as it traces Australia's inevitable progress from moral innocence to ethical complexity and the pain that it brings. By the end of the play Mukinupin, through two of its sons, has been to war and returned changed, but the repercussions have only just begun to be felt by the community and so it is still (but only just) possible for the people to join together in the dance around the maypole.

Certainly this production was enter­prising, and interesting; it survives on the edge of a vast melodrama, whereas more subtle treatment could have perceived the philosophical contradictions and the pain that it brings. By the end of the play Mukinupin, through two of its sons, has been to war and returned changed, but the repercussions have only just begun to be felt by the community and so it is still (but only just) possible for the people to join together in the dance around the maypole.

The very fact that Hewett had imposed such clear polarities should have freed the director to shade and inflect the spaces between. Mukinupin is no Camelot and even things there weren't always pleasant; it survives on the edge of a vast desert protected only by a flimsy rabbit proof fence and the brooding threat of racial and sexual guilt is only held at bay for so long. Judith Alexander seemed to have decided that it was "light" and "theatrical" and so found these disquieting strains as diversions from the "real" show.

**Vapid fantasies of personal crises**

**FOUR FRIENDS**

*by Cathy Peake*

*Four Friends* by Graham Simmonds. La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. Opened February 26, 1981.

Director, Rex Jonas; Lighting, Jane Danne.

Cast: Sheila, Bernadette Boundy; Ferdy, John Coombes; Sean, David Keystone; Peter, Michael Mifsud.

(Fringe)

Graham Simmonds' *Script for Four Friends* is a depressing and doleful affair which suffers most from an exaggerated preoccupation with what are fashionably and tritely referred to as interpersonal realities. These tend to be located somewhere outside the individual but within the nexus of a relationship — like so many fuses in an electrical circuit. From time to time, in *Four Friends* they are blown, but mostly they just simmer away in an ambience of static and disharmony.

His "friends" in fact are a divorced husband and wife, the ex-husband's boyfriend, and one of the ex-husband's boyfriend's favourite, male, ex-HSC students.

It could have been heavy stuff. Instead, the script is riddled with emotional cliches, is often clumsy in its transition from stress point to stress point, and, despite the intentions of what are doubtless well-meaning programme notes, manages to paint a picture of human relations which is both horrifying and impossibly doctrinaire about the paths it charts towards its own version of personal liberation.

The play opens with Sheila — alone in her flat and about to prepare the annual dinner for herself and her ex-husband in celebration of their divorce. The chicken — which she christens Iphigenia, comes in for a fair bit of her nervous, rhetorical "wit", so does her mother who makes the mistake of phoning her to suggest that her lingering fascination with Ferdy (ex-husband) is probably deeply pathological. In the end, Sheila cuts the chimes out of her cuckoo clock and refuses to readmit Ferdy — whose timid entry has been fairly rapidly succeeded by a hasty goodbye.

Act two shifts over to Ferdy's flat which he shares with Sean, a cassette player, wagonloads of booze and Peter, who Sean has just re-discovered at a dance-hall somewhere. Ferdy now directs a fair bit of aggression at what he terms the "meat market" on the couch, which latter, needless to say, survives and even thrives on this attention and finally exits with a light step and a bottle of champagne.

Finally, all four characters get together. Sheila — who, it transpires, is an aspiring journalist, takes out her notebook, various Achilles heels are submitted and everyone gets drunk. The curtain comes down on Sheila making an hysterical phone call to her Greek boyfriend.

Director Rex Jonas seems to have insisted upon a curiously stylized interpretation of all this, particularly in the case of Sheila who appears to be marooned in a world of curious and forced rhetoric. Indeed it is only via David Keystone's Sean, that the play manages to transmit any passion or theatrical energy beyond the footlights.

For most of the time, *Four Friends* is just content to teeter between the bottle and some fairly vapid fantasies about the collective management of personal crises.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA APRIL 1981

THEATRE/WA

A recycled radio play

by Margot Luke

Duff by Alex Buzo. Hole in the Wall Theatre, Leederville, WA. Opened 12 February, 1981. Director, Jon Ewing; Designer, William Dowd. Cast: Dick, Vic Hawkins; Janice, Sally Sander; Matt Duff, Bernie Davis; Simon, Colin Borgonon; Suellen, Liz Horne; Ricky, Rod Hall; Frank, Geoff Gibbs; Liz Duff, Rosemary Barr. (Professional)

There are certain things one might reasonably expect from a play "especially commissioned" for a festival. Exhilaration, perhaps, something to stimulate controversy, striking dramatic or poetic qualities — something memorable, at any rate. What one does not expect is a recycled radio play that has none of these qualities.

Alex Buzo's Duff at the Festival of Perth is a dud, and no amount of frenetic galloping by the hardworking cast across the cramped set of the hole in the Wall Theatre will persuade us that it a lively farce with "overtones" the director, Jon Ewing claims to be "read, if we care to".

There's a narrator, played by Vic Hawkins with breathless eagerness to show what a lively vital character he is. Lighting cunningly separates the confidential asides (dim) from the action scenes (bright), and somewhere early on there are voices, suggesting yet another dimension, but this device is later forgotten about.

The storyline is about a man who has bought himself a motel to live in, and is plagued by unwanted guests. He has also temporarily lost a disssatisfied wife. He gets rid of the former and retrieves the latter. What could be simpler?

It is a mistake to assume that just because there are loads of recognisable current clichees in the dialogue this makes it satire; just as it is a mistake to imagine that a farcical situation is enough without a plot full of a few good twists and turns and surprises.

Once the characters have been introduced the play has nowhere to go and a fairly unmotivated bit of mistaken identity doesn't help a lot.

The characters have their comic moments: Liz Horne and Rod Hall as a couple of "new class" hitchhikers from Adelaide are probably the happiest inventions. The girl owlishly broods over the contradictions of being a liberated female and being feverishly turned on by a man she believes to be a cop, and her boyfriend goes to work with mop and duster while the spinach boils. They are an endearing pair and all but steal the show. Top acting honours must go to Geoff Gibbs, the representative of the past generation (old class) who while swigging his tinnie, thongs and all, sitting in front of the telly, brings to life that dearly beloved character Norm, being In It.

Bernie Davis exerts a good deal of energy as Matt Duff whilst Sally Sander manages rather nicely as Janice, the female interest, to suggest amused wickedness. Colin Borgonon is Simon, an excruciating comic-cuts Englishman, and does as well as can be expected with this sort of thing, whilst Rosemary Barr is completely wasted in the tiny part of Liz, the errant wife.

It is an ironic reflection on the relative levels of impact, that the play coming closest to the "Festival criteria" suggested above, is a foreign language play comprehensible to only a fraction of the audience - The Liberation of Skopje, presented by the Zagreb Theatre Company, had to extend its season after the news got around that here was a truly memorable theatrical experience.
Trelawney of the Wells and The Liberation of Skopje proved to be the twin theatrical summits of the 1981 Festival of Perth, and they made an interesting contrast in style.

Skopje is a thoroughly twentieth century offering, it could not have predated Stanislavski or Brecht. The raw emotion and seemingly loose episodic narrative masks subtly controlled acting and sophisticated dramaturgy. In contrast the Old Vic Theatre Company's Trelawny is a tribute to a long tradition of British theatre. I am not suggesting that it is ossified, museum theatre like so many Gilbert and Sullivan productions: on the contrary, it combines awareness of tradition with a willingness to be innovative, the hallmark of the best theatre found in Britain.

With excellent ensemble acting the Company convey a sense of nineteenth century theatre without patronising it. The feeling is celebratory without being either overpious or too reverent. The performance deftly brings out Pinero's irritation with the vacuity and overblown rhetoric which characterised the theatre of his time. Pinero employed a cunning device to make the natural style he advocated stand out against the posturing he saw all about him. He made his central characters actors, who, as we know have a tendency to act out their lives with the same overdramatised performance they employ onstage. Pinero has thus astutely criticised the falsity of the theatrical values he knew by having his characters behave in "real life" as they do in the theatre. He also presents the stifling boredom of Victorian middle class life in contrast to the vigorous if vulgar life of the actors.

Pinero's mixture of affection and annoyance with the theatre is focussed in the figure of an indifferent actor and struggling playwright, Tom Wrench. I can only describe Robert Lindsay's performance in this role as brilliant. His affectation of awkwardness, owlish blinking, stumbling and hesitation were perfectly timed, reminiscent of Anthony Hopkins in the television version of War and Peace. Lynne Miller conveyed both sides of the deceptively difficult character of Rose Trelawney, showing the mixture of self-centredness and warmth which (dare I say it) still characterises many in the profession. The Company is strong down to the smallest part, and much of the credit for a beautifully paced and nicely focussed production must go to the director, Timothy West.

Mr West also earns high praise for his Shylock in the Company's other offering The Merchant of Venice. He settles for neither a Faginesque stage Jew nor the forerunner of a holocaust victim, but lets the ambiguities which Shakespeare wrote into the character remain. Prunella Scales gave us a witty and likeable rather than passionate Portia, and avoided the bossiness which can emerge from what is, after all, one of Shakespeare's less engaging heroines.

Again the Company showed its strength down to even minor parts. An excellent example was Lionel Hamilton's Duke of Venice, a rich-voiced, crusted-port Establishment figure whose very presence left...
Success of spectacle and performance

FAUST

WINGS

by Cliff Gillam

Faust by Christopher Marlowe. Western Australian Theatre Company at Hayman Theatre, Perth, WA. Opened, February 7, 1981.

Director, Peter Wilson; Designer, Beverley Campbell-Jackson; Stage Manager, Ian Stewart; Lighting, Ian Tregonnong.

Cast: Faust, Tony Nicholls; with Takeshi Hoshino, Noriko Noshimoto, Margot McCarthy, Greer Bradbury, Bruce Mohan, Dennis Clements, Christopher Saunders, Craig Colley, Dheera Sujaan, Jane Davers, Alison Tame, Anne Gaunt, Cielia Tedeschi, Sarah Kernet, Christopher Warne, Jenine Mackay.

The original cast of Trelawny has come to Australia but the exigencies of touring have meant that some substitutions have been made in The Merchant. This perhaps accounts for the sense of a still unsettled performance. Nevertheless, both productions fully vindicate the Festival director's decision to invite the Old Vic Theatre Company to come to Perth.

Wings


Director and Designer, Ken Dampbell-Dobbie; Stage Manager, Christina Pask; Lighting Design, Robin McCrae.

Cast: Emily, Jenny McNae; Amy, Robin Millhouse; Doctors, Paul English and Michael Chapman; Nurses, Francesca Mehan and Molly Worsnop; Billy, Robert Parry; Mr Brownstein, Ray Richardson; Mrs Timmons, Molly Worsnop.

The West Australian Theatre Company's Festival offering, an adaptation of Marlowe's classic Dr Faustus for puppets, was one of the most unusual of the theatre productions among a group distinguished by its range and variety.

Director Peter Wilson has a long history of involvement with puppet theatre, and following a successful period as Director-in-Residence at the Western Australian Institute of Technology from 1979 was invited to devise a puppet production for the 1981 Festival. This gave him the opportunity to fullfill an idea he had been nursing for a decade, the performance in the idiom of puppet theatre of one of the archetypal tragic dramas in the western literary tradition.

Designer Beverly Campbell-Jackson created a cast of "characters", ranging from traditional rod puppets to stylised giant figures operated from within by human cast members which were a constant delight to the eye. Moreover, the set proved a marvel of mechanical ingenuity, with multiple traps allowing for surprise (and magical) entrances and exits, and a piece de resistance in the form of Faustus' conjuring pentagram which became, lit with numerous flashing lights and belching vast quantities of smoke, Hell-Mouth itself.

But, as Aristotle long ago recognised, spectacle ranks as the lowest, in terms of its contribution to the essential dramatic experience, of the six dramatic elements, and this puppet version of Dr Faustus went a long way toward proving his point. Despite the elaborate mimes, the highly skilled manipulation of the pair of rod puppets who simulated the spiritual dilemma and conflict in Faustus (played in human form by Tony Nicholls) and a veritable barrage of exploding flash-pots, clouds of smoke, and dragons and monsters unleashed from Hell-Mouth, the production lacked any really dramatic cohesion, seeming instead to lurch from one carefully prepared and skillfully executed "special effect" to another.

As an attempt to animate and tap the dramatic power of one of the archetypal myths of Western man then, Wilson's Faust must be counted a failure. However, as an attempt to combine the ancient arts of puppetry and mime in a context of visual spectacle aided by all the mechanical resources of the modern stage, it was an entrancing success and one hopes the first of a good many more such innovative and daring experiments in this form of theatre.

Innovative in a very different sense was the Festival offering of the newly formed Actor's Company. Kopit's play Wings is essentially one long interior monologue, delivered by a stroke victim from within a consciousness intact, but only gradually becoming aware of what has happened to her and of the extent to which she has been deprived of her powers of communication. This monologue is very cleverly crosscut with parallel sequences in which the blunt facts of her condition emerge through the attempts of hospital staff firstly to diagnose the extent of the brain-damage suffered and then to begin the long and difficult (given the degree of scientific ignorance which still surrounds the relation between brain structure and speech functions) process of rehabilitation. It is a masterful piece of writing on a subject both inherently difficult and little explored.

The Actor's Company rose to the challenges offered by the script. Director Campbell-Dobbie elicited from a largely inexperienced cast some marvellously fluent and disciplined ensemble playing, as well as a couple of sharp little cameos (notably Paul English as a harassed but basically sympathetic medico, and Ray Richardson as a cheerful Brooklyn Jewish stroke victim undergoing speech therapy). Campbell-Dobbie also provided for his players a set design which was both visually striking and dramatically efficient.

The production was, however, and quite properly, dominated by Jenny McNae as the protagonist, Emily Stilson. She performed what was an extremely demanding and difficult role, involving long passages of lyricism, bouts of "word-salad" nonsense, and periods of extended facial mime matching taped voice-over, with a sensitivity, skill and authority truly remarkable. I do hope that Wings played on the whole to better houses than that on the night on which I saw it, not only because of the worth of both the play and the production as a whole, but because a performance of the quality given by Ms McNae is all too rare an event in the theatre in Perth these days.

Wings was, without doubt, one of the surprises of this year's Festival. Such an auspicious beginning bodes well for the future success of the fledgling Actor's Company, which may indeed be the catalytic fillip the Perth theatre scene has long needed.
The Last New Wave

A D Hope once wrote that it can take a long time for a young country to build up strong mature artistic tradition of its own, but that when it comes the change is "sudden, brilliant and permanent". This is exactly what has happened in the last decade in Australia in the theatre and in film. The definitive book on the theatre of the period has yet to be written, but David Stratton's The Last New Wave on the film revival will surely stand for a long time as one of the best Australian film books. Eschewing the glossy, pictorial presentation of some film books Stratton provides a highly detailed account of the growth of what is now one of the world's most promising film industries.

The book is divided into chapters on leading directors, with additional sections on "one-shots", producers, genre films, 16mm films and prognostications for the development of the industry. Within these sections it takes a film by film approach, but in his running commentary on the films Stratton manages to give a clear and elegantly written account of the politics of the industry, its artistic and commercial achievements and the role of the reviewers.

To the layman it is a fascinating insight into the workings of the sometimes incomprehensible industry and to those familiar with the theatre of the 70's it provides many interesting parallels.

Not the least of these is the shameful role of reviewers. Australian reviewers, of theatre and film, have emerged in the 70's as among the most uncomprehending, insensitive and therefore destructive in the world. They have probably done more than any other single group to frustrate the endeavours of theatre and film workers; and have, in spite of their much vaunted role as representatives of the public, done much to limit the public's potential enjoyment of good films and plays. This is demonstrably true of the theatre and film industry. Possibly a mature critical climate of opinion is the last part of a cultural tradition to develop — perhaps we may look forward to it in the '80s.

In spite of the hindrances such as this the film industry has come a long way. As Stratton says, who would have thought in 1969 that Australians were to make well over 100 feature films before 1980 and that in 1979 Australian films would be screening in some 40 countries. The commercial failures at the end of the decade, which scared some of the big money, make it now all the more important that we don't suddenly lose support. Stratton also argues, convincingly, that "mid-Pacific" films, made with a too self-conscious eye to the American market, will not only lead to an artistic decline, but cannot even be a successful solution to the industry's commercial problems. He cites the example of the British film industry, ruined in the early '70s by "mid-Atlantic" lowest common international denominator attitudes.

The Last New Wave is a densely packed book, written with great knowledge not only of the Australian industry but of world cinema. Assuming (as a layman I only can) it to be substantially accurate, it is a book of great importance to those interested in theatre as well as film. When someone writes as good a book on theatre then maybe we will have our mature critical climate and we can begin to counter the influence of all those reviewers.

All you want to know about the Australian film industry

by Elizabeth Riddell

Australian Film, 1900-1977, Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Film Institute, $75 and $56.20 to members of the AFI.

Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, who put together Australian Film started on this valuable work, with two collaborators who later dropped out because of other commitments, ten years ago. It is easy to see why it took so long — comprehensive is the word for it — because as well as providing a list of feature films it offers intelligent, well-written introductions to seven filmic periods as well as the essential facts about each film, set out chronologically. Not all the material is available on early films; who worked the cameras, designed the costumes and lit the set is lost in the mists of time. After the Second World War cast and crews come easier to hand, although up until the seventies and the revival of the film industry there is nothing like the detail now available on the technical side.

It is, of course, a reference book, but I spent a rewarding afternoon browsing through its 448 pages and 488 listed films, the first of which is Soldiers of the Cross, produced by the Salvation Army in 1900 and directed by the Messrs Joseph Perry and Herbi Booth, and the last Fantasia Comes Again produced by the Australian International Film Corporation and directed by Eric Ram (Collin Eggleston).

Odd bits of information come to light: there was a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the industry in 1927 which lasted a year, its main recommendations for a quota system coming to nothing (surprise, surprise); 1911 was the biggest production year for Australian films, and is still unequalled; when the theatrical family of Tait made The Story of the Kelly Gang they kept it in the family: two Taits produced and four acted; the Red Cross produced a film called Cupid Camouflaged in 1918 to raise money and used society ladies and gents as performers; Hoyts invested in Australian film-making for the first time in 1940, putting money into Charles Chauvel's 40,000 Horsemens which made a star of Chips Rafferty; Jack Thompson appears for the first time in a cast list in the Goldsworthy production, The Lady From Peking, described as a "flunky"; Kamahl played in Tony Richardsson's Ned Kelly.

Australian Film, 1900-1977 in fact tells you all you want to know, and some things that only a very few people could want to know, about the Australian film industry, whose ups and downs are painfully apparent. It has struggled up often enough, and again fallen down. With a bit of luck it will now stay up.

The authors had to decide what was a feature film and what wasn't and they have had to omit documentaries, which they regret. Perhaps another book will cover that extraordinarily prolific and talented part of the industry.
**ACT**

**THEATRE**

**ARTS CENTRE (49 4787)**
Australian Theatre Workshop: *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett; director, Ralph Wilson. To Apr. 4.

**AUSTRALIAN THEATRE WORKSHOP (ACT)**
Wilson. To Apr. 4.
by Cole Porter; director, Warwick Baxter.

**SHOP**
AUSTRALIAN THEATRE WORKSHOP

**CONFERENCE.** Apr 25-May 10.
director, Alison Summers, jjpr 21-26.
director, Warwick Baxter.

**Days**
Canberra Philharmonic Society:
*Arthur.* Apr 8-18.

**NSW**

**THEATRE**

**ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)**
School tours: *The Book Book Theatre Company,* drama for infants and primary; metropolitan area until April 10.
Adult Tours: *The Larrabees,* folkgroup; Riverina from April 5.
AXIS ARTISTS (969 8202)
Axis Fun House Supper Club: Ramada Inn, Pacific Highway, Crows Nest.
The *Billie Bacos Tonight Show* by Tony Harvey and Malcolm Frawley; directed by Peter Meredith; with Greg Bepper, Amanda George, Christie Briggs, Steven Sacks, Tony Harvey. Throughout April.

**BONDI PAVILION THEATRE (307 2111)**
The *Heiress* by Ruth and Augustus Goetz; directed by Doreen Harrop; with Vincent Ball, Diane Jeffrey, Faye Donaldson, Richard Hill. Until April 25.
ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)
*I Ought To Be In Pictures* by Neil Simon; directed by Hayes Gordon. Commences April 2.

**FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N'BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (358 1988)**
The *Good Old, Bad Old Days* with Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Lorain; directed by George Carden. Throughout April.

**GENESIAN THEATRE (55 5641)**
The *Vigil* by Ladislav Fodor; directed by Colleen Clifford. Until April 11.

**WAITING IN THE WINGS**
by Noel Coward; directed by Elizabeth Lyndon. Commences April 25.
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. Continuing.
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526)

**Mary Barnes** by David Edgar; director, Arne Neeme; with Natalie Bate. April 1-4.

**No Names...No Pack Drill** by Bob Herbert; director, Arne Neeme. April 10-May 2.

**CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL** (68 5705)
The *Mystery Plays* based on the Chester Mystery Cycle; directed by Robert Page, designed by David Wood; music by Margaret Lloyd with John Doyle, David Frost etc. Opens April 22.

**KIRRIBILLI 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 P C Cranney; directed by Perry Quinton; with Dave Bertram, Jane Hamilton, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson. Throughout April.

**MARION STREET THEATRE** (498 3166)

**Outside Edge** by Richard Harris; directed by Richard Nichalak. Throughout April.

**MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6585)**
Pardon our Privates directed by Peggy Mortimer; with Ron Frazer, Maggie Stuart and Lee Young. Throughout April.

**NEW THEATRE (519 3403)**
*Yobbo Nows* by Kevin McGrath; directed by Marie Armstrong. Throughout April.

**NIMROD THEATRE (699 5003)**

**Downstairs:** *Death of an Anarchist* by Dario Fo; directed by Brent McGregor; with George Whaley, Deborah Kennedy, John McTernan and Tony Taylor. Until April 5.

**Roses in Due Season** by Doreen Clarke; directed by Fay Mokotow; with Martin Harris, Carole Skinner, and Heather Mitchell. Commences April 11. Late Night Late Night Show: Los Trios Ringbarkus from Melbourne's Flying Trapeze Cafe. Until April 5.

**NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)**

**PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (232-232 4900)**
Scanlon by Barry Oakley; with Max Gillies. Commences April 1.

**Q THEATRE (047 21 5735)**
The *Warhorse* by John Upton: Penrith until April 18; Orange April 21-25 and Bankstown from April 29.

**REGENT THEATRE (264 7988)**
Barry Humphries. Commences April 23.
RIVERINA TRUCKING CO (069 25 2052)
Contact theatre for details.

**THE ROCKS PLAYERS (569 0223)**
*Play with a Tiger* by Doris Lessing; directed by Amanda Field. Commences April 10.

**SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)**
York Theatre
Tomfoolery, from the works of Tom Lehrer. Commences April 1.

**SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)**
Free drama workshop on weekends.
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.

**Youth Theatre Showcase:** Shopfront Touring company productions April 3, 4, 10, 11.

**SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (20588)**

**THEATRE SOUTH (28 2923)**
*Travelling North* by David Williamson; director, Gordon Street; with Brian Blain and Faye Montgomery. To April 4.

**THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)**
*Whose Life Is It Anyway?* by Brian Clark; directed by Brian Hewitt-Jones; with Robert Coleby, Annette Andre, Don Pasco, Elaine Lee, David Foster, David
Nettheim, Dorothy Alison; Phillip Ross; Keith Lee; Lenore Smith and Fred Steele. Throughout April.

DANCE

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET (20 588)
Opera Theatre, SOH
Carmen by Roland Petit; Kettenanz by Gerald Arpino and Suite en blanc by Serge Lifar. Until April 7.

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET (20 588)
Opera Theatre, SOH


ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
Major Barbara by George Bernard Shaw; director, Jennifer Radbourne; designer, Graham MacLean. To May 2.

LA BOITE THEATRE (36 1622)
Summer Of The 17th Doll by Ray Lawler, plus Volapuk by Jim Daly. Apr 6-18.

LITTLE PATCH THEATRE
Wall Street Suet by Nigel Triffit, plus

OG DLNT

The Fittest by Errol Bray. Apr 6-18.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY
(51 5151)
The Playhouse; Buckley's! by Ariette Taylor and David Allen. Apr 4-25.

TROUPE
Suburban Mysteries by Keith Gallash. Apr 14-May2.

THE WAREHOUSE
The Stardust Room; Cabaret by Iaon Gunn, Bill Rough and Lyn Shakespeare. Apr 2-11.


WE COMPANY
Sheridan Theatre; X-Pectations by the company. Apr 2-5.

XITH HOUR COMPANY
Street Theatre. Throughout April.
For all bookings contact the Australian Drama Festival on 267 5111/ 267 5209.
For entries contact Edwin Relf on 267 5988.

THEATRE

ROYAL

MICKS OMNIBUS PLAYERS
Carclew; The Great Australian... What? by the company. Apr 4.

LOOSE LEAF THEATRE

PLAYHOUSE
Playhouse: TBA. Apr 11.

MAGPIE TIE
Playhouse: TBA. Apr 11.

MIXED COMPANY
Carclew Ballroom; Aesop's Fables and The Melbourne Show by the company. Apr 11, 12.

PANORAMA THEATRE GROUP
Sheridan Theatre; Forse Food by PMG. Apr 2-7.

MICKS OMNIBUS PLAYERS
Carclew Stables; Witold Gombrowicz In Buenos Aires by Roger Pulvers. Apr 6-18.

MIXED COMPANY
Carclew Ballroom; Aesop’s Fables and The Melbourne Show by the company. Apr 11, 12.

PANORAMA THEATRE GROUP
Sheridan Theatre; Forse Food by PMG. Apr 2-7.

PHAB PLAYERS
Walkerville Town Hall; Leavin’ School. Apr 11, 14.

PIGS ON WINGS
Improvisations by the company. Apr 9-13.

POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE

Q THEATRE
Up The Track by Betty Quin. Apr 8-18.

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY
AMP Theatre; Such Is Life adapted by Peter Barclay and Ken Moffatt. Apr 7-18.

SHOPFRONT THEATRE
The Box Factory: Without Women and

VICTORIAN THEATRE

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543 2828)
Mikada by the Babirra Players. Apr 3-11.

How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying with the Cheltenham Light Opera Company. Apr 24-May 9.

ARENA THEATRE (24 9667)
Touring secondary schools: Minamata devised by Coventry Belgrade TIE Team.
White Man's Mission devised by Popular Theatre Troupe.
Drama Workshops.
ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (5294355)
Touring secondary schools: McDad with Keith Hounslow and Tony Gould.
Peasants All with Philip Astle and Paul Williamson.
Touring primary and kindergarten: Soundscapes with the Lightening Creek Trio.
AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (3477133)
Front Theatre:
The Twelfth Headed Calf by Stanislaw Witusiewicz; translated and adapted by Roger Pulvers; with Maggie Millar, William Gluth and Howard Stanley. To April 11.
Back Theatre: Sister by Joy Wiedersetz; with the APG Ensemble. To Apr 22.
COMEDY CAFE RESTAURANT (4192869)
Downstairs: Train with Mary Kenneally, Steve Blackburn, Geoff Brooks, and Rod Quanton; pianist Andrew Quinn. Throughout April.
Humour and Blues with Annie Gastin, Dave Grey, Alan Pentland and Susie Simon.
COMEDY THEATRE (6623233)
They're Playing Our Song by Neil Simon; with Mary Kenneally. Apr 2-5.
DRAMA RESOURCE CENTRE (3475649)
Touring Schools: 2D or Not 2D with the Bouverie Street TIE Team.
FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (4196226)
Expo Con and Vince '81 with Tony Rickards, Simon Thorpe, and Toni Edwards. Throughout April.
LA MAMA (3476085)
Primates and Sweeney's Supper Show by Ian Nash; director, Brad Farney. Apr 2-5.
Jack and Jill written and directed by Sarah Wetenhall. Apr 8-19.
An Event by Lloyd Jones. Apr 24-May 3.
LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (4196226)
Momma's Little Horror Show devised and directed by Nigel Triffitt. To April 18.
Mick Conway All Stars Review directed by Terry O'Connell. From Apr 24.
Upstairs shows changing weekly.
MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (6544000)
Athenaeum Theatre: Pete McGinty and the Dreamtime by Keith Michel; director, John Sumner, designer, Anne Fraser. From Apr 1.
Russell Street Theatre: Einstein by Ron Elisha; director, Bruce Miles; designer, Richard Prins; with Fredrick Parslow, Gary Down and Roger Oakley. From Apr. 15.
Athenaeum 2: Beecham by Carol Brahms and Ned Sherrin; director, Ron Rodger; designer, Christopher Smith; with David Ravenswood, and Michael Edgar.
MILL THEATRE COMPANY (222318)
Mill Nights, Run Of The Mill and Teenage Workshops.
The Woman Who Died For Her Husband by Euripides; director, James McLaughry; with the Mill Team.
Geelong Performing Arts Centre: The Bear by Anton Chekhov; director Barbara Ciszewska. Apr 1-11.
MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (27615)
Back To Dean Street with the Performing Ensemble.
School For Clowns at the Orange Festival to Apr. 3
Clown Ensemble at Tumut to Apr 8.
MUSHROOM TROUPE (3767364)
Touring upper primary and lower secondary: Flying Heroes devised by Mushroom Troupe; director, Alison Richards. Throughout April.
PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (634888)
The Universal Theatre: The Choir by Errol Bray; Nimrod production, director, Neil Armfield; designer, Eamon D'Arcy. Throughout April.
Downstairs: I Sent A Letter To My Love by Bernice Rubens; director, Malcolm Robertson; designer, John Beckett. From Apr 29.
Upstairs: Bleedin' Butterflies by Doreen Clarke; director, Roz Horin; designer, Tracy Watt. From Apr 3.
THEATRE IN THE COMMUNITY
Four's Company (311755)
Touring HSC Literature Programme: Brecht, Shakespeare and The Greeks
Throughout April.
CROSSWINDS (623366)
Touring upper secondary: Getting The Hang Of It, director, Tony Clarke.
THEATRE WORKS (2850444)
WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE
(3707034)
Touring: Girls. Throughout April.
The Players by Phil Sumner and Ian Shrives; director, Ray Mooney. Throughout April.
Just a Simply Bloke by Theatre Workshop's director, Phil Thomson, and Ian McDonald; with Ian Shrives, Phil Sumner and Greg Sneddon.
Essendon Civic Centre: West Nights Out and The Proposal.
MAJOR AMATEUR COMPANIES
Basin Theatre Group (7621082)
Clayton Theatre Group (8781802)
Heidelberg Rep (492262)
Malvern Theatre Company (2110020)
Pumpkin Theatre (428237)
Williamson Little Theatre (5284267)
1812 Theatre (7968624)

WA

THEATRE

HOLE IN THE WALL (3812403)
A Shadow Box by Michael Christofer; director, Edgar Metcalfe. Apr 1-25.
NATIONAL THEATRE (3253500)
Pal Joey by John O'Hara and Rogers and Hart; director, Terence Clarke. To Apr 28.
NATIONAL THEATRE TIE
On Tour to metropolitan schools: Ready Mixed, I'll Be In That by Ann Harvey and Num Lagger by David Young.
UNIVERSITY THEATRES
Dolphin Theatre: Dark The Moon by Howard Richardson and William Bernie. To Apr 11.
For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639.
**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

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**The Thespian’s Prize Crossword No. 30.**

**Across:**
1. Sailor we had followed by journalist seems offended (6)
5. Outbreak of pied mice? (8)
9. Liberates enough to provide a foretaste (4,6)
10. Love noted Spot (4)
11. “Let me not to the... of true minds” (Shakespeare) (8)
12. About job...do it again differently (6)
13. Damage, masin the holy man (4)
15. “What a mess in the abbatoir!” (8)
18. Stephano’s friend will ruin colt badly (8)
19. Creative time? (4)
21. Sounds like a sweet nut (6)
23. Reconditioning partly improved, it can be a spark (8)
25. Find edging on part of the wicker basket (4)
26. Kermit’s group? (10)
27. Oratory can be richer when about two characters (8)
28. Drenched earth seen by the animal’s lair (6)

**Down:**
2. Graduate imbibes rum drink in colony (5)
3. Herdsman at the helm (9)
4. Church leaves foreign currency for plays (6)
5. Pict son is sexier, somehow, giving an idiosyncratic view (15)
6. First person to yell gets the dessert (3,5)
7. Give points about the note (5)
8. Meddle with one Darwinian queen keyed before (9)
14. Libertine gets stuck in bog in North Africa (9)
16. State one’s in before being bothered and bewildered? (9)
17. Moncrieff’s tea-time filling (8)
20. Creeps like snakes, perhaps (6)
22. Customary gear (5)
24. No tun of note but that might be like Humpty Dumpty (5)

The first correct entry to be drawn on April 25 will receive one year’s free subscription to *TA*. 