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Theatre Australia

DESIGN FEATURE/NEW COMPANY FOR CANBERRA/THE PLAYWRIGHTS' CONFERENCE/IRENE INESCOURT AT MTC.

‘An Evening’
SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY
THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY presents
STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S production of
LULU
Scenes of Sex, Murder and Power
Adapted by LOUIS NOWRA
from Wedekind's "Earth Spirit" and "Pandora's Box"
Director JIM SHARMAN
Set design BRIAN THOMSON
Costume design by LUCIANA ARRIGHI
Music by SARAH DE JONG
Lighting design by NIGEL LEVINGS
Starring JUDY DAVIS
with Brandon Burke, Sharon Calcroft, Geoffrey Clendon,
Ralph Cotterill, John Frawley, Russell Kiefel, Robert Grubb,
Juliet Taylor, Kerry Walker
and John Wood
SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
Drama Theatre
July 21 to August 29
The Sydney Theatre Company

production of

CHICAGO

A MUSICAL VAUDEVILLE

BOOK BY
FREDEBB & BOB FOSSE

MUSIC BY
JOHN KANDER

LYRICS BY
FRED EBB

based on the play 'Chicago'
by Maurine Dallas Watkins

starring
NANCYE GERALDINE HAYES TURNER
TERRY DONOVAN

with
JUDI CONNELLI
GEORGE SPARTELS
J.P. WEBSTER

DIRECTED BY
RICHARD WHERRETT

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
ROSS CASEY

CHOREOGRAPHY
COLEMAN

SETTINGS BY
BRIAN THOMSON

COSTUMES BY
ROGER KIRK

LIGHTING BY
SUE NATTRASS

SOUND BY
COLIN FORD

BORAL
This production of CHICAGO has been generously sponsored by Boral Limited.

THEATRE ROYAL, Sydney, in association with the MLC Theatre Royal Company

From July 17 to August 29

COMEDY THEATRE, Melbourne, presented by J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd. and the Paul Dainty Corporation

From September 4
COMMENT

Is the cultural cringe starting to operate in reverse?

Guest comment by Richard Wherrett

The Sydney Theatre Company’s recent production of Hamlet has proved to be to many people enormously pleasing, perhaps most of all young audiences experiencing the play for the first time. Certainly, it was an awareness of a generation existing that had not had that opportunity that led us to program it. Nonetheless, it received some scathing criticism, not only in the press, but also at times in the foyer and the Opera House. The 19th century setting, being itself, hysterical, outraged, incredulous!

It received two kinds of criticism: that it suffered from a total lack of interpretation, that the play stands naked and unadorned by any kind of concept; secondly, the reverse, that it suffered from not being allowed to stand on its own as a great play, and rather was drowned in the gimmickry of a director’s concept and interpretation.

The truth in my view lies somewhere in the middle. The 19th century setting, being a period marked by its religiosity, militarism and conservatism, seems to me a period marked by its religiosity, war, and bucking the system. At the same time, the text was often taken very literally, which runs the risk of a lack of interpretation. The ghost is described as suffering from a total lack of interpretation, which runs the risk of a lack of interpretation. The truth in my view lies somewhere in the middle. The 19th century setting, being a period marked by its religiosity, militarism and conservatism, seems to me a period marked by its religiosity, war, and bucking the system. At the same time, the text was often taken very literally, which runs the risk of a lack of interpretation. The ghost is described as suffering from a total lack of interpretation.

Meanwhile, back in the cast, something of the old sort was still happening. I saw fears and inhibitions of a sort and intensity I’ve rarely seen with any local director. A strange chicken-and-egg situation developed. Bill being the sort of director who was as if something of the same kind of interpretation. The truth is described as walking "more in sorrow than in anger". This is exactly what he did. I find the result extraordinarily illuminating, a kind of interpretation in reverse, focusing hotly on exactly what the meaning of the line is. It is this fierce discipline that I have known Mr. Gaskell to always bring to a text that led me to the decision to invite him to direct Hamlet, of all plays that which is most risked by excessive interpretation. It is as impossible to please everyone with a production of Hamlet as it is a Chekhov or a Mozart opera. We all have the definitive production in our head. One person told me as we entered the theatre he had just taken a bet as to where the inflexion would fall in "To be or not to be!"

But that decision, to invite a director from abroad, has been seriously questioned by many, as has that of bringing out an English designer. Apart from the fact that in the latter case it was a decision reached only after a number of local designers had been approached but found unavailable, it seems to me we are approaching a situation whereby no visitors are wanted here. This I feel is dangerously parochial. I have been paramount in questioning the abuse made of visiting artists, and in the case of the STC have argued that once every couple of years it is acceptable in the case of a talent that has something unique to offer, such as Tenschert from the Berlin Ensemble for the MTC’s Mother Courage, Fenolio from Italy for the Adelaide STC’s Servant of Two Masters and ours with Gaskell. Yet as I say, we were challenged at many levels for our decision, from Equity down to drunken Green Room confrontations.

More to the point, the challenges come more after the fact of the production, and its proving to be less than the outstanding success expected of it. The relative success or failure of the production has nothing to do with the validity of the decision to bring a guest director out to do it. But the reaction to it has been one of shock, horror, and rage shrouded in a delight that it was not the production expected. See, we don’t need them! Why do we bother?? Let them piss off and stay where they come from. This is a terrible narrowness, a silly shortsightedness, and a disturbing self-destructiveness. It’s also the cultural cringe in reverse, while just as extremist.

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA JULY 1981

(Continued on page 64)
SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY

in

‘An Evening’

A NON-STOP DANCE ENTERTAINMENT

FESTIVAL THEATRE at the ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE

8 NIGHTS ONLY—JULY 4-11 1981

choreography GRAEML MURPHY design KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON
guest performer JILL PERRYMAN
piano MAX LAMBERT and DENNIS HENNIG lighting JOHN RAYMENT

... with the music of CHARLES IVES • DARIUS MILHAUD • GABRIEL FAURE • LEONARD BERNSTEIN • RICHARD MEALE
• JEROME KERN • IRVING BERLIN • GEORGE GERSHWIN and many others...

Patrons please note that evening performances commence at 8.30 pm and there will be no intervals.

COUNTER BOOKINGS NOW AVAILABLE AT SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (2 0588) AND
ALL MITCHELLS BASS AGENCIES (264 7988)
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AT AETT

Speculation about possible appointments to the new position of Artistic Director of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's Entrepreneurial Division were confirmed or otherwise when it was announced that Anthony Steel had the job. He has accepted it on a freelance basis, and will continue with his own entrepreneurial activities and as consultant to such other ventures as the Ciadan Cultural Exchange Programme.

The position of Artistic Director has yet to be clearly defined between Mr Steel and the Board of the Trust. In the past the AETT's entrepreneurial activities have been conducted on an ad hoc, show by show basis with a mixture of some highly commercial and some esoteric and artistic ventures coming under their banner, including, concerts, plays and musicals.

Anthony Steel feels they must in future be committed to acting as a resource centre for product for the numerous newly created arts centres, capital and regional, and that they must collaborate and complement, rather than compete with the commercial entrepreneurs. He hopes there will be a strong commitment to local product, both in and out of the country, but will doubtless have to move warily on this one, given the substantial losses made by the Trust on the recent tour of Celluloid Heroes.

Although he will be working with a Board who have previously made the artistic decisions themselves, Mr Steel anticipates no clashes. "Of course," he says, "boards have a final say, but their most important function is to hire and fire. When they appoint a professional to do a certain job, they do so believing that the person is the best equipped to carry it out."

MOMMA'S IN EUROPE

In December 1980, from the mothballed environs of the defunct Tasmanian Puppet Theatre emerged Nigel Triffitt's Momma's Little Horror Show, set for resurrection in Melbourne's Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant. From the anonymity of the black velvet performing masks of this latest and highly successful production of Momma's, the cast of unseen artists have emerged to form the new company: The Australian Puppet Theatre.

The Company, operating as a co-operative, has conjoined the multi-faceted talents of: Winston Appleyard, Nigel Cox, Ian Cuming, Patti de Foie, Frank Italiano, David Ogilvy, John Roger, Robert Thompson and Fred Wallace; and now having hurdled the necessary legal documentation has celebrated its incorporation into the world of commerce.

Riding on the wake of its Melbourne success the APT and Momma's gave a brief season in Adelaide at the Scott Theatre in June, from whence Australian Puppet Theatre departed the shores of Oz taking with them over three tonnes of aluminium scaffolding, multitudinous props, puppets and enthusiasm for an extensive tour of Europe.

The tour, covering cities and provinces of Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Germany and France, was made possible by the financial assistance of the Australia Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Victorian Ministry of the Arts and through the untrining efforts of John Pinder and Roger Evans, and of course months of hard slog by the Company.

Already murmurings are sounding for the next production based on the company's concept of puppetry and what better place than Europe, where puppetry is by no means considered to be "kids' stuff", for the collation of ideas and stimuli.

Fred Wallace

NIDA HARD-SELL DINNER

On May 31 at the Grand Ballroom of the Wentworth Hotel, NIDA launched its new one million dollar fund-raising appeal. Supposedly intended to woo "the private sector", the function was less conspicuous for its millionaires than for actors out to enjoy themselves. And why not? As 20 years of NIDA graduates gossiped and speculated on the sudden change of venue from Seymour Centre to the Wentworth, a band of demonstrators downstairs waved flags at the guest-of-honour Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Rumour had it that things could have got much nastier if the function had gone ahead at the Seymour.

Meanwhile, back at the Grand Ballroom, Joe Hasham as compere kept hammering home the theme of the evening — "Hard Sell". This theme was further amplified in the songs (eg "Luck be a Lady Tonight") sung by NIDA acting students and in the short documentary recently made by the ABC on NIDA's "appalling" conditions. One also suspected some conspiracy in the number of little black dresses being worn by female NIDA graduates. Perhaps black is the colour of "Hard Sell".

Prime Minister Fraser hardly cracked a smile throughout the "Hard Sell" songs, but managed his own kind of humour when he deprecated himself as a "rank amateur" amongst all those professionals. Amateur or not, he skillfully avoided any promises as to exactly when the pre-election promised 3 million dollars would materialise, but he hinted that building for the new NIDA near the Seymour Centre might begin this year. NIDA returned the
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extending extra performances even before directed season being virtually sold out and production. to the play aside after writing it and went on actually written in 1958, though it only had in Melbourne Judith Alexander has turned friend and benefactor. production was enormous, with the it had opened. The cast is headed by Ray Lawler, making his second return to the Australian premier last month at the Melbourne Theatre Company. Pinter put his London premier last year and its Melbourne production for a total of three months; meanwhile the searches for the "remaining Evitas" needed for the rest of the Sydney run, continues throughout the country.

Ms LuPone did, however, take five performances off during June; she flew back to the States to be a guest at the Tony Awards of which she was a winner last year for her performance as Evita in New York. She also won the Drama Desk Award for her outstanding performance during the initial season in Los Angeles.

Patti LuPone will be with the Australian production for a total of three months; meanwhile the searches for the "remaining Evitas" needed for the rest of the Sydney run, continues throughout the country.

AUSTRALIAN WRITERS’ GUILD ON THE PLAYWRIGHTS’ ISSUE

We at the Writers’ Guild would like to congratulate Theatre Australia on a most useful and thought-provoking Playwrights Issue. Directors and managers would do well to consider most carefully what our writers have to say.

Was it absolutely necessary, though, to group the playwrights into brackets marked "Top Five", "Next Ten" and "The Rest"? What earthly purpose could this serve, other than to somehow demean and humiliate those writers who might have just as easily made it to the Top Five, or Next Ten — but didn’t? Such categorisation, based anyway on simple opinion, can only be harmful. And why do we have to be so competitive, so image conscious?

As to your list of also-rans, I feel obliged to point out what appeared to me to be some quite serious omissions. Some playwrights who didn’t make it to that list could include Betty Roland, John Powers, Gordon Graham, John Summons, John Upton, Nick Enright, Ron Elisha, Colin Free, Margot Hilton, Janis Balodis, Fred Willett, Justin Fleming, Cliff Green and Graham Bond — to name but a few.

Well, those comments aside, we look forward very much to your next Playwrights Issue, and to the continued coverage of writers and their views in your magazine.

Angela Wales
General Secretary

John McCallum, Playwrights’ section editor, replies.

I agree with Angela that there is something unpleasant about ranking playwrights and awarding marks for effort and achievement. For someone like her, in the know, there must be little to be learnt from the Guide. It was intended, however, as just that — a guide for general theatregoers, laymen and outsiders to writers whose plays they might like. In the three pages we had, a simple annotated list seemed the best way to fit the most writers in.
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PERTH ACTORS' COMPANY

With a number of new theatre companies opening up in W.A., Perth's youngest, the Perth Actors' Company, has taken a new direction to most others. They are prepared to take risks, and, using actors not often seen before on Perth stages, they approach with enthusiasm plays which larger commercial theatres would not be able to produce.

Their artistic director, NIDA graduate, Ken Campbell Dobbie, has ambitious plans for future productions, but these are of course, subject to the availability of funds. Originally funded through the Department of Health and Education — who made available the company's home, St George's, Perth's first theatre — their last production, Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon, was privately sponsored by Mr David Kahan. Hopefully such generosity will continue, for the new company will need time to win their audience.

FAST IN 81

FAST — or the Festival of Australian Student Theatre — has languished somewhat over the last few years, but this year's organisers have been working to put the punch back into the Festival that it had in its early days.

FAST 1981 is being held at La Trobe University (August 22-30); it consists of workshops during the days, to be taken by such people as Bob Thorneycroft and the Murray River Performing Group and in such areas as clowning, movement, creative dance, playback technique, mime, kids theatre, circus skills and more. The Festival has a theme of "New (or nearly new) Plays" in the hope of encouraging students to write.

The Literature Board has made it possible for Barry Dickens to write for FAST; rehearsals of his commissioned play will be in the final throes during Festival week and open to observers. The first performance will be on the last Friday night, followed by a two weeks season at Anthilia Theatre.

FAST also includes an Open Day and a new addition will be Writers' Week, the week before the Festival proper. Playreadings and discussions of the participant's plays will take place as workshops taken by playwrights like Dorothy Hewett, Roger Pulvers and Ted Neilson.

ANOTHER QUEENSLAND PLAY COMPETITION

Following the QTC's playwriting competition last year, and TN's playwrights' scheme currently running, the Queensland Film and Drama Centre at Griffith University is running yet another, with local history as its theme.

The competition is for a new play on any aspect of Queensland local history and the organisers hope writers will approach this in an innovative way and consider previously neglected aspects. Plays can be written in any style or format. The Centre is particularly interested in plays that are suitable for touring to community venues and that are adaptable for television production.

There is a prize of $1,000 awaiting the writer of the winner play and a tentative (at this stage) hope that the piece will be performed at La Boite and published at PlayLab Press in 1982 as part of Brisbane's cultural contribution to the Commonwealth Games. Entries close on October 16.

SNIPPETS....

CAPPACAPPA — The Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts has secured Tony Staley as its Chairman... Helen Musa (formerly van der Poorten) is the recipient of a general writer's grant from the Literature Board to write the history of the Old Tote in book form — apparently offers of reminiscences and correspondence have already been forthcoming... The MacPhail Center for the Arts at the University of Minnesota are considering holding a festival of Australian arts in 1982. A possible item in this would be a production of an Australian play by a local theatre company. Jack Reuler, director of the Mixed Blood theater will consider a piece that is "the less conventional the better... not necessarily avant garde or bizarre, but not a standard format... should be strongly physical, not too long, not too wordy..." Reuler spent some time at last year's Playwrights' Conference, though, and had problems understanding much material that was "too local". The Literature Board has been asked to submit possible scripts... Triad Theatre Company claim to be the only successful, unsubsidised theatre company in the world. Founded in Alice Springs five years ago, they left Australia when they couldn't get funding and have spent the last three years successfully touring Europe with their own plays and a production of Macbeth (which has been favourably compared to the RSC's). Lead actor David Clisby has been home, looking for funding for the company to be able to work in Australia, but now finds their overseas success has labelled them non-Australian... Theatre in the clubs seems to be a growing thing; in Canberra David Bates and Joe Woodward have opened Williamson's The Club at the Ainslie Football Club, following their very successful Don's Party at the Parkroyal Hotel, and a revival of Hair has been running for the last few weeks at the St George's Leagues Club in Sydney.

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

Theatre Board Grants, 1982

DANCE, DRAMA, MIME, PUPPETRY, YOUTH THEATRE

The Theatre Board has limited funds available for projects in 1982, and invites applications in the following categories:

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

Development: Assistance to companies, groups or individuals for special projects, particularly of an experimental or community-oriented nature.

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


General Grants under $50,000: Assistance to a limited number of established professional organisations that have been active for at least two years on a professional basis and offer the highest standards of performance. These grants constitute general support assistance for a program of production and production activities for periods of up to one year.


Limited Life: One or two grants may be given to groups of accomplished professional artists, temporarily brought together to undertake innovative theatre performances or development activity, which is not presently possible within the normal marketing constraints of an on-going theatre company. Maximum period two years, non-renewable.

Preliminary proposals may be submitted at any time.

Choreographers'/Designers'/Directors' Development: Assistance to artists of proven potential for personal development programs within Australia, as choreographers, designers or directors.

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

Closing Date: 15 February, 1982 — Decision advised by 30 April, 1982.

For details and application forms contact: The Secretary, Theatre Board, Australia Council, P.O. Box 302, NORTH SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2050. Telephone: (02) 922 2122.
by Norman Kessell

At least one of those recently mentioned rumours about upcoming revivals of musicals is true. In the programme for The Dresser, MLC Theatre Royal Company director Frederick J Gibson confirmed that Wilton Morley's new production of Rocky Horror Show will be at Sydney's Theatre Royal in October. Presumably Melbourne will also be seeing it.

Gibson also confirmed an earlier promise that we would see, early next year, Mark Medoff's Tony Award-winning drama, Children of a Lesser God. It's about a teacher of the deaf who marries one of his pupils and the problems of such a match.

The most persistent publicity ploy, apart from the "theft" of an actress's jewels, is the drawn-out search for a star, which reached its ultimate in casting the movie, Gone With The Wind. Hal Prince got some mileage out of it, casting the local Evita, but now it seems to be for real. By the time you read this, you should know why has replaced the pregnant alternative Evita, Mariette Rupps, leaving at the end of June.

The hunt continues, however, for a replacement for Patti LuPone, the dynamic Broadway star who replaced Jennifer Murphy as Evita and who is said to be here only for three months. Despite all doubts, management says the show will run through Christmas. Meanwhile, spare a thought for understudy Camille Gardner, rarely mentioned, but who appeared successfully at a few matinees when Mariette had to replace the voiceless Jennifer Murphy.

Incidentally, there's little chance of Patti LuPone suffering the kind of voice trouble that put the original Evita, Elaine Paige, out of the London production and laid low our own Jennifer Murphy, who has now opted out to pursue a recording career. Patti rests her voice 12 hours in every 24. That's to say, if she sleeps eight hours, she does not speak for another four, but writes notes to communicate.

Barnum, the American musical slated for production next January by the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, Michael Edgley International and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, is a mighty money-spinner in the States. By April it had recovered its $1,210,000 capitalisation costs and was in the black with $190,138 of assets over liabilities. Investors have now received their money back and are looking forward to substantial profits from the still near sell-out Broadways production, the national touring company, the Paris and London productions and the upcoming Australian production. Production costs for the US touring company were approximately $900,000, so local producers are looking at an outlay of around $1,000,000, as they were with Evita.

Neil Simon's They're Playing Our Song has been another bonanza. Figures are not available for its smash-hit and continuing run in Australia, but in America it has made about $4,000,000 profit on its original investment of $800,000. Even up to last December 31, $2,200,000 has been distributed, half of it to investors, giving them a 137.5 percent return on their original stake. It's payoffs like that which keep the angels coming!

Unfortunately, timetable difficulties forced cancellation of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's planned double bill at the Wayside Chapel last month of Olive Bodill in Miss South Africa, by South African playwright Barney Simon, and Leila Blake in Melbourne writer Barry Dickins' The Death of Minnie. However, the Trust hopes to be able to programme Miss South Africa at a later date. Meanwhile, Olive begins rehearsals next month for Athol Fugard's newest work, A Lesson From Aloes, due to open in Adelaide on August 31.

A Lesson From Aloes was nominated for a Tony Award as the best play of the year, along with Hugh Leonard's A Life, Peter Shaffer's Amadeus and Lanford Wilson's Fifth of July. Results will be known by the time this issue of TA reaches you. These nominations underline Variety's gloomy report that the current Broadway season has been the worst in years for new American plays. The first three, plus Pam Gems' Piaf, all overseas imports, were top of the few to win critical acclaim, though only Amadeus has been a major success. The others began well, but did not build. In Variety's words: "There's been an abundance of flops, both on and off Broadway, and a woeful shortage of new works of stature and box office appeal."

About Amadeus. The Trust is still holding Australian rights, but has not yet been able to cast the show to its satisfaction. I understand that if production is not achieved by year's end the rights will be released to the State companies.

The attractive Joanna Lockwood, free at last from the long-running TV series, Cop Shop, had been toasted to take over from Megan Williams in the engaging club circuit show, Harem Knights, when Megan's 10-week leave from The Sultavins ended. This is not to be and Joanna will be seen next in a straight role. She tells me she is to play the pregnant daughter in Richard Beynon's The Shifting Heart at Sydney's Marian St Theatre in October.

Another $34,000 was all, at the time of writing, Sydney's Ensemble Theatre needed to match the State Government's one-for-one grant of $112,750 towards Stage 1 of its rebuilding programme. It's hoped a start can be made within a year on alterations wanted by the First Board as well as upgrading the foyers, toilets and dining room.

Dick Hauser, director and actor with De Horde, the Dutch company brought here recently by the Cladan Cultural Exchange Institute with its first production, Delusion, told me the company's policy was not to play any show more than 100 times. The company was going on to Paris and Zurich, by which time it would have played Delusion 103 times. In my book, that's at least 100 times too many. But let's not forget the Cladan Institute and its artistic consultant, Anthony Steel — not also artistic director of the Trust's entrepreneurial division — did bring us the stunning The Liberation of Skopje and the fascinating Greek production of The Arbitration. Two out of three is a winning score. More of the same, please.
NIMROD

SUBSCRIPTIONS 4 PLAYS $28 (STUDENTS $16)

Cloud Nine
by Caryl Churchill,
directed by Aubrey Mellor
An hilarious study of sexual role conditioning filled with bizarre role reversals as men play women, adults play children, and whites are cast in black roles on a topsyturvy canvas that switches between acts from Victorian times to the present day, from the jungles of Africa to a city park. Starring Cathy Downes, Michele Fawdon, Colin Friels, Barry Otto, Deidre Rubenstein, Anna Volska, John Walton.

Ron Blair’s
LAST DAY IN WOOLLOOMOOLOO
directed by John Bell
The ‘Loo is being demolished, its oldest inhabitants booted out of their natural habitat... but in Doreen McNab’s boarding house the down-and-outs determine on a violent last stand. Starring Pat Evison, Robert Alexander, Stuart Campbell, Peter Collingwood, Les Dayman, Ron Falk.

Welcome the Bright World
by Stephen Sewell,
directed by Neil Armfield
One day we will wake to find we no longer recognize the world in which we live. Something has gone wrong. How has the police force become politicised? Why am I reading these lies in the newspapers? Could it be that the government is covering up the poisoning of my children? Why do the Secret Police have a file on me?

After TRAITORS,
Welcome the Bright World...

Tales From The Vienna Woods
by Odon von Horvath,
directed by Aubrey Mellor
TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS examines the petit-bourgeois stratum of Austrian society locked in a struggle for survival and a desperate search for happiness during the interwar years. One of the great European classics, it is a spectacle of fear, bravado, impetuous one night spending and a dread of tomorrow.

Subscribers to the above four plays also receive concessions to SLICE, PINBALL, EYES OF THE WHITES, and DESERT FLAMBE in our Downstairs Theatre, and to our revival of THE VENETIAN TWINS at the Seymour Centre.

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St. Martin's Youth Arts Centre

28 St. Martins Lane South Yarra 3141

(03) 2673058; 2672551
by Pamela Ruskin

Years ago, somebody told me that Irene Inescourt, today one of the stalwarts of the Melbourne Theatre Company, was a niece or cousin of the eminent English stage and screen actress, Freda Inescourt. Both English! Both actresses! So it seemed likely. The first thing then that I asked Irene Inescourt when I went to talk to her was, “What relation were you to Freda Inescourt?” She gave me one of those, “thereby hangs a tale” looks and shook her head. “None whatsoever!” and this was said with great emphasis.

“I don’t like the name. I never did and it’s not my real name. I was appearing in my first professional engagement, a production of Smiling Through. The man who owned the theatre and engaged the company didn’t like my name. It was Irene Casey. Perhaps he didn’t like the Irish. Anyhow he said I must change it. My first real theatrical chance! I’d have changed it to Mud if he’d asked me. So he went through a theatre reference book and saw that the role I was playing had been played years before by Elaine Inescourt, who was the sister of Freda. He thought Irene Inescourt had a ring to it and that was that. A few days later my phone rang, someone asking for Irene Inescourt. A woman with a very deep voice informed me that her name was Elaine Inescourt and she wanted to know if I were claiming a relationship with her family. I said I wasn’t and that it wasn’t my name at all and told her the story. She gave me hell, so I offered to change the spelling. She was so rude that when I went back and told them at the theatre they said, ‘Take no notice, I didn’t but I still don’t like it.”

In fact, Irene Inescourt has no family theatrical background at all. “From the age of ten or eleven, I wanted to become a nun. I was a boarder in a strict Catholic school run by a French order, in Kent. The idea was that after I left school, I would enter the novitiate, probably to become a teaching nun. When I was sixteen, I decided I didn’t have a vocation. The idea of absolute, unquestioning obedience wasn’t in my nature. I question everything.

“I did some commercial art, worked as a tracer for a firm of propellor-makers during the war but my maths were so bad, I didn’t last long. Then the family moved to the North-East of England and my father insisted I get a ‘proper job’. I went into the civil service, in the insurance section — for five years. It was ghastly. I joined the choral and amateur dramatic societies and our society hired the local repertory theatre and we did two plays. The producer thought I was wasted in the civil service and so did I. He persuaded the local rep to engage me which they did as Assistant Stage Manager, but I was soon playing parts.

Irene Inescourt, whose family was Irish, has the Irish gift for the telling of tales. She is an excellent raconteur. She also has a love of accents and an ear for them which is probably why she is given so many character parts. One of the things that really make her wince is bad “Stage Irish”. Her own is impeccable which was one of the reasons that she was so outstanding as Widow Quin in the MTC’s production of Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World. The other is that she is, in any case, a very fine actress who can play comedy or tragedy with equal facility. She is continually cast, these days, as
rather dotty old ladies and admits she'd like a change. "I'd like to play a really bitchy one".

London and marriage to an actor husband came next in her career and the two worked well together all over England, but after five years the marriage broke down. "I made my West End debut in 1960 in a play called Shadow of Heroes, directed by Peter Hall. I did a lot of pantomime which I adore. I love working for children, they are so honest. I worked with the National Theatre for some time and then in 1968 I came to Australia.

"Why? Well, I had a lot of romantic ideas about Australia and I had a lot of Australian friends. Then I was cricket mad. I still am. Also I really hero-worshiped Peter Finch. No! I never met him but I admired him immensely. I arranged to meet Ronald Falk, a Sydney actor who was coming home to see his parents. Somehow we agreed to meet in Perth and I received an invitation to play with the National Theatre of Western Australia. I worked there for about a year and then I went to Sydney. So during 1969/70 I worked in radio and TV but I never set foot on a stage there."

The following year, Irene returned to England to see her family. It used up most of her savings. She stayed there two years. She was working in Salisbury when she received a phone call from an agent in Sydney — an offer from the MTC for the February 1972 season. She returned and stayed with the MTC for three years. Then she went to Sydney and did a lot of TV and got a Sammy for her role as the mother in Power Without Glory, a typical Inescourt role, indomitable and forceful.

John Sumner invited her back to do a country tour as Emma in Lawler's Kid Stakes. After the country tour, she played Emma in the trilogy on stage and on TV. "I just adored those two Saturdays when we played all three plays, morning, afternoon and night! Exhausting, yes, but so satisfying."

Over the years she has played many roles for the MTC. One that could have been tailor-made for her was that of the dotty Abby Brewster in Arsenic and Old Lace. Other memorable performances were Madame Desmermotes in Ring Around the Moon, Clytemnestra in Electra, Lady Bountiful in The Beaux Stratagem and much more recently the mother of Pete McGynty in Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime, a performance that matched that of Keith Michell.

On July 8 Brecht's The Good Person of Setzuan opens for a six week season at the Athenaeum Theatre. Irene Inescourt plays Mrs Shin who owns the shop now bought by the young girl Shen Te, a prostitute in a very poor village to which come three men looking for one good person. If they can find such a person, the world can still be allowed to go on. The more good she tries to do, the more trouble she attracts.

When she's not working, Irene Inescourt indulges her other three loves, cricket, music - especially opera - and reading detective stories, particularly those with an English background. Occasionally, she likes to sketch.

Unfilled ambitions? "I'd like to play the Geraldine Page part in Tennessee Williams' Sweet Bird of Youth and I'd like to go back to England in an MTC tour." Right now with cut backs in funding at every level the latter ambition, at any rate, doesn't look like being fulfilled.
GEORGE WHALEY
Seeking his Fortune in Canberra

Interviewed by Barry O’Connor

In your sixth year at NIDA you’re leaving this July to become Artistic Director of the Fortune Theatre Company which is based in Canberra. How did this come about?

About seven years ago, soon after I came to Sydney, the Canberra Theatre Trust commissioned me to do a couple of reports — a feasibility study for a professional company in Canberra. I have been talking about it and they have been talking about it for a long time. Fortune advertised this position, having got themselves going, and having been in receipt of a bit of Federal money from the Australia Council and the Department of the Capital Territory. I applied, was given it, so now I go down very much as a one-man band.

Fortune was founded as a company about three years ago by a group of actors, and they’ve had a very spasmodic history so far.

That’s right, but what is very good about Canberra: those actors are still there. They’re very good actors; they’re trained actors. There is a number of other actors who’ve worked in the Jigsaw TIE company down there, who’ve had experience in other places . . . There are very talented technical people in Canberra. People who are experienced in theatrical administration as well. Canberra’s very strong musically. So Canberra’s full of a lot of very good people. What I want to do is base the company very much on Canberra people.

How do you cater to a Canberra audience?

I believe there are several definable streams of activity we’ve got to attempt in Canberra. Obviously there’s an audience for the established repertoire. We will do those; I hope we’ll do them well. I also think there’s an audience for more adventurous new work. We will do those. What I don’t want to do is fall into the trap of schizophrenic programming. You know that problem where you have a season; you do six plays, so you give them one of these and one of those which is very different from the first one, then you slip in another one that is a bit different again and nobody quite knows what they’re getting.

I want to avoid that by using two venues. So I should imagine the Canberra Theatre Centre, the Playhouse, which is a good little proscenium arch theatre, will be the place where one does the established repertoire; and the ANU Arts Centre — in that amazing black box, which I think could be used very well when a bit more work’s done on it — is where we may programme the more, you know, the new work. There’s another whole area that interests me tremendously, and that is the popular theatre. You know, the theatre restaurant, cabaret. A couple of weeks ago there was a “George III Night” done there with food and music. So I hope we’ve got a number of different streams of activity, but I don’t suggest for a moment that I know what Canberra’s expectations are yet. I’ll find out.

What kind of people do you want in Fortune?

I don’t want a rigid hierarchical structure. What I do want is a group of people who, well, to be pragmatic, must have a variety of talents. I want people who can both production-manage and stage-manage. I want a designer who’s also a very good graphic artist, and set painter. I want actors, some of whom will want to direct and some of whom may be very good at teaching or running workshops.

Will you be inheriting these people or are you still looking?

No, I’ll be looking for them. I’ve started to look. I go down weekends. I just do one interview after the other.

Any ideas for the opening season?

I honestly don’t know yet. But it’ll just be two plays. Probably one at ANU and one in the Playhouse, I think. There’s a possibility of a new Australian work, which is fairly interesting and not yet in third draft form, but getting that way. The major consideration is that we’ve got to be modest in scope.

Yes, what about money?

I know that the Department of the Capital Territory and the Australian Council, both of whom have already funded Fortune to a small extent are committed, and have been for some time, to a full-time professional operation there . . . of the sort the Fortune will be. Now I’m not unrealistic enough to think that we’re going to get mammoth amounts of money next year. Of course we’re not. But I think we’ll be getting enough to operate a continuous programme for a good part of the year. So, although I don’t know how much money, it will be adequate for next year.

Your career so far has included actor, director, teacher; will being an artistic director discount any of your other activities from now on?

No, I don’t think so. There is a very good person in Canberra who, I hope, will be the administrator of the company; he’s also quite an accomplished director. There is that sort of ability down there. Now, with the sort of company I’m envisaging it is not going to be a mammoth organisational structure, that is going to take a vast amount of running. Of course there are administrative duties, as indeed I have at NIDA. With administration I believe in doing it as fast as possible, so that you can get down to the good stuff.

A last word: on your policy as artistic director?

I do like doing plays people come to. I do, I really do.
Artistic Director Kevin Palmer  
Associate Artistic Director Nick Enright  
General Manager Paul Iles  
Director, Theatre-in-Education Malcolm Moore

At Theatre 62 Adelaide to 4 July,  
at Playbox Theatre Melbourne from 15 July  
FAREWELL BRISBANE LADIES  
Doreen Clarke  
Direction Kevin Palmer  
Design Sue Russell  
Lighting Design Nigel Levings  
Cast Maggie Kirkpatrick, Monica Maughan  
(Presented in Melbourne by Playbox Theatre Company Limited)

At Theatre 62, 15 July-1 August and on tour to Mt. Gambier, Millicent,  
Barmera, Renmark, Broken Hill, Pt. Pirie, Pt. Augusta and Whyalla during  
August.  
AS YOU LIKE IT  
William Shakespeare  
Direction Nick Enright, Michael Fuller  
Design Richard Roberts  
Lighting Design Nigel Levings  
Cast B-J Cole, Tom Considine, Peter Crossley, Vanessa Downing, Michael  
Fuller, James Laurie, Deborah Little, Susan Lyons, Wendy Madigan, Philip  
Quast, Henry Salter, John Saunders  
(Presented on tour in association with the Arts Council of South Australia)

At the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, 21 July-29 August  
LULU  
Play Frank Wedekind  
Adaptation Louis Nowra  
Music Sarah de Jong  
Direction Jim Sharman  
Set Design Brian Thomson  
Costume Design Luciana Arrighi  
Lighting Design Nigel Levings  
Cast Brandon Burke, Sharon Calcraft, Geoffrey Clendon, Ralph Cotterill,  
Margaret Davis, John Frawley, Robert Grubb, Russell Kiefel, Malcolm  
Robertson, Juliet Taylor, Kerry Walker, John Wood and Judy Davis as Lulu  
(Presented in Sydney by Sydney Theatre Company Limited)

At His Majesty’s Theatre, Perth, 31 August-4 September  
MAGPIE presents  
ONE UP MY SLEEVE  
HEY MUM, I OWN A FACTORY!  
ACCIDENTALLY YOURS  
I CAN DO TOO  
Director Malcolm Moore  
Assistant Director Kelvin Harman  
Writer/researcher John Lonie  
Actors Caroline Baker, Maree Cochrane, Jenny Lind, Kelvin Harman, Geoff  
Revell, Igor Sas, Paul Sommer  
(Appearing in Perth for the National Association of Drama-in-Education  
Conference. Sponsored by Australian National Railways)
JOHN MILSON

A new direction for Marian Street

by Donna Sadka

Asked what adjective he would use to describe his kind of theatre the director elect of Marian Street, John Milson, opted for "eclectic".

It is fairly apposite and not as facile as it may immediately sound. In some ways he has been a theatrical gadfly for much of his professional life.

Sydney born, Milson was working with the Commonwealth Film Unit when in 1969 Nugget Coombs founded the Australia Council and with it opened doors for people like him who till then had earned a living by day and "dabbled" at night in the things that really interested them.

"In those days there was virtually only commercial theatre — rather terrifying and not all that attractive — so it was a bit of a miracle for those of us who found we could earn a living by doing what we actually enjoyed."

For Milson that meant free-lancing, mainly in opera and music-theatre, for regional companies all over the country. He says he still enjoys this kind of work situation enormously, relishing the challenges it imposes. In May this year he flew in to Perth to direct On Our Selection at the Playhouse immediately after doing La Traviata in Melbourne. To go from la dame au camelias to Dad and Dave in a matter of days, may be something of a culture shock but its the sort of thing Milson says keeps you on your toes.

He was leg-roped for the first time by the Hole-in-the-Wall theatre in Perth when he was made Director in Residence in 1974 and stayed for four years.

In that time his programming embraced such variables as The Importance of Being Earnest, Days in the Trees, Blithe Spirit, The Trial, Edward II, Chinchilla, and a rich mix of Australiana from Hibberd to Nowra. One thing that a lot of the plays had in common was a distinctive use of language, and if there is a unifying Milson stamp it is probably that musician's ear for the rhythms and orchestrations of voice and dialogue which frequently made his productions an aural delight.

In 1979 Milson took over The Twelfth Night theatre in Brisbane and although for the last 12 months he has been free-lancing again he is well aware of the standard dilemma of a director running a small subsidised theatre.

Looking back he admits that the pieces he really enjoyed doing at the Hole were things like Happy Days (Brecht), The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria (Arrabal), and Home (Storey)—"marvellous to do for a tiny minority audience and it would be really easy to stay in that backwater of being arty, but one has a dual obligation — to the audience as well as to the funding body.

"If you're running a regional company (and Marian Street is far enough out of the city to be servicing its own particular area and therefore considered regional) one is really in the first place responsible to the people who support it. At the same time we have to bear in mind that as a subsidised theatre it's important that we bring our programming into line with the kind of fare that funding bodies recognise as important."

That, for a theatre which has generally been described as boulevard, must augur a change of flavour. He agrees. Perhaps in a spirit of noblesse oblige or from sheer pragmatism he is quite prepared to justify the presentation of such box-office bread and butter as A Bedful of Foreigners if it is used to pay for "the caviar".

"But if funding is given to ensure quality, I think that quality begins in the writing and there is no reason why a play can't be both good quality and entertaining."

Milson does not see himself as a kind of prophet with some arrogant pre-conception of what Marian Street audiences need. He points out that he has not lived in Sydney for seven years and for the first six months of his tenure intends to listen, to feel the audience pulse, and to take it from there.

This year he will offer three widely divergent pieces to the little North Shore theatre and guage the response. For openers there is the little-known, but fascinating and virtuosic two-hander Crossing Niagara, with Robert van Mackelenberg who gave a dynamic performance as Blondin the tightrope walker when it was staged at the Hole.

Following it is a revival of Richard Beynon’s naturalistic drama about the problems of Italian migrants in their new country, The Shifting Heart, and Milson will round off the year in Marian Street tradition with a musical. The innuendos of its title notwithstanding, Once Upon a Mattress is a zany American musical version of the fairytale of the princess and the pea.

For Marian Street audiences the months ahead should prove interesting ones. For Milson they mean foregoing pro tem his gadfly existence but he welcomes the opportunity they afford him of once again "contributing to a process of growth, an on-going concern."
AT THE PLAYHOUSE

SQUIRTS
A New Revue (1981)
Direction Neil Armfield
Design Stephen Curtis
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY
Cyril Tourneur (1606)
Direction Richard Cottrell
Set Design Richard Roberts
Costume Design Sue Russell
Music Jim Cotter
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

NO END OF BLAME
Howard Barker (1981)
Direction John Gaden
Design Stephen Curtis
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

THE THREEPENNY OPERA
Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill (1928)
Translation Ralph Manheim and John Willett
Direction George Whaley
Musical Direction Michael Morley
Design Richard Roberts, Ken Wilby
Choreography Michael Fuller
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

AT THE PRICE THEATRE

FANSHEN
David Hare (1975)
based on the book
by William Hinton
Direction Ken Boucher
Design Ken Wilby
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

THE SAD SONGS
OF ANNIE SANDO
Doreen Clarke (1981)
Direction Margaret Davis
Design Stephen Curtis
Lighting Design Nigel Levings

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company is the oldest of the non-capital city, regional theatre companies. Founded in 1976 it has suffered continuing financial difficulties and two severe breaks in continuity, but under the artistic directorship of Aarne Neeme since 1980 has achieved the levels of artistic and critical success and integration and involvement with the Newcastle region that has always been its ultimate objective.

And yet its problems continue. In a period when arts funding is scarce, regional companies find themselves in the position of nobody's baby; they are neither major metropolitan companies drawing large audiences, nor any longer considered a special project.

The central funding bodies, with their limited funds feel that the region must show more public and private support if it truly wants its professional theatre company. In spite of stated personal support, Newcastle City Council's contribution to the running of HVTC amounts to what it considers "reduced" rental on the company's home, the Civic Playhouse. Although the company itself raised over $150,000 and a dollar for dollar matching grant for the Premier's Department, for the complete conversion of the Council's old Wintergarden building, the Council still charge them some $4,500 a year in rent. For an 11 night season in the big Civic Theatre the Council would make no reduction in their standard rental of $13,000. The large companies based in Newcastle, like the Coal Board or BHP, make no significant donations to the theatre.

Aarne Neeme and the Hunter Valley Theatre Company are at present doing their utmost to find the backing to retain the small but permanent company for the rest of the year. Neeme summed up why he sees this continuity as essential:

"The HVTC's biggest problem has always been, and still is, that we have never been adequately funded for what the Company sees as a necessity — a full-time, permanent professional theatre company for the region. The funding bodies cheerfully admit this, and go on to suggest that it is irresponsible of us to attempt anything more than a limited season each year. But it is a question of philosophy and intent.

Our policy is to become a vital part of our community — a truly local professional company that gives expression and identity to, and gains expression and identity from the community it serves. It is the work apart from performances in the theatre, that largely contributes to the uniqueness of a regional company. How indeed can theatre people do justice to a community they never really contact?

This requires a far greater involvement, commitment and loyalty from Company actors and staff alike, than would be possible from people engaged and imported for short periods. It demands therefore, a substantial level of local employment throughout the Company. This is not possible without some modicum of job security, as there are no other professional opportunities in the region.

Peter Cheeseman puts it most succinctly: "The theatre is a potential public service... if the structure of relationships within the theatres allows participation by people with genuine and long term commitment to the outfit, and if these people can work on community research, on the evolution of new programmes, new styles, new formats; if writers can be involved and if writers, actors, directors, designers, and technicians can work together in making the theatre play an invigorating, stimulating and significant role in community life, then I believe we are genuinely responding to the challenge of being the hired artists of a democratic society."

There is a Company, The Q Theatre, that approaches this idea, supported by reasonable subsidy (in 1981 $226,000 compared to our actual $95,000). Part of the rationale behind this assistance is that the Q requires special encouragement for an area (the outer western suburbs of Sydney) that is culturally deprived. The same argument can be made for the HVTC, who are doing similar pioneering work in a similar situation and on a similar scale.

Moreover Newcastle is the largest non-capital city in Australia, on the brink of massive growth and development. The theatre is a natural meeting place of all arts forms and we have a right to demand a company befitting our region's size, importance and contribution to the life and material progress of the state and the nation.

We are seeking sufficient subsidy so that our company's life can exist beyond the life and death of a season, that we can begin to ensure a continuity of approach and growth. We need more subsidy so that the company will not be obliged, in order to fill the theatre and improve its economic performance, to build up a superficially attractive but artistically insignificant repertoire, or at the very least to give excessive emphasis to lightweight entertainment. It must be materially possible for the theatre to go in for experimentation, to adopt an innovative approach and to advance at the risk of something going astray."
Ken Horler sums up the 1981 Playwrights' Conference

I had a terrible dream last night. I dreamt that the committee that invented the Playwrights' Conference invented something else. I mean who would willingly immur themselves in Canberra for a two week sentence, eat College tucker, bed down in one's own fall-out shelter, exchange banalities with damp students of breaststroke and listen the bleatings of tyro writers in return for such an uncertain basket of cultural goodies? In spite of the Canberra ascetic, on any view of it the ninth National Playwrights' Conference, under Graeme Blundell's artistic direction must be adjudged a success. These austerities are the Conference constants. This year there were some important changes which reflected the taste and style of the conference leadership. Less a benevolent despotism, more your Gang of Four with Blundell, Ron Blair (Chairman of the Playreading Committee) and the administrators Janet and Donald McDonald pulling the troika. The stranglehold that Sydney has had on the Conference was broken by the advent of Cliff Green and Jack Hibberd from Melbourne as dramaturgs and Nick Enright as director and actor from Adelaide.

Those fledgling playwrights that didn’t get a guernsey perceived a change, a doctrinal backsliding in the choice of three out of the seven plays by so-called established writers — Dorothy Hewett; Robert Adamson’s Zimmer, Vocations by Alma de Groen and A Night in the Arms of Raeleen by Clem Gorman. The Conference has always had as its policy that plays by working playwrights should be welcomed. I am not aware of any flawed masterpiece that missed out because of the inclusion of these three writers. Even Zimmer, which suffered the least of the sea changes, benefited by the process. (And “process” along with “metaphor” and “spine” soon hit the front as the buzz words of the Conference.) Without Blundell’s professional antennae it is unlikely that these three plays would have presented themselves for workshopping. This should be remembered by those who seek to set limits to the initiative of the Conference’s artistic director.

It is arguable, however, that since the Playbox Theatre, Melbourne had already announced its production of Raeleen, that one of the functions of the Conference had been made irrelevant. Not that this play doesn’t need work — it still does — but management had responded to it before the Conference by taking it on.

Vocations gives further proof of the benefits of attracting so-called established playwrights. This play began about two years ago as the result of a Nimrod commission. Its progress was slow and when delivered to Nimrod they didn’t jump immediately. I sense that the process for Alma de Groen is slow, private and often painful. If she had not been wooed by Blundell the script might have been long unsung. Now it is to have a production by the Melbourne Theatre Company later this year. I sense that it is tougher, funnier because of the contributions by Jack Hibberd, Alma’s dramaturg. For my money it was the play that benefited most from workshopping and it already marks an advance on Going Home.

Originally Alma de Groen was to direct the workshopping of her own play (as did Bob Herbert with Sex and Violets). This innovation is admirable in principle, but didn’t seem to work out in practice, with Alma vacating the field to Blundell and Hibberd. In the result the play was marvellously well served by its cast: Ramsay, Blundell, Morse and Hilton seem to be a monte for the first production.

As part of the resolve to serve the writer, more plays were received and reported on (191), more plays workshopped (7) and more plays were read in the evenings (16). Blair, with some of the dramaturgs, Christine Johnson and

HELEN MORSE RETURNED TO WORK AT THE 1981 CONFERENCE.
Zimmer's Essay by ex-prison writer Robert Adamson with journalist Bruce Hanford. Then Dorothy Hewett collaborated with Adamson on the script. I guess that Hewett gave some theatrical shape to Adamson's raw material. I suggest that it was probably almost ready for production before the Conference. What we got, in spite of all our protestations, was a partly realised production with something approaching a performance by Blundell as Zimmer with little change in the text. At its best it occupies the same territory as the earlier Jim McNeil plays such as Familiar Juice. I find the romantic view of Zimmer as artist/criminal a bit hard to take. The sweetest irony of the conference occurred in the discussion of Zimmer. After the argy bargy about plays that were sexist, ageist, an enthusiast from the audience praised Zimmer for making a positive statement about gay rights. And this comment about a play in which Zimmer sells his boyfriend down the river for a packet of Drum!

The second exception was Bob Herbert's Sex and Violets, directed within an inch of its life by the author. When first submitted this sex comedy had no music. The director first slated to direct it (and who had to drop out later) suggested the addition of songs, which the author and Sharon Raschke created, brilliantly, but I think irrelevantly. This was a case of the author too willing to please wanting to please everyone. Opinions were sharply divided about the selection of this potentially "commercial" piece — the social realists from Nimrod being the noisiest. So in this case, the process became the getting on of a musical, rather than removing some of the fatuities in the script. Its solid basis in theatrical craft will ensure a wider audience after its premiere at the Stables.

The Death of Willy by Canberra poet Frank McKone illustrates the value of the Conference in allowing original and difficult work to be seen. It is a short, black and sometimes impenetrable piece that offers no concession to Stanislavskian naturalism. Its presentation is unlikely to be taken up by professional theatre but McKone is encouraged to write a second play.

The various seminars have been covered in the daily press, including the debate between the Nimrod Soviets and the pluralists led by Blair. I'm not sure who the seminars are intended to serve. Discussion of agents, royalties, billing and such are irrelevant to the new writer trying to get his play on and known by the established writer. It was good to have a seminar unanimously resolve that the Opera and Ballet ought to compete (and be accountable) for grants in the same way as the other theatre companies.

Two plays emerged from the readings which ought to be taken up: a new play by young Adelaide writer Angela Fewster, Black Chrysanthemums; and a comedy about cyronics by actor Craig Cronin, I've Come About The Suicide.

Frank Moorehouse and Donald Horne will be pleased to know that the basic conference rules were observed although there was a certain slackness in the second week about name tags. Sharon Raschke was as brilliant at the piano after dinner as she was in the rehearsal room. The only unperformed piece I'd like to have seen was Jack Hibberd's The Fumigators, written in response to the Nimrod Soviets. The stock characters were all present. Brian Sweeney, the stage Irishman, ripped off a few one-liners and then went off to lunch with Jim Killen. The Cuban Revolutionary burned a few ears. Bob Ellis' last night aria was unnecessarily morbid. And I still seem to be a mark for ex-prison playwrights.

PLAYS WORKSHOPPED WERE:
- Butterflies of Kalamanton by Kate Bowland; director, Alison Sumner; dramaturg Barry Oakley.
- Vocations by Alma de Groen; dramaturg Jack Hibberd.
- Hell and Hay by Richard Fotheringham; director, Ken Horler; dramaturg Cliff Green.
- Sex and Violets by Bob Herbert; dramaturg Margot Hilton.
- Zimmer by Dorothy Hewett; director, Nick Enright; dramaturg Jack Hibberd.
- Death of Willy by Frank McKone; director, Ken Horler; dramaturg Barry Oakley.
Chris Westwood looks at the '81 Youth Festival of Arts

Flying above the median strips in Adelaide are huge coloured flags made by kids to celebrate COME OUT — a unique youth festival of arts. This biennial festival is not unique for its emphasis on young people alone, but because it is not run by an artistic director as such, having instead a committee which puts into effect the proposals from hundreds of submissions by kids, professional arts companies, animateurs and teachers.

For those who still mistakenly believe committees can only create ugly and aesthetically unsatisfying results, COME OUT proves the opposite. This '81 festival is full of humour, inspiration, enthusiasm, commitment, professionalism, energy, wit and skill. Many theatre workers visiting COME OUT are frankly amazed at the depth, range and quality of the entertainment presented. Perhaps this is because COME OUT has concentrated its limited resources into "people and not things", as Penny Chapman points out. The theatre side of the programme can be divided up into shows by adults for kids (such as Golden Valley, the MAGPIE State Theatre of SA's contribution, reviewed elsewhere in this magazine) or shows using kids with professional adult help (such as the Australian Dance Theatre or State Opera's involvement) or shows in which the substantive effort in all areas is by kids (all performances in the "Over To Youth" programme). Obviously it was not possible for me to cover all 40 or so performances presented each day, so I have simply selected one or two outstanding examples in each category.

For my money, the most interesting work was in the "Over To Youth" programme, for that is where kids tell the truth as they see it — a truth tougher, more resilient, more perceptive than adults generally want to acknowledge. Themes picked up included coming to terms with the relationship of maths to real life (Unusual Numbers), growing up female and Anglo-Greek (Marty Hollitt), examining the myths of stardom (Superstar), or dreaming, flying and freedom (Icarus). The latter production, an ensemble directed by Gale Edwards with students and ex-students of Morialta High School, "lends credence to the theory that youth performing groups have great potential to present new forms of theatre which rely more on their imagination and energy than second-rate imitations of traditional theatre" says Andrew Bleby, the Festival Centre's Education Officer.

In each of these productions, the energy, discipline and dedication of the kids and the capability to excellent direction by the few adults involved provide very powerful theatre. The kids in the audiences are much harsher critics on their peers than we polite adults, always ready to put down what they see as "weak" in ideas or execution, and this harshness contributes to the high standards throughout the whole COME OUT programme.

Where adults are involved in mounting productions with kids, the quality of their work is perhaps more obvious (for its strengths and weaknesses) than in an all-adult production. Eggs and All The Kings Men are cases in point. Eggs, a dance theatre piece (with terrific music by John Sweeney), is a combination effort by Australian Dance Theatre (adults) and Mummy's Little Darlings (kids). Devised and directed by Ariette Taylor, choreographed by Jonathan Taylor and designed by the inspired Silvia Jansens, the whole piece comes together as a spectacular and amazing piece of theatre, in which children are not exploited and adults' talents are given openly and generously. Much of the success of Eggs is due to the plot, for it allows adults to play adults, and children to play children, in a manner which makes a powerful and provocative statement.

Set in the future are two tribes: one composed entirely of adults (who centuries ago chose immortality for themselves over child bearing) and, living separately, a tribe of children (who are mysteriously born from giant speckled eggs). One of the adult tribe finds a doll thing "like a child"; their patriarch demands that it be burnt in line with their "no children" principle; and it is thrown into a pyre (which palpably horrifies the children in the audience!). A slightly older child arrives on the scene and dances with the adults — a wonderful scene of the vulnerability and charm of children...
and the indulgent exploitative side of adults.
The adults follow the child, in a spectacular optimistic procession to the children's tribe. Battles ensue, mixed with gymnastic dancing and quiet moving moments, during which some adults wonderingly examine the eggs. The adults are beaten back by the children. One of the eggs cannot open, so an older child breaks it apart and lifts out a tiny limp baby, dead from the adults' touching the eggs. The children finally reject and repulse the adults. The strength of this fantasy must give adults in the audience a real fright, and children a rush of power.

All The Kings Men, on the other hand, shows what is not good about adults working with kids. While Richard Rodney Bennett's music is stunning, the opera says little of significance, the direction has the kids "stand and deliver" and the visually strong set overwhelms the whole production. For the State Opera of S.A., Eggs should be a model.

Commissioning appropriate work might do wonders for opera for or by or with children. On the subject of music (and clearly the kids in All The Kings Men greatly enjoyed singing and playing in it), special "awards" should go to Alan Farwell and Dean Patterson for their general contribution to the high quality of music education in SA and their specific excellent work with the music in many COME OUT shows.

One of the striking features of this COME OUT festival is that most "theatre" combines language, dance, mime and music. What might young people, growing up with such involvement and preparedness to mix art forms, think of the staid and duller productions so often presented on the "adult" stages around the country? Will they demand a livelier theatre? Will they seek theatres which offer productions of greater accessibility, popularity and meaning?

Interestingly, some of the early COME OUT kids (from 1975 on) are now running events in this festival. Penny Chapman says there seems less of a gap between adults and kids involved in COME OUT than is usual, as though "34 year olds are not the next generation anymore", and certainly an ideological consensus prevails at the COME OUT Club. While some figures of Australia's establishment theatre may find an awareness of sexism, racism and class both offensive and anti-art, it is clear that the hundreds of kids and adults involved in COME OUT do speak directly about the current social and economic crisis in an extraordinarily entertaining manner.

The tasks of the next COME OUT festival, according to Penny Chapman will include working through the tensions between "excellence and accessibility" and "looking more at defining what art and art events mean to young people". She feels that COME OUT's priorities should include "making more room for enabling the best and most inspired adults we can find in the industry to work with kids particularly those who have never done it before". She cites Dorothy Hewett and Silvia Jansens' excellent contributions in writing and design, and looks forward to similar integration of dramaturgs and directors with children next time.

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA JULY 1981 21
The Conference, bitter, bilious and carnal as usual, was this year marked by the potent presence of the Women’s Movement, who among other things were rancorously opposed to Bob Herbert’s musical comedy Sex and Violins, in which a man with a stutter fails for three hours to quarrel with the Premiers.

39th birthday and Malcolm Fraser’s rancorously opposed to Bob Herbert’s journalism and cardiac arrest. Bob Ellis! did Clem Gorman’s play, his dramaturg Ken Horler in the eye. mealtimes and on one occasion punched Bob Adamson, who did a lot of yelling at Movement, who among other things were Anns Of Raelene, and now lives picaresquely in North Adelaide. Brian Sweeney, list of Australia’s top thirty playwrights, in which I came about 27th. John Howard is come before you a broken man, with a heart pacer and receding gums, an empty casting couch and bitterly mildewing heart. Rob Page and Lucy Wagner, the art form, Rob Page and Lucy Wagner, the casting couch and bitterly mildewing heart. I feared it might be catching through this my final autumn of the better days of Burton Hall, and the bangers and mash and coitus interruptus and fortnight stands of a now forgotten era of simple pastoral and pagan values, now gone alas forever, before the toothed vagina inned the world.

My close friend Malcolm Fraser and I have slab a hard week, both of us tall, enigmatic men with yapping dwarves at our heels, pressing on regardless with our iron vision of the necessary future of man, but we have had our little worries. I was caught in a breakfast queue with Chris Westwood, and had to forego sausages for fear of ideological attack, and Malcolm, in the seventh day of his struggle against the eunuchs, and the fourteenth week of his sleepless quest for someone who would smile at him, was obliged to have lunch with Brian Sweeney, that male equivalent of the Wife of Bath, who juggled the salt cellsars, urged that he, as head of the Arts Council be given a “casino licence”. I sang “Annie Laurie” with an impromptu quartet of octogenarian waitresses and fell under the table well before the fish. The Prime Minister is reported to have said, looking down admiringly, “I think I understand that man. Can we give him the ABC?”

I have had my work cut out, in my secret capacity of CIA troubleshooter for garulous minorities. To everybody’s qualified horror Bob Adamson on Monday night went on a hunger strike, refusing all alcohol until the Conference accorded him the status of political prisoner. It took me long hours to convince him that Little Red Riding Hood was not eaten by the wolf, and the yellow brick road did lead to a happy kingdom of lollipop ships and lemon drop trees, and all would be well if he closed his eyes. He was grateful for the information. On Tuesday I had to replace the strongbodied hostesses with the prettier members of the Women’s Movement, who agreed to serve tea and biscuits in return for indoctrination rights on first class passengers. I felt the compromise was necessary to stop the country from grinding to a halt, and diplomacy is my foremost talent. On Wednesday at midnight violence broke out when Helen Morse refused the leading role in a feminist movie called Caddie Sees The Light, to co-star Dawn Fraser as her strong, sagacious, firm, proud, embattled, pipe-smoking, pub-owning lover, and several bones were broken. I dealt with the situation brilliantly by shouting rape in another room so they all came in to watch.

On Thursday Dorothy Hewett was arrested under Canberra law for mythmaking before breakfast, an activity said to be economically destabilising, and for transporting a dangerous weapon across state lines. The dangerous weapon, Bob Adamson, on reaching gaol said “Home at last” and refused to leave, in spite of an offer from all twenty-five warders of three thousand dollars if he would do so immediately. I secured them both a Prime Ministerial pardon after making Dorothy promise to write with Mojo a musical play in the manner of Chapel Perilous called Pumpkins Progress on the life of Senator Flo.

But my Herculean effort to preserve law and order was taking its toll. By Thursday morning I was showing signs of plaque and senility. Over lunch I mistook Leonard Radic for Bob Adams and thanked him silly for the money. By mid-afternoon I was smiling eerily at Marlis Thiersch, and huskily asking Ron Blair for his autograph. I had a few jars and by four o’clock was offering the starring role in Goodbye Paradise to increasing numbers of beautiful teenage women and failing to get their room numbers. I began to worry about myself. At six o’clock my old mate and fellow CIA operative Jack Hibberd, or X3B12 as we guys out here in the Company have come to know and love him, came down with toxic shock of the epiglottis in mid-polyssyable, and was carried out on tongue first. His condition was diagnosed as terminal, and a stenographer, a dictaphone and fourteen crates of Bay Rum sent up by VIP jet to ease him across to the other shore. I feared it might be catching and ‘I may have drunk a little myself, because that night I thought I saw Graeme Blundell acting brilliantly, and Bob Adamson looking thankful, and meek, and attentive. The rest of that strange night I spent, for the very first time, with a girl I proposed to on Wynyard Station in 1962, and did not take notes. I knew I was cracking up.

By noon I was feeling sudden, inexplicable, swift, recurring visions of Jim Killen and Margaret Guilfoyle making love, and Malcolm Fraser admonishing them forward in their stygian exertions with the aid of a metronome. The vision abruptly changed to a nightmarish Bugs Bunny Show with Blundell as Bugs, Cliff Green as Elmer Fudd, Rob Page as Daffy Duck and Harry Reade as Yosemite Sam.
My condition swiftly deepened, and that night I dreamed I saw... a filthy Whitehall musical farce of wit and precision and sex appeal, with no redeeming social value that would make ten million dollars for its producer, and Richard Wherrett turned it down and the glib, benighted author offered it to me. I woke up joyously sobbing in a cold and terminal sweat. My surgeon told me the worst: I had caught the Hibberd disease, and said the end might be a little postponed if I took off weight, and recommended adultery. I gave the filthy knave a bunch of fives and said I would sooner die; so when Barbara Stephens and Helen Morse come clawing at my door again tonight, with their usual breathy, milk-soft promises of three-way bubble baths and home-cooked apple pies and slippers by the fire, they will know what angry answer to expect from this reformed and dying man.

The theatre of course I will always miss the most. Stephen Sewell's new play, *Salzhentitz*, told from the vegetarian point of view, Dorothy Hewett's new rousing evening of rambunctious poetry and premenstrual insight, *The Eskimo Dot and Darby Munro Show*, Steve Spears' *Duck Soup*, which establishes once and for all Daffy Duck as the true genius behind Bugs Bunny's success, Clem Gorman's new comedy, *A Night In The Union Foyer*, in which at a SUDS reunion twenty years after, John Bell, Ken Horler, Richard Wherrett, Ron Blair, Bob Ellis, John Gaden, Bruce Beresford, Dick Brennan, Germaine Greer and Mr Justice Kirby find they have nothing much in common any more. A new play by Bob Herbert, a wacky musical set in an abortion clinic, called *Meat and Gravy*, in which Barbara Stephens keeps turning up gaily pregnant until the doctor falls in love. And last but not least a play about the Playwrights' Conference by David Williamson, called *What If You Dried Tomorrow*, which is set in Ingmar College and features again the well-beloved Nestor Snell, who gets his just comeuppance this time, having a heart attack in flagrante, while everyone downstairs rubbishes his work.

It is of course a libel on this troubled place of dreams among the leaf-fall, where my utmost pleasure is yearly found. It is good, I think, that the best years of our lives, now clearly over, even for Robin Ramsay who has served too long as Bob Adamson's Dorian Grey, have brought us to this honourable place, where comrades in travail, and humour, and lust, and drunkenness, and thought, we by inches change the hearts of the world to better hearts or fail.

I am thirty-nine today, having attained Jack Benny's majority, and I feel every bit as healthy, and hale, as he does tonight. My children I may not long be with you; I must be about my father's business in the grocery store in Murwillumbah but if thanks are in order from the third eleven, and toasts can still be drunk to larger things, I would only like to conclude, as I have before, in Yeats's useful words:

"Ask not where man's glory most begins and ends,
But say my glory was, 1 had such friends."

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA JULY 1981 23
Graeme Murphy talks to Bill Shoubridge about the SDC's road to success.

"People have said that the Sydney Dance Company is parochial," said Graeme Murphy in an interview prior to the USA tour, "but then so is the New York City Ballet or the Royal Ballet, they're all parochial and it's that which makes them stand out from others, it's that which makes us an internationally viable company.

"If we had gone trying to give New York what nearly every other dance group gives, well, they wouldn't have found out that much about us. And since we never hide behind a big name here at home I see no reason why we should do it anywhere else."

All members of the Sydney Dance Company have a strong pride and sense of unique identity in themselves and, more than anything else, it's due to the fact that they have built up a mass of ballets created especially for them and by them. It compounds their pride even more now that the heavy critics of the New York dance scene have reacted so positively to them and singled out Murphy as a major talent in an international market.

But all of this didn't happen overnight, it has been a cumulative and organic growth going steadily on since Murphy first took over the job as Artistic Director back in 1976.

"I hardly knew what I had inherited when I took over the reins" says Murphy. "I knew some of the (then) repertoire and some of the dancers, but that was it, and I certainly wasn't about to go making big changes in areas that I was quite new to. Those changes only happened slowly as the ballets I was choreographing and commissioning began to enter the repertoire. No one was sacked, but certain dancers left to
try elsewhere and others joined us. As far as style goes, I wanted a more classical technique than what had been utilised before, even though I pulled and stretched it to meet my specifications.

"I never wanted a uniformity of style or 'look'. If I liked a dancer and thought I could use them, I engaged them, and they knew they would be given greater creativity in the roles and works made for them. That brought about a change; the dancers felt that their role in rehearsals was substantial, that they weren't bodies just there to be manoeuvred."

It seems to be a recipe that has held the SDC in good stead so far and what has helped bring them to pre-eminence in Australian dance. It is also what has helped them build up a large and devout following.

"Some people might think that we're going to New York to prove ourselves to ourselves, but that's not true," says Murphy ruminatively. "We have enough pride in ourselves already. What we are going for is to have a unique repertoire seen in the dance capital of overseas will do anything to change the invidious attitude of certain theatre managements in Sydney. The SDC has to go more or less cap in hand to get a booking in that city and even then that isn't sure. A regrettable state of affairs when one considers that other performing groups with far less imagination and creativity sit firmly ensconced in their theatres and smug in their offices, while the SDC still isn't sure of a new home when they have to move out of their Woolloomooloo premises later this year.

"We know from the An Evening season at the Opera House that we can fill theatres" notes Murphy. "85% capacity is good in anyone's book. And we know that larger audiences are coming to see us, their interest pricked by names like Sheherazade and Daphnis and Chloe. We don't trick them on those names, we're honest and subsequently they return to us, accepting things that hitherto they wouldn't have accepted. What is aggravating is that managements still see us as a risk, even at the Opera House which is supposed to be our 'Home'. The major hirers there (Australian Ballet and Opera) get first priority. Commercial managements want a long, safe musical or play. We can put in a pencil booking and they will sit on it, but if anything else comes along that looks more promising then we're edged out. It's come to such a pass that if we don't get a theatre soon, well, we just won't be seen in Sydney again until God knows when.

"We as a Company love to perform and we love to communicate and that's one of the reasons why we tour. We felt it last year with the Italian tour and it will be the same on the American tour. Not just the hands across the water nonsense, but new audiences, different cultures. Performing is exciting, it's nonsense, but new audiences, different cultures. Performing is exciting, it's like meeting new friends or a new lover and heaven knows, Sydney is where we live and where we want to perform most of the time.

"But there are other reasons why we tour or prefer long seasons. Dancers develop and grow much more quickly in conditions like that. A tour is hard and rigorous and the dancers just blossom. In Italy I saw dancers develop almost overnight because of the demands placed upon them. In a long season everyone gets a chance to expand, there are other people in
THE EVOLUTION OF A

Brian Thomson talks to Robert Page

Brian Thomson's career as a stage and film designer is one that must be the envy of many. From his first association with Jim Sharman in Sydney in the sixties to his current Associate Directorship of the Sydney Theatre Company, he seems to have combined his considerable talent with the admirable facility of being in the right place at the right time with the right idea. He is one of the few people who can truly say "I've never done anything I didn't want to do" and who has managed to preserve this integrity along with an unflaggingly successful career.

When he gave up his architecture studies at the University of NSW, Thomson saw himself as an environmental artist; he hawked around his "Environmental Kits" — "boxes which contained various elements which helped you participate in whatever activity it was supposed to be associated with" - and haunted the experimental discotheque at 10 Cunningham Street, which became known for its environmental "happenings". He was mainly interested in the idea of art in everyday contexts and new ways of introducing it to people; theatre seemed to him remote and old fashioned and in no way connected with the lines he wanted to pursue.

A five minute chat with Jim Sharman in a hamburger joint changed that entirely.

Having tried to sell Sharman an Environmental Kit as they waited in the queue, Brian Thomson expected nothing further from the encounter. He was amazed to get a phone call from Harry M Miller and a request, on the strength of a recommendation from Jim, to decorate the foyer of the Metro for Hair. Art in a foyer coincided well with his concept of art in unusual contexts, but again he anticipated no follow-through - he wasn't that keen on the show anyway, thought it could have been more hard-edged.

But Sharman kept in contact. First he got Thomson to design plans for a production of Tommy that was scheduled for the Melbourne Playbox, but never went on. In 1970, though, it was exciting enough for Thomson to be commissioned and payed for his work. He couldn't have been more surprised to be asked next to design a production of As You Like It for Jim Sharman at the Old Tote; the combination of Shakespeare and the seemingly staid organisation hardly seemed to fit with his interests or ideas, but he read the play, came up with a concept and was amazed to be told to go ahead and make it happen.

"The set builders there thought I was some arty farty ratbag at first; they didn't realise that my training as an architect and other work meant I did know exactly how to do it. Theatre at that time had never embraced materials like metal and perspex, which seemed ridiculous and to me the natural way to go. It was marvellous to be paid to do what I wanted to do, and to have the people to physically put my ideas together. When it comes to actually building I don't have the patience; I can spend six or eight weeks working on a model, but not the full sized thing."

As You Like It was a success and provoked another call from Harry Miller, this time with a request to design the new production of Hair. Thomson was able to go to town on the environmental angle and surrounded a plethora of household junk with an enormous rainbow and neon effects. From there he was invited back to the Tote and created the stunning look of Richard Wherrett's Arturo Ui. Despite his initial reaction to the company, he counts Ken Southgate and Robin Lovejoy's support of his work at this time as a major influence and encouragement. He did other work for them and then designed Jesus Christ Superstar which eventually led him to London.

"It was interesting doing Superstar. I always had a great naivety about musical theatre and the institutions involved with it, so it wasn't at all daunting for me to be working in the West End with all those people. It wasn't until later that I realised the whole theatre industry in Britain is just geared to doing what we were doing - but we just stepped off the plane and did the production."

Brian Thomson received several offers in London, "but they were more crassly commercial than Superstar, and I turned them down, to my agent's annoyance. There was a terrible musical thing with Tony Newley; I knew that was what theatre meant, but there was no way that was ever going to touch me — even if I didn't work, too bad, there were other things I could get on and do."

What he did do was work at the Royal Court on Shepard's The Unseen Hand in which Sharman had cast Richard O'Brien. From O'Brien's compositions and singalongs round the piano came The Rocky Horror Show which entrepreneur Michael White decided to mount after he had heard four bars.

While he had been working for the Tote, Thomson had designed the film Shirley Thomson and the Aliens which combined his loves of science fiction and rock and which he could follow through in Rocky. "We applied a consciously trashy level to it, although at first Richard wanted it to be very slick. But we had a budget of about £300 and we could have spent all that on one good raygun. The opening
Frankenfurter’s costumes were converted from the Glasgow Citizens’ production of The Maids — everyone involved put in a great deal.

“The opening night was one of the most exciting nights ever. Vincent Price and Coral Browne had been working at the Court Downstairs and they came up to see Rocky. They went back stage afterwards, having loved it, which was so exciting as he was one of the greats of the old trashy horror movies. At the same time I was working on Anthony and Cleopatra with Vanessa Redgrave which had opened two days earlier!”

The progress of The Rocky Horror Show is now history: it played continuously in London at various venues until 1980 and gave Brian Thomson the opportunities to go to Norway, Japan and the USA to design the international productions. He has supplied designs for Wilton Morley’s revival here in September, as a serious theatre, should do it in a manner where we respond to the work, the text, like any other good show, rather than as a lairy thirties musical. I think it makes the information and the characters a lot gutsier and there may well be deeper ramifications than in other productions I’ve seen of it. Richard’s aim is to make the STC an actors’ company so the set must work to make the actors work — it’s a more focussing approach. We decided to make it monochromatic until the trial scene and having decided to do it like that we’ve had to be uncompromising.

“With Lulu, the approach was again metaphorical rather than specifically placed. It’s basically a series of arches which are all aiming at the final scene. You need to feel a person as low as they can go, yet in an environment that’s epic and overpowering. Society will always squash people like Lulu. Louis (Nowra) thought it looked very Albert Speer and it does use classic architectural forms devoid of decorative detail, as they did in the Bauhaus era.”

Part of Thomson’s arrangement with the Sydney Theatre Company is that he will direct a show for them at the end of the year, thus fulfilling one of his ambitions. “Finally I do want to move on to directing. I understand visuals, I’ve done it for ten years and maybe that’s enough. I want to do an opera in the Paris Opera sometime and I want to design a film that’s made in Hollywood.”

If Shock Treatment is anything like the success that Rocky Horror has become, offers from Hollywood are a strong possibility; and as for the Paris Opera, they’ve already had an exhibition of the Death In Venice set and costumes in the foyer. Most of all, with Brian Thomson’s luck and talent he is more than likely to continue his ten year tradition of doing what he wants to do.

“I also worked on the acoustics of the set with Death In Venice, which succeeded remarkably. At the first run people though there was amplification — and there was, in the set itself. I think it’s the best thing that Jim and I have done as a team.”

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Director, Roger Pulvers, comments on Dance of Death at Melbourne's Playbox

These drawings are, for me, metaphors for a production. A design is always a comment on a play, whether it intends to be so or not. Peter Corrigan's designs are poetic comments.

The ideas in the drawings reverberate throughout all aspects of the final concrete result. The wire becomes string. The cliff-face became a narrow but by no means con-fining - acting space around the audience.

As a director (and translator too, I suppose), I am tempted, now that the production is on stage, to link Peter's visual statements with key themes in the play. This is the area in which designer and director must collaborate fully, so that the visual and verbal become indistinguishable. When I look back on a play I've seen, I am happiest when I can't remember whether it is words that I saw or images that I heard.

Ultimately, I fear, by linking these images to text I may be demeaning them. They stand on their own. They compromise what Tadeusz Kantor called "the plastic direction of the play".
THE CLIFF FACE/Corrigan: 
The implication here is that 
acting in the Dance of Death 
might be seen as a 
dangerous or threatening 
past time. Rather like 
performing on a narrow 
mountain path in the Andes. 
Pulvers:Here I feel a real risk, 
the precariousness of a play 
whose brutality and insight 
force us to stretch what we 
call acceptable, what we 
deem logically credible. 
"I don't die so easily. Don't 
celebrate prematurely, Alice." 
(Edgar)

THE DANCE FLOOR 
Corrigan:The dance around the audience is here viewed as a magic ritual. 
The closing of a circle or a magic ring. An act of European voodoo 
somewhat akin to a Bertolucci tango. 
Pulvers:The dance floor with the middle taken out. A dance of death 
around the edges of a live audience. 
"And I will do his dance...and wear a laurel wreath in my hair, a sign of 
triumph." (Alice)
THE EVOLUTION OF A DESIGN

THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE
Corrigan: The audience is at the calm or centre of the storm.
Pulvers: Is the audience perpetually in the calm centre, or only temporarily?
"Everyone who comes here turns evil, then goes his way." (Edgar)

THE WEIGHT OF THE PISTONS
Corrigan: The existing mezzanine in the upstairs Playbox space was intended to feel heavy, as if the performance existed in a clamp or vice.
Pulvers: Characters caught under self-created and self-perpetuated burdens.
"I've never hurt anyone, except myself." (Alice)

Peter Corrigan's original designs for The Dance of Death were displayed at the Australian Perspecta 1981 exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW during June. Corrigan was the only stage designer (as well as the only architect) represented in the exhibition.
different roles all the time."

It's one of the thumbprints of the SDC that when you look at the dancers, you see a group of truly individual talents performing coherently; so different from the grey, faceless ensembles that one sees so often in dance these days.

"Some companies and repertoires require that 'grey, faceless ensemble' answers Murphy, "but that company and rep always comes to life when there is a performer strong enough to put their stamp on it. People say, 'Wasn't that a fabulous ballet' when what they actually saw was a good ballet danced with real personality."

"We're not in showbiz" says Murphy, warming to his theme, "we're in the business of communication and enlightening through that communication. I think the SDC has broken down a lot of those former barriers because there's an immediacy about the Company that's refreshing. That 'honesty' in the art has a lot to do with encouraging audiences' esteem."

All of which is true and so far so good, but does Murphy ever see the day when he'll want to leave the Company and freelance overseas, attracted by the golden hoard of more money and greater fame.

"Well it is true that I've had offers to choreograph on various companies overseas, most specifically the Stuttgart Ballet," answers Murphy. "But really what does that 'golden hoard' mean? A five week period at a time, working with dancers you're not familiar with, unaware of their intrinsic gifts and strengths, waiting on the platform of the Metrotogofrom one place to the other. What I have here with the Sydney Dance Company is the most special thing one could hope for, a chance to really stretch one's talents. I would accept some commissions from other companies because I think it is occasionally important to work with different dancers, and I would like my work to be seen elsewhere, but the knowledge that one has a home to come back to is important."

"You know, dance today, in Australia and elsewhere, is in such a vibrant and healthy state. Time was when people just wanted to do the 'big' roles, the Swan or Aurora, but now people want parts and roles specifically created on them. Natalia Markarova for example, is always casting around for someone to create a role on her. As long as that happens, as long as stars, with all that crowd-pulling ability want today's automobiles to ride in thanks, not yesterday's, then dance won't, can't stagnate."

"And the same goes for audiences today too, they want new stuff, a constant diet of the classics is stultifying to them, and that is the best news yet."
DREW FORSYTHE AND FORSYTHE ARE TWO FUNNY FOR WORDS AS THE ONE AND ONLY VENETIAN TWINS.

NIMRODS MADCAP MUSICAL COMEDY
NICK ENRIGHT CLARKE
DIRECTED JOHN BELL
DESIGNED BY STEPHEN CURTIS
CHOREOGRAPHED BY NANCY HAYES & KEITH BAUM
WITH VALERIE BADER-ANNIE BYRON
JON EWING-ALIDA JOHNSON-BARRY LOVETT-GORDON M'DOUGALL-JOHN McTERNAN-TONY SHELDON-TONY TAYLOR

9 JULY-15 AUG
SEYMOUR CENTRE
Send in the (local) clowns

by Karl Levett

Despite the relentless escalation of international communication in the world entertainment industry, there remains one stubborn reactionary - Comedy. Laughter continues to be local. This is particularly true in the theatre, where even the various English-speaking clowns have great difficulty in conveying the same language.

Comedy is the wine that doesn't travel well and it's much safer to stick to the local vintage, so they say. Alan Ayckbourn may make it to National Theatre in London, but he stumbles on Broadway. Neil Simon who is a demon with dollars hardly gains a pound in London. The Australian playwright views both these gentlemen and their alien corn with suspicion. Ah, what a fragile thing is comedy. (There's a gift of a Master's thesis in all this for somebody.)

Along with its fragility, however, comedy is also very remunerative. Nothing succeeds like a successful comedy: people will pay a lot of money to laugh. While the casualty rate in the comedy stakes is high, the survivor is very amply rewarded. Recently on New York stages there has been a succession of comedies competing for valuable prizes.

Neil Simon has carried off more of these prizes than any other American playwright in the last twenty years. Earnestly prolific, he has penned since 1960 a series of comedies that have been hugely popular and successful. Mr Simon is indeed an American phenomenon and his imprint on American comedy has been considerable. A "Neil Simon Comedy" has become part of the theatrical language.

It is interesting to report then a Simon failure. His latest comedy Fools had the briefest run of any Simon venture on Broadway. Fools is different from the usual Simon offering in that it is based on a folk fable and set in the Ukraine of "Long Ago". A schoolteacher (John Rubenstien) comes to the village of Kuyenchikov to discover that a curse of stupidity has been placed on its inhabitants. The breaking of the curse is the play's slender plot line.

What it does allow for Mr Simon to exercise himself of every idiot-joke that has ever haunted him. There must be a good hundred of them in the evening and some of them are even funny within the context. A typical sample: a housewife accused of not having dusted some books indignantly replies that she put dust on them only yesterday. This, then, is basically a one-joke show and the play's plot does not have enough variations to disconcert us from this obvious fact. The cast includes two genuine American clowns, Mary Louise Wilson and Harold Gould and the director is Mike Nichols, but none of these talents can flesh out such thin material.

With its attractive fairytale setting (John Lee Beatty) and its storybook costumes (Patricia Zipprodt) Fools cries out to be a musical - a kind of Foolish Fiddler On The Roof. Some pleasant music and some spirited dancing might have given it that extra dimension it so badly needs.

With his early television background it is probably very natural that Neil Simon is a writer of contemporary situation comedy with a positive genius for the one-line zinger to help the situation along. Americans show a preference for naturalistic comedy with contemporary, recognisable situations, settings, and characters. (When did you last see an American farce?) Simon presents his audience a mirror (non-distorting variety) wherein they see themselves. In Fools the comedy of the Ukraine of long ago comes via today's Grand Concourse in the Bronx. In Mr Simon's dictum, if an anachronism can get a laugh, then that's a laugh he didn't have. The rest of the dramatic elements can go fend for themselves.

Woody Allen is another American phenomenon in the world of comedy. Also beginning as a TV writer, he became a stand-up comic, then wrote two successful Broadway comedies while also developing into a movie writer/director of international repute with Annie Hall, Interiors and Manhattan. In between times he's written three books and contributed humorous essays to the New Yorker. Like Neil Simon, Woody Allen is a veritable one-man entertainment industry. Thank heavens for the American Work Ethic.

His last theatrical effort was Play It Again Sam in 1969 so that the announcement of a new Woody Allen comedy as part of the reopened Vivian Beaumont Theatre's new season helped sell many subscriptions. The new play The Floating Light Bulb might not be quite what the subscribers expected. It is a small, bittersweet, family drama, sad and intimate in tone - with its intimacy being swallowed up in the large playing area of the Vivian Beaumont.

Clearly autobiographical in origin, it details the Pollock family in Brooklyn, 1945: Enid, the nagging but strength-of-the family mother. Max, the wayward gambling father, ready to fly the coop; Paul, the bright, stuttering teenage son who retires from life practising his magic tricks in his room; Steve, the wisecracking, confident kid brother. Act I is a series of hesitant exposition scenes setting up the family relationships and it is not until Act II that the play catches any fire. This comes with the entrance of a small-time theatrical agent Enid has talked into coming and looking at Paul's magic act.

The presentation is a fiasco and Paul retires to his room leaving Enid and the agent to play a wonderfully sad and comic
love scene. Here Woody Allen hits his stride, greatly helped by two of the best of Broadway's clowns. Bea Arthur as the mother and Jack Weston as the agent. Each succeeds in being simultaneously funny and touching - a demonstration of American comic acting at its best.

The play is very much in the American mainstream with ghosts of Williams (particularly Glass Menagerie) and Miller ready to pop out of the kitchen cabinets. For Woody Allen, the playwright, The Floating Light Bulb indicates a more serious turn and the promise of possible substantial dramas to come. Let's hope Mr Allen will ignore the distraction of his own multi-talents and find a comfortable seat in theatre and stay awhile.

Off-Broadway it is interesting to discover a group, the Manhattan Punch Line, which is devoted to the exclusive presentation of comedy. Manhattan Punch Line is "dedicated to the spirit of comic, the gagdly, the satirist, the clown". The group believes that "comedy is the only rational stance". Their subscription mailer has a delightful banner: Comedy: It's a Dirty Job, but Somebody's Gotta Do It!

REPORT FROM BRAZIL
The Report, called Oficiam-o Trabalho da crise, from the Teatro Oficina of Sao Paulo deals with 20 years of theatrical work under conditions often very difficult. Write to Teatro Oficina, Rua Jaceguay 520, Bela Vista, Sao Paulo, SP, cep 01315 Brazil. "THE FUTURE OF MUSICAL THEATRE IN EUROPE"
A symposium on this topic will be held by the Research Institute for Musical Theatre of the University of Bayreuth and the Bavarian European Academy. Speakers include Paolo Grassi, Sir Claus Moser, Rolf Liebermann, Gotz Friedreich. Information from ITI Centre, Bismarckstrasse 17, 1000 Berlin 12, Federal Republic of Germany. August 2-4, 1981.

NEW THEATRE 50TH ANNIVERSARY COMPETITION
The longest running theatre in Australia, the Sydney New Theatre, is celebrating this year with the offer of a prize of $1000 and a second prize of $500 for a new full-length stage play. Information and entry forms from: New Theatre Play Competition, Box No. 337, PO Kensington, NSW 2033. Closing date: 18 January 1982.
Alison's Birthday - far from convincing

by Elizabeth Riddell

Alison's Birthday, which has turned up unexpectedly and least to me sponsored by the National Film Institute with a first run at the Sydney Opera House, can perhaps best be described as too little and too late. It is too late because the horror movie seems to have peaked, and passed, after a run of a few years, and too little because it doesn't really scare the audience. In fact at the session I attended it made them laugh, though kindly.

One doesn't want to be too hard on it. Its pretensions are modest. Produced by David Hannay and directed by Ian Caughton, it stars pretty Joanne Samuel, first seen in any prominence in Certain Women, and features Lou Brown, John Bluthal, Bunny Brooke and a chorus or coven of witches dressed in green butter muslin and carrying torches around the back garden of a house which seems to be in Sydney's North Shore. Joanne is spending a reluctant couple of days with her aunt and uncle who wish to celebrate her 19th birthday.

Her usual habitat is an east coast town where her boy friend, Pete, played by Brown, is an announcer in the local radio station. He drives her to the city but is not welcomed by uncle and auntie, who want Alison for themselves. Uncle is a dithering retired gent who is said to be fading fast, though he looks healthy enough, and auntie offers Alison sinister draughts of herbal cocoa. Alison has nightmares, and the viewer has far too much time to

There should be tension, but there isn't, and the viewer has far too much time to notice gaps in the continuity and such anomalies as the large suitcase Alison brings for what is only a two-day visit. Especially as she never wears anything but shorts and a T-shirt.

The writing is far from convincing, in other ways. It is pretty difficult to believe a back garden so untidy and tangled that a replica of Stonehenge can be hidden from other ways. It is pretty difficult to believe a auntie offers Alison sinister draughts of herbal cocoa. Alison has nightmares, and the viewer has far too much time to

Joanne Samuel (Alison) in Alison's Birthday.

Maybe This Time — credible

So many of the parts of Maybe This Time are imaginatively conceived and excellently performed that I wish the film came together rather better than it does. It is a great plus for the scriptwriters, Bob Ellis and Anne Brooksbank, that they have actually written about credible people, got the behaviour and the speech rhythms right and not taken the whole thing too seriously. The plot drifts along in a quite believable way. That may be part of the trouble - it does drift.

Joanne Samuel (Alison) in Alison's Birthday.

The time is the present, or near enough (during the film Gough Whitlam's government comes unstuck) and the place mostly Sydney. The principals are Fran, a woman about to be 30 years old, and her three non-concurrent lovers - Stephen, a married man past his first freshness who is press officer to a Cabinet Minister, Paddy the carefree soul who teaches history at a university and enjoys the attention of female students, and Alan who lives on the land, votes for the Country Party and wants to marry her. A possible lover, Stephen's Cabinet Minister, lurks in the background, a middle-aged, greyly-hand-

some romantic. This classic type is cleverly suggested by Leonard Teale. The other players are respectively Judy Morris (in danger of being cast once too often as a woman who doesn't know where she's at), Bill Hunter, Mike Preston and Ken Shorter. Also along is Jill Perryman as Fran's smalltown mother, iron-clad in pleated nylon and prejudice (and allowed to sing only once, "Just A Song At Twilight" with others around the piano at a birthday party), and cosy Michelle Fawdon as Fran's sister Margo. Margo petulantly asserts that she will leave her bottom-pinching husband Jack (Rod Mullinar) but in the final scenes she is still with him, clinging to his arm as Fran fades out through the departure gate at Mascot, on her way to Greece and... what? Ellis and Brooksbank don't say.

As might be expected from the writers, Maybe This Time is full of true and funny, sad and merry moments. One of the best occurs when Fran, driving back to Sydney and from her re-encounter with Alan (who fails the bed test, while Fran says, "It doesn't matter, it happens to everybody" in a somewhat unconvincing tone) meets a salesman played by Chris Heywood in the motel grill. He charms her with jokes, then makes a heavy pass from which she is rescued by the motel clerk. "Why couldn't we have just gone on talking?" she enquires bleakly of Heywood. It's a question for which there is no satisfactory answer.

Fran's real trouble is that she cannot get her men to commit themselves to her. Stephen tumbles her into bed, in about as perfunctory a way as the manner in which he removes his socks. Paddy corrects exam papers while she purrs alongside him in bed. Alan is clearly in too much of a mess. The Minister would have a heart attack if she responded to his windy approaches. There is no passion in her life, passion not being the same as athletics between the sheets. She and they pick up and then discard one another and all its very probable but hard to care about. The audience should have to worry a bit more about Fran. Bill Hunter's time-serving Stephen should be more sharply delineated, there should be more cogency to Paddy's hedonist.

For performance, I would almost give the prize to Ken Shorter, who presents a subtle picture of a sincere country chap, no mean feat. Both Hunter and Preston are miscast, the latter quite ludicrously.

Maybe This Time is a Cherrywood Film, presented by the NSW Film Corporation, produced by Brian Kavanagh and directed by Chris McGill.
AB's Programme 3 — Poems, Faun and Monotones

by William Shoubridge

When I first saw Robert Ray's *Poems*, this year's token Australian Choreographer serve-up from the Australian Ballet, I was so battered by all the borrowings and cutesy allusions in it that I could hardly walk a straight line home.

Using Jim Parker's travelogue background music to some poems of Sir John Betjeman pompously intoned by David Ravenswood, Robert Ray has managed to concoct a cardboard replica of a ballet. It's not so much the "Englishness" of the work, a charge that cannot be critically substantiated in any case, as the "oldness" of it; you'd think that the last 50 years of choreographic development had never happened.

At first glance it looks like Ashton's *Enigma Variations*, a tweedy, Nancy Mitford set of home county personalities, thumbnail sketched in movement. Unlike *Enigma Variations*, however, it doesn't have any love for its characters and it hardly gives them enough idiosyncratic gesture to keep a warm after-image in the mind's eye.

In the scene titled "Olympic Girls" we open with a tennis ball bouncing onto the stage, a la Nijinsky's *Jeux*, the Liliam solo, with its dancer shrouded in Chanel silk and a turban is more than reminiscent of the Blue Girl in Nijinska's classic *Les Biches*. The trouble is that Ray never gets any further than a facile and glibly chic allusion and his choreography, taken on its face value is bland, insipid and merely illustrative of the poems of Betjeman.

The dancers at every performance I witnessed tried hard to make it work but they only succeeded in trying to sell it, and sell it with a hard face indeed. Take the trio of girls in the "Business Women" scene, the poem goes on about young bodies soaking in a warm bath on a windy morning in Camden Town and, sure enough we get three girls in pink body tights, wrap around towels and shower caps doing simple arabesques forward and back and not much else. In the "Clemency" poem, Betjeman rolls on about a young girl in a skiff on a lake and what do we see but a girl supported by two boys doing literal "pulling-of-oar" movements.

Other choreographers have tried doing ballets to poetry and have usually emerged chastened by the experience. The choreographic element is always downgraded in things like this, even though it might have great merit on its own. An audience's eye only wants to see what its ear is hearing — and if not, the friction caused between word and gesture is so great as to negate any impression caused by one or the other. The problems are only worsened if the choreographic element is weak as it is here.

I don't know whether the Company will keep *Poems* in the repertoire very long — personally I'd scuttle it and give Ray a second chance at something a little more progressive. What it did do, however, was give dancers a go at certain roles throughout its run and for that much it was worthwhile, giving us a chance to look at the young talent arising out of the corps de ballet and soloist ranks.

It was interesting to see dancers like Lisa Pavane, Lyndell Sweetman, Joanne Cann and Martyn Fleming dancing out on their own, putting their own stamp on what they do. It's just a shame that they weren't given much to do.

No one from within the company was given a chance to do Jerome Robbins' *Afternoon of a Faun* this time around, that was the sole preserve of the resident "star" performers this year, Leonid and Valentina Kozlov. At first glance, it is an odd choice of ballet for them to do; Bolshoi trained dancers are not noted for emotional subtlety and this, just as much as the ability to dance is important in *Faun*. It is a self-contained lyric of unspoken poetry held on a single breath.

On opening night, I didn't think they did at all well. It was vibrant, it was emotional but it was also pantingly vulgar. Jerome Robbins is down on record as saying that his little exquisite masterpiece is about innocence and the first burgeoning of the erotic impulse. The Kozlovs, in their initial performance, looked as if they'd been "at it" for years.

By setting the work in a ballet studio on a hot afternoon, Robbins manages to set up a myriad of inferences in the work: is the encounter real or a dream; are we seeing the dancers or the reflection of them in the studio mirror; are they dancing with each other or their reflections; and lastly, is it a real encounter or a rehearsal? All of these things have to be sustained around the

Valentina and Leonid Kozlov in *Afternoon of a Faun*. Photo: Branco Gaica.
dancers like a cloud of perfume.

On opening night, the Kozlovs were too studied and cool, it became just a rehearsal. The single architectural factor that keeps this arch of movement up is the tension of discovery in the two protagonists: it is a study in tantalisation, not narcissism. As their performances went on, the Kozlovs got into the feel of the work, one knew that they liked this ballet because it not only meant a lot to them, but it was a source of unfamiliar choreography and was developing them.

They never managed to contain all the aspects of the work in one performance; one night it was an awakening, another night it was a diaphanous dream; and then again, due to the powerful animal quality of Leonid, it was an exercise in studied eroticism, all of which is valid and all of which was wonderful to watch. I hope that one day they’ll be able to put all the aspects of the work together, then it will be fascinating.

The AB company as we know it, came back into focus with the production revival of Frederick Ashton’s Monotones, a masterpiece of pure movement on a par with the same choreographer’s Symphonic Variations.

As much as anything else, Monotones was set to Erik Satie’s Gnossiens — was so nervous that they wobbled more than danced, they also looked heavy and lumpish which is probably due to not being sufficiently schooled in the style. Monotones represents a constancy of devotion to the details of classical style. Good old British Cecchetti technique — all chaste and flowing arabesques, limp contrapasso harmonies, impervious balances and very strict épaulement.

As far as Monotones I was concerned, all three casts that I saw were out of tenor with an alien style. Splinters and chips appeared all over the place. The dancers made a brave attempt, they all did a lovely series of back-curving lunges into tight attitude, but none of them could clear their heads in oblique positions or hold an unsupported balance. These were blood, sweat and tears performances, and all three casts direly needed careful coaching.

The trios in Monotones II were better, they took on the calm transparency and sustained momentum that Ashton intended the work to have; the cast of Martin Raistrick, Joanne Canning and John Vye especially conveyed the delicate oriental “salambaque” arm calligraphy without drawing undue attention to it.

The one limitation, which none of the cast changes managed to dispel was the feeling of unnaturalness. When the work is danced by the Royal Ballet you feel the strength and tradition of the whole company behind it. When the AB danced it, it was a precarious undertaking. The Company hasn’t trained its audiences or its dancers to see stylistic faults or the absence of authority and stretch in the classical silhouette. These days in the AB, a dancer has practically to fall flat on his face for the audience to notice anything is wrong, the attention and favour is there, it’s just underdeveloped and indiscriminate.

It’s the reason they love such showy and unconnected trash like Choo san Goh’s Variations Concertantes above works of greater import. This Singapore choreographer, now based in America, although using classical technique as a base has wrenched it into a style of choreography reminiscent of the aesthetic wrestling style of John Butler and Glen Tetley. He even adopts their favourite costume of all over tights for the put upon women and minimal briefs for the men.

I don’t know what he’s like in other works, perhaps his chameleon talent takes on the attributes of someone else, but in this work reset on the AB he uses a clichéd, lumpy choreographic vocabulary, more suited to a Las Vegas floor show than the ballet stage. The work progresses by indigestible, grisly dollops, getting tighter and tighter. He doesn’t know how to get his dancers out of an impasse, so he just breaks the half-nelsons they get themselves into and starts the dreary formula all over again. It’s an effect somewhat like opening a window on a stuffy room. It doesn’t expand the dancers and it doesn’t show the audience anything other than a few set pieces and tricks.

If San Goh is, as people say he is, the current “Wunderkind” of American dance, then that country’s dance scene is in a bad way.

Elizabeth McBain and David Burch in the AB’s Poems. Photo: Branco Gaica.

Perth’s Peter Pan
— fun and magic
by Terry Owen

Peter Pan, the boy hero of J M Barrie’s classic story for children, has seen a lot of action in his time.

He has starred in London’s West End plays and pantomimes, in a Walt Disney animated film, and now — for the first time in his fictional life — he’s the star of a new three-act ballet written, choreographed and produced for the West Australian Ballet Company by its artistic director Garth Welch.

I talked to Mr Welch about the production before opening night at His Majesty’s theatre on May 27, a benefit performance in aid of the Society for Crippled Children of Western Australia.

“The idea of doing the Barrie classic first occurred to me back in 1979, when we had such a good response to KAL as theatre entertainment for the whole family,” he said. “Fantasy is something I think we take pleasure in throughout our lives, but I know that a lot of Australians feel uncomfortable with the romantic fantasy of a ballet like, for example, Swan Lake, where the prince falls in love with a swan maiden. So when I heard that Peter Pan was being revived as a play with a smallish cast, I thought, why not a ballet aimed at entertaining the family as a whole?

“I see Peter Pan as a very positive move in the business of appealing to the whole family as the basic audience unit for dance in Western Australia. The fact is that Australian audiences now expect dance companies, large and small, to include three acts in the repertoire. The Australian Ballet, for example, is increasingly relying on lavish full length spectacles to hold audiences.

“It has worked its way through the ballet classics like Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty, and is now recycling literary classics like Anna Karenina and The Three Musketeers in efforts to keep its audiences satisfied.”

Working to a budget the Australian Ballet production team would scoff at, Mr Welch has created with his Peter Pan a charming family entertainment which blends good-looking and strong classical dancing, pretty candy-coloured designs, touches of clever knockabout fun, and the magic of a great theatre like His Majesty’s.

The fantasy of flying is the key to the story’s attraction, and the spacious cube of His Majesty’s proscenium stage is a great place for flying. I know I wasn’t the only failed romantic on opening night to feel tears of wonder come as Peter and Wendy flew out high into the moonlight on their way to Never Never Land and battles with
Captain Hook.

Mr Welch is working this year with a more widely experienced group of performers than he has had previously. Timothy Storey, former first soloist with London Festival Ballet, has a strong, clean technique and a range of theatrical skills that allow him to exploit fully his double role of the nice Mr Darling and the flashily nasty Captain Hook. Ex Australian Ballet soloist Jak Callick, who is guesting with the company, bubbles along cleverly as Wendy’s young brother John, building his characterisation all the time. The pas de quatre for the Darling family, presented with style by Storey, Callick, Natasha Middleton as Wendy and Maggie Lorraine as Mrs Darling, gives the first act the fizz it needs after a low key start, and it’s one of several passages throughout the work which let the audience relax and enjoy some good, traditional set-piece dancing.

Geoffrey Rayner’s Peter has lots of muscular bounce but needs more personality definition, and Joanne Munday’s fairy Tinker Bell is a nicely-judged combination of butterfly-wing lightness and spoilt beauty sulks.

The commissioned score, by Verdon Williams, is thoroughly danceable. Mr Williams has had a long and successful connection with dance as conductor and composer, and it’s a pleasure to hear such a good craftsman in action.

Steve Nolan’s art nouveau inspired set works smoothly through the Never Never Land scene changes, and I especially like his fancy dress costumes for Captain Hook and his under-achieving pirates.

Like most story ballets, Peter Pan has its fair share of unexplained entrances and exits. A more serious criticism is that, as family entertainment, it’s about 30 minutes too long. Judicious pruning in the second act, notably the Red Indians sequence, would move the action along more successfully without spoiling any of the fun and magic. Because it is theatre magic that Mr Welch has aimed at, and largely succeeded in creating, with this Peter Pan, giving us the chance to believe in fantasy and dreams.
May brought me three operas within 24 hours, with much to compare: two of them were French; two sung in English; two presented by the Australian Opera. The mathematically inclined will have no difficulty in understanding that all three pairs were different. Operatic permutations... or should that be combinations?

The two French composers, Poulenc and Offenbach, could hardly be more dissimilar, the former’s The Dialogues of the Carmelites being through-composed and emotionally intense; The Tales of Hoffmann on the other hand contains a good deal of speech (far too much to justify the AO’s continuing to offer it in French), and a score whose superficiality prevents the opera from being great.

Hoffmann has always seemed to me an ideal subject for an operatic masterpiece. All the romantic elements are there: an ardent lover in search of the perfect woman; an evil genius who continually foils him; comic relief; magic. The saga unfolds in a series of reminiscences as Hoffmann waits for his current lady to finish singing in a performance of Don Giovanni, that tale of opera’s greatest but finally least successful lover. Offenbach lavished melody upon it, but Barbier’s masterly libretto demanded a composer with psychological insight and the technical means to express it. The creator of La Vie Parisienne proved better suited to setting the can-can.

Regret for what might have been by no means implies that Offenbach’s opera is unworthy of our national company. Originally created for Joan Sutherland and the Sydney Opera House, Jose Varona’s sets and costumes looked better at the St Kilda Palais than they had done when I last saw them in Canberra. Richard Bonynge’s reconstruction of the work’s musical and dramatic geography is perhaps his finest contribution to modern repertoire. And the composite role of the four villains is undoubtedly the best thing we have had from Raymond Myers.

While there is no doubt that dramatically the four villains are the incarnations of a single evil genius, the use of the same soprano for Olympia, Giulietta, Antonia, and Stella poses a question. If they are all in an obvious sense the same woman, then

Hoffmann has already found the perfect woman in so far as she exists. The experience of losing her in her every manifestation becomes a tragedy too deep for Offenbach’s pretty tunes to encompass. But we know that one soprano, Adele...
Isaac, sang the three roles (Giulietta was cut) in the premiere one hundred years ago.

Whatever of the opera's history, Joan Carden has now added a sensual Giulietta to her justly acclaimed tubercular heroine, Antonia. The doll, Olympia, has always seemed a natural showpiece for Carden's clean and agile coloratura; one stands in awe of the allure and power of her voice as Giulietta, while cherishing the ethereal quality of characterisation as Antonia. Anson Austin was a believable Hoffmann, although the role is not yet settled into his voice as his Rudolfo is. At the performance I saw, Rosemary Gunn made the most of her solo appearance as the Muse and Nicklauser. Stuart Challender seemed more comfortable conducting this score than in anything I had previously heard from him.

If Offenbach merely skims the surface (which, when you look at a musical score, is where the tune is), the same cannot be said of Leos Janacek, whose intense psychological drama Katya Kabanova occupied the Princess Theatre. Puccini is a useful starting point for those who want to find their musical way to Katya, or for that matter to Jenufa, the Czech composer's earlier work in the AO's repertoire. While his scores contain more whistleable tunes than Poulenc's Carmelites (this month's third opera), Janacek does not sustain melodrama with the cohesive power of unbroken melody as Puccini does. Indeed, conflict of character is expressed largely through rapid sequences of melodies which can give the appearance of fragments. With often dissonant chording and rough-textured orchestration, the starkness of the score is enhanced by omission of linking modulatory chords (in Mosco Carner's phrase) and rhythms frequently based on eighth-notes.

Katya is a powerfully moral being, her adultery and her tragic guilt locking her into conflict with the oppressive forces of her Russian provincial town. They are personified in her mother-in-law, Kabanichka, who drives Katya to suicide as surely as guilt does. Puccini has set no grander conflict of overwhelming emotion, yet Janacek is the more profound dramatic writer. This is the composer for the thinking theatregoer who would find a way to opera.

As Katya Marilyn Richardson was youthfully vulnerable without a hint of weakness. Jennifer Bermingham made a touching Varvara, her companion. And they both sang opulently. All three tenors, Gregory Dempsey as Katya's lover, Robert Gard as her mother-dominated husband, and Ron Stevens as the student lover of Varvara, sang and acted with a degree of intelligence not normally associated with tenors. But then, this is not a "bel canto" opera. The fearsome power of Rosina Raisbeck's Kabanichka was so elementally dramatic that singing, instead of being a stylised or contrived form of utterance, seemed the only way to convey vocally such near-demonic outpourings.

Although the Volga unaccountably begins the opera in the vicinity of the orchestra pit (where its beauty is admired) and ends upstairs (where Katya throws herself in) Roger Butlin's set is an object lesson to all opera and ballet companies with large budgets. Wooden decking slid into place for the basis of a room, and a dock when necessary. An oblong of timber flooring indicated outdoor paths, and a dock when necessary. An oblong of timber flooring slid into place for the basis of a room, and interiors were established with freestanding furniture. Projections on a cloth, the occasional flown item, and a dominant, flying metal piece constructed in bar-like sections, completed the compelling stage setting. Not a superfluous dollar any-

where, and a challenge to an audience to respond more imaginatively than by applauding lavish re-creations of period naturalism.

In Canberra, the night before I went to Melbourne, designer James Ridewood proved himself a master of supporting strong drama with slender financial means. Producer Robin Lovejoy educed committed performances from a cast which varied from barely adequate to strong in vocal accomplishment. The Dialogues of the Carmelites lacks the passionate, open conflict which characterises Katya Kabanova, yet for that elusive audience member, the playgoer reaching out towards opera, it is at least as much a revelation as Katya.

The title of Poulenc's opera is important. The action unfolds as a series of dialogues, first between individuals, later between the Carmelite convent and the revolution. It is a brave composer who would render it into music drama, and Poulenc was not helped by a combination of miscasting and lack of competence from Canberra Opera's men who shared the burden of the opening scene. Thereafter the performances (principally from the women) grew until in the final scene they matched in stature the huge silhouette of Madame La Guillotine as she severed, precisely at the vocal cords, each nun in the midst of the "Salve Regina".

It seemed that Robin Lovejoy had directed Heather Sneddon to portray Blanche as a neurotic, complete with exaggerated physical postures of grief and doubt. In fact, if one were to fault the massive achievement of Lovejoy and his cast, it would be that both Blanche and the old Prioress (Gloria Eiser) were too active physically in their efforts to portray deep
emotion. It was not difficult to forgive the Prioress her excessive robustness on her deathbed; she sang so well. So did Isabel and Joan Richards as the new Prioress. Fiona Maconaghy made an impressive debut as both singer and actor as the youthful, ingenuous Sr Constance, and Heather Sneddon confirmed the quality she displayed as Safi in *The Gypsy Baron*.

Conductor Donald Hollier, like his colleague Lovejoy, elicited from forces of widely varying ability orchestral playing that largely made up in commitment and sensitive accompanying what it lacked in detailed accuracy. Canberra must envy Melbourne its Elizabethan orchestra, which had played as well for David Kram in *Kaisa* as it had for Stuart Challenger at the matinee of *Hoffmann*.

Both of the operas which were sung in English (*Carmelites* and *Kaisa*) were 90% audible to me. There were very few acceptable French accents in *Hoffmann*, and anyway the effort of listening hard becomes tiring even when one has some degree of the language and a close knowledge of the opera. But opera in English is another topic.

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**Tales of Hoffman in Perth**

by Charles Southwood

Last month’s season of *Tales of Hoffman* from the WA Opera is another box-office success for a company whose relations with the public are quite extraordinarily close and cordial. In part this is the result of careful management and an increasing bias towards tried and proven repertoire. It’s also a function of the company’s effort to make its productions look good, and *Tales* was no disappointment for an expectant first-night audience which oo-ed and ah-ed appreciatively at William Dowd’s often sumptuous costumes and expertly-painted charcoal-toned sets.

This may seem a strange point to introduce first up, but my hunch is that the outward opulence of a production is one of the principal ways in which a company can acknowledge the role of status symbol thrust upon it by many a city and nation. Having an opera company to patronise is rather like having a Mercedes in the garage, and the WA company, particularly since taking up residence in the splendidly refurbished His Majesty’s Theatre, has seized on the fact to win ever more devotees of its particular brand of high-class entertainment. If so much is clear, however, *Tales* may have left many of its patrons less clear as to the deeper point of the experience. As one audience member commented before lapsing into dull silence “Wasn’t it lovely! and all that singing...” *Tales* received a largely local performance under the firm musical direction of Gerald Krug. Ian Westrip as Lindorf and variants was joined by two imports, Christa Leahmann as Hoffmann’s four loves and John Main as Hoffmann himself. Anne Watson played Niklaus and Antonia’s mother on opening night. Megan Sutton alternated with her thereafter. Production was by Edgar Metcalfe.

Act III worked extremely well, as the sinister grey of Hoffmann’s blighted world closed in on the home, the furniture, the costumes, even the musical instruments of Antonia and her father. The warm dramatic qualities of Leahmann’s and Main’s voices found their true place here and Ian Westrip, goat-shanked, staccato and explosively bewigged in grey, had no trouble convincing us that his Dr Miracle was no human doctor, and certainly no heavenly one. Chris Waddell was good as the touchingly human but powerless father.

Other moments achieved more qualified success. I admired the way the themes of illusion and manipulation were fore-shadowed by the two hands, like those of some great, supernatural puppeteer, holding up the backdrop at the start of Act I. And what an uneasy feeling those two closed ranks of jerking, sugary dolls gave us at the start of scene 2, flanking and only in once sense animating a cavernous ballroom utterly void of human souls! Christa Leahmann was impressive as Olympia, the doll that Hoffmann falls so madly in love with, but overall Edgar Metcalfe somehow failed to give his actors the necessary direction to bring out the power of the situation. For lack of movement were difficult to arrange, particularly with the chorus on stage, and as a result we were given few of the visual clues needed to clarify a fairly complex set of relationships. Ian Westrip made too little impact as the magician Dapertutto, perhaps because his relatively small stature reduced his visual fighting power against the marble patterns and other detail in the set and the splendid costumes largely lost in the cramped mass of the chorus. But what a wonderful ending to the act, with Dapertutto, the dwarf and Giulietta gliding eerily across the darkened gallery at the back of the set while downstage Hoffmann, horrified and starting, is dragged off the other way by Niklaus. This was one time when the relationships of the act became completely, chillingly clear.

Sets and costumes alone don’t give a production the punches of moments like these. A producer has to help his singers extend the dramatic intentions of the piece, already present in the music, into the area of supportive action. Maybe first-night nerves creamed off this layer of the production. Maybe Edgar Metcalfe underestimated his cast’s ability to sing and act at the same time. Whatever the cause, the result was a performance that made less sense than it could or should have. The company has some hard thinking to do in this area before mounting the next of its long run of otherwise high-standard productions.

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*Ian Westrip (Dapertutto), Christa Leaumann (Giulietta), John Main (Hoffmann) and Anne Watson (Niklaus) in WA Opera’s Tales of Hoffman.*

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Fidelity of approach

DEATH OF A SALESMAN
by Janet Healey


Director, Pamela Rosenberg; Designer, Louise Clarkson; Lighting, Anne Maree Gallien; Stage Manager, Paul Hunter.

Cast: Willy Loman, Gordon Glenwright; Linda, Margery Lhnhuus; Bill, Phil Roberts; Happy, David Bennett; Bernard, John Stead; Woman, Mars Versluys; Charley, Phil Mackenzie; Uncle Ben, Bill Boyd; with John Honey, Elizabeth Long, Jesse Shore, Chris Wilson, Edda Massimi.

(Pro/Am)

Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning play is often characterised as the prototypical vision of the futility of the American dream. Yet Miller himself saw it in more universal terms: his aim, he said, was "to set forth what happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of life". Undoubtedly there is a sense in which Death of a Salesman is a social document. It is firmly embedded in American middle-class mores; its style and diction are determinedly American; and it is framed in a quintessentially American metaphor of substancelessness, that of "salesmanship".

But although social documentation is an important function of art, it is also contingent upon the timelessness of good art, and to see this play as primarily a comment on an historical phenomenon, no matter how significant in human terms, is to take a reductive approach to the work. Willy Loman is far more than a victim of transatlantic commercial morality. He is the common man; a man whose life might have derived meaning from working on the land or with his hands, but whom progress has forced to become the purveyor of the nameless fruits of others' labours. His failure to make his life work on the material level is both an image and an ironic reinforcement of his deeper failure to attach any ultimate significance to the pre-occupations that have used up most of his life.

All Willy's superficial values are progressively stripped away. Elusive success presents itself to him in many guises: in the ghost of his death brother Ben, who wrested the tangible wealth of diamonds from the African jungle; in the physical prowess of his son Biff, whom he mistakenly sees as a healthier, luckier projection of himself; in the figure of his friend Charley, upon whose charity he is forced to depend and whose son Bernard succeeds where his own son has failed.

Space and light and the possibility of spiritual expansion are gradually crowded out of a life dogged by mechanical objects which wear out as soon as they are paid for. Willy's inner life is defined by a tendency to see his life as a series of mechanical objects. His final indignity is his suicide, which will happen without distraction or distortion.

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Commercial theatre at its best

THE DRESSER
YOU NEVER CAN TELL
by Michael le Moignan


Director, Rodney Fisher; Designer, Laurie Dennett; Costumes, Melody Cooper; Lighting, Nigel Livings.

Cast: Norman, Warren Mitchell; Her Ladyship, Ruth Cracknell; Madge, Jennifer Hagan; Sir, Gordon Chater, Irene, Linda Cropper; Geoffrey, Ken Fraser; Mr Oxenby, Frank Garfield; with Ron Ratcliffe, David Goddard, Paul Russell, Robert Cooper, Paul Ferry.

(Professional)


Director, Terence Clarke; Designer, Jennie Tate; Lighting, Tony Youliden; Stage Manager, Frances Taylor.

Cast: Dentist, Patrick Dickson; Young Lady, Susan Leith; Parlormaid, Liz Thomas; Young Gentleman, Alan Wilson; Mother, Maggie Blince; Daughter, Katrina Foster; Landlord, Alan Tobin; Gentleman, Gordon McDougall; Waiter, Redmond Phillips; Young Waiter, Mark Ranson; Cook, Liz Thomas; Stranger, Peter Rowley.

(Professional)

Sydney is currently playing host to two excellent examples of commercial theatre at its very best. The Dresser, at the Theatre Royal prior to a national tour, and Evita, at Her Majesty’s, now with the original Broadway lead, Patti LuPone, should not on any account be missed.

The Dresser is a delight from start to finish. Ronald Harwood’s play is steeped in the lore of the theatre: it portrays vividly the long tradition of actor-managers, men of steely self-confidence who cast themselves in all the best parts, ran their companies with the iron fist in the iron glove, and paid most of the bills.

Their names live on — Sir Henry Irving, Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree, Sir Charles Wyndham, Sir Frank Benson, Sir Squire Bancroft, and in Australia, George Darrell, John Alden and others. Ronald Harwood’s play is drawn in part from his own experience as dresser to one of the most recent actor-managers, Sir Donald Wolfit.

It is an exquisite revenge. The dresser, Norman, played by Warren Mitchell, has all the best lines and Sir himself is something of a supporting player. There is splendid work from Gordon Chater, Ruth Cracknell and others, but it is, triumphantly, Warren Mitchell’s play. He shapes and moulds each minor climactic with the expertise and timing of a great actor.

As the play starts, the company is in a state of crisis: Sir appears to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, quoting the wrong plays, starting to make up for Othello and incapable of remembering even his first line. And the other members of the company are well aware that Lear without the King is liable to mean a theatre without an audience and weeks without wages.

Only Norman keeps his head. His loyalty to Sir is unwavering. Like Lear’s own Fool, he knows he serves a poor master, but he also knows the value of love and service.

In some ways, Norman represents the spirit of the theatre itself. The actors are by nature evanescent, “such stuff as dreams are made on”, but there is, there has to be, something which continues.

It may be something trivial, like the superstition that any mention of “the Scottish play” will bring bad luck: when Sir so forgets himself as to mention the dreaded name, Norman insists on him going outside, turning round three times and knocking before coming back. Or it may be something deeper, such as the need for an actor to play his part right through to the end, to die with his buskins on. There is an element of ritual to the play, and it is uncannily moving.

Rodney Fisher’s perceptive direction is always at one with Harwood’s text, enhancing it and bringing out above all the warmth behind the humour.

The recurring parallels with King Lear itself enriches the texture, emphasising just that sense of continuity that lies at the core of the drama. Sir’s three women, Her Ladyship (Ruth Cracknell), a devoted, spinsterish stage manager (Jennifer Hagan) and a younger admirer (Linda Cropper) who loves so much she cannot speak her love, echo Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, and the Blitz itself is a fair approximation to Lear’s “fire and hurricanoes”. But the point is never overstated.

Chater’s part is certainly the most difficult. Obliged as he is to be something of an old ham (Sir, that is) the problem is to maintain credibility. Sir, by virtue of his position, is a hard man, and a hard man to love; perhaps only Norman loves him truly, and even his love is most often masked.

This is a wonderful piece of theatre: it works on many levels of humour and emotion. It is witty but not particularly comical, nostalgic but not sentimental, strong but not overpowering. It will live long in the memory.

Patti LuPone’s arrival to take the title part in Evita for three months seems to have prompted a fresh burst of energy in a company that has, after all, been together for over a year.

Her opening night was a blessed contrast to the St Valentine’s Day disaster in Sydney, when Jennifer Murphy’s opening night was marred by a serious throat infection.

It seemed at the time to be a one-tune musical: the cadences of “Don’t Cry For
Me Argentina” resonate through almost every other melody. This is still the case, but with a star in full voice and in full dramatic command of the stage, the orchestrations and variations are more than sufficiently beguiling.

Peter Carroll’s Peron is a superbly conceived and executed characterisation, which mercilessly lays bare the man’s strengths and weaknesses. “Dice are rolling: the knives are out” he delivers with an unforgettable, chilling quaver to the voice. John O’May’s Che Guevara, the voice of dissent, is now more authoritative and Laura Mitchell, as Peron’s girl-friend, sings “Another Suitcase in Another Hall” with enchanting clarity and candour.

It is worth remembering that as spectacle the show works very much better seen from the Dress Circle than from the Stalls.

Evita is both heroic and tragic, an inspiring figure and yet a flawed, ignoble, grasping manipulator. We must love her and hate her. She is larger than life, a symbol of the unending flux between good and evil. For all its suspiciously well-packaged presentation, Evita is much more than a musical.

Far from the big city theatres in leafy Killara, Terence Clarke’s production at Marian Street of George Bernard Shaw’s You Never Can Tell is very clean and classical, true to the spirit of the original, but a little slow. Pauses are held, poses adopted and every word is given its full weight. The characterisations, particularly by Patrick Dickson, Katrina Foster and Maggie Blinco, are amusing enough but never fully convincing.

The main interest of the play lies in Shaw’s astonishingly perceptive view of what twentieth century woman would do about nineteenth century male dominance. The result is an entertaining evening that skims through some intriguing ideas. But it is to be hoped that the new management at our major subsidised theatre? For those of us lucky enough to have seen this smash hit, the answer is simple: entertaining audiences. People leave the theatre smiling at one another, striking up conversations with total strangers. Thoroughly humanised by the whole experience.

Musicals have grown beyond the I-feel-a-song-coming-on-days to a sophisticated genre better known as musical theatre. In the modern musical, music tells the story, it doesn’t just serve as decoration to the exposition. Moreover, plays like Chicago go even further than that. In rather the same way as the Beggar’s Opera satirised eighteenth century society, Chicago shows ours to be a self-seeking and corrupt century.

The setting is Chicago in the 1920s; in particular, COOK COUNTY JAIL, which is picked out in outsized dressing room lights as a permanent feature of Brian Thomson’s set. The orchestra is located on an upper level to the rear of the stage. Two semi-circular arms of bars can be swung into place when necessary. Otherwise the space is unlocalised; exciting, shining like black onyx. Against this background the costumes of Roger Kirk blend subtly in grey and silver, or contrast in the tawdry colours of the cabaret-courtroom scene. All this adds up to a most stylish production. Rod Dunbar’s MC sets the tone with his mischievously aloof introduction and periodic commentary.
takes the rap (almost) for his wife (in name only), Roxie. Mr Spartels masterfully
takes the stage, ironically singing "Mr Cellophane", about a man everybody just
looks through without noticing. We are all
like stage-awed children, however, when
George Spartels leans forward, at a
perilously actue angle, to shake the hand of
a front row patron.

It's not easy reviewing a complete
success like Chicago. This reviewer hasn't
wholly succeeded, but, believe him when he
tells you that the Sydney Theatre
Company has — most resoundingly so.

Pregnant with laughter

WE CAN'T PAY? WE WON'T PAY!
by Barry O'Connor

_We Can't Pay, We Won't Pay_ by Dario Fo, Q Theatre.
Pennib, NSW. Opened May 1981.

Director, Rick Billinghurst; Designer, Arthur Dicks;
Stage Manager, Ian Young Landel.

Cast: Antonio, Suzanne Roylance, Margaretta, Laura
Gabriel, Giovanni, Bevan Wilson, Luigi, Alan Brel, A
Police Sergeant etc. Kevin Jackson.

(Professional)

The trademark of Q Theatre productions
is their set designs which reach out,
embracing actors and audiences in a
cosy rapport. Arthur Dicks' setting for the Q's
latest play, Dario Fo's political farce _We
Can't Pay? We Won't Pay!,_ carries on this
tradition. As you enter the auditorium you
pass under lines of scrupulously clean
washing to find more of the same inside,
trailing from an Italian working-class
kitchen in turquoise and canary yellow.

We are in Milan, and the Fiat workers'
wives are refusing to pay for their groceries.

"We won't pay!" is their defiance of the
spiralling cost of living. But it's one thing
to defy the authorities and quite another
to face their husbands, who are peasant-proud
and pig-headed. So the girls band together
to disguise their contraband from their
husbands who are in turn trying to keep
their wives from discovering their own
guilty secret.

This is no docu-shocku-drama; no
agitprop here. Dario Fo's political satire,
while it may be seriously intended, is sugar-
coated and served up in a palatable farcical
style, which combines social truth
with theatrical artifice, dipinto four aspects
of middle class life. "Mother Figure" is a
piece of nursery madness, in which Faye
Montgomery's Lucy, whose whole world is
nappies, orange juice and tantrums, treats
her newly wed neighbours as a pair of
mischievous five year olds. "Between
Mouthfuls" is a clever but somewhat
obvious damage to the original. There are
no fake Italian accents — except inexplic-
ably for the Pope. The acting style is the
exaggeration of farce, not of national
stereotypes. Audiences will never forget
the women hiding their shopping pregnantly
under their tocoats; an Inspector of
Carabineri thinking he's pregnant by divine
miracle; the look on Bevan Wilson's face as
Alan Brel unknowingly eats an olive his
wife has given birth to. Pregnancy is
catching and the audience is left pregnant
with laughter.

All stops out

MIGHT AS WELL TALK TO YOURSELF
by Barry O'Connor

_Might As Well Talk To Yourself (or Confusions)_ by Alan Ayckbourn. Theatre South, Wollongong, NSW.
Opened May 1981.

Director, Des Davis; Designer, William Pritchard;
Lighting, Michael Morrell; Stage Manager, Judy
Armstrong.

Cast: Faye Montgomery, Katherine Thomson, Paul
Hunt, Geoff Morrell, Gordon Streek; Pianist, David
Vance.

(Professional)

_Might As Well Talk To Yourself_ is really
Alan Ayckbourn's Confusions, a quartet of
side-splitting comedies performed by Thea-
tre South with all stops out.

The plays, in that recognisably Ayck-
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tion. Vera's mind alternating between the brooding loneliness of the real present and the remembered emotions of the past. As the past becomes the present in the fantastic idealism of her sanity, Vera relives her courtship with Jack, her wedding day, her bush adventures “up the Hume” with her new husband, and her encounters with the “cops”, the “tarts” and the “pubs” of the post-war years.

Dickins can possibly be charged with too rigidly adhering to a set pattern of presenting Vera’s consciousness in which the present reality breaks down to reminiscence, which in turn collapses into a renewed awareness of the present, and so on. He does, however, attempt to vary Vera’s return to reality, sometimes letting her break down and weep herself back to the present, sometimes bringing her back through a fit of laughter.

Annie Byron takes us through a wide range of emotions — perhaps succeeding more brilliantly with the positive joyous feelings than the more desperate ones. Her tentative opening of the play — an apostrophe to death (an awkward abstract kind of opening in any case) soon gave way to a strong performance. Jenny Laing-peach’s nice sense of pace piloted the actress through some dangerously sentimental areas such as Vera’s twice-returning to the bridal veil and twice using it as the instigator of her reminiscences. 

Mag and Bag provides us with the rare experience of seeing women playing (and playing well) scenes of sheer physical comedy. Mag and Bag, however, do more than throw whipped cream and perform vigorous and deft acrobatic jokes. They skilfully work through the medium of a metaphor used throughout the play; in Dickins’ words, the play is one for “two budgerigars, being two women of one hundred years, lasting 30 arguments, two cupsa tea, and a lot of birdwhistlings”. The old sisters play about a swing built in their room to prevent boredom; they move in and out of their metaphorical characters (their bird qualities explaining their human idiosyncrasies) and in and out of comedy and tragedy.

Jenny Laing-Peach has sensed the right moment to introduce Bag’s use of the swing so that we easily accept the importance of this eccentricity in the lives of the sisters. She has also succeeded in presenting through the technical skills of Louise Le Nay and Robyn Gurney, the essence of what it is to be aged. Perhaps the century-old sisters’ mutually abusive sessions over-indulge in some anachronistic use of language — but then they also perform circus acrobatics (to the incidental squeak of the colour wheel) and revive an ailing heart with a sink pump!

Perhaps they do go to excess in their litanies of abuse and their indignant reactions to each other’s insults; but then they partly retrieve their situations, themselves admitting with wry humour that indeed “we went too far”.

Too slick, too didactic

CAIN’S HAND

by Tony Barclay


Director, Helmut Bakaitis; Musical Director, Geoffrey O’Connell; Choreographer, Robyn Sedgewick; Set Design, Michael Pearce; Lighting Design, David Murray; Stage Manager, John Woodland.

Cast: Matty, Dorian Lazar; Bob, Justin Napier; Sue, Jane Mendoza; Ro, Lucy Cowden; Burkey, Julien Lodge; Alex, Keir Saltmarsh; Kuths., Kaarin Fairfax; The Band, Geoffrey O’Connell; Peter Oliphant; Brian McManus.

(Professional)

When we turn to drama about youth — that most nebulous of growth periods — it seems increasingly difficult to find pieces that combine serious intelligence with warmth, humour and, above all, a liberating sense of fun. But then I suppose for many there’s nothing very funny about adolescence. Allan McKay’s Cain’s Hand more or less hinges on the pertinent, and obvious enough issues. Its broad thesis seems to be that young people are the victims of a social environment that inflicts the most grotesque of double-standards — especially through the all pervading influence of the media with its Brady Bunch slick wholesomeness and its cuddly, sensitivity trained cops, Starxky and Hutch style of violence.

But for all of its potential accuracies here as well as its very neatly captured idioms (which remarkably Nimrod saw fit to warn us about in its advertising!) the whole thing was too slick and too didactic. Granted adolescence can be black but it is also
enlivened by a sense of fun and sheer inventiveness and these qualities Cain’s Hand lacked in abundance. Above all it lacked a sense of dramatic structure that resulted in a tedious pace and rhythm, and in a monotonous monotone as the poet puts it. One thinks of equally dark pieces — Barrie Kefele’s Kid in the powerfully compassionate “Gotcha” scene from Gimme Shelter: or, more recently, of the immense power of Nigel Williams’s scathing yet humorously compassionate attack on education and class in Class Enemy. Closer to home: one still retains vivid memories of John Summons’s Lamb of God or of Terry O’Connell’s richly evocative treatment of this theme in the “circus” episode from Mad Scenes (Which all too many in Sydney missed last year).

The static nature of Cain’s Hand had much to do with the production and the directorial strategy. Not that the playing style was at fault. (Though what might have functioned well as TIE in some high school auditorium looked mightily out of place at Nimrod Upstairs — a matter I will return to later). Rather one had the impression that director Helmut Bakaitis was himself telling us what “it” was all about. Herein lies the rub: the whole cause-effect relationships of the play and production are just too simplistic. Parents at club, kids on the street; media images of violence become street realities. The danger of this kind of play is that it comes close to glorifying destructive behaviour precisely because it lacks liberating and reforming self-awareness. (The character of Bob could have been more prominent here). I might read like a moral prude but really I think I’d much more leave Don Walker and Cold Chisel to carve up Ita Buttrose than write a play about it.

The plot is simply love back to front and no sides. Teenage kids stranded in some coastal town on a bleak Sunday afternoon. The dream is escape to “sophistikated Synnie”; the reality an “org-gee” at Ro’s postponed by the arrival of the lisping, sexually persecuted Burkey with a revolver pinched from his father. Group rivalries and tensions lead inevitably to the shooting of one of the young males. Another brick in the wall. The production, though, was marred by overstated delivery and slow, ponderous movement that pretended to choreography. The best performance came from Jane Mendoza who seemed to be the only cast member with full vocal clarity and deft movement. She too seemed to be the only capable singer.

Finally, one applauds the idea behind Nimrod allowing its Upstairs Theatre for outside groups. But the precise reason for this season escapes me. Over the past couple of years there have been several productions around town that could very well have benefited from the use of this.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA JULY 1981

People enjoyed it

THE MAGIC PUDDING
by Emma McDonald*

The Magic Pudding by Norman Lindsay, adapted by
Eleanor Whitcombe. Marionette Theatre of Australia.
Drama Theatre Sydney NSW. Opened May 11, 1981.

The puppet play starts rather slowly off the mark, set in the bush where Bunyip
Bluegum decides he can’t stand living with his Uncle Wattleberry and he wants to get
out into the wide world.

When he meets Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawoff he finds they have a pudding which
is magic and can change into any sort of pudding Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawoff
wish it to be (it is mostly steak and kidney).

Sawoff get Albert back.

By this time Bunyip Bluegum has joined them. In the end the three of them decide to
move to a tree house which is somewhere the pudding stealers won’t get Albert, the
Magic Pudding. They still live there to this day.

I think the puppetry in this play was quite good, except for the occasional hand
popping up. I thought the music wasn’t very effective and the poems would have
been better read than sung.

This season should be put on in the August holidays as well, because I think
people enjoyed it.

*Emma McDonald is our junior correspon-
dent.

Played straight to the heart

HAY FEVER
by Lucy Wagner

Hay Fever by Noel Coward. Hunter Valley Theatre
Company, Playhouse, Newcastle NSW. Opened May 8
1981.

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company’s recent production of Noel Coward’s Hay
Fever struck a chord with Newcastle theatre goers scarcely matched since their
sell-out season of Cabaret two years ago.

Though lacking the musical element it had similar drawbacks of period set and
costumes, light banter, romantic intrigue and the addition, perhaps most important-
ly, of the starring presence of Carol Raye as Judith Bliss.

The eccentric and bohemian Bliss family with their respective “straight” weekend

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guests provide a range of characters not easily cast from the HVTC resident company. Carol Raye’s performance proved central, but only as the ideal piece of casting, but also in setting the style of era and locale, a lead which was followed with varying success by the other actors.

Her Judith had every ironic nuance of a well-loved actress playing a well-loved
actress and she caught perfectly the attractiveness and charm coupled with the
infuriating self-dramatisation and self-centredness of an archetypal Coward
heroine. Julie Kirby’s spiky and neurotic vamp, Myra, made a strong foil, but the
two younger girls never quite came to grips with an appropriate playing style.

The men had more problems to contend with, their ages and physical appearances
hardly approaching those of the character. Aarne Neeme rightly picked the
youngest, but most versatile, to play the older men: John Doyle in particular grew
in stature as David Bliss, at the final moment appropriately dominating Raye’s
Judith; and Jonathan Biggins’ comically uncomfortable diplomat stood up mainly
as character rather than caricature. It is much to the credit of both that the stage
relationships of husband and lover to Judith held no incongruity despite the real-
life age differences.

Bill Haycock’s melee of period-ish costumes were mainly delightful and
certainly a success; unfortunately the soft (not extended to the set looked
dismally washed out and did nothing to

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hide its extemporised appearance. However this couldn’t have mattered less to the
audience who, having got through Coward’s rather drawn-out first act, followed
the action with the most careful attention and responded to every comic and
dramatic moment with all the involvement that could be desired.

With the exception of Ms Raye’s performance if not by any means the
clearly, subtly vituperative comedy that Coward intended, but it played straight
into the hearts of a Newcastle public largely, I suspect, unused to live theatre.

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Theatre NT

Too good to miss

BUFFALOES CAN'T FLY
by Sue Williams


The reaction of the uranium miner in the outback town of Jabiru tells the success of Simon Hopkinson's new play, Buffaloes Can't Fly, performed by the Darwin Theatre Group. After the first act he went home for a beer but decided the play was too good to miss: he came running back.

The play's appeal is its simplicity. It is a clean, direct story told with compassion and humour and based in the Territory reality of mildew and failed vegetables. The dialogue is strong and appropriately sparse.

Set in Emungalen (Katherine) immediately after World War One, this is a play about outback, isolated Australia where dreams have no place. To open up the Territory with an airline is the vision of Reg Hargrave. His energy is contrasted by the outrage and despair of his wife, Laura, now far removed from the niceties of Melbourne society. Laura remains outside his fantasy, imposing order with serviettes. Marilynne Hanigan was properly prim. Peter McGlone as Reg finely expressed burning desire becoming burnt-out obsession.

It is the bushie, Jack “Damper” Glover, drawn within the traditions of Australian lore, who is reluctantly inspired by the dream. Colin Jacobus conveyed the open charm of practical mateship which is the warm balance to the chill of Laura.

A naked stage images the outback, lonely and boundless. The immensity of the land is itself a character, shaping and shattering those who try to press their will upon it. Pruned of set, the stage is ready for the dream to materialise. In a daring and clever design the aeroplane, Buffalo Flyer, is constructed. Indeed, it is so successful it narrowly escapes upstaging the actors. Moments of elation break the tension as the dream starts to emerge in wood and calico. But as the venture becomes impossible the bubble of harmony evaporates.

The stage is left, cluttered with spent dreams.

To the three actors go the kudos for performances that belie their amateur status. And Hopkinson has succeeded in writing and directing a play that has wider appeal than the Territory, although it was commissioned for outback touring. At the Australian Drama Festival in Adelaide in April the production won The Critics Award for Innovation. Simon Hopkinson was awarded Best Script and Marilynne Hanigan received Best Performance. It was the company's first venture inter-state, and the play's Australian premiere.

But the actors and the director knew the litmus test would be reception on the home run. From Alice Springs to Katherine the audiences loved it. And in Darwin, the group's home town, people flocked and demanded an extended season.

Marilynne Hanigan (Laura) and Colin Jacobus (Jack) in DTG's Buffaloes Can't Fly.
Mixed style and characterisation

THE CIRCLE
THE GIN GAME

Director, Alan Edwards; Designer, Graham Maclean; Lighting, James Henson; Stage Manager, Ellen Kennedy.
Cast: Arnold, Duncan Wass; Footman, Stephen Haddan; Anna, Lyn Treadgold; Elizabeth, Christine O'Connor; Edward, Noel Hodda; Clive, David Clendinning; Butler, Reginald Cameron; Lady Catherine, Hazel Phillips; Lord Porteous, Barry Lovett.

Director, Jon Ewing; Designer, Larry Eastwood; Lighting, Walter van Nieuwuyk; Stage Manager, Brian Melood.
Cast: Fonsia, Elaine Cusick; Weller, Leonard Teale.

The Circle is this year's excursion by the QTC into English "high" comedy. It is a dig at the pretensions of the upper middle class and the gentry in love, strangely alien in 1981, depending as it does upon the new daring of the '20s and the consciousness of a previous generation in touch with the strictures of the Victorian era. Moreover Maugham's now dated social comedies serve mainly to epitomise the nadir of English playwriting that followed in the wake of Pinero, Wilde and the early Shaw.

Lady Kitty returns to her son's house thirty years after running away with a lover, Lord Porteous. Living on the estate is her husband, Clive, and the three older protagonists discover that history is repeating itself in the form of an affair between the son's wife and a dashing business-man on leave from the colonies. Kitty has turned to skittish self-mockery, her lover to boorish vindictiveness, but despite these warnings and the threat of social ostracism, the impulsiveness of youth wins the day; the young lovers disappear into the night, with the blessing of Kitty and Porteous who can but recognise the same unquenchable idealism that had motivated them in their salad days.

The QTC's production is lively; perhaps too much so in the case of the younger actors who lapse all too frequently into frenetic posturing in an attempt to capture what is presumably intended to be the "style" intrinsic to English comedy of manners. Luton, the younger lover,

Christine O'Connor and Hazel Phillips in the QTC's The Circle.
bounds in through the French windows and bounds out again in a manner obviously calculated to demonstrate that this is the original "Anyone for tennis?" routine. The result is an inappropriately farcical tone which belies the intended moral complexity later displayed in Luton's declarations to his would-be mistress. "I don't offer you happiness...I offer you love." Only Barry Lovett really forges a link between style and characterisation; his misanthropic, florid Porteous wins sympathy and understanding as well as raising more than a few laughs. The Gin Game has been much feted (a Pulitzer prize for writer D. L. Coburn and a premier directed by Mike Nichols with two greats of the American stage, Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn) but turns out to be a rather thin piece of writing. It commands attention over its brief two acts by dint of the marvellous opportunities it offers the two players for developing the minuets of character observation and Leonard Teale and Elaine Cusick, in a production due to tour the state, rise to meet the challenge in fine style.

The premise is simple, two residents in an old people's home meet on the back porch to play gin rummy, a game in which he professes to be an expert but in which she can do nothing but win. In these increasingly predictable confrontations their pasts are revealed and with them a picture of failure and self-deception. Mercifully, the play eschews sentimentality; to the last moment, mutual sympathy vies with impatient antagonism. If the play's climax, in which Weller stagers off with stroke, is its weakness it is because the convention of the two-hander does not allow such an event to be played with convincing realism.

One's only criticism of the performance is that Elaine Cusick, lacking the head-start, as it were, of Leonard Teale's grizzled beard, fails at times to convince one of Fonsia's age. The actors balance perfectly, Teale's crotchety imperturbability and his childish rituals providing a sustained obligato for Cusick's nervy refuge in gentility.

**Strengths and weakness of collaboration**

**SKITZ 'N' FRENZY**

**by Veronica Kelly**


(Professional)

The TN Company's third production for the year is a genial, corporately-devised caper loosely based on The Comedy of Errors and utilising the diverse talents and skills of the Company members. Music, acrobatics and multiple costume and accent changes punctuate the unfolding of the familiar plot; witty transvestite vignette characters chat to the audience, a madrigal is sung, a huge motor bike is ridden inside the theatre, the cast juggle and lead choruses of "Beautiful Queensland" with lagerphone and bellringing accompaniment.

Amidst these divertissements the Errol and Cyril complications proceed along lines which suggest sometimes a localisation of Shakespeare, sometimes a version, and at times a simple reproduction of the original text which leaves elements like ducats, gold chains and abbey jars jarringly intact in the new ambiance.

Errol and Cyril, country and western artists hailing from Augathella, arrive at Injune harbour to look around. Of course Injune possesses not only a strict C and W ban but its own Errol and Cyril, and before long the wallops are being exchanged and pratfalls taken. The basic idea of localisation is very promising. Where it is consistently observed and zestfully interpreted it is not only extremely funny but witty as well.

Sean Mee and Geoff Cartwright, playing the visiting pair, create confident, sharp-edged characters which are believable as Australian comic types and by no means patronised. The nuances of their relationship suggest fruitful improvisation, and their acrobatic and inventive fights are the high points of a show where physical virtuosity is flamboyantly displayed by all the cast.

However, something appears to go awry with the idea of localisation. The Duke of Injune turns out to be bursting with colourful characters assembled from every theatrical age and clime. Beryl the anxious spouse is from Old Vienna, Injune Errol-and-Cyril are Mexicanos; a Deep South floozie, Cockney sparrow, Wizard of Id executioner and Counties squire rub accents with a bereted Frog and scarlet-robed nun.

These characters aren't conceived of as credible local equivalents of the Ephesian originals. They don't integrate to form a unified comic environment but dilute the joke through nonce effects which disperse rather than concentrate the show's strongest premise. My mind turned back nostalgically as it frequently does — to the superlative Clowneroonies, also a corporately-devised show based around physical skills. There however the characters, situations and routines were minutely and consistently observed from the local scene to produce a comic world which was creatively indigenous. Skitz 'n' Frenzy could benefit by a clear and disciplined appraisal of its aims and material in order to rid itself of those self-indulgent brainstormss which derive from theatre at a remove or two, rather than from a social reality which can provide Errols, Cylirs and their associates with solid ground from which their colourful exuberance can bounce and dance skywards.

Both the strengths and weaknesses of the show spring possibly from its collaborative method of creation. The actors have full measure of disciplined physicality, plus the generous ensemble cohesiveness which is the hallmark of the new TN style, but maybe, after all, shows do need writers. Skitz lags in its scripting, which relies obsessively on groaney puns and Knock-Knock jokes. Hence the show undersells itself.

However no doubt the show will be long and deservedly remembered for some of the best musical and clowning energy seen for a long time in professional theatre here. For my part I'm anticipating TN's next production, Starstrud, a rock musical with a promising new element provided from within the company itself — writers.
Great expectations

LULU
by Michael Morley


Director, Jim Sharman; Sets, Brian Thomson; Costumes, Luciana Arrighi; Lighting, Nigel Leving; Stage Manager, Coralie Ashton.

Casts: Schon, Malcolm Robertson; Schwarz, Geoffrey Clendon; Goll, John Frawley; Lulu, Judy Davis; Aiwa, Brandon Burke; Rodrigo, John Wood; Schigolch, Ralph Cotterill; Geschwitz, Kerry Walker; Escerny, Robert Grubb; Magelone, Margaret Davis; Hugenberg, Juliet Taylor; August, Russell Kiefel; Bianetta, Sharon Calcraft.

(Prefessional)

During his lifetime, Frank Wedekind suffered severely at the hands of contemporary performers: his views on directors were rather more complimentary — but then he was lucky enough to have had Karl Kraus and Max Reinhardt taking him seriously. Much of the same sort of comment could be made about Jim Sharman's production of Lulu: it is a brave choice, with many good directorial touches and some fine performances. But overall, it misses out on doing full justice to Wedekind's text.

Some of the weaknesses and uneven features can be attributed to Louis Nowra's adaptation, which reduces Wedekind's two plays to two and a half hour's playing time. Of course there is ample justification for condensing Earthspirit and Pandora's Box into one play: Wedekind himself did so in the last decade of his life, Pabst followed suit in his film version and Berg's libretto is a wonderful example of an opera composer's sense of dramaturgical aptness. But Nowra seems not so much to have "disembowelled" (as Shaw put it, speaking of Irving's cuts to Shakespeare) Wedekind, as filleted him and thrown away the bones of the dramatic structure.

His insertions — mostly cabaret songs — are well-chosen and effective (though the added prison scene is surely a miscalculation). But because so much of Wedekind's dialogue has been pared away, the audience is left somewhat bemused by the development of the plot-line, which becomes even more episodic and disjointed than in the original. To take but one example: it is difficult in Nowra's version to follow the logic of Lulu's rise (in Act 1) and fall (in Act 2). But this sequence depends on her relationship with Dr Schon. Schon acts as her protector and entree to society in Act 1: with his death, Lulu is easier prey for the men in Act 2. This is not the same as saying that Schon controls her: but just as it is inevitable that he will destroy himself through her, it is clear that without Schon, Lulu will be exploited by those around her. Once she kills the men she fought to possess, she deprives herself of the good that sustained her and gave her such vitality in Act 1.

The sense of aimlessness is well caught by Judy Davis in Act 2, as are the exuberance and vitality which characterise the Lulu of the first half. In fact all the "girlish" qualities in Lulu's makeup are conveyed without exaggeration — her pertness, her coquettishness, her teasing of Schwarz and Hugenberg. But Lulu is something more (and less) than a teenage vamp; she is a canvas on which each of the men sketches his own idealised figure. And it is this impassivity, verging on the anonymous and the enigmatic which is lacking in Ms Davis' reading of the part. Lulu is beyond good and evil, and the almost mythical and quasi-metaphysical aspect of the character receives little attention. Of course, this side of Lulu is difficult to catch in performance; but Nowra's adaptation could have made things easier for the performer by retaining more of Wedekind's dialogue in which this aspect was referred to.

The positive qualities of Judy Davis' Lulu are her energy, her sense of presence, her readiness to throw herself into scenes...
Too few of the actors in this production (especially good as Dr Goll), Ralph do with unfocussed physical behaviour or the tackling of difficulties, and little to actor throw himself into the part and blaze and bluster away in all directions. It has came close to this (somewhat exaggerated) caricatured traits, but a bizarre, farcical actor's gallery of unforgettable cameos. If the audience seemed miscalculated. And there are other actors of his age in Australia with his range, precision, vocal and physical skills, I have yet to see them. His Escerny was no mere collection of caricatured traits, but a bizarre, farcical and quite uncanny characterisation: in a sense, he came closest to that juxtaposition of the comical and the unsettling which lies at the heart of Wedekind's dramas. If his Casti-Piani seemed less clearly characterised, at least part of this is attributable to Wedekind himself.

With the exception of John Frawley (especially good as Dr Goll), Ralph Cotterill (who had his moments as Schigolch), John Wood and Margaret Davis, the other performances were uneven. Malcolm Robertson's Schon was disappointing: in place of animal fascination and the "brutal intelligence of a beast of prey" (Wedekind), we had stock club-room bluster and the behaviour of a domesticated stockbroker. And Geoffrey Clendon's Schwarz and Brandon Burke's Alwa are best forgotten: the latter, in particular, was hardly recognizable as the character Wedekind (or Nowra) created — fey, unconvincing and totally unworthy of an antagonist either for his father or for Lulu.

Brian Thomson's design — a set of seven towering, red-marbled arches, two on each side and three in the middle — was effective, though ultimately a little undifferentiated. It served well for the casino scenes and the underneath-the-arches death of Lulu at the end, but it fitted less well into the smaller, more intimate scenes, tending rather to dwarf the performers. And Luciana Arrighi's costumes were a mixture of the effective (Lulu's mini-Pierrot costume) and the inapropriate (her kimono): sometimes there was a decided smell of the film wardrobe as characters swept on and off.

Jim Sharman's undoubted strength as a director in his visual sense and flair; and he certainly found a series of image-correlatives for Wedekind's world of exploiters and exploited. But one is left with a feeling of dissatisfaction and a wish that both director and adaptor could have placed more trust in Wedekind's theatrical sense. This does not mean a slavish adherence to the original, simply a readiness to look for the problems and not iron them out. Nowhere it seems to me, is this better exemplified than in the death of Schon. In Wedekind, Lulu delivers the line — "the only man I ever loved" — a precise objectification of feeling — and offers the dying Schon champagne when he calls for water (of Christ on the cross). In Sharman: Nowra the expression of feeling is personalised — "You are the only man I ever loved" — and all the bizarre and disturbing comic business is gone. Wedekind, I would venture to suggest, knew better — at least in this case.

Worthy of children

GOLDEN VALLEY

by Chris Westwood


What a break for kids that they should have a play written for them by Dorothy Hewett! More power to Maggie for commissioning this writer, who says no one ever asked her to write for kids before. The play is marvellous, picking up on a theme which Nick Enright tried last festival with King Stag: mutability.

In the hands of a writer who does not take children seriously, this story could seem empty, but in Golden Valley, Dorothy Hewett has captured a rich Australian idiom, developed rounded and complex characters, added every magic trick in theatre and mixed it all up into a convoluted dense piece. The play, and production, demands children's thoughtful attention and excited delight.

It opens one evening, in the outback, eerie and phantasmagorical. At night, the four oldies transmute into bush animals: Aunt Jane becomes the Crane, Aunt Em the Wombat, Uncle Nee the Possum, Uncle Di the Mopoke. As they float from their beds, huge shadows of their alter egos rise behind an eggshell screen. As dawn breaks, they recede back into their usual rather eccentric human forms, and decide they want a child. Aunt Jane is delegated to visit an orphanage to find one. A witty and wicked scene with the Mother Superior follows, and Aunt Jane ends up with a stroppy little Marigold — the red headed child no-one else ever wanted.

To try to explain the plot further or the amazing convolutions would be to weaken the subtle and powerful theatricality of the play and ruin many surprises. It is, like other COME OUT productions, full of song and dance as well, with an excellent sound score from the man who brought you the music of Mukuwinj: Jim Cotter.

The cramming of images and shifting of focus underlines the theme throughout: anything is possible, as the audience is taken in and out of myriads of fantasy and reality. A cat changes into a witch who flies off on broomstick, an old gold-digger fades in from the past, a Marlboro Man screams in from above, a rock singer appears in Marigold's bedroom, the villain falls down a well to emerge clinging to the skeleton of a long lost sister of the family. Weird stuff, but evocative and dramatic, poetic and challenging for kids.

Three actors deserve to be singled out: Marilyn Allen, who plays Aunt Jane, combines a grey haughty severity with a warm, down-to-earth frankness. Her performance is disciplined, intelligent and powerful. Jack Swannell, the angular and greedy villain, is played very well by Maggie newcomer Geoff Revell. Igor Sas, the magic boy, has a presence and power in his very demanding role, requiring gymnastics, singing and constant character changes. Maggie is an extraordinary ensemble — such a good feeling of commitment and professionalism prevails.

It is, however, hard to transfer from the intimacy and realism of their theatre-in-education style to the sprawling stage of The Playhouse, and some actors seemed inclined to blow up their characters into almost caricature to cope with it. Helene Burdon's Marigold, for example, is played in a rather silly "Little Orphan Annie" manner. Perhaps the too literal nature of Malcolm Moore's direction aggravated my sense that the play needs fluid easy poetic direction to bring the characters to life in a way which makes a virtue, not a vice, of eccentric humanity. Similarly, the constant shifting of focus in the first half of the play should be made integral to the production, rather than seeming awkward. Dorothy Hewett's gentle satire, outright irony and love of what is quintessentially Australian has to be reflected in a directorial mode which gives kids room to move.

For all these criticisms, though, it is a real pleasure to go to a children's play and see the same level of craft, commitment and joy in theatre that one might see in the
world's best theatres for adults. *Golden Valley* has good writing, alert and responsive to the culture it comes from; careful attention to performance; and excellent design (so often theatres appear to think that children only want "a bit of colour and movement" but Sue Russell and Nigel Levings present here a set — which despite having to double with *Pygmalion* — is inspired, subtle and wedded to the writing).

Magpie has commissioned a major Australian work, worthy of children. I hope they do it again next time!
With this production of Strindberg's *Dance of Death*, director Roger Pulvers has returned to that dark territory he first charted for Melbourne audiences two years ago with his production of *Miss Julie*. In each case he made a fresh translation of the plays, a preparation which must be of considerable benefit to him as director. Given that Pulvers' own writing and his interest in the Polish and Japanese theatre are predicated on a passion for a theatrical form that is the antithesis of naturalism, his interest in Strindberg must seem surprising, if not perverse. However the evidence of these productions suggests that it is the very transparency of these texts that attracts him; he apprehends Strindberg in a way that doesn't simply flout naturalism but rather makes us question what we thought we were seeing before.

Pulvers' intellectual realisation of *Dance of Death* is inseparable from its visual plastic execution by designer Peter Corrigan. Pulvers and Corrigan worked together last year on *Buried Child* and in both cases the union has produced unique and exciting results. The natural ambiance of the Upstairs Theatre at The Playbox is reminiscent of a darkened lift well, however with *Dance of Death* an acute sense of claustrophobia is mandatory and Corrigan uses its bunker-like atmosphere to advantage.

The action is ranged across along two walls in an L shape and the walls are rendered in hessian and paint to suggest damp and supurating plaster. The few pieces of quasi-period furniture are painted in ugly colours and pinned against the walls and held there by a web of string to create a Christo "wrapped interior". It feels as if both the actors and the furniture have been flung against the walls of this cell by a psychological centrifugal force. As Strindberg says, the walls seep poison, and for Alice the walls and her face have the same colour. The room increasingly resembles the prison that it once was, the characters are no more able to leave it than they are able to break the tortuous bonds of their marriage, and no breath of fresh air can enter to relieve the staleness of habitual hatred.

Kurt's arrival at first promises some release but ultimately he too succumbs to the polluted air. The mechanical tapping of the telegraph is the only link that Alice and Edgar have with their children and the world and, like a metronome, it seems to measure the distance between them and human contact rather than link the island to the mainland.

The sense of enclosed terror and mutual torture — of animals caged together and tearing at one another — is accentuated by the harsh Expressionist lighting. Footlighting illuminates the figures from below and produces the deeply etched shadows and haloes of a Munch etching or Nolde woodcut.

The direction and acting is similarly intense and mannered and many of the strongest images suggest the animal in the human; as when Edgar (Gary Files) yawns like a parody of the MGM lion or Alice (Maggie Millar) stalks the room waiting to pounce on her prey, or the seduction scene between Kurt (David Kendall) and Alice which is all grunts and bites. Maggie Millar and Gary Files, as the ill-matched couple indissolubly linked by the pain they have inflicted on each other during twenty-five years of marriage, gave superbly controlled performances that move between moments of lucid madness and poignant tragedy.

Whereas I found David Kendall's performance diffuse and out of step with the regulating rhythm of the play. The play's dynamic enacts a long night of the soul and as the morning fitfully breaks and the worst has been revealed, it seems as if reconciliation is possible and that Alice and Edgar will make peace in the knowledge that Edgar's death is imminent and thus their release ensured.

However it would be a denial of the play's complexity to accept this without qualification and with his final image Pulvers ensures that we don't — Alice and Edgar dance a slow waltz locked in each other's arms like dolls on the lid of a music box destined to repeat their twirls until the mechanism runs down.
Rather superficial

**BEECHAM**

by Colin Duckworth


Director, Ron Rodger; Designer, Christopher Smith; Lighting designer, Murray Taylor.

Cast: Beecham, David Ravenswood; Narrator and other parts, Michael Edgar.

Outrageous, irascible, effervescent, blunt, brilliant, uncompromising, indefatigable Sir Thomas Beecham could put you down with one well-chosen word or raise you to greater heights of performance than ever before. For this he was feared, hated, loved and admired. One of that blessed band of self-starting, self-driven, self-governed, self-contained energy sources (Balzac, Churchill...) for whom the word ‘dynamic’ was coined. When these chosen few put their resoluteness at the service of the talent with which they have been gifted, the result is always sublime and upsetting to us lesser mortals.

To impersonate Sir Thomas is at once an impertinence and an impossibility. To have to do so in the form chosen by Caryl Brahms and Ned Sherrin is even more so: small fragments of scenes, one-liners, a string of anecdotes already known to all those with even a passing interest in music; no extended dialogue which would allow the impersonator to develop character.

The authors’ approach to this immensely complex man is rather superficial. He deserved the kind of profound explanation that Ron Elisha gives in the concurrently playing _Einstein_, but instead he is subjected to a largely for-laughs treatment. Fair enough, so long as the laughs are forthcoming. The first night was nowhere near as funny for me as Timothy West’s premiere in London, and for this the director was largely to blame: from the back of the gallery the action kept disappearing from view, and it was clear he had taken no account of the sight-lines. Ron Rodger should become aware that this tends to make badly-seated spectators feel unwanted and uncooperative. There was simply no reason why the downstage area should have been used so much.

Again, this performance was marred by David Ravenswood’s uneasy tension, leading to a few muffed lines — surprising after several previews. However, he has got over that now, and, presumably, his baton is less tentative. One can sit back and wallow in the sallies and the repartee, from the singular Mr Ball, poor chap, to the harpsichords copulating like skeletons on a tin roof. Mr Ravenswood puts over Beecham’s state of constant anger with just the right precise, incisive dry tones, sustaining the character well through the bittiness of the script.

The simplicity of Brahms’ and Sherrin’s structure — the main character plus one narrator-cum-straight man, excellently played by Michael Edgar with versatility and tact — enables all the light to be thrown on Beecham, but leaves many facets of his troubled life in the dark, particularly his complicated love affairs and marriages. One would have welcomed some female presence, and any portrayal of Beecham must remain vastly incomplete without it.

There are two sagging moments that require attention: at the end of Act I we have the strange and anti-climactic view of Mr Ravenswood wafting his baton at a disembodied solo ‘cello. If, indeed, no recording of the required Delius Cello Concerto could be found, some other rather more rousing orchestral piece should be substituted. And then, the lecture on Mozart seemed over-long and self-indulgent, failing to infect us with Beecham’s delight in the composer he loved above all others.

_Beecham_ needs to be seen by all those who sometimes feel like giving up the struggle for what they believe in; it revives one’s faith in the ultimate effectiveness of an individual’s lone battle in defence of beauty and excellence, in the face of ignorance and apathy. To think that but for Beecham, Delius could be as little known as Allan Pettersson.

David Ravenswood (Beecham) and Michael Edgar (Narrator) in the MTC’s _Beecham_. Photo: David Parker.
Subtle and moving performance

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by Colin Duckworth


He was, said Samuel Johnson of Thomas More, the person of the greatest virtue these islands ever produced. Inevitably, human nature and society being what they are, virtue is sacrificed and martyred by the professional administrators, time-servers, and turncoats: from the Common Man — who is many things to many men, including manservant to More and finally his executioner, an adroit survivor in the murky sea of practical living, and played with deft, apologetic but hard-headed gusto by Douglas Hodge — to the arch-intriguer Thomas Cromwell, who becomes in Chris Hallam's interpretation the epitome of smooth and utterly ruthless ambition, the prototype of the high-ranking Gestapo officer who apologises in impeccable English whilst politely requesting that the thumb-screws be tightened up just a little bit more, perhaps.

The clash of personalities and of ideals provides the climax of many a historical play (Thomas a Becket and Henry II, Joan of Arc and Cauchon, Creon and Antigone, if that is history, Charles I and Cromwell . . .). In each case the dramatic power depends on the apparent evenness of the opposing strengths, both in argument and in character. In Robert Bolt's play the absolute ruthlessness of Cromwell is more than adequately balanced by the logical and legal powers of reasoning of More, and yet the stronger case goes under because it cannot withstand the onslaught of the System. Inexorably, we see the net closing round the innocent believer in abstract Justice, gathering up in its entangling knots and threads the waverers — the Common Man, and weak, young Richard Rich (Tim Hughes' high unresonant voice was, no doubt deliberately, irritating).

The women do not get very strong parts in this play, Beverley Dunn could not do much with Thomas' wife, Alice, except make her a down-to-earth and not very intelligent housewife, and Sally Cahill's Margaret, the bluestocking daughter, was lively but unremarkable. Of the other middling parts, Anthony Hawkins' Duke of Norfolk was comfortably rounded and persuasive, as was Sydney's Conabere's Wolsey. But Chris Orchard did not get beyond hands on hips and bluster as Henry. We had a very credibly earnest, if pedestrian Roper in Andrew Martin, and a too deliberately comic puppet of a Spanish Ambassador from Robert Essex. Which leaves us with the Saint himself: an outstandingly subtle and moving performance by Edwin Hodgeman. Despite occasionally looking and sounding like an offshoot from Roy Dotrice's rendering of Aubrey's Brief Lives, he attained and maintained a quiet, firm, severe dignity. Infinitely gentle but absolutely uncompromising, and welded these conflicting qualities into a thoroughly satisfying and convincing character of great authority and authenticity (in the existentialist sense).

This play is presumably on the HSC syllabus, to judge by the number of semi-sheepered young people at the first night. Even those among them who apparently thought they were at a football match to start with were tamed fairly quickly — all honour to the director and to Paul Kathner's ingenious set, which was flexible, atmospheric and blessedly real without fussiness. Small wonder there was barely-smothered laughter when More kept encouraging Rich to "become a teacher for the quiet life": a few care-worn victims of the State system (and I mean the teachers, not the kids!) clearly found this highly amusing, as it was intended to be.

The female condition

DOODY

FROM HERE TO MATTERNITY

by Suzanne Spunner

MTC's A Man For All Seasons. Photo: David Parker


FROM HERE TO MATERNITY

by Suzanne Spunner

While Melbourne can no longer boast a Women's Theatre Group, these three one-woman shows attest to the legacy of the original WTG in the style of performance, content and method of originating; in fact Sue Ingleton and Evelyn Krape worked with the WTG during the early seventies. The Stripper's Progress and From Here to Maternity were devised by the performers and could be described as autobiographical theatre. However each performer had created a theatrical objective correlatives which detached and commented upon their acutely vulnerable sexual states. In their own way both performances were courageous statements which transgressed theatrical conventions and social taboos.

In The Stripper's Progress, Doody used classic Brechtian alienation devices combined with elements of contemporary performance art to create a gutsy and challenging piece that was funny and deeply moving. The Stripper's Progress pivoted on the dislocation of context and expectation, the first shift meant that a mixed audience was watching a striptease artist in a theatre.

Each of the four dance sequences in the show culminated in a full strip and was punctuated by slides and a voice-over commentary by Doody describing and analysing the events, attitudes and intentions of the dances. The four dances she performed constituted a dialectical critique of her work over ten years beginning with the Space Odyssey 2001/Zarathustra inspired "The Cape 1970", subtitled "The Strippease"; it was followed by "The Mask 1977", "The Escape" which parodied conventional stripping. Her face and hair were masked and she dressed from head to foot in an elaborate costume with exposed her breasts, buttocks and vagina, thus the strip consisted in revealing the "unimportant parts" — the arms, legs and face.

The third piece, "The Scarf 1978" represented an escape into express movement and was inspired by her
admiration for the life and art of Isadora Duncan; subtitled "The Dance" it was pre-eminently her plea to be taken to seriously as a dancer. The show ended with "The Fan 1979" expressing the frustration and anger of being without a form and a space in which to do her work and be herself. The statement of the final piece articulated the double edge of the show's subtitle, "A Parade to No Man's Land".

Sue Ingleton's From Here To Maternity used the comic device of role reversal to distance the visceral reality of her pregnancy and in so doing that supremely individual experience was universalised and made accessible to an audience. Like The Stripper's Progress, From Here to Maternity, also relied on dislocation — the shock of seeing a pregnant woman performing in a theatre would have been enough, let alone performing before a late night boozed cabaret audience. Ingleton's alter-ego Bill Rawlings, was an average to sexist, working class bloke who finds himself pregnant. He then took us through a series of funny things that happened to him on the way to his first internal examination by a female gynecologist and his encounters with that unflappable organisation, The Nursing Mother's Association.

Indeed the redoubtable Bill, looking like a benevolent Oliver Hardy, conducts a Cook's tour of the rite de passage of maternity and even enlists an audience member to assist at a simulated Le Boyer birth (his brother was that French movie actor with the soothing voice!). Ingleton's performance was a superb, comic, Chaplinesque tour de force and reached its apogee in the consumption of an apparently inedible concoction of Sara Lee raspberry shortcake topped with cream and green gherkins.

From Here To Maternity was a brilliantly executed piece that delivered its feminist salvos as carefully aimed custard pies.

At first Jack Hibberd's Mothballs seems to create a similar dislocation in the figure of Jocasta Vaudeville Smith, a woman who descures both the coffin and the memory of her dead husband, Ashley, through her spirited refusal to behave in the manner fitting.

Mothballs is described as a comic panegyric and the woman's name is intended to connote three types of women and three corresponding theatrical styles of mourning — Greek tragic, vaudevillean and Austral ordinary. Certainly we receive a liberal dose of the latter two, but ultimately those forms overwhelm the play in a welter of vulgar and increasingly obvious jokes so that the possibility of Jocasta expressing any real grief or pain let alone of Grecian dimensions is cancelled.

For the first fifteen minutes her furious patter of associative, alliterative jokes on jokes was quite funny and Evelyn Krape's performance under Ros Horin's direction was subtle and suggested that deeper and perhaps more desperate things were being held at bay the comedy.

However from the moment she opened the coffin and leapt in for a final necrophiliac consummation any potential for the glimpse of a tragic underside was gone, the monologue lost impetus and direction and became wordly and predictable. Obviously it could still have been an excursion into pure absurdism but unfortunately it simply did not have enough ideas underpinning it. We were left with a sense of verbal french polishing and no furniture beneath.

Krape's performance similarly deteriorated into the gestures and mannerisms she has used in other plays — particularly her memorable portrayal of Hibberd's Melba. It felt as if both the writer and the performer were not stretching themselves, nor venturing into new areas but relying on the successful formulae of their past.

Intense and engaging theatre

I AM WHO YOU INFER

by Cathy Peake


Very little is known about Emily Dickinson's life. Yet so much speculation about her relationships, her poetry and her social circumstances has been published, it is something of a relief to discover a dramatic portrait of the famous writer which refuses to find simple and or traumatic explanations for her genius.

Indeed I Am Who You Infer as its title suggests, doesn't really look for explanations at all. Devised and designed by Meredith Rogers and Barbara Ciszewska, it uses letters, poems and the occasional narrative aside to reconstruct the parameters of the poet's physical and mental worlds.

It is a daunting and perhaps impossible task, but the great strength of this production lies with its ability to present the poet in a manner that is both poignant, economical and moving, without ever sinking into the melodrama of distress and isolation which so many of Dickinson's biographers and commentators seem to have created for her.

Whether the Rogers/Ciszewska interpretation of her life with its carefully balanced passages of wit, passion, restlessness and pain is the right one, is difficult to determine, and, in the final analysis, probably not very important. What is important is the way in which they have conserved the rich variety of Dickinson's imagination, and, in the space of what seems a very short hour, have directed the audience's attention to the vitality, compression and sheer emotional power of her poetic language.

Skillfully performed by Meredith Rogers, who both maintains a lucid distance from her subject and insists upon us engaging with the more chaotic of her emotions — especially through the poems, the whole is developed into a dense, dramatic model for the intriguing and self-contained world of Dickinson's consciousness.

In these hands, Emily Dickinson emerges as willful, restless, and impulsive rather than insane, the wide-ranging, colourful reference of the script being intelligently complemented by a design which effectively closes off the ordinary world, reinforcing the moral and "religious" restraints of the poet's life.

Rogers structures her performance with "business" which she uses to lighten and vary what might otherwise have been a dense and indigestible lump of nineteenth century language. She collects poems from shelves and crevices around the room, she arranges flowers — which are actually small branches of lemon and cumquat trees, but most of all she arranges and re-arranges chairs as if to invoke an imaginary social world or to give shape to the passionate dialogues Dickinson habitually conducted with her self.

The result of all this is intense and engaging theatre, slightly flawed, perhaps, by one or two awkward transitions from poem to letter within the script, but certainly one that sent this reviewer back to the bookshelves and the poet with renewed interest.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA JULY 1981
Questions of attitudes

BODIES THE ELEPHANT MAN
by Collin O'Brien

Director, Stephen Barry. Designer, Gene Banducci. Stage Director, Helen Godecke.
Cast: Anne, Gillian Lomberg; Helen, Jenny Davis; David, Bernie Davis. Mervyn, Alan Cassell.

Let me begin by declaring an interest: in the mid-sixties I directed the first Australian productions of James Saunders' early plays Next Time I'll Sing To You and A Scent Of Flowers. I therefore feel I am more familiar than most with his view of life.

His latest play Bodies carries his early preoccupations into middle age. He sees life as precious in spite of the pain, and absurd because ultimately meaningless. Any attempt to find and state what life is about is doomed to failure, because all explanations prove facile and smugly truistic, leaving us where we began.

Saunders brings together two married couples who ten years previously had a disastrous brace of double-adultery affairs with one another. Schoolmaster Mervyn (Alan Cassell) and his wife Anne (Gillian Lomberg, an increasingly impressive actress) can still draw blood and seek solace in booze. The other couple David and Helen (Bernie and Jenny Davis) have found the answer in the Therapy: live for the Now, step back from hassles and obsessions, including drink. Serenity, but at the price of constraint and personal interaction, whether love or hate.

Mervyn is waiting to hear from the hospital that the life support system has been turned off for a student of his who deliberately rode his motorbike into a brick wall and turned himself into a vegetable. The boy was an insufferable nuisance who argued about poetry and so on, but who finally could not bear to live. Mervyn argues that the pain and the poetry go together, he feels that bland serenity is too high a price for foregoing the work of a tortured Michelangelo.

The play is quite frankly a debate, about ninety percent purely verbal. Many people found it too much to keep up with, in spite of good acting all round and tight direction by Stephen Barry. I liked it, although I would advise not going after a large meal or half-boozed or both. I have no objection to theatre which makes demands of concentration and cerebration rather than overt conflict and predigested message. And if the answer to questions about the meaning of life is that there are no answers, perhaps, as Saunders suggests, it is still a can that is worth some kicking around.

Not a great deal needs to be said at this stage to Theatre Australia readers about The Elephant Man, especially a production which boasts the fine central performance of Robert van Mackelenberg. But one or two comments about the play in its Playhouse manifestation might be in order.

The playwright's decision to have the actor mime John Merrick's gross deformities was good artistic judgement. An attempt at make-up and padding would only draw attention to itself as sham, or ironically feed the very voyeurism the play exposes.

Playwright Bernard Pomerance is clearly influenced by Bertolt Brecht, and it is not surprising to learn he has adapted A Man's A Man. He has effectively followed his master in the use of alienation effects, especially through the device of many short episodes to restrain too much build-up of emotion. While we admire Merrick's courage, sensitive intelligence and wry humour, we are kept effectively at a remove. But I am sure Pomerance intended that his Goyaesque scene "headings"—very Brechtian in flavour too—should be projected on a screen with the appropriate scene to point and comment on the action, ironically and otherwise. As it was, they were only printed on the programme, so that one had either to struggle to read them in the dark or forgo their effect. This did make the play at times bitty rather than properly episodic.

Van Mackelenberg's performance was counterpointed by Vic Hawkins as the humane but paternalistic Victorian doctor who befriends Merrick. Sir Frederick Treves. Rosemary Barr effectively handled the part of Mrs (Madge) Kendal, the popular actress who introduced Merrick into the highest social circles in London.

The play is a subtle work which goes far beyond mere compassion and admiration for a deformed man's heroism. It questions not only Victorian attitudes but ours, suggesting that we sometimes see in deformity the spiritual "heavy bear" we all carry with us. It is a specifically theatrical experience, the sort of work which depends on the particular rapport between live actors and live audience: it is ironic that such theatre should have been rediscovered by playwrights such as Brecht, Beckett and Pinter in this age of superb technological reproduction of images.
Commitment to style

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST
RING AROUND THE MOON
by Cliff Gillam

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde. Presented by Mason Miller, Octagon Theatre, Perth WA. Opened April 28, 1981.

Director, designer, Raymond Omodei; Lighting, Jake Newby; Wardrobe, Jane Simms, Sue Rigg; Stage Managers, Lloyd Grosvenor, Glenn Swift. Cast: Worthing, Gerald Hitchcock; Algernon, James Bean; Chasuble, Neville Teede; Merriman, Lloyd Grosvenor; Lane, Glenn Swift; Lady Bracknell, Joan Sydney; Gwendolen, Leith Taylor; Cecily, Julie Moody; Miss Prism, Faith Clayton. (Professional)

Ring Around the Moon by Jean Anouilh. Perth Actors Company, St George's Theatre, Perth WA. Opened April 24, 1981.

Director, designer, Ken Campbell-Dobbie; Choreography, Barry Scrath; Lighting, Henry Baileman; Stage Manager, Christina Pack. Cast: Hugo, Paul English; Mme Desmermotes, Barbara Blackburn; Isabelle, Sarah Cullity; Mother, Molly Warnup; Diana, Francesca Mehlen-Raser; Lady Indu, Michelle Marzo; Capulet, Robin Millhouse; Joshua, Derek Crowther; Messerschmann, Ray Richardson; Patrice, Michael Chapman; Romawinville, Robert Parry. (Co-operative)

In a week of production openings quite remarkable for Perth (no less than four productions within two or three days) two stood out particularly by reason of the commitment of the companies concerned to the idea of style. The plays concerned, Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest and Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon (in the Christopher Fry translation) are both pieces which, though based in the genre of romantic comedy are essentially concerned to transcend the limitations of the genre by shifting the focus from content to style.

Raymond Omodei's second venture for Mason-Miller is as distinguished as the first in terms of clarity of directorial vision and efficacy of design. The limitation of the acting area to the front of the Octagon's thrust stage, with a succession of elegant screens and minimal changes of furniture to suggest the different locales of the action, emphasised the audience's sense of intimate contact with the verbal wit of Wilde's creatures. A strong sense of Edwardian opulence was suggested by the octagonal floor pattern and the tastefully chosen furniture and artefacts, but this remained suggestion and did not (as I've seen occur in other productions) distract attention from the play itself by overfussiness. Omodei's trademark touched (where comedy is concerned) of finely orchestrated and quite subtle gestural counterpoint were all over this production, but at no point did they cause any imbalance through disruption of the timing and pace of the performances.

Among a group of performances distinguished by intelligence and a real sense of relish for Wilde's wit, those by Jim Bean as Algernon and Joan Sydney as Lady Bracknell were particularly notable. Bean, as Jack Chesney in Charley's Aunt and now as Algernon, has shown himself possessed of a real gift for stylish comic acting, a gift which belies his relative inexperience. Joan Sydney turned her contrastingy great experience to good account in delivering a Lady Bracknell as acerbically ridiculous as anyone could desire that dowager-by-default.

Leith Taylor's Gwendolen was a well executed and well rounded exercise in tartness and precision of line placement, while Julia Moody enhanced her growing reputation as one of Perth's finest young actresses with a vivacious yet tough Cecily. The famous tea party dialogue between these two was one of the highlights of the production. As Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble, Faith Clayton and Neville Teede lent even more of the strength of experience to the high-gloss finish of the production. The one minor flaw in the production was I thought the intelligence and skill with which it is directed and performed. For those, like myself, for whom the play has become something of an old familiar, there is the pleasure of hearing some of the funniest lines in English comedy delivered with the panache, elegance and sheer style they deserve.

Far less safe, in every way, was the Perth Actor's Company's production of Ring Around The Moon. Anouilh has less of the built-in box office bankability of Wilde (he's not on high school English syllabi for one thing) and the Actor's Company is manifestly not possessed of the resources to compete with Mason Miller in such matters as promotion, publicity and lavishness of design. For all that, their Ring Around The Moon is very fine indeed.

Director Ken Campbell-Dobbie was also responsible for the design, which made a virtue of necessity, and offered a spare, elegant mirror-lined winter garden as the basic locale for the intrigues of the play's Parisian high-society characters. Campbell-Dobbie found, and walked with grace and finesse, a thin line between extravagant commedia-style caricature and an impossible (given the implausibilities of the plot and Anouilh's carelessness about characterization) naturalistic style of playing.

Working with a largely inexperienced cast of amateurs and semi-professionals Campbell-Dobbie managed to elicit a remarkably good and even standard of performance. One of the stated aims of the Actor's Company "to provide a platform for young actors and actresses to develop by experiencing a variety of roles and production styles" is fully vindicated in the superb performance of Paul English. In the demanding dual role of Hugo Frederic, English is at the very centre of the production, and he brings qualities of intelligence, sensitivity and brilliant timing to the task that prove him to be one of the most exciting new talents to emerge in quite a long while in Perth Theatre. Balancing this fine piece of work was Barbara Blackburn's beautifully controlled Madame Desmermotes, a performance graced by a marvellous speaking voice. The absence of some of the other performers showed most I think in the area of voice projection.

It seems that the Perth Actors Company has as yet only a tenuous hold on the possibility of becoming a permanent part of Perth Theatre life, due to hard financial facts. Perth theatregoers should do all in their power to ensure that the group stays with us; it is a matter of enlightened self-interest, this support of a company which on the evidence of their two major productions so far is eminently worthy of support.
George Darrell, 19th century actor-manager and author, once said “There are only two plays so-called nowadays — Hamlet and The Sunny South.” He ought to know — he wrote one of them. And 20th century taste, although perhaps not going quite so far, seems partly to agree with him. The Sunny South is the best known 19th century Australian play: and, in spite of the fact that 19th century critics thought that melodrama was not “legitimate”, the form that Darrell based his entire career is the one that attracts the most attention now. All those writers of 19th century “legitimate” plays (their names for the moment escape me) must look down now in horror as Australia’s National Theatre Magazine turns to review a whole book on the vulgar and superficial work of “Gentleman George”.

Darrell was colourful, energetic, popular, ambitious and hard-working. In 10 years he rose from being an obscure young bohemian interested in amateur theatricals to become a leading actor, playwright, manager, producer and entrepreneur. He hitched his wagon to the star of melodrama and his career rose and, when melodrama went out of fashion, fell with it. He had the misfortune to devote a lifetime to developing and improving a form (melodrama) and a theatrical system (based on the central actor-producer) which time, changing economics and technological developments were to prove, for the theatre at least, a dead end. With the rise of film and of the big monolithic firm of JCWs, Darrell’s sort of theatre declined. Darrell himself lived in obscurity for the latter part of his life, and eventually ended it by going on what he called in a note left for a friend “a long voyage” — out into the sea.

The Sunny South is the only one of Darrell’s 53 (yes 53) plays which survives, and unlike many other 19th century theatre people he left behind no papers, diaries or manuscripts for study. Eric Irvin has managed to piece together (mainly from newspaper accounts) a fascinating account of his career. The publishers claim that this is a fresh critical assessment of Darrell’s work, but the book is really a pleasantly journalistic reconstruction of the life, and of the exciting theatre world, only just being rediscovered, in which it was lived.

Also this month there are four new plays from the Canadian publisher Talonbooks, distributed here by Currency Press. After Abraham, by Ron Chudley, is an historical drama in the old school, boosted for modern taste by the inclusion of two ghosts who argue humorously about where they are and what it’s like being dead. Their attempt to analyze the historical meaning of the Battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 (which was decisive in winning Canada for Britain) is unsuccessful. The main action narrates the events leading up to the battle, using familiar types of characters the noble but flawed commanders (Wolfe and Montcalm also the ghosts), the indolent cynical aristocrats, devoted aides-de-camp, trustworthy common soldiers, bluff Scotsmen and courtiers and courtisans. Perhaps all the great historical battles really were fought by people like that. There are plenty of cannon shots and shoutinu soldiers off.

Aleola, by Gaetan Charlebois, is an extraordinary lyrical dialogue for an old Quebeccois couple, celebrating their 53rd anniversary in a tiny decrepit apartment in Montreal where they have retreated to end their days, casting off their country and their language. They dance, giggle, remember their past, and prepare (significantly for supper, as they wait anxiously for their faithless children to phone. Their almost metaphysical passion for each other makes Frank and Frances in Travelling North look very cold fish indeed. The play sets up the joyful passion of their first love, 53 years previously at their wedding, and then manages to convince us that this has grown steadily ever since, so that by the time we see them their love is cosmic. Now they prepare for another rite of passage — the last.

Israel Horovitz’s The Primary English Class is not the sort of play that could have been written by just anyone. The central comic device is a “total immersion” English class for migrants with seven characters (speaking, respectively, Polish, Italian, French, German, Chinese, Japanese and English) not one of whom can understand anything any of the others are saying. It is a brilliant conceit, very cleverly worked out. The audience is helped along occasionally by the voices of godlike Translators, but even the Translators have troubles. The class, naturally enough, degenerates rapidly — not helped much by the paranoid American teacher who refuses to let her terrified and bewildered students leave the room for fear of a rapist in the corridor. It is one of the funniest plays I have read for a long time. It must be rather difficult to cast.

Jitters, by David French, is a play about the theatre, with a play-within-a-play and a cast of actors who are jittery about it (the play-within-the-play, that is, although who knows…?) One of its themes is that critics have very little that is useful or interesting to contribute, so there doesn’t seem much else I can say.
ACT
THEATRE

CANBERRA THEATRE (497 600)
PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
Canberra Philharmonic Society: Finian’s Rainbow. July 15-25. REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (470781) Jigsaw Tie presents: For Some Fun (pre-schoolers) and The Zoo Show (upper primary). Two group-devised shows to be presented at various locations throughout July. Producer, Graeme Brisnan.
THEATRE THREE (47 4222)

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
ERINDALE CENTRE

OPERA

CANBERRA OPERA
For entries contact Janet Healey on 49 3669 (w) or 48 4807 (h).

NSW
THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
School Tours: Jim Stopford reptiles of Australia, for infants and primary; South Coast and metropolitan areas until July 24.
Sidetrack Theatre Company: drama for infants and primary; North Coast and Hunter areas until July 17.
ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877) I Ought To Be In Pictures by Neil Simon; directed by Hayes Gordon with Julie Baileu, Sharon Flanagan and Brian Young. Throughout July.
FRANK STRAIN’S BULL ’N’ BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 4627) The Good Old, Bad Old Days, a musical review from the turn of the century to today; with Gordon Poole, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil O’Meara and Helen Lorain; directed by George Carden. Throughout July.
GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY (33 3817) Stables Theatre New production, directed by Peter Kingston.
HER MAJESTY’S THEATRE (212 3411) Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice; directed by Harold Prince; with Patti LuPone, Peter Carroll, John O’Meara and Tony Alvarez. Throughout July.
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526) Habebas Corpus by Alan Bennett; director Aarne Neeme; with Jonathan Biggins, John Doyle, Julie Kirby, Julie Hudsplch, Lorrie Cruickshank, Allan McFadden, David Wood. To July 25.
KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415) The Private Eye Show by Perry Quinton and Paul Chubb; music by Adrian Morgan, lyrics by P P Cranney; directed by Perry Quinton; with Zoe Bertram, Margie McCrae, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson. Throughout July.
The Matchgirls by Bill Owen; with music by Tony Russell, directed by Peter Cowan.
NIMROD THEATRE (699 5003) Upstairs: Teeth ’n’ smiles by David Hare; directed by Neil Armitage; with Michele Fawdon. Until July 19.
Late Night Show: A Couple of Strangers with John O’Meara, Deidre Rubenstein and Max Lambert. Into July.
NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200) Theodore, for primary schools and The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson for secondary schools; both directed by Ian Watson; with Nola Colefax, David Longdon, Colin Allen, Bill Eggerking and Margi Brown. Throughout July.
PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211) Bondi Pavilion Theatre Trap for a Lonely Man a psychological drama directed by Peter Whiflard. Throughout July.
Q THEATRE (047 21 5735) No Names, No Pack Drill by Bob Herbert; directed by Doreen Warburton. Penrith: commences July 3.
REGENT THEATRE (264 7988) Marcel Marceau commences July 20.
SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948) Free drama workshops on weekends; includes playbuilding, mime, dance, puppetry, design, radio and video. Shopfront Theatre Touring Company touring metropolitan and country areas with The Tale Play directed by Don Munro. The Third World Horror Show directed by Michael Webb and Whom by Errol Bray. Youth Theatre Showcase: The Third World Horror Show and Dumper Room an adventure play created by young people and directed by Don Munro. July 3 and 4.
SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (20588) Drama Theatre, SOH Chicago by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse; directed by Richard Wherrett, with musical direction by Peter Casey; and Nancyle Hayes, Geraldine Turner, Terry Donovan, Judi Connelli, George Spartels and J P Webster. Until July 11. Lulu adapted by Louis Nowra from Wedekind’s Earth Spirit and Pandora’s Box; directed by Jim Sharman; with Judy Davis, Kerry Walker, Brandon Burke, Ivar Kants, Malcolm Robertson and Ralph Cotterill. Commences July 21.
Chicago presented by Sydney Theatre Company commences July 17.

NEW ENGLAND THEATRE COMPANY (067 72911)

School tours and DCAP project: Count Ten (infants); Mr Punch and his Baby (primary); An Evening for Merlin Finch by Charles Dinnzeno; The Happy Journey by Thornton Wilder, (junior high school); Macbeth by William Shakespeare (senior high) Until August 2.

DANCE

HER MAJESTY'S (221 2777)

QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY (229 3355)
Carmen choreographed by Harold Collins; music, Ron Hamner; designer, Mike Bridges and Jennifer Carseldine. On tour at Broken Hill July 23, 24 and Adelaide Festival Centre July 28-30.

OPERA

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (20588)
Opera Theatre, SOH
Tosca by Puccini, conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario with production by John Copley; La Traviata by Verdi; conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by John Copley; Alcina by Handel, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by Sir Robert Helpmann; Les Hugenots by Meyerbeer, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by Lotfi Mansauri and design by John Stoddart and Michael Stennett; and Rigoletto conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by John Copley and designs by Alan Lees and Michael Stennett. In repertory throughout July.

For entries contact Carole Long on 3571200/9093010

TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON (34 8018)


SALAMANCA (23 5259)
In rehearsal until July 12. Annie's Coming Out written and directed by Richard Meredith (secondary). Company devised play, Trees (primary); director, Les Winspear. Both in performance at schools around the state from July 12.

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
Theatre Royal Opera Company: Irene; director, Alan Harvey; with Jane Davies. To July 11.

For entries contact Elly Kamal on (02) 29 1818.

VIC

THEATRE

AUSTRALIAN NOUVEAU THEATRE (699 3252)


AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Front Theatre: Artaud at Rodez by Charles Marowitz; director, Paul Fried

rich. To July 9.


ARENATHEATRE (240 1937)


For entries contact Connie Kramer on 881 9448.

THEATRE

DAZEN

WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE (052) 222 318 "Mill Nights" every Thursday evening. The Mill is open for community workshops. Folk dancing with Faye Hodgeman. To July 4.

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (052) 222 318 "Mill Nights" every Thursday evening. The Mill is open for community workshops. Folk dancing with Faye Hodgeman. To July 4.

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WINTER THEATRE
Princess May Theatre, Fremantle: The Choir by Errol Bray; director, Ross Coli; with Denise Kirby, Christina Parry, Marcelle Schmitz and Jenny Vuletic. July 3-25.
Theatre Song with Dennis Follington and Jenny Vuletic. Songs by Jerome Kern and Cole Porter with original songs from new music. Late night show Fri, Sat, Sun, July 3-25.

DANCE


OPERA

WA OPERA COMPANY
His Majesty's (3216288): La Bohème by Puccini. Musical Director, Gerald Krug; with Christina Leahmann and John Main; with sets from the Australian Opera. July 18-Aug 8.

For entries contact Margaret Schwan on 341 1178.

(from page 3)

with the director, and I heard the interviews from the adjoining office, reputations and careers and work-experiences were constantly under-valued, confessed to, dismissed, thrown away, laughed off. One actor, after (a) three years, (b) playing increasingly leading roles, for (c) Adelaide's State Theatre Company reported it as "a while, doing a few bits with a company interstate"!! It astounds me.

So what are we left with? A strange kind of no-man's land whereby, on the one hand, we arrogantly defy the visitor to show us why they're better than we are, and on the other, when confronted by them, behave in such a way as to confirm that they are! Neither party can win. And both ways the result is self-defeating, negative and wasteful. The "new nationalism" resulting in a diminishing of the cultural cringe mentality is to be passionately welcomed, but not when it's replaced by a reverse attitude of "we don't need them". Either way it's immature. And we should be growing up.

THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD
No. 33.

Across:
1. Liberty of form round Dee (7)
5. Name, note, suitable to 'is point (7)
9. How we were in our salad days? (5)
10. Listen to the scoundrels — they're like small boys (9)
11. Vegetable Sara, Gus and Pa prepare (9)
12. Car for the doctor by the mount (5)
13. A hard god? (7)
15. Dressed for a race with one colour (7)
17. A coin coloured in the middle (7)
19. Presses and surrounds with tissue, we hear (7)
21. Many coy in the tree (5)
23. A playwright to plunder the monarch (3,6)
25. Woolly water? (6,3)
26. "Where every ......thought shall be my grave" (The Tempest) (5)
27. Aim to mix drinks for the finales (7)
28. Sway old actor about note (7)

Down:
1. Light the obscure golf map (3,4)
2. Concession for former oriental member not back around one (9)
3. Scholar or giver (5)
4. Speaks ill of many to arrange the point (7)
5. In SA, prohibition on the outsize going to South Africa (7)
6. Brilliant Laetitia has an affliction (9)
7. Amin to back a fool (5)
8. Followed around right and guaranteed (7)
14. Ruin level with the negative (9)
16. Taking refuge in Surfers, Fiji, Noumea... (9)
17. Quality account reverted to the Free French (7)
18. Strips off the German honours (7)
19. Strangely sober, my germs (7)
20. Proligate poet? (7)
22. Somehow assessed trade (5)
24. Superfluous crowd member? (5)

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The first correct entry drawn on July 25 will receive one year's free subscription to T.A.
The winner of last month's crossword was T Jones of Berwick, Victoria.