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Graeme Blundell’s ‘Suicide’ in Melbourne
Alternatives in Joh’s State
Opera: More Feathers Than Las Vegas!
Dance: Is There a National Style?

Venetian Twins
And Nimrod’s New Look
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 Basia Bonkowski,
Brandon Burke, Sharon Calcraft,
Geoffrey Clendon, Ralph Cotterill,
Margaret Davis, John Frawley,
Russell Kiefel, Robert Grubb,
Malcolm Roberston, Juliet Taylor,
Kerry Walker and John Wood
SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE Drama Theatre
July 21 to August 29
PHONE BOOKINGS 20588 ext. 381
COUNTER BOOKINGS at Opera
House or Mitchells Bass
Sir Robert Menzies had his squirts. Mrs. Thatcher has her wets. Mr. Fraser is dry.

What is a squirt? Is it a dash of soda? Is it an act of relief? Does it relate to disease, glandular or intestinal? Is it a dollop of tomato sauce ejected onto a pie in the outer at Unley Oval? Does it relate to loathsome little boys and water pistols? Water pressure during a drought?

No. A squirt is a colourless and diminutive politician. Menzies coined the word to describe some of his colleagues, men relatively unblessed with the gifts of nature.

In an important sense, many of Pig Iron Bob’s political descendants lack both stature and personality. Menzies thrived in an insipid, paranoid political milieu. His pomposity and servile Anglophilia make him a delicious target for satire.

The contemporary political scene cries out for parody and comic analysis. It is dominated by an insidious arrogance redolent of Menzies. It is populated by squirts.

SQUIRTS then is a lampoon on little minds and big power. It takes pot-shots at the pint-sized victuallers of power in Australia. SQUIRTS comically blots the escutcheons of those who believe they are born to rule.

Political and cultural life in Australia is currently stifled by greed and a callous conservatism. Canberra’s feather bed is occupied by Small Government. Big Business and the Media, warped offspring of the myopic Milton Friedman.

The constitutional assassination of November 1975, as executed by our representative of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, has successfully depoliticised Australia. There is little debate. Fraser is dry.

Instead we are awash with propaganda from essentially illiberal and authoritarian media. While the evangelists of reaction, Murdoch, Packer, Singleton and Laws, spread the primitive gospel of nationalism, the Government is busily selling off the nation.

Australia has never possessed a strong political theatre. Apart from the New Theatre of Sydney and Melbourne, there has only been the Australian Performing Group and more recently the Popular Theatre Troupe of Queensland and Adelaide’s Troupe.

Politics is a dirty word in the theatre, despite the dirtiness of much political activity. Theatre is Art and dress-ups, the last especially apparent in the foyers. As Brecht put it, patrons tend to hang up their brains with their coats in the cloak-room.

Critics, frequently mere mouthpieces for the media monopolies, can become quite vile and unhinged in the face of left-wing theatre. SQUIRTS, while offering a good night’s entertainment, is guaranteed to send some of them right off the planet.

Roughly 50% of the voters in Australia lean to the Left. Roughly 80% of Australian theatre-goers lean to the Right. Roughly 70% of plays presented in Australia are non-Australian.

SQUIRTS is all-Australian. Yet it is full of Art and dress-ups. The set, the costumes, the make-up, will delight theatre-goers. Patrons of the State Theatre Company will be made to feel at home, experts will be reminded of the Old Tote Theatre at its best and tours by the Old Vic or Chichester Company.

SQUIRTS boasts two of Australia’s finest comic performers, Max Gilles and Evelyn Krape, as well as the highly gifted actor-musician, Alan John.

Gilles and Krape flowered as actors at the APG. They were leading figures in the upsurge of Australian theatre that commenced over a decade ago. Both physically exuberant stylists, they have always aimed at a theatre that is rich, relevant and ribald, since cutting their teeth on Shakespeare and Chekhov.

The mimetic powers of Gilles have captured personalities as diverse as Sir Robert Menzies, B.A. Santamaria and Oscar Wilde. Dramatically he is well known for his performances in DIMBOOLA, THE HILLS FAMILY SHOW, BEDFELLOWS and A STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION. He was introduced to State Theatre audiences last year in SCANLAN and SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU.

Evelyn Krape, an actress-singer, has worked in theatre, music theatre and opera. She is best known and highly regarded for her performances in DIMBOOLA, THE HILLS FAMILY SHOW, BACK TO BOURKE STREET, A TOAST TO MELBA, ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD and GENTLEMEN ONLY.

SQUIRTS draws upon the talents of a wide range of Australian writers. David Allen, John Clark (Fred Dagg), Patrick Cook, Jack Hibberd, Louis Nowra, Barry Oakley, Tim Robertson, John Romeril, Phil Scott, Steve Vizard, Don Watson and David Williamson.

Concessions will be available for old Wobblies, Anarchists, Veterans of the International Brigade and pioneering feminists.

A surcharge will be applied to Groupers, Gropers and Gropiers. Special seats will be laid aside for members of the Lunatic Right, the ANA, the RSL, ASIO, the NFC, the NCG, Masons, members of Rotary, Banana-benders, the League of Rights, the Festival of Light, WASPS, HAWKS and veterans of the Australian First Movement.

Playhouse
Adelaide Festival Centre
Friday 7 August — Saturday 29 August
and on tour at the
Universal Theatre, Melbourne
from Wednesday 9 September

This STC production is presented in Melbourne by The Almost Managing Company Pty Limited.
**Secundus Rex**

For some time the Playbox has been in trouble.

In fact since its conception. The original idea was to occupy a supposed middle ground between the MTC and the Pram Factory but it turned out there was none, or that their programming was awry.

It seemed that either they played popular appeal shows, which the MTC did — and often, let's face it, better — or other material that was too odd, tangential and intermittent to find a following. Even then, there is Athenaum 2 for Melbourne audiences with a taste for that kind of thing. John Sumner's theatrical crown remained secure.

On the other side there was the Pram, though it often had more in the Collective than in the audience — and statistics show that its historical importance, influence and reputation have been far in excess of Box office. As has its funding, but then alternatives in Melbourne have been much indulged; arts agencies seem desperate to find a Melbourne Nimrod.

Hence a theatre being virtually given to the then Hopola company and hence the massive salvage operation last year to extricate it from what would have been a six figure loss. It was not without strings, however, and the condition was that a resident director be appointed. The powers of the only remaining member of the original triumvarate, Carrillo Gantner, were to be curtailed.

In the meantime all manner of cloak and dagger stuff has been going on — including a proposition to axe both Playbox and the Pram and create a new half million dollar second company (which even reached the stage of attempts to lure Paul Iles and Neil Armfield as GM and Director, respectively). But Melbourne would not be Melbourne without such intrigues.

Now matters have been resolved, at least for a year or two, with the appointment of Rex Cramphorn, a director of esoteric brilliance, an actors' guru who has never had the common touch, an aesthetic far removed from the politics of a working company.

Cramphorn is the archetypal director who needs the right to fail. Which is not to suggest that his work artistically fails, but bankability is not a term often used of him. Perhaps he needs a company again like his legendary Performance Syndicate — but almost 10 years on are such ensembles possible? His actors then accepted a pittance and there was little pressure for product. It takes a Ford Foundation to fund Peter Brook's group explorations.

And the Playbox palpably needs results. Its 30% audience figures are the crux of the problem. But Cramphorn remains serene above "market pressures", openly declaring that he's "the last person they should get if they want better audiences." With equal candour he speaks of something that seems a revival of Performance Syndicate — "eight or ten actors working outside the mainstream." He seems enthusiastic about the move to the Victorian capital, though, perhaps because it remains the last bastion of '60s style ferment.

For the future of Australian theatre a good case could be made for funding a Cramphorn company; such an idea was to be withdrawn from some companies rather than undermine all.

Given such statements, this is probably Playbox's last chance. In Perth the Hole in the Wall, though reprieved from notice of complete withdrawal of subsidy, looks set to amalgamate with the state company.

Perhaps the sincerity of Cramphorn's work, the depths of his perceptions and the intensity of his approach will win him a following in our cultural intellectual capital. His is a precious talent; it should be nurtured. Melbourne could be immensely richer for having him in its midst. Vivat Rex.
TOGETHER AFTER ALL
Robyn Nevin and John Bell were slated to appear together this year in a Nimrod production of Coriolanus, but due to scheduling and casting problems the production has been postponed until 1982. The two of them will be seen together in Sydney this year, though, in the Sydney Theatre Company's revival of their immensely popular Cyrano de Bergerac.

In the original production, John Bell in the title role, played opposite Helen Morse as Roxanne, but Ms Morse is unavailable this year. So Robyn Nevin is stepping into the part, following work on the film Goodbye Paradise and one of the ABC drama series Spring and Fall.

NEW FACE FOR PLAYBOX
Rex Cramphorn has been appointed as the New Artistic Director to Melbourne's Playbox Theatre. Although he's directing Shepard's True West for them at the moment, and is involved in planning next year's season, he sees the next few months as transitional and won't settle into Melbourne fully until 1982.

He's looking forward to "having a home for a while, to having a commitment to a company and being able to do developmental work with actors", though whether he will be able to keep actors permanently on salary and so work outside programmed seasons, depends on finances. Cramphorn says he's eager to be going to Melbourne and is excited by the touring and work outside the theatre he sees Playbox moving into next year. His 1982 season is not yet decided, but at this stage it looks as though it will be "more structured, with groups of plays rather than simple alternation", and a trilogy of Sam Shepard's and another of Louis Nowra's look like being something Melbourne can look forward to next year.

STC'S CAT
It will be an all star cast at the Drama Theatre for the Sydney Theatre Company's production of Cat On A Hot Tin Roof in September. Richard Wherrett will be directing Wendy Hughes and John Hargreaves in the lead roles, and rehearsals get underway on August 17.

SWEENEY DEPARTS
The Theatre Board of the Australia Council is temporarily without a Chairman, following the departure of Brian Sweeney. Sweeney's term with the Board ended on June 30 and a replacement has not yet been appointed. He was an active and vocal leader of the Theatre Board; his parting comment was simply "There's a divinity that shapes our end, rough hew them as we may." No doubt he will continue to exert his influence in the arts world from his Brisbane home.

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE MASK
A group exhibition with the title "The Mystique of the Mask" opens at the Gallery Distelink in Hawthorn, Melbourne, at the start of the month. Portraits of some of the cast of The Dresser will be on view, as well as those of other theatrical personalities, including that of John Gaden, shown in the photo. The artist is Susan Rogers and for her the designs are essentially the perception of the inner person of the subject, in terms of colour, and an expression of the person's attitudes in terms of likes and dislikes.
ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN TOOWOOMBA

If you wondered what had happened to director, Mick Rodger, after his production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Sydney Theatre Company last year, and numerous other productions all over the country, he is alive and well and training actors at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba Qld.

DDIAE houses the Performance Centre and the Arts Theatre and offers a three year diploma in the performing arts which Rodger believes can develop the prestige required to put it alongside NIDA and the University, and a group of Sydney actors working with Tim Fitzpatrick, of Sydney University, and a group of Sydney actors on a translation of *The Venetian* — an early Italian play — and a piece by Dario Fo. He does of course direct his students in productions, and plans to take the 15 or so final year students down to Sydney at the end of the year and erect a showcase in a hired venue.

THEATRE BOARD CONCERN

I am writing with some concern regarding the article "The Lone Anzac and No One", page 6, *Theatre Australia*, June 1981.

The Theatre Board of the Australia Council consists of Brian Sweeney (Chairman — until 30 June 1981), Alan Edwards, Malcolm Moore, Tom Lingwood, Graeme Murphy, Carol Raye, Joy Snedden and David Williamson. In making a decision to fund Mike Mullins, this Board (composed mainly of theatre professionals) did so in acknowledgement of the fact that they consider Mike Mullins' work important to the overall development of theatre in Australia, as is its support of the mainstream theatre through general grant companies, specialised programs (including special projects) and the other areas of concern to the Board. These are clearly set out in the Board's policy booklet and specifically stated in each of the Australia Council's Annual Reports — copies of both freely available from the Australia Council.

In funding Mike Mullins (and similar projects) the Board is expressing its concern, not only with the support and maintenance of the present and past of the theatre performing arts, but also with the future. The current grant to Mike Mullins is not only to present the Lone Anzac but to develop other projects. It is also one of a number of grants awarded to Mr Mullins since 1979, and covering such projects as *Shadowline II*, *Exhibition No 2* and *New Blood: a fable for tomorrow*, (co-funded with the Music Board), most of which have been critically acclaimed and well received by those interested in such work.

At no time did your correspondent approach me or other staff to get a Theatre Board view. Surely such an approach is basic to ensure balanced and responsible journalism. Your correspondent hopes "that the Australia Council will at some stage give an indication of what the public have to gain from what could be seen as simply a series of outdated 'happenings'". I do not think that either Mr Mullins or the Board would view his work as "outdated happenings". As to what the public will gain remains to be seen and judgement will be best left until after Mr Mullins' work has been seen for the remainder of this year, next year and beyond. What the Board is concerned about is that audiences should develop in new areas and for new art forms. Such gains are not easily won, the "results" may not be seen for a long time, but nevertheless the Board sees the support of this development as a critical part of its brief, especially if it be in experimental/innovative theatre, modern dance, young people's theatre, community theatre and other such categories (and in one or two of which, notably modern dance, advances have been made).

Your correspondent also considers the $11,000 grant for Mr Mullins "a substantial amount in view of the limited funds available to, and financial difficulties of many theatre companies in 1981". Again, within the financial constraints of limited money, the Board attempts to support many different kinds of activities, across all the theatre art forms that are its responsibility and meeting State and local needs. The Board has not yet reached the stage as set out in its review "Support For Professional Drama Companies" that "if subsidy continues to fall in real terms, the only solution would be withdraw subsidy from some companies rather than undermine all", though the time for this may be imminent. Many grants are given that could be seen as "substantial" especially considering the situation of many theatre companies. (Would your correspondent consider the $33,000, granted to *Theatre Australia* for this year in this category?). However, the Board gives very careful consideration to the many applications it receives, its stated policy and its wish to ensure a balanced development of theatre in Australia, and makes its decisions responsibly and accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

Michael FitzGerald,
Director,
Theatre Board

MISLEADING ELLIS

The Ellis Column in your June edition was typically misleading. Ellis whims about the rash of 'classics' at Nimrod and the other major companies. In fact Aubrey Mellor's outstanding production of *Three Sisters* is the only 'classic' being staged by Nimrod this year.

During 1981 Nimrod will produce 11 Australian plays, thus maintaining its record as the most prolific producer of Australian drama, with an average of eight Australian plays a year for the last 11 years."

John Bell,
Co-Artistic Director,
Nimrod.
The five Tony awards — best play, best actor, best direction, best set and best lighting — won recently in America by Peter Shaffer's Amadeus raised hopes that we might at long last see this interesting-sounding play. Now the whisper ... the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, which holds the Australian rights, intends letting them go to the Melbourne Theatre Company. If the production then takes off, the Trust will consider a national tour.

The Trust has good reason to be cautious. Following the loss of a reported $150,000 on David Williamson's Celluloid Heroes, it was looking at another, though very much smaller, deficit from the disappointing tour of Brian Clarke's Whose Life Is It Anyway? Final figures are not available at the time of writing, but the Adelaide and Perth seasons had to be cancelled, though the Melbourne season was extended to take advantage of the building box office there. The final week there, as in Sydney, was close to break-even. The Queensland tour was in jeopardy until a sell-off agreement was reached with the risks being carried by the Melbourne Theatre Company. If the production doesn't make the hoped-for distance of 1980-81 season by the Trust, has good reason to see this interesting-sounding play.

By the time you read this, attractive Sydney singer-dancer-actor Karyn O'Neill, who took on the happily pregnant Mariette Rups, will be nearing the end of her stint as the alternate Evita and ready to replace US star Patti LuPone, whose three-months engagement ends this month. Gaye McFarlane then becomes the third of the alternate Evitas, not counting understudy Camille Gardner, who also played the role a few times. Word is that both new girls are more than able to handle the role, but as one performing member of the company put it to me, it's going to be uphill marketing the local talent after the hard-sell campaign with LuPone. So its fingers crossed for the show to return home to Perth.

A Lesson From Alou, the new Athol Fugard play in which the husband and wife team of Olive Bodily and Tony Wheeler, foremost exponents of Fugard's work, will star for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, has been voted best play of 1980-81 season by the New York Drama Critics Circle. The circle named Beth Henley's Pulitzer Prize-winning Crimes of the Heart best American play. Alou opens in Adelaide on August 13, followed by Melbourne, Hobart and Canberra. Then there's a break till it comes to Sydney next February.

Remember the first production by Sydney's short-lived Mercury Theatre, Heinrich von Kleist's The Broken Pitcher, starring Peter Finch? This 1808 comedy has just been cast for an off-Broadway revival.

Melbourne's Playbox Theatre's second 1981 season got off to a good start with the production of Stoppard's Every Good Boy Deserves Favour — presented in conjunction with the Victorian Arts Centre. Director was George Fairfax, Incidentally, I hear lead dancer Kevan Johnston has left the show to return home to Perth.

Musical Director, John Hopkins and the 80 piece symphony orchestra from the Victorian College of the Arts. At the same time the Playbox Theatre itself saw their production of SA playwright, Doreen Clarke's latest play Farewell Brisbane Ladies, directed by former SA State Theatre Company Artistic Director, Kevin Palmer. Next up they have the Australian premiere of Sam Shepard's latest, True West which Rex Cramporn will direct and following that they go into co-production with the Marionette Theatre on Roger Pulvers' puppet play General MacArthur in Australia. At the Playbox Upstairs comes another premiere this month, of two short plays by Barry Dickens and yet another in October with Clem Gorman's A Night In the Arms of Raelene, which was workshopped at the Playwrights Conference.

Budding playwrights who need lots of characters to get their message across, now's your chance. For its full-length play contest to celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, Sydney's New Theatre points out that as it is non-professional, opportunities exist to write for large casts. Prizes are $1000 and $500 plus a royalty of 10 percent of gross takings if plays are staged, which the theatre reserves for 12 months the right to do. Contest closes Jan 18, 1982. Send stamped, self-addressed envelope to New Theatre Play Competition, PO Box 337, Kensington, NSW 2033, for details.

Met visiting British comedian Jimmy Jewel at a select welcome party attended by a host of local fellow-comics — Johnny Lockwood, Johnny Pace, Bobby Limb, Mike Harris, the lot. Box-watchers will remember Jewel in the series Funny Man, screened earlier this year by the ABC and screened in which he played his own father. He told me a follow-up series is planned in which he'll play himself. He was here to visit his son and family and to do some talkback radio in New Zealand. He was reported later as saying he'd like to appear here in his West End success. Neil Simon's The Sunshine Boys. I wouldn't put money in that, even if he could find a backer or a theatre. Both play and film have done the rounds here with only moderate success.
by Shelley Neller

Most thinking actors try to minimise their professional compromises. Graeme Blundell, having done his share of “really reprehensible roles”, is pleased to tackle the part of Semyon in the Melbourne Theatre Company’s production of The Suicide this month.

Despite its title, the play, by Nikolai Erdman, is a great satirical farce which emerged from the bizarre restrictions of Stalin’s Russia. Erdman uses farce as a way of exhibiting the madness of a society in which “only the dead say what the living may think.”

It is the late 1920’s and Semyon’s financial situation is hopeless, so he decides to commit suicide — or rather, the idea is accidentally forced upon him. Suddenly, he is besieged by spokesmen of several action groups urging him to use his death to promote their causes. Semyon’s suicide would offer a splendid opportunity for a manifesto in the form of a suicide note.

The little man’s courage grows with his new importance, the zaniness of a bureaucracy run riot is paralleled by the outrageousness of the fanatics who want to use him.

As the man’s courage grows with his new importance, the zaniness of a bureaucracy run riot is paralleled by the outrageousness of the fanatics who want to use him.

The Suicide was recognised as a comic masterpiece by Erdman’s contemporaries — Gorki, Stanislavsky, and Meyerhold. And in retrospect, it is something of a miracle that the play progressed as far as rehearsal. It was banned before the opening and never performed nor published in the Soviet Union.

Blundell sees Semyon as “a Walter Mitty figure with touches of Hamlet when it comes to making decisions.”

“The Suicide is much more serious than a farce — if that is not a contradiction?” Blundell says. “In those times, to kill yourself was quite a realistic thing. The revolution was over and people were worse of than ever. The tragic dimension is quite hard to fathom for someone who has never been to Russia. It is not an easy play to research.”

To delve into the politics and social conditions of that period, Blundell has engaged the expert help of a friend, Roger Pulvers, whom he describes also as an authority on European history, a playwright, director, translator and novelist.

As for his interpretation of Semyon, he says: “That is an open book. It starts off as an amorphous thing. I’ve done this as a director. You toss a few ideas around and see how it works.”

This sounded more elusive than flippant and belied the concentrated professionalism Blundell brings to his work.

When I asked him about his own political persuasions and their potential influence on his portrayal of Semyon, he gave me a long-winded reply which began with: “The Suicide’s political credentials are incredible... and trailed off into irrelevance.

“But you haven’t answered the question.”

“No, I haven’t,” he replied with a cheeky smile, “and I don’t think I will.”

Blundell has not worked on stage (with the exception of acting in two plays at this year’s National Playwrights’ Conference in Canberra) since he played in Tom Stoppard’s Every Good Boy Deserves Favour — at the Adelaide Festival last year. Ironically this play, also dealt with the plight of Russian dissenters. “But The Suicide is not nearly as verbally dexterous as Stoppard’s play. It is more a situation comedy.”

After living in Sydney for a year, “doing bits and pieces (television: two plays in the ABC’S Spring and Fall series — The Expert and Going Home — and film: Doctors and Nurses and The Best of Friends), Blundell is looking forward to working in Melbourne theatre again.

“Television has a gross appetite that devours people very quickly and spits them out,” he says. “Yet I loved working on Water Under The Bridge. And I love the Cop Shop shows — the short cuts, the instant rapport and camaraderie among the actors.”

He also says that despite being “merchandised and marketed like a soap powder” in his Alvin Purple days — “it was an abberation, a potboiler, I needed the money and it seemed harmless” — he has always been secure about his standing in the theatre.

“I’ve worked in most of the companies in the country. I’ve always been involved in theatre work — Pram Factory, La Mama and hoopla. Ironically, it was through my Alvin roles that I received invitations to politicians’ homes for dinner.”

Which makes you wonder what kind of dinner invitations he’ll receive after The Suicide opens...

THEATRE AUSTRALIA AUGUST 1981
SPOTLIGHT

Puppet's home—with MTA Artistic Director, Richard Bradshaw.

It has taken the Marionette Theatre of Australia four years to find a home; a place where one small company could combine its administration, workshops, rehearsals and performances, and not even on a full-size human scale. Puppets like Albert the Magic Pudding, Captain Lazar, Harry the Hippo and Morton Barman have been a long time looking for somewhere to rest their strings.

As soon as the Marionette Theatre's tenancy was finalised at the end of last year they moved straight in; even in its unconverted state — with no heating and few amenities — the building provided better accommodation than their previous quarters. Their administration was operating out of two particularly grotty back offices at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust; the workshop they had once occupied had been taken over by the Sydney Theatre Company, so that had been transferred to the bowels of the Sydney Dance Company building; and they had no performing space of their own — having to resort to booking the Opera House Drama Theatre for major school holiday productions when possible — nor any central place for the full company even to meet.

Although the Sailors' Home is potentially the ideal home for the Marionette Theatre, that potential is still half a million dollars away from being realised. Their current task — along with continuing regular work — is to raise money needed for conversion, on the basis of a dollar subsidy for dollar raised capital grant from the State Government. Work will start when they get to about $100,000, hopefully by the end of the year. A professional fund-raiser is on staff for five months (fund-raisers do not work who had just stepped in to look around with his wife and family, was so impressed by the puppet exhibition that he offered all timber needed for the conversion completely free of charge, and similar offers had been made on seating for the theatre, electrical work and glass. Cash, though, is needed too, and as soon as enough is raised work will begin — plans and estimates are completed and all that is needed is the word to go. Of course, should the fund-raising take much longer than expected, costs may rise.

The Sailors' Home is solid sandstone, a wonderful old building, and MTA will not need to make any structural alterations. Built in the 1860's it was the first Sailors' Home in Sydney and became an early landmark of the city. A first fund-raising campaign for the building itself was launched by Prince Albert, Duke of Edinburgh, on his tour to Australia; the central event was an inauspicious picnic at which an assassination on a percentage basis, as is commonly believed — to protect themselves from failure and their employers from success) and things were looking optimistic after a fund-raising gathering mid-year. If the cash was not exactly flowing in, donations in kind were forthcoming: a timber merchant, attempt was made on the Duke by a madman, which misfired and he was shot in the backside (the subject of Dick Hall's play, The Duke of Edinburgh Assassinated). Nothing quite so momentous has occurred during the recent fund-raising efforts.

The major amount of work will go
no strings attached

into the new theatre, planned to seat 170 and designed especially for children, but which adults can also use. It will be able to accommodate totally flexible staging — middle and end — and can be raised and lowered to be used for anything from rod puppetry to late-night cabaret. All seating will be custom built, there will be space for flying scenery, complex electronics and altogether it will become what Administrator, Philip Rolfe, describes as "a very technical space". Having their own theatre will also allow MTA to entrepreneur other Australian and international puppet companies, something they are always receiving requests about, but have not been able to do so far.

In the meantime they press on with the immediate work in hand. Throughout the year three separate companies each with different productions, play to between 500 and 600 schools around the country and their last school holiday show was the popular revival of The Magic Pudding. Following last year's Captain Lazar, two more adult shows are planned, again with the designs of cartoonist Patrick Cook: with the Playbox, a Melbourne season of Roger Pulvers' puppet play, General McArthur in Australia; and hopefully in October, at the Stables in Sydney, a production called Megalomania, with comedian Geoff Kelso, will be scheduled.

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Off on a tangent

Queensland's state company goes alternative

by Jeremy Ridgman

With one of the largest subscription lists in the country and record attendances this season, the Queensland Theatre Company are riding the crest of a wave; it is on that crest they are launching their first "alternative" season, three productions in the Community Arts Centre's Edward Street Theatre, under the banner Tangent Productions. Two years ago, the company had an unexpected hit with Clowneroonies, a brilliant exploration of physical comedy, improvised on a shoestring by a handful of otherwise temporarily redundant actors: Tangent Productions, however, represents the first attempt to create a full season and whilst the trio of plays have little in common other than their Australian origin, the QTC's Artistic Director, Alan Edwards, maintains that if the project is a success, a more thematically cohesive programme might be considered for next year.

One might, with some justification, question the choice of a new play by an unknown writer (Stuart Dickson's A Season at Clayton's) as the inaugural production. It is neither a crowd-puller nor a particularly challenging piece in the ways that David Allen's Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World and New Sky, a one woman show by mime specialist Judith Anderson, might be considered. What, in fact, does the much bandied term alternative mean?

Although associate director Peter Duncan has been appointed co-ordinator of the season, the venture is the brain-child of Alan Edwards himself and has apparently been gestating for the past three years. Edwards' aim is to check the tendency towards "artistic and administrative atrophy" that comes with consolidated success by providing an opportunity for actors and younger, inexperienced directors to develop their talents through experiment and risk-taking.
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THOMAS MEEHAN CHARLES STROUSE MARTIN CHARNIN
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National Theatre Company
at the Playhouse
3 Pier Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000 Telephone (09) 325 3344
by Lucy Wagner

Since the break up of the original artistic triumvirate in 1980, with Richard Wherrett picked to lead the Sydney Theatre Company and Ken Horler’s later departure, Nimrod appears to have been floundering. Even though it could be argued that it was John Bell’s classical and Australian productions that largely encapsulated what has become recognisable as the “Nimrod style”, he alone, without the administrative abilities of Horler and the precision, richness and coherence of Wherrett’s productions, did not seem able to sustain Nimrod’s leading role among theatre companies.

New brooms and clean sweeps were initiated: a gamble on the youthful and inexperienced Neil Armfield seems overall to have paid off; the idea of a designer as co-artistic director, judging by its short-livedness, did not. Coincidental with Bruce Pollack’s replacement of Paul Iles as administrator, rumours of pushes and attempted coups proliferated and the advent of the Women and Theatre “limited life” project within the Nimrod portals did nothing to quiet them. By May this year, discussions at the Playwrights’ Conference openly referred to clashes between groups of differing political and sexual preferences within the company: matters seemed to be reaching a head.

Turmoil in the company culminated in a motion being carried at Board level that the decision of the Artistic Directors was final, and Board member, David Williamson, still bruised from his Melbourne experiences and shy of confrontations, had to be persuaded not to resign in the face of controversy.

Whatever differences there were, though, it seems that steps have been taken to avert a crisis, re-establish company coherence and assert the joint and unified leadership of the Artistic Directors. Possibly Aubrey Mellor, the most recent addition, has provided a bridge between the theatricalism of Bell and the more politically motivated Armfield. Certainly in a round table discussion between the Directors, members of the new permanent acting company and Chris Westwood of Women and Theatre, everything, at least on the surface, gave the impression of a united company, strong working relationships and an optimism and certainty about Nimrod’s current strengths and aims.

The way in which the new season was chosen is evidence of the continuing policy of democracy in the company, but with ultimate responsibility lying with the Artistic Directors. At a number of company meetings attitudes were expressed and concerns aired which were taken into consideration over the choice of plays. More specifically the whole company then read and discussed a number of plays and selected a majority consensus. This was passed on to Bell, Armfield and Mellor who made their own directorial choices in the context of a balanced season. Armfield was quick to point out that it wasn’t simply an “elected season” and Bell that “there wasn’t a narrow set or rules or restrictions on the choice of play, but they reflect a wide number of concerns and individuals”.

The new permanent acting company employ, with larger casts or other role requirements being filled by short term engagements. Part of the company has been on staff since early in the year, but its current strength is still only four women — Michele Fawdon, Anna Volska, Cathy Downes and Deidre Rubenstein — and two men — Barry Otto and John Walton. This is claimed to be due to the greater amount of work available for male actors and so a greater unwillingness by men to commit themselves to a single job for one year.

Even without this problem the cast requirements of most plays, classic and contemporary, leans in favour of men, yet it is not seen as unrealistic to have an equally divided ensemble. It is rather a conscious decision aimed at righting the current inequality and an important factor in dictating what plays are produced. Coriolanus (to star John Bell and Robyn Nevin) was at one stage to be included in the new season, but along with Mellor feeling he hadn’t sufficient time to prepare for it, the lack of good female roles led to its postponement.

Although in the very early days Nimrod had a core group of four actors, they have for many years cast their seasons for specific requirements and have created an identity as a theatre company without needing to employ a permanent acting company. Bell explained that it was a long desired development and that the philosophy behind it was “the opposite to the old concept of opera, where a production exists, virtually independent of anyone; it’s put on year after year and the prima donna flies in with her own costume and make-up and steps into the role, the chorus arrives...
and are told their steps and gestures, and the whole thing's dead from the ankles up".

Michele Fawdon committed herself to a year at Nimrod because "I wanted to work within a situation where I felt happy, with a group of practitioners I respected, and I wanted to break away from certain type-casting". Nimrod was a particular choice for its mode of theatre, the energy it generates and the broad spectrum of communication, within the company and to audiences, whereas "I think there's something very intimidating about the Sydney Theatre Company".

She is particularly excited by a company devised show which will probably be scheduled for performance next year. Aubrey Mellor and Neil Armfield have sat in on a few sessions so far and Mellor commented that "the work they're doing in front of each other is very brave and it will help them in other plays". Barry Otto agrees that it is elements like this that make being part of an ensemble an entirely different proposition to being hired for two or even three shows in a row. "It is the opportunity to relax into a job, to be able to expand without looking to the next prospect all the time and to have the time to learn to trust your fellow actors."

If the role of the acting company is one of expanding artistic potential, where then does the Women and Theatre project fit in to Nimrod? Nowhere, they all insisted; Nimrod simply houses the administration of the project, a very congenial arrangement because their general aims are similar and each benefits from cross-fertilisation with the other.

"There has been talk," said Chris Westwood, WAT co-ordinator, "of Nimrod looking to the Women's project's hundred thousand dollar grant to supplement its own income, and of a Marxist feminist mafia trying to take over Nimrod, but there's no possibility of either." The Directors agree that their vision has been expanded by the presence of WAT, to the extent of scheduling Alison Lyssa's play, Pinball, Downstairs, following its debut at the WAT play-readings in February; and appointing Chris Johnson as trainee director when they would otherwise probably have looked for a man.

Despite the raised level of social and sexual consciousness that seems to inform the current season and planning, it might still be true to say that Nimrod has undergone an identity crisis over the last 18 months, particularly in regard to the Sydney Theatre Company. Now, though, the company seems to have worked through this to a stronger sense of assurance than ever in its past and future. John Bell's comparison of Venetian Twins and Chicago (see box) exemplifies this, and the general commitment to Australian writers is one of the major policy tenets.

Nimrod will have produced 11 Australian plays this year; six out of the new season's eight plays are Australian and that brings their annual average to eight Australian plays over the last 11 years.

In terms of general social commitment none of the Artistic Directors would be drawn to say more than that their choice of plays was strongly affected by their relevance to current concerns and that that applied to the classics as much as to new plays. The feeling towards the Sydney Theatre Company seemed to be one of reasonably friendly rivalry and one which found comparisons were no longer relevant to the Nimrod's recaptured certainty of direction. The odium of comparison was not entirely absent, though, from Chris Westwood's summarising remark that the bar of Nimrod should be a place, not where audiences loitered to exchange raptures on the set and costumes, but where people stayed to the early hours discussing the ideas raised by the production they had just witnessed.

JOHN BELL: "The Venetian Twins", "Last Day In Woolloomooloo"

"It's interesting that Venetian Twins will be competing with Chicago — and literally so in Melbourne, where they're at the Comedy and we're across the road at Her Majesty's — though they've got a 10 week season to our three weeks. The point is that Chicago is a very glossy, very thorough, professional American musical and ours is much more ramshackle, knockabout and anti-professional in a sense, and it reflects our policy in that it takes a classic and knocks spots
off it and makes it totally Australian and popular in the broadest sense. It's just interesting that those two will be seen together. It reflects a lot of what we've been doing over the years. Now it's in rehearsal we've been changing and adapting and the actors are more and more taking over the show. It's the kind of work that even though it's frivolous on the surface and a trivial piece, it's serious in another sense and in that it's breaking all the rules of theatre and getting through to an audience.

"Last Day In Woolloomooloo is the least satisfactory in terms of using the company because there are no parts the resident actors can really do. It's a play we selected some time ago and it now needs workshopping and rewriting to some extent to bring it a little more up to date with the issues. On one level it's a black comedy concerned with what's happening to certain areas of Sydney that are being taken over, demolished and redeveloped. On the other hand in a more metaphysical way it's about people having half-lives; all the residents are being moved out and destroyed because they're not living in the real world, their hopes are pinned on memories of the last war or winning the lottery or old lovers. They're the losers and the pragmatists are going to destroy them and dig up their territory."

AUBREY MELLOR: "Cloud Nine", "Tales from the Vienna Woods"

"The great thing to start with about Cloud Nine is its four men and four women — the numbers of the resident company. It's also a very funny play, and nice for me to do a comedy after the heavies (Three Sisters and Protest). It's got something to say and it says it in a very entertaining way; there are marvellous chances for actors with the sexual role swapping. Though it's another English play, which is unfortunate following Teeth 'n' Smiles, it's the start of a new season and within the balance of that, is good. The more one looks at it the better it actually is; the remarkable thing is that it's been revived three times.

"Both that and Tales from the Vienna Woods were very popular with the company — people wanted to be involved with them and to act in them. It's nice to do an epic in the season somewhere and it's nice to try the challenge of staging such a piece in our theatre — we have to find a way of cutting down on the cast and concentrating on the issues. It's a very black piece and I always like to see a ray of hope somewhere, but it's so black that I think it'll have a very positive effect on the audience; perhaps to try and watch out for the signs that were happening then, in Germany in the thirties. It's all the bourgeoisie and self-seeking, self-centred people in desperate search of happiness in an age of inflation with mounting pressures and time speeding on. There are many parallels."

NEIL ARMFIELD: "Welcome the Bright World", "Eyes of the Whites"

"Welcome the Bright World isn't cast yet; Stephen Sewell is still working on the second draft. The first draft was extremely exciting, with Stephen's usual mixture of wonderful dialogue which seems to reach out and touch on an enormous breadth of understanding and interest. It's set in Germany, although, like Traitors, it's an Australian language play and just as much about Australia as Germany. He's deliberately chosen a Western style democratic society, fairly highly industrialised, and it seemed to be best placed in Germany. It's concerned with a scientist who, having worked for the Government and been in a highly responsible position socially, finds that his daughter is a terrorist, and his crisis of conscience about the kind of society he's working for. It's about the way science is being used more and more by society to make the world what it is, and individuals making a response to this.

"Eyes of the Whites is by Tony Strachan, who lived in New Guinea for a lot of his childhood, and a lot of it's drawn from his personal experience in the 60's. It's about the clash of the native New Guinea culture with foreign, imperialist cultures coming in — particularly Australian. The country and the culture are being changed by white rule and it's about how a culture can survive and work towards independence in the face of technology."
25 YEARS ON - A TURBULENT ANNIVERSARY IN THE WEST

Director, Stephen Barry talks to Mardy Amos about the National Theatre, Perth, currently celebrating its quarter centenary.

When the Playhouse first welcomed Perth theatre-goers in August, 1956 it was the concrete fulfillment of the dreams of all the dedicated enthusiasts who had been involved with live theatre since the formation of the Perth Repertory Club in 1919 and little difficulty was envisaged, in those pre-television days, in keeping its 700 seats warm. Sadly, those halcyon days are gone; theatre, like just about everything, is going through "difficult" times and the National Theatre Company at the Playhouse is no exception — and faces the problem of how to get the vital "bums in seats" (now trimmed down to 512) and keep them coming back.

In this year in which it celebrates its 25th anniversary, the NTC has implemented a change of policy which has caused rumblings of opposition, particularly amongst the theatrical community. This is nothing new to Stephen Barry, for the same rumblings occurred when he arrived in Perth just over three years ago to take up his position as Artistic Director (having held a similar position at the Harrogate Theatre in England) mainly on the grounds that he wasn't a "local product" and therefore knew nothing about Australian theatre. Barry, an urbane but positive man in his mid-thirties, cheerfully admits this:

"I knew a bit about the Playhouse, but couldn't prejudge Australian audiences. I just had to learn."

And did he?

"When I came here we had a marketing problem; subscribers were down to 300 and they are the most powerful selling factor for a loyal subscriber audience helps when word of mouth is bad. Now we vary between 2,000 and 2,600."

Had Barry perhaps played it too carefully, in the artistic sense, when he came here, catering for the "blue rinse set" who had melted away under his predecessor, Aarne Neeme, who had not provided a menu bland enough for their palates. Why, for instance, had the tiny upstairs Greenroom (originated to provide "alternative" theatre) closed down?

"Simple economics. As productions got bigger in the downstairs theatre, there wasn't enough money to go around and with only fifty seats they had similar problems to the Hole in the Wall; even with a full house it didn't pay enough. When the Hole had to go fully professional with its subsidy and pay full Equity rates, it meant that the demands on any director were enormous. If the Playhouse amalgamated with the Hole, it would preserve its availability for all "alternative" work and take the financial pressure off. I'm totally in favour of such a merger."

(The Hole in the Wall Theatre — Perth's other subsidised company currently under the direction of Edgar Metcalfe — has always provided healthy competition for the Playhouse, though somewhat limited in its choice of plays by its size, but it also has to woo an audience.)

What has changed the face of Perth theatre dramatically (many would see it as being "lifted") is the advent of local entrepreneurs Mason-Miller, who have had success with recent revivals of The Importance of Being Earnest and Cowardy Custard, under the direction of Raymond Omodei. There is also the fact that two more theatres have become available for "commercial" productions: His Majesty's, restored from its decaying Edwardian grandeur to comfortable opulence, and The Regal, an old movie theatre in the inner-city suburb of Subiaco.

How does Stephen Barry regard this nibbling away of his potential audience and what could be called an altered atmosphere of acceptance for the Playhouse?

"I've been greatly interested in the number of companies that have come into Perth. There's always value in novelty and I guess we are regarded as part of 'The Establishment'. But I don't see the theatre-going public increasing all that quickly, which means they are being spread more thinly with the advent of new companies and we are all jostling for our share."

In that case, what is the solution, if any?
"I wonder," says Barry thoughtfully, "if we (The Playhouse) are not doing too much work. We're based on the English system, which started out as weekly repertory, then monthly. But now a number of companies in England have moved away into doing less work, but having bigger productions. They run for a four-week season and then extend if the demand is there, balancing out the big productions — Brecht, Shakespeare, Sheridan — with monthly gaps in between, so that with more time the company has a chance to catch its breath. Take our case for instance — in its last week The Elephant Man was doing good business, but we couldn't extend because On Our Selection was crowding on its heels."

On May 21, the opening night of Bernard Pomerance's The Elephant Man, Stephen Barry ceased to be Artistic Director of The National Theatre Company. Instead he assumed the title of Director and with it overall responsibility for all the Company's workings, until his extended contract expires at the end of 1982, the afore-mentioned change of policy which has caused the rumblings which take the form of questioning exactly what he will do.

Apart from assuming overall executive and administrative responsibility (although there is already a General Administrator, John Toussaint) there is no doubt that one of Barry's tasks will be to operate as a "money man" encouraging further financial support from the private sector. He has already achieved a good track record in this field from organisations such as the Perth Building Society, Shell Company of Australia and other commercial enterprises and will now be able to concentrate more in this area. How else will this change benefit the Company?

"Over the next period I will introduce a number of artistic directors to work with the company — they will not all be of the one stamp, but varied. I've always thought that there has never been enough exchange of directors and as they come from other States to work here, it will also increase the possibility of an interchange of actors."

The system has already started with John Milson directing On Our Selection and Edgar Metcalfe with Priestley's When We Are Married.

David Addenbrooke will direct Shaw's Pygmalion which will mark the 75th Anniversary celebrations and the beginning of the new subscription season, then comes Metcalfe again with Alan Ayckbourn's latest, Sisterly Feelings then John Preston (Director of the Company's flourishing Theatre in Education) with Dorothy Hewett's children's play Golden Valley.

"The pattern won't really become clear until next year as we changed in the middle of this year. I'll choose the directors, and the final casting decisions rest with them, although I will make recommendations. But the buck definitely stops at me. I'd also like to see actors, directors and playwrights have a bigger hand in what we're doing; perhaps form a "repertoire committee" to look at programme concepts and ideas. State Drama Companies tend to become monoliths — access should always be available to everybody concerned."

Will he be doing any directing himself from now on?

"Yes, but as a guest director in the same way as the others. I'll probably work with Edgar (Metcalfe) on Sisterly Feelings as that consists of two plays running on alternate nights which will be an enormous work-load for him, but it will be his overall baby. Then I'll be directing our Christmas musical, which is becoming a bit of a tradition, and people liked Oliver last year. This year it will be Annie with Jill Perryman as Miss Hannigan and Edgar Metcalfe as Daddy Warbucks — he's going to shave his head, but we haven't cast the lead yet or the dog! That will be at The Maj."

Where then does he see the National Theatre Company going when it leaves The Playhouse?

"Well, it will be ten years, I think before the State Drama Company is housed in the proposed Cultural Centre (a new complex to be constructed on the North side of Perth which has been begun with the new WA Art Gallery). They (the State Government) have missed their chance now because of dramatically rising costs. Here's the theatre (he grabs a thick roll of plans from the corner beside his desk and waves them) but it's been shelved for eight years and I think it will be ten. Things could change with any changes of Government, but the present one has already spent $12 to $14 million on The Maj and they sank about $6 million into the Entertainment Centre a few years back."

Looking around his cramped and cluttered office and thinking of the chilly bowels of this now out-dated theatre where the administrative staff and design and wardrobe are housed I suggest that the Company is battling against somewhat fearful odds.

"Oh, it's not so bad. This theatre has its problems; it's inflexible in the sense of the auditorium, in terms of ambience and relationship with the audience, but no worse in those terms than the Drama Theatre at the Sydney Opera House! Besides, there's something about being housed in adversity; hunger is part of the artistic endeavour and creates horizons to strive for — it gives us an edge of 'rogues and vagabonds'!"

Stephen Barry certainly has faith in this "new look" for the National Theatre Company in its 25th year and it will be interesting to look back a year from now on its 26th birthday and see if the injection of varied theatrical talents has had therapeutic effect enough to enable the aging lady of Pier Street to counter her young rivals.
New Stages for the American Musical
by Karl Levett

The Broadway musical, an art form that is quintessentially American, is now alive, healthy and resolutely walking backwards into the past.

Through relentless television advertising, Broadway producers have tapped a new and remarkably large audience—one that comes to the theatre two or three times a year, is TV-fed and seeks spectacular presentations of totally innocuous subjects. The big Broadway musical is, therefore, a natural. In recent years, except for the considerable contributions of Stephen Sondheim, the Broadway musical has not been too venturesome. But it never actually walked backwards until now—backwards into mind-deadening safety and expanding financial security.

Already, many New Yorkers have packed and departed for the freer and greener musical pastures of Off and Off-Off-Broadway. On the smaller stages around town, the mini-musical is in full summer flower.

Several recent offerings will give some indication of the diversity of subject matter than can now be encompassed within the mini-musical: Bloodlips—a British music hall type entertainment with added science fiction routines performed by six drag comedians; El Bravo—based on the tales of Robin Hood, Hispanic style; Love in the Country—a new version of the Daphnis and Chloe legend; The Winos—alcoholism and drugs in an ethnic community; The Siren of St Malo—about a siren who brings disaster to a French city in the late 18th century; Homeseekers—the opening in New York of a home for abandoned and abused children.

The Off-Broadway musical that has created the most attention recently has been William Finn's March of the Falsettos at Playwrights Horizons. The musical has no dialogue or conventional "book", but consists of twenty songs telling the story of Marvin, who leaves his wife and son to live with a male lover. To complete this "tight-knit family" group is the psychiatrist (to both Marvin and his wife Trina) who promptly falls in love with Trina when Marvin moves out. The son, Jason, is some sort of genius child and the only wise one in the group as the neuroses burst into blossom on the stage.

William Finn's art is that he captures the spirit and emotion of the situation exactly in his music (jumpy, discordant, original) and lyrics (provocative, confessional, seamless). Songs entitled "Four Jews in a room bitching" and "My father's a homo" are not quite the usual Broadway fare. One could hope for more conventional melody amid the emotional arias, but probably Mr. Finn knows what he is doing. Certainly his director, James Lapine, does. There is an economic straightforwardness about the show and the performances that results in a tense, dense work. Unhappily, in all this angst and theatrical attack there doesn't seem time to come to know or care for any of these characters. This surely was not Mr. Finn's intention.

The women's movement has already given two worthwhile mini-musicals to New York audiences: The Club and I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It On The Road. The latest contribution I Can't Keep Running In Place, at the Westside Arts Theatre, hopes to emulate these two successful feminist forbears. The musical's not too promising premise is a workshop in women's assertiveness training run by a psychologist (this time it's surprisingly touching. Only in the lyrics does her immaturity peep through. The cast is near perfect with Helen Gallagher as an embittered wife of a dentist bringing a Broadway-style attack that really rocks the small Off-Broadway house.

While all this consciousness-raising is happening upstairs at the Westside Arts Theatre, downstairs there is an affectionate musical tribute to the Boswell Sisters. The Heebie Jeebies. Written by Mark Hampton and Stuart Ross and directed by Mr. Ross with obivous love and attention to detail, this is a first class musical revue that again borrows from the rich treasure trove of American popular song. Although in conventional biographical form, the presentation is neat and witty and celebrates the charm of the human voice. After the miked efforts on Broadway where the sound is always above, beyond or behind, the pleasure of close harmony singing in an intimate setting is very welcome. The singing is superlative and as the three sisters are Nancy McCall, Audrey Lavine, and Memrie Innerarity (they don't write names like that anymore). This is the kind of show that could give nostalgia a good name.

The smallest of recent small musicals would surely be Really Rosie which featured child actors for (possibly) child audiences. It did, however, introduce two major talents to the Off-Broadway scene. Carol King, the pop singer/composer (music) and Maurice Sendak, probably the most outstanding author/illustrator of children's books in America (book, lyrics, scenic and costume design).

First a book, then an animated television musical, Really Rosie seems perfectly at home on stage. Exploring the special territory of childhood, Carol King's songs are sprightly and Mr Sendak's book and lyrics are full of sense and charm. And it is good to see a major illustrative artist designing for the theatre. Mr Sendak has already created sets and costumes for The Magic Flute at the Houston Grand Opera and it is hoped he will continue to bring his prodigious talent to New York stages.

The continuing health and creative growth of the Off-Broadway musical seems assured. An interesting development is that not only has the Off-Broadway musical divorced itself from its Broadway parent in subject matter and style, but it also seems to have built a devoted following that wouldn't be found in a current Broadway house. What we have are two separate audience groups with no significant crossing over.

A thought to bring a gleam to any Off-
Cats and classics

by Irving Wardle

Vying in pre-publicity with the royal wedding, Cats (New London) unites the unlikely partnership of Andrew Lloyd Webber (composer of Evita) and Trevor Nunn (artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company) in the even unlikelier venture of extracting a musical from T S Eliot's Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.

The first impression inside the restructured auditorium is that humans have no right to be there. John Napier has turned the place into a cats' adventure playground, crammed with outsize dustbins, bicycle wheels, chunks of timber, even a monster car-chassis - all seen from the viewpoint of the chorus-line of "Jellicle Cats" who steal through the darkness flashing green eyes in your face before frisking into the opening number.

The show's creators set great store by the Jellicles who form a cat community from which soloists detach themselves for individual numbers, and whose annual ball becomes the central event of the evening. In place of a story-line, we get a tribal rite involving the choice of a cat who is granted rebirth at the end of the festivities. This choice, needless to say, falls upon the tarnished beauty Grizabella who is wafted up to the higher regions on top of a huge lorry tyre swirling with rainbows of brilliantly lit smoke.

Apart from typifying his virtuoso staging, this idea is a natural extension of Mr Nunn's warm-hearted community style; but it is too sentimental a framework for Eliot's work, and the show admits as much by abandoning the original Grizabella poem in favour of a mawkish new lyric called "Memory". The scenario does not support the individual numbers any more than Old Possum's third-person narratives achieve first-person dramatic statement.

What remains is an immensely exhilarating dance show which has stimulated Lloyd Webber into exploring his previously under-used rhythmic gifts; and wittily matching up the principal felines to popular styles - blues, waltz, an old time music-hall ballad for Gus the Theatre Cat, a chugging patter number for Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat, and a shower of orchestral fireworks (electronic as well as acoustic) for Wayne Sleep's balletic climax as Mr Mistoffelees the Original Conjuring Cat.

In Brian Friel's Translations (Hampstead) you see the opposite process of a magnificently integrated work springing from one fertile seed. We are in a Donegal Village of the 1830s where Gaelic, Greek and Latin are spoken, but not English. The setting is one of the "hedge schools" which flourished before the imposition of English education, introducing a cross-section of the local peasantry from a mute girl, gently being taught to pronounce her name, to a ragged old man who breaks off from reading Homer to quote Virgil on the advantages of black soil for growing corn.

British troops arrive to rationalize (ie anglicize) the place names, bringing with them the schoolmaster's elder son as interpreter, and an Ireland-infatuated young lieutenant who promptly falls for the younger son's girl. The lieutenant vanishes; the Irish lover takes flight; and the play ends with the British preparing to evict the population and raze the area.

One measure of the play's quality is that the compromised Owen - marvellously played by Tony Doyle - never appears as a traitor. He is the practical one: the one who wants to pull the district out of its impoverished stoicism. And Friel wonderfully balances this attitude against that of the hedge academicians who disdain Britain as culturally provincial. "We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean," remarks the master (Ian Bannen) in a grandly patronizing poteen drawl: "We tend to overlook your island." After Donald McWhinnie's production, I have never felt more certain of having witnessed the unveiling of a national classic.

*Irving Wardle is the theatre critic of The Times.
Different levels of Williamson

THE REMOVALISTS
THE CLUB

by Janet Healey

June was David Williamson month in Canberra: two plays, written some years apart and presented at very different levels of both style and achievement, opened within a week of each other.

The Removalists was presented by Thaddeus Productions, one of the many unclassifiable theatre groups that are springing up like mushrooms in the ACT. As such it deserves encouragement, and certainly Williamson's early satire was a good choice for a first production — a choice influenced, I imagine, by the appearance of Williamson's name on secondary college drama syllabi.

John Cuffe as Sergeant Simmonds and Michael Campbell as Constable Ross handled their extended opening and closing scenes quite well, without being able to completely disguise the excessive length of these scenes. Not all Cuffe's mastery of intonation and gesture could overcome a sense of tedium. Margaret de Mestre as the brittle and domineering Kate was excellent, but the role of Fiona Carter did not suit Tamara Ross — she seemed uneasy and lacked dramatic confidence.

Denis MacKay as Kenny Carter turned in the performance of the night. It lacked, perhaps, the fine edge of submerged violence, but compensated by realising Kenny as not so much an insensitive brute as a man lost in a world of alien values. Steve Hartnett's Removalist was a delight. The nuances of the character were perfectly mastered, from the drawing combination of primitive honesty and fundamental laziness to the crack of buttock appearing above the hipster jeans.

Nevertheless, despite strong casting and a production which offered some imaginatively surrealistic touches such as the slow-motion beatings under a crimson strobe, there were major flaws, one of which was the venue. Although 1, along with many other old Canberrans, have a sneaking fondness for the appalling Childers Street Hall, it is still bitterly cold and hideously uncomfortable.

Staging the play in the round fought against the underlying sense of the action as confined in small spaces. The dramatic potential of this claustrophobia was not entirely realised since the actors were in general expert enough to create it imaginatively, but one did feel that their task would have been easier on a traditional stage with the invisible fourth wall.

The Club at the Ainslie Football Club was a very different experience. It began with a film clip of the 1947 VFL Final made for American viewers — exciting for the majority of the audience and instructive for the minority (me). The author's gift for evoking compassion and even affection for thoroughly unlikeable people was well developed by the time The Club was written. This Bates and Woodward production extracted the maximum of humour from comic situations and unforgettable one-liners — a necessary approach for such an audience — while never losing sight of the human authentcity of situation and character. The illusion of the privacy of the Boardroom was sustained, with the audience cast as flies on the wall.

Hec McMillan as Jock Riley, gullible, untrustworthy ex-President, was seen here in a role he must have been waiting for all his life: he simply couldn't put a foot or an eyebrow wrong. He was ably abetted by Ken Moran in his first legitimate stage role as Ted Parker, current President under threat from internal strife and his own indiscretions. Dez Kavanagh as Gerry Cooper, smooth-talking manager and PR man, and Bob Longbottom as Danny Rowe, ageing captain of the team, gave strong support.

There were weaknesses in the two remaining roles, coach Laurie Holden and prospective star player Geoff Hayward, played by Joe Woodward and Phill Smith respectively. Woodward was physically not quite right for his role, and this stood out particularly in a production where the physical casting was otherwise spot-on. Smith looked right, but lacked the intensity of the angry young rebel against a set of values that provide his living but are not sacred to him.

But these are quibbles. If one index of a production's success is audience enjoyment, this one passed with flying colours; and when minor flaws become obvious only upon reflection, the critic is surely justified in awarding an honours grade.

THE REMOVALISTS, by David Williamson. A Thaddeus production, Childers St Hall, Canberra ACT. Opened June, 1981.

Director, Lee Shipley; Designers, Lee Shipley, Terry Hornby; Lighting, Paul Hunter; Stage Management, Helen Lewis and Kerrin Madden.

Cast: Constable Neville Ross, Michael Campbell; Sergeant Dan Simmonds, John Cuffe; Kate Mason, Margaret de Mestre; Fiona Carter, Tamara Ross; Kenny Carter, Dennis MacKay; Rob, Steve Hartnett.


Directors, designers, David Bates, Dianne Eden.

Cast: Ted Parker, Ken Moran; Jack Riley, Hec McMillan; Gerry Cooper, Dez Kavanagh; Laurie Holden, Joe Woodward; Danny Rowe, Bob Longbottom; Geoff Hayward, Phill Smith.

(The Professional)
Nimrod diversity

PROTEST

TEETH'N' SMILES

VENETIAN TWINS

by Michael le Moignan

Three plays presented by Nimrod in Sydney show the company's diversity. The three current co-artistic directors take responsibility for one each: John Bell directs a return season of The Venetian Twins at the Seymour Centre, Neil Armfield directs David Hare's Teeth'n' Smiles at Nimrod Upstairs and Aubrey Mellor directs Protest, a brilliant work by the imprisoned Czech playwright, Vaclav Havel, at Nimrod Downstairs.

The next four plays for Upstairs have just been announced, and look promising. They include Ron Blair's Last Day In Woolloomooloo and a new play by the gifted Stephen Sewell, Welcome The Bright World. The Upstairs Theatre is in urgent need of a couple of successes.

The Downstairs Theatre seems to be continuing the tradition and fulfilling the promise of the original Nimrod in its early years at the Stables Theatre in Nimrod Street, Darlinghurst. It is still a venue for radical, innovative, contemporary theatre, with a political and social conscience, a sense of humour, strong intellect and genuine emotions. Artistically, it is probably the most valuable theatre in the country.

Protest is a group of three one-act plays set in post-Dubcek Czechoslovakia. Separately and together, they make a powerful and cogent plea for a more compassionate understanding of the needs of the individual. Interestingly, although Vaclav Havel's work stems from and satirises jocund social behaviour under a totalitarian government, his observations of human character are just as apposite and perceptive when applied to a supposedly democratic society.

Havel himself is at this moment in jail in Czechoslovakia for having the temerity to pass unfavourable comment on the government of Mr Husak. He is due to be released, after a four and a half year sentence, on 29 November, 1983. An established and internationally recognised playwright in the 'sixties, his work was banned at home after the Russian invasion of 1968, and he was forced to take a job as a labourer in a brewery.

His experience there forms the substance of the first one-act play, Audience. It is an encounter between the worldly-wise old maltster who contrives to spend most of his time at work drinking beer, and the comparatively innocent writer, Vanek, who doesn't drink much and naively just wants to get on with the work.

The maltster (Barry Otto) is a symbol at once of the ordinary worker and of petty authority. He thinks he knows what makes men tick: he has used and manipulated those weaker than himself for years, and has, in his turn, been used and manipulated by those more powerful or ruthless than himself. But this writer puzzles him: he doesn't understand his motivation; he doesn't know how to bribe him.

Vanek (John Walton) is friendly enough, eager to please, at least on the surface. But he will not pretend. It is he who finally refuses to make the necessary compromises to form a bond with the maltster. While denying and deprecating the middle class status that sets him apart from the maltster (and from the masses) he affirms it and uses it to sustain his self-confidence through the time at the brewery.

These tables are turned in the second play, Private View. The writer is once again on the outer, but this time the protagonists are a fashionable, well-to-do couple who used to be his "best friends" before he fell from his position of privilege.

Vera and Michal (Cathy Downes and Barry Otto) have succeeded in surrounding themselves with exclusive material possessions, a luxurious apartment, antiques, sculpture, paintings, Bourbon and the latest rock music from America, etc. In the guise of polite conversation, they boast about each object in turn, and when they run out of objects they boast about Vera's cooking. Michal's job, their relationship and their sex-life.

By this stage, Vanek is acutely embarrassed and alarmed at the prospect of spending the rest of the evening with a pair of human leeches who are desperate for his approval of their self-indulgent way of life. Once again, Vanek makes a stand for a principle, where charity and fellowship might have led him to betray it.

In the third play, Protest, Vanek goes to visit another old friend, Stanek (Barry Otto in a third magnificent virtuoso characterisation). Stanek is an older writer who chose to compromise by supporting the Husak government rather than risk unemployment and poverty.

With fewer of the verbal games and repetitions of the earlier plays, this is a painful portrait of a man who knows he has taken the soft option, abandoning his principles and the truth. He is hypocritical and self-deceiving, but he is also intelligent enough to understand his own moral perfidy. That knowledge is his lifelong punishment, and Vanek stands almost a mute accuser.

There is much more to these plays than I have been able to discuss. They are
The cast work valiantly to breathe some life into the piece: they make the most of the comedy and there is some entertaining character work, notably from Geoffrey Rush, Robert Menzies, Michelle Fawdon and Garry Waddell. There is also some loud but average rock music, which is audible and extremely annoying even in the Downstairs Theatre. *Teeth'n Smiles* is a shallow play which goes nowhere slowly.

*The Venetian Twins*, Nick Enright and Terence Clarke's lively musical, is a jolly romp which richly deserves its current revival for a national tour.

It presents the unusual spectacle of an entire cast apparently enjoying themselves enormously, and the atmosphere is contagious.

There are outstanding performances from Drew Forsythe as both twins, Jon Ewing as the villain and Valerie Bader as the pert maid.

The staging is less effective at the Seymour Centre than it was at the Opera House because the thrust stage is more separate from the visible wings, making the show more of a concert party.

On the opening night I felt some of the theatrical devices and business were being overworked, possibly because of the cast's familiarity with the text. This company should respond well to their various audiences around the country and I think the production will give people a lot of pleasure.


Director, Aubrey Mellor; Designer, Paul Biek; Lighting, Jonathon Ciddor; Stage Manager, Anne Marie Morgan, Lee-Anne Donolley; Cast: Vanek, John Walton; with Barry Otto, Cathy Downs. (Professional)

*Teeth'n Smiles* by David Hare. Nimrod Upstairs, Sydney NSW. Opened June 17, 1981.

Director, Neil Armfield; Designer, Eddie Kurzer; Musical Director, Michael Carlos; Lighting, Raymond Medhurst; Stage Manager, Mark Robinson; Cast: Inch, Gary Waddell; Arthur, Robert Menzies; Laura, Michelle Fawdon; Nash, Ian Bowie; Wilson, Jack Weiner; Peyote, Geoffrey Rush; Smegs, Steve Coupe; Maggie, Gillian Jones; Sarafian, Tim Robertson; Randolph, Tony Strachan; Snead, Robert Davis; Anson, Warren Coleman. (Professional)


Director, John Bell; Musical Director, Terence Clarke; Musical Director on tour, Sharon Raschke; Designer, Stephen Carroi; Lighting, Jonathan Ciddor; Choreographers, Nancy Hayes, Keith Balm; Production Manager, Margie Wright; Stage and Company Manager, Jeanne Hurrell; Cast: Columbina, Valerie Bader; Rosaura, Annie Byron; Judge, Gordon McDougall; Brighella, Barry Lovett; Zanetto, Tonino; Drew Forsythe; Pantalone, Jon Ewing; Beatrice, Aleda Johnson; Flavio, Tony Sheldon; Tiberio, Lelio; Tony Taylor; Arlecchino, John McTernan. (Professional)
The scalpel cuts cleanly through the first layer of suntanned skin. A second stroke cuts the pinker layers beneath. A third parts the tissues and reveals the red and blue, wet and pulsing organs below.

So, too will Slice cut — into the metropolis.
Lacked conviction

MERCHANT OF VENICE

By Sue Williams

A Shylock more charismatic than the gloomy, weak Antonio created immediate problems in the Darwin Theatre Group's production of Merchant of Venice.

For a modern audience, unquestioned anti-Semitism is not readily acceptable. Arguably, the play enshrines racism: the Jew is ruined and the merchant championed. However, Shylock was interpreted as a materialist, rather than the usurer and underdog, which is the conventional portrayal. But the play requires a strong Antonio to ensure the audience is not swayed by Shylock's impassioned plea. Although he looked the part, Bob Whiteford's tepid Antonio was no foil for Alan Youngson's forceful and treacherous Shylock.

This imbalance created a dichotomy between intention and effect. Denied compassion for the Jew, the audience could not approve the priggish Christian.

A finer balance was achieved in the trial scene, where Youngson's eloquence vied with Maryanne Haslam's excellent Portia. She played the stern arbiter with clarity and avoided conflict between this and Portia's other role the coquette. To this aspect she brought confidence and humour.

Michael Glasson, as her lover, Bassanio, lacked conviction, highlighting the play's incomprehensible marriage of the witless opportunist to virtue and honesty. Weakness in the casting of both Bassanio and Antonio was the production's most serious flaw.

The minor characters provided humour and warmth. The slapstick Salerio and Solanio were very funny, although exaggerated in part. Their failure to convey the complex nature of the Shakespearean fool was probably due to a lack of direction rather than talent.

Old Gobbo was a lovely cameo. Mark Norris, as his son, Launcelot, defined the fiend conscience dialectic in a series of sharp, acrobatic movements that were sculptured images.

Technically, the production was imaginative and visually exciting. It was performed in the open air at the gun turret, a World War II legacy that overlooks the Timor Sea. As a performing space, it would be the envy of most theatre companies. And the set design of Justin Hill and Steve Duddy maximised the venue. Simply constructed from bamboo, calico and masonite, the Venetian ships and Portia's Belmont palace were etched against the night sky, with the effect of painting. Tiered platform structure in the hollow core allowed shifts in focus and mood.

DTG is predominantly an amateur company, usually bringing a freshness that demands attention. The production of Merchant of Venice, apart from its energy and magical setting, lacked conviction.

Women at the centre

NO NAMES... NO PACK DRILL

THE HOMECOMING

by Veronica Kelly

"They can't 'elp it. Natural dobbers. Somethin' to do with their glands" declares Tiger Kelly in QTC's No Names... No Pack Drill. The play has the not uncommon dramatic pattern of a central woman character surrounded by confused and competing demands from males, with the concomitant problem of how and at what price, if at all, she might survive. Bob Herbert's Kathy falls foul of the no-dobbing code which everyone else in the play observes or breaks as convenient. The landlady, to whom the code and its intricacies are foreign, deplores it as un-British: "I suppose your history does explain it, but that hardly excuses it." This character's instinctive and unwavering class loyalty to the forces of law render her the play's one unambiguous villain, from whom Gwen Wheeler gleefully extracts every ounce of predatory vengefulness.

Yet No Names does veer in its last pages from more fully dealing with the intriguing social questions started in its cops and fugitives plot, and plonks for a seemingly more glandular solution. Kathy's motivation for her final decision to save the deserter Rebel is worked out in psychological terms which come as close as dammit to the image of the good-hearted tart who in sacrificing her self affirms the Value of Love. Partially drawn as self-reliant and resilient, the character bears a double burden in having to accommodate the sex-role code as well as that of the convict brotherhood. "You're not a MAN" she spits, like Scarlett O'Hara, at the bewildered Rebel, who of all the men has done least to earn this sexist accusation. Maybe it is the play's point; that a woman can take the conflicting codes too seriously for her own good — while others meantime keep changing the rules — but it makes a bumpy change of direction in the play's concluding scenes.

In an oddly lit and in places redundant set which does anything but make the vast stage look smaller, the production's success is assured by the three young actors who carry most of the play. Graham Harvey and Merrin Canning, both new to Brisbane, are an attractive central duo. Harvey's Rebel — no macho manipulator — is basically a likeable but scared kid thrown into a combat whose violence is more than he can take: a valid and believable reading which certainly hits home in terms of the Vietnam situation, whether or not it works for the Second War context. Duncan Wass makes the most of the well written role of Tiger, the
street-wise survivor who has solved his own oedipal terrors and guilts by a judicious wielding of a cricket bat upon his sleeping dad, and thus oddly is best qualified to point the play's Ibsen-like moral about where woman's first duty lies: "Get smart, sort... Look after yourself."

At La Boite, a finely-tuned and beautiful looking production by Malcolm Blaylock of The Homecoming, a play whose voracious but obscured textual subcurrents can also seem pretty glandular in origin. Not so however in this reading, which refuses to become a display of turgid doom and shows the victory of consciousness over chromosomes.

Jennifer Flowers' wonderful stillness and sensitive detailed work deliver a riveting and enigmatic Ruth which overcomes the main problem of that part; that the character is partially expressionistic, written only as the other characters see her in their turgid needs and fears, while the audience is denied the objective and ironic view of her that is built into the male characters. This sense of a Ruth as she is to herself must be supplied by the actor, and this Ruth displays an iron will and a breath-taking emotional courage which make her decision to replace the dead mother a positive rather than a self-destructive act.

The well balanced cast makes every role a winner. Particularly strong is Michael Austin's irascible Max, the butcher-king whose powers are failing. The scenes of tension between him and Alan Endicot's gently spoken Teddy make it clear that the real battle is between these two, with the transfer of Ruth seen by them as the condition for a temporary stand-off. The practised needling of the spivish Lenny—polished reading by Ian Calder—is a light skirmish in comparison. Lenny being, as his dad has become and maybe always was, basically all talk. A great play, which honestly states and confronts fears and desires which must be pretty common, if the persistence of the one woman and several men casting pattern is anything to judge by.

No Names... No Packdrill by Bob Herbert. Queensland Theatre Co, NGIO Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened June 12, 1981.

Director, Peter Duncan; Designer, James Ridewood; Lighting, James Henson; Stage Managers, Patrick Weihan, Ellen Kennedy.

Cast: Rebel, Graham Harvey; Kathy, Merrin Canning; Joyce, Christine Jesston; Bernie, David Clandinin; Tige, Duncan Wink; Mrs. Palmer, Gwen Wheeler; Browning, Lawrence Hodge; Webb, Patrick Reid; Lambert, Malcolm Cork; Wood, Peter Drouny.

(Professional)

The Homecoming by Harold Pinter. La Boiote, Brisbane Qld. Opened June 24, 1981.

Director, Malcolm Blaylock; Designer, Sally Anne Connolly; Stage Manager, David Foster; Cast: Max, Michael Austin; Lenny, Ian Caldar; Teddy, Alan Endicot; Ruth, Jennifer Flowers; Joey, Michael Hooper; Sam, Rob Nicholls.

(Pro/A m)

Overlong and strong direction

A SEASON AT CLAYTON'S

THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF ARTURO UI

by Jeremy Ridgman

Stuart Dickson is an Adelaide solicitor and A Season at Clayton's his first professionally produced play. No doubt his professional commitments have prevented his being present at many of QTC Tangent's rehearsals, but one hopes that when he does get up to see Betty Ross and Faye Donaldson's valiant performances, he may realise how much pruning the play needs if it is to achieve a manageable length and style.

This is a two-hander for women (perhaps therefore welcome in itself), full of compassion and humour but buying rather unceasingly into a market already cornered by a number of recent plays; that of the frustration and isolation of the suburban housewife tied to the hitching post of domesticity while the experiences of life pass her by.

The action, mostly wishfully reflective, centres around the presumably daily ritual of tea and chat in the kitchen of Beryl Clayton, a sturdy and occasionally appealing misanthrope, equipped with an arsenal of super-accurate similes and devastating epigrams which she lobbs, like inter-continental ballistic missiles at unseen targets in the world beyond; neighbours, family, priests, minor officials etc. Her interlocutor and neighbour, Dymphna, is a good-natured soul, characterised by little more than a simple faith, whose main job is to act as a sort of range-finding device through which Beryl homes in on her unwitting targets.

The play then is very much Beryl's and steers close to joining the ranks of the ubiquitous monodrama, especially in the soliloquising of the overlong first act. Beryl it is who has suffered a bitter marriage, been left on the shelf of middle-aged widowhood and who now feels the cold wind of old age blowing through the house. Only in the second act, with the news of death in the family, does Dickson set up a stimulating tension between the two characters. Otherwise the script depends too much on a self-conscious literariness which could be sloughed off with more consultation between writer and director. As one becomes anaesthetised to Beryl's elaborate repartee, her rather unsubstantial character emerges as a self-pitying Jimmy Porter in search of a context. On a purely technical level, both actors on opening night were stumbling over lines often one or two clauses too long.

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui is perhaps Brecht's most theatrical piece, dealing as it does with the gigantic illusionistic con-trick played by a small-time hoodlum in order to set himself up as a death-dealing dictator. At its centre (literally and metaphorically) is the brilliant scene, based on Hitler's habit of practising in front of a mirror, in which Ui takes lessons in performance from a ham actor and unconsciously perverts his rhetorical flourishes and attitudes into the now familiar grotesque clucking stance, the contorted gestures of emphasis and, of course, the goose-step itself.

Here then is a perfect vehicle for fifteen or so final year acting students: the richness and purposefulness of Brecht are there, providing a training ground in microcosm. Mick Rodger's first production at DDIAE is full of strong directorial statement (I especially liked the use of a smoky atmosphere and a design exploiting the mutual motifs of swastika and dollar sign) but wisely thrusts the actors into the open and is largely dependent on their resources.

The stage is wide and bare, the recourse to tricks minimal and the introduction of songs from other Brechtian and non-Brechtian sources serves to deepen the ensemble input.

Barry Searle's Ui is more confident in the early depiction of a little clown with ideas above his station but fails to bring to bear the strength required to give the final "tomorrow the world" speech the horrific impact it deserves. Bronwyn Naylor brings an abrasive sensuality to the Barker, here most convincingly transposed into a female role.


Director, Gregory Gesch; Designer, James Ridewood; Lighting, James Henson; Stage Manager, Kristin Reuter.

Cast: Beryl, Faye Donaldson; Dymphna, Betty Ross.

(Professional)
Two superlative performers

FAREWELL BRISBANE LADIES
by Michael Morley

Kevin Palmer’s parting production is a play of leave-takings and new beginnings: it also sums up and exemplifies the strengths of his approach to his period of stewardship. It is openly, even extravagantly Australian; direct, humorous and colourful. And it provides two superlative performers with roles which, if not as rich as they initially promise to be, are nevertheless clearly fashioned.

The ladies of the title have seen better (or rather more lucrative) days; though never in the big league they obviously had a fair range of customers for their merchandise. Some neat jokes are had on the subject of the goods they once offered — not muslin, haberdashery or assorted hardware, but their bodies and their company.

Maggie Kirkpatrick’s Winnie is the louder, blowier of the two; and the relationship between them is very much along the lines of that explored in Neil Simon’s The Odd Couple. Not that Doreen Clarke’s piece is an antipodean copy of the American original: its social aspects and the situation are too distinctive for that. But if there is one major weakness in the script it is the author’s inability to sustain her story-line over the two acts. One is left with the feeling that nothing much happened after Act 1: not altogether true, in fact, but the ending in particular is lame and contrived. It may be customary for academic critics to sneer at Simon, but his plays are dramaturgical models. Any author looking to develop situation comedy for the theatre could do far worse than study his technique.

After the arrival of Winnie, uninvited and somewhat unwelcome, the patterns of superiority and compromise are fairly well worked through by the end of Act 1. Gert (Monica Maughan) has left her past behind and done her best to be accepted into the North Queensland township where she has retired. She attends seances instead of bridge or tea parties and is well on the way to acceptance as a pillar of the community. In breezes Winnie, largely and brightly clad in skin tight, screaming pink slacks: and the initial exuberance and surprise on Gert’s part are soon replaced by annoyance and requests for Winnie’s immediate departure. Seven weeks later, after a row, she takes the last of a series of broad hints and returns to the city — only to ensure that Gert will eventually follow her there.

Monica Maughan’s Gert, all assumed respectability and waspish primness, and Maggie Kirkpatrick’s Winnie, noisy, overbearing, coarse and hugely (in every sense) comical, are splendid characterisations. Their timing is well-nigh flawless, their feel for the pointed joke or throwaway observation spot on. And Kevin Palmer’s production allows them space to develop their relationship.

There are few enough genuinely amusing Australian plays; and both director and author are well served by two performers working intelligently and sympathetically on a script which could be improved. Not so the performances themselves, which are a delight from beginning to end.


Director. Kevin Palmer; Designer, Sue Russell; Lighting. Nigel Levingis; Stage Manager. Bev Maclnnis.

Cast: Gert Anderson, Monica Maughan; Winnie Madigan, Maggie Kirkpatrick.

AUDITIONS
ACTORS/MUSICIANS
Male and Female
The Central and Northern Queensland Theatre Company will make its debut in January, 1982. The Company will present a season of contemporary theatre with a strong musical emphasis in Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton and Mackay.
Auditions from actors preferably with musical or other performance skills will be held in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Company is also looking for a keyboard player/musical director and will be interviewing designers, production staff and stage management. Those interested, write immediately with biography and photograph to Peter Barclay or Terry O’Connell, Artistic Directors, Central and Northern Queensland Theatre Company, Civic Theatre, TOWNSVILLE, Queensland.

Cruelty and compassion

SAMIZDAT TOMORROW'S NEWS
By Gus Worby

Veronica Jeffrey and Gwenda Helsham in Troupe’s Samizdat.
One. When the truth goes underground it becomes samizdat. Samizdat: Russian for the whisper behind the word.

Two years ago, John Romeril was on the road. Travelling light. Trading whispers. The news he scrounged was all up North. News, even though some of it was old enough to be at school. It hadn't made the Press. It was still moving. It hadn't become the Word. News in Limbo. Why? It was about the wrong side of the Law. 1972 - a black woman, raped for the third time, wants to press charges and ends up on a plane to New Zealand, exiled; 1976 - a hippie squatter is mind-fucked in Paradise by a deputy with a gun; 1979 - a third generation policeman - a Kelly - is on the run from the force for protecting the public and private right to protest.

The stories are taut, punchy, full of paranoia and anger. They run on the spot, sweat and twitch - then bolt. The actors telling the stories do the same. Their sense of urgency outpaces the audience six to one. The ability to control this actor-audience gap becomes the critical factor in the production. The time-lag and warp in perspective alienates for a purpose and to great effect. Is this my Australia? But, sometimes, the audience is simply left to languish in the lazy rhythm of the mainstream - no character to contact - looking, as it were, through a plate-glass wall at the frenetic display on an almost bare thrust. Freaks. Alienation becomes segregation.

One source of this fracture comes with what seem to be differing (though well-defined) and, at times, inimical concepts of characterisation and style. Jon Firman (the Cedar Bay hippie) and Keith Gallasch (Do, the gay waiter) have the manic mode of the silent movie played at sound speed. Evan Johnson (Em. the exile) and Gwenda Helsham (the hippie wife) adopt an almost naturalistic approach to character despite the use of mime and pantomime conventions throughout the three-play sequence. Veronica Jeffrey alternates between the two, though not with any discernible patterning based on inter-relationship. As Dee, the ever-present journalist, she reflects, rather than shapes, the extremities of condition tackled by the work. If Dee does not give space to samizdat, if she does not let it live, breathe, open out, stand still, then the whisper stays underground and the whole truth remains half told ... in the theatre. And that doesn't seem to be the point of the exercise.

Two. When government for the people means eliminating some of the people, that is 'strage di stato'. Strage di stato: Italian for state massacre.

In 1977, two of Italy's most popular theatre works, Dario Fo and Franca Rame, created: Ulrike Meinhoff: Sex: Female, Communist and Tomorrow's News. Both pieces share dual qualities of cruelty and compassion. The first is essentially a dramatic monologue in which Meinhoff's guerrilla campaign continues after incarceration. Ideology sustains the mind and morale, even as the state seeks to break the body. Tomorrow's News extends the vision of torture further to the entirely lucid, documentary, description of the 'stage-managed suicide' of four imprisoned guerillas as told by one of their number, Ingrid Moeller, as she is stabbed and bleeds to death. This, too, is samizdat.

In keeping with their first programme, Nick Tsoutas and Peggy Wallach have joined with visual artists, musicians and sound sculptors to create their performance environment this time in the Red Shed.

The thesis which seems to connect these works, and the one which Tsoutas pushes as the key to their relevance here, is of the 'violence begets violence' kind. The debate centres on the nature of violent, radical action and the implication of the violent assumptions which underlie our accepted social, political, sexual philosophies and practices.

The production has conceptual as well as visual strengths. Wallach as Meinhoff hangs suspended in a white cage-cum-ducks stool, ten feet above the floor - a modern witch. Below her, an unnamed prisoner and a nameless guard perform rituals of brutalisation. Her harangues are matched by their silence, her stillness by their incessant movement. Peter Cheshyn as Moeller is fixed in a corner by a beam of light. The inevitable, but separate, victim walks round and round 'her' hoop of life bleeding to death as Moeller talks, stabbed by a guard who lives for her dying. Speedy movies flicker, a ladder holds centre stage, corrugated iron crashes, and a crazed saxophonist-mourner rasps and gasps an end.

Basket Weaving for Amateurs, Nick Tsoutas and Peggy Wallach have joined with visual artists, musicians and sound sculptors to create their performance environment this time in the Red Shed.

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**Basket Weaving for Amateurs**

By John Romeril. Troupe, Unley SA. Opened June 18, 1981.

Director, Keith Gallasch; Designer, Heather Bishop; Lighting, Richard Chattaway; Dramaturg, Barry Plews.

Cast: Veronica Jeffrey, Eva Johnson, Keith Gallasch, Gwenda Helsham, Jo Firman.

(Professional)


Director, Nicholas Tsoutas.

Cast: Peggy Wallach, Derek Kreckleer, Peter Cheshyn, Jamie West.

(Professional)

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL LITERATURE AND THEATRE BOARD

PLAYWRIGHTS-IN-RESIDENCE

The Literature Board invites applications from T.I.E. and professional theatre companies for assistance under the 1982 Playwrights-in-Residence Programme. Grants towards the fares and salaries of Australian playwrights are usually determined on a 3:1 (Council: Company) basis and are available for periods of 1 to 6 months.

Guidelines and application forms may be obtained by writing to the Literature Board, PO Box 302, North Sydney NSW 2060.

Closing date for applications which must be on the appropriate form is 30th September 1981. Applications postmarked after this date will not be considered.

NOTE: The Literature Board and Australian Film and Television School are offering short term screen writing apprenticeships for 3 writers in 1981-1982. Enquiries to Keith Thompson, A.F.T.V.S. PO Box 126, North Ryde, NSW 2113.
Successful and pleasurable

UNDER MILKWOOD
by Pamela Hyland

Polygon Theatre Company presented Dylan Thomas' Under Milkwood "out of the darkness", "simply and warmly". The eccentricality of the myriad characters were impressionistically displayed by ten people on stage, some of whom occasionally moved from their playing space.

Martin Brown, John Hale, Keith Blaxhall and Chris Harvey in Polygon's Under Milkwood.

The cast worked well together. The tick tock of Cut Glass clocks and the huffs of breath on a puff ball became chorus sounds and the sound flowed from character to character. Only a slight change of hat or hairstyle or shawl made a difference. There were problems however. The audience was startled and bewildered when compared with the fine individual performances, and with the sense of unity and pleasure that the company generated. John Hall was most remarkable and convincing in his varied and sympathetic presentations: teasing and jolly as Butcher Beynon; all-caring, all-seeing and poignant as Damien Morgan as Ivan gave the only convincing performance of the evening.

These problems were not serious when compared with the fine individual performances, and with the sense of unity and pleasure that the company generated. John Hall was most remarkable and convincing in his varied and sympathetic presentations: teasing and jolly as Butcher Beynon; all-caring, all-seeing and poignant as Damien Morgan as Ivan gave the only convincing performance of the evening.

It is difficult in a rippling waterfall of words to love every one of them, as Thomas instructed. But the evening was successful and pleasurable, encouraging the audience to share. Part of the value and interest in Milk Wood is not so much that it is so much Welsh, but that foibles like those presented are universal.

As Captain Cat flicking his skivvy-top and adding spectacles to become the Reverend Eli, speaking timorously as Mr Pritchard, Hazel Alger moved with ease through her range of characters. She contrasted the iceberg — hoily laundered Mrs Ogmore-Pritchard with the gentler, accepting Mary Ann Sailors. She chatted on the cobbles as Mrs Dai Bread One: "nice to be cosy" and shrieked incredulously, with large eyes, as Mrs. Butcher Beynon.

It was more Irish than Welsh. Overall, the rhythm seemed uncertain. The cyclical nature of the play was completely broken by the singing of "Wales" at the finale. The one spring day is folded into the bible-black night and should stay there. The essential sadness and loneliness of the last scenes was overwhelmed.

The rest of the cast need a good deal of improvement in that area.
Over-wordy asylums

THE HOTHOUSE
ARTAUD AT RODEZ
by Colin Duckworth

If anyone is planning a Season of Psychotheatre, these plays are a must, together with, say, Marat-Sade, Equus, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, and Beckett's Rough for Radio. Not only would most efficient use of long white coats and straightjackets be ensured, but we should see the extent to which the psychiatric institution has replaced earlier forms of enforced normalisation (from the Inquisition to Chinese "struggles").

Pinter wrote The Hothouse in 1958, lost it, found it, and thought it funny enough to warrant performance, since it had not, he considered, aged. I think he was wrong (it has the self-indulgent verbosity of the 50s of Fry and Osbornes), and right (any full-length Pinter play should get a showing, just as Beckett's first play, Eleutheria, should, if and when he releases it, but he is more self-critical than his disciple, Pinter).

Pinter's reasons for liking The Hothouse ("he laughed quite a lot", not a "grim piece of work", an odd piece of "laughter and chill") show exactly why it has dated: Amnesty International has taught us all that "psychiatric hospitals" in totalitarian states are not a laughing matter; unless, as with Stoppard, the laughter is a means to pathos.

Pinter has given us a very lightweight, jokey comment on a terrifying subject. It lacks menace, suspense or sustained black humour. For this, the production may be partly to blame. Quite a few chances are missed in the timing of the comedy and in Pinter's emphasis is on those who inflict mental torture. The inmates remain in the wings. Marowitz is concerned primarily with those who inflict suffering on themselves and then have this compounded by their treatment. Chief among these tormented souls at Rodez, the clinic of Dr Ferdiere, is the man who - and this is far from clear in Marowitz's presentation or this production's rendering of it - wrote fourteen volumes of overwhelmingly powerful, poetic, influential and visionary works on theatre and life: Artaud.

True, the text is Artaud's incarceration and suffering at Rodez is good job he was stowed away there, or the Germans would have had little time for him despite his anti-semitism and the copy of the work he dedicated to Hitler). But Artaud the genius needs to be established if the average spectator, who is not au fait with the author of The Theatre and its Double and The Cenci, is to properly understand the degradation of Artaud the para-noiac and schizophrenic. It does the admirable Artaud no favours in the public memory to give an impression of a bunch of nutcases practising their aggro on the audience.

A good deal of the text is based on biographical fact, and on information given to Marowitz by Dr Ferdiere. But there is also a considerable amount of invented material masquerading as fact, which is fine in a work claiming to be imaginative, but not here. Or again, the "Manifesto" with which we were all issued at the end, demanding the release of Artaud, takes no account of Dr Ferdiere's fear that if released Artaud would return to dependence on laudanum, opium and heroin. The fear was justified. To state, as the "Manifesto" does, that "Madman (sic) are, above all else, the individual victims of social dictatorship", is to associate Artaud with a brand of crass naivety that ignores the very many interpretations of his case that have been published, psychiatric, religious, physiological, poetic, and mystical. Artaud's writings and his case-history opened doors of comprehension for R D Laing, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. Marowitz and the Pram Oughtnot to slam them shut again by insisting on a single, dogmatic approach to this harrowing problem of mental torture.

Apart from the misguided attempt at audience-alienation (we were led in one by one like sheep and made to sit where told (as at the Paris production of Arrabal's And They Handcuffed The Flowers) for no good reason, the production was laudable in its energy, control and use of space. Arpad Mihaly, although physically unsuited to play the haggard, skinny, haunted apparition Artaud became, held together this bitty and over-wordy structure with a driving force and conviction that called forth our compassion for one who, in ancient times, might have been allowed to roam round the desert in a loin-cloth, revered as a seer and prophet.


Peter Friedrich Cast: Antonin Artaud, Arpad Mihaly, with Robin Anson, Suzi Rosedale, Rhonda Wilson, Alan Knoepfler, Geoffrey Murray, Rod McNicol, Susie Dee, and John Howard. (Professional)
A Mixed Show Bag

by Suzanne Spunner

In keeping with the show bag metaphor one could proceed to excavate its contents in an archeological fashion beginning at the layer chronologically furthest from the excavator and describe a movement from the loveable 19th century eccentricity of E W Cole, to the Cold War, pre-feminist angst of Sylvia Plath, to the assorted manifestations of early seventies schizoid personality of Fineline and end in the eighties with the alienation of language and effect via television and mass media; and a corresponding inference could be drawn about theatrical style from the antedeluvian layers of naturalism to new wave performance.

Steve Vizard has written numerous cabaret and theatre restaurant shows but Coles Funny Picture Person is his first play. E W Cole was an acute businessman and bookseller, and idiosyncratic philosopher. He preached with unflagging energy on the rights of children to enjoyment from instruction; the unity of black and white; and the miraculous qualities of the humble apple. He combined free thinking with entrepreneurial flair and rose from selling books from a barrow in the Eastern Market to a vast and wondrous book arcade and in his own words, "made a temple of the market place". There he sold his own works, his literary castor oil the Coles Funny Picture books so that the children of the new world might laugh and learn simultaneously.

Vizard's portrait of Cole emphasises the more bizarre elements of his personality, while it is empathetic it never delves below the surface, but creates Cole in the same terms as he promoted himself. Under Paul Hampton's direction, Norman Kaye's performance was attractively whimsical and most beguiling, but neither baroque enough to sustain the cartoon aspect of the writing nor subtle enough to suggest a more complex reading of the character. Paul Kathner's set was a masterpiece of scene painting and it led to one of the best moments in the play when Cole unveils his book arcade; you felt his famed rainbow shoot across the top of the eagerly stacked shelves of new books.

Since her death in 1963 Sylvia Plath has generated a welter of academic scholarship, and in recent years a succession of dramatic interpretations of her life and art. Rose Leiman Goldemberg's Letters Home is based on the extensive series of letters she wrote to her mother, Aurelia Plath, during her college years out East, and in England later as a poet, wife and mother. The focus of the play is the relationship between Sylvia and her mother; Aurelia and her daughter.

Their relationship is both intensely loving and intensely competitive and their letters both express and disguise this problem.

Goldemberg stresses the way in which daughters are doomed to repeat the patterns of their mothers' lives — her successes and her failures are yours if you only knew; and at times this female fatalism is heavy handed and cliched — "Ted was just like Otto...". The weakness of the play is the limitation of its scope — it neither explores the social context of Plath's life nor does it deal with any of her writing. So that we end up with a very lopsided picture — if it had not been for her poetry we would not be interested in a play about someone's letters to their mother.

The poetry, the work, and what she made of, and from, her life needs to be there with her, the woman, the daughter. Nancy Black's Sylvia in her pastel sweater and barrette was subtly observed and keenly felt and in tandem with Gerda Nicolson's Aurelia, the performances were able to hold what was finally a thin text, together. Murray Copland's direction and Axel Bartz's design reinforced a sense of something between a fifties musical and a Joan Crawford melodrama and did little to take the play into more interesting areas.

Tsk Tsk has been working now since 1977 in the new territories between art, theatre and contemporary music in various performances, installations, gigs at galleries, pubs and parties. But Television Works is their first venture into a theatre space and a cabaret form. In Television Works they did everything from acting, writing and composing to recording their own sound track, compiling and making video material. Television Works was an exploration of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, or television and its audience and its intention was to analyse and demystify that nexus; to make the viewer, an active conductor rather than a passive observer/consumer. Its method was to take examples from current television programmes and deconstruct them by breaking them into their component parts and then record those parts and/or create new and contradictory components and thereby reveal the aesthetic and ideological assumptions beneath the images. Thus the show alternated live action, video playback and original video pieces all of which refracted and clashed with each other.

The concept and technological execution of the show under Ralph Kerle's direction was highly sophisticated, stylish...
and provocative, even if the live performance lacked definition and weight. The group's commitment to finding an accessible fusion of areas in contemporary culture which have become fragmented and self-referencing is unassailable and I look forward to seeing more of their work and hope that in their future projects they will begin to tackle the real politics with the same creative vigour that they explore artistic practise.

After seeing the Routinos new latenight, music cabaret piece, Videoville I felt as though I was doomed to endless repeats of some of the few good moments from the APG Ensemble's first show, Rezistor Routines. I first saw the material then and later saw it reworked into a piece at the Last Laugh. Third time round, it certainly begins to pale. This version comprising original songs interspersed with sketches has a loose, even lazy thematic thread and a casual structure. It could possibly have worked in a pub or in the Piano Bar (again) but certainly felt flat and uninspiring in the Back Theatre. All that saved it were a number of clever, boppy songs and a brilliant sketch on unemployment written by Barry Dickins. The show felt desperately in need of an idea, and possibly a director or writer outside the performers could have helped.

After seeing Fineline I felt that I was condemned to reliving the dramatic issues and the modern dance language I'd gone through in the late sixties. Fineline was executed with an artistic earnestness rarely seen today. It was polished and thorough but I found it devoid of genuine experiment and without any desire to communicate with an audience. At time the acting of Rinske Ginsberg and Joe Spano lived, breathed and moved, despite the busyness and tricksiness of the directorial effects. By the end I felt that everyone was all dressed up and had nowhere to go. I think what frustrated me most was seeing yet another superficial treatment of a significant topic — sanity and psychiatry. It was no doubt sincere but I felt very trendy and flip.

Grim portrayal of survival

THE APPOINTMENT

by Cathy Peake

Kathy Mueller's The Appointment takes much of its strength from the sensitive way in which it handles subject matter which ranges from the plight of the aboriginals in the Northern Territory to the identity and survival of a young female schoolteacher called Bridget.

Set mostly in Bridget's caravan — an arena that is constantly being invaded by tropical wildlife and the local populace — it is a relatively grim portrayal of survival and the struggle for personal integrity against bureaucratic blunders of racism and oppression.

One of the questions it never asks, but which the whole diverse cast constantly seem to raise, is that of why these people, the whites anyway, are here. With few exceptions, all of them seem to be the victims of circumstances which have cast them into this tropical paradise cum nightmare and marooned them there.

Tommy, the local retard, brilliantly played by Mark Shirrefs, certainly couldn't move on, but Valerie, the wispish, frustrated and socially ambitious postmistress, Joan, the dear old eccentric who is losing the pigment of her skin, Allan, the aggressive Yank with a major in psychology from UCLA and Bridget herself all find their problems compounded by their relatively easy. The Appointment has been directed by its author whose interest seems to have mainly been centred on the naturalistic level at which most of the social problems have an intensely personal basis.

It is probably the best way to handle it, although I am not sure whether all the issues that the play raises are really able to be brought back and somehow tied up by Bridge's final outburst and rejection of Allan. In terms of a rather more dense and satisfactory resolution, that might have been more successful if the play had received a less naturalistic interpretation.
Coldness and warmth

COWARDY CUSTARD

UNCLE VANYA

By Joan Ambrose

The policy formed by the Hole in the Wall Board to go dark for 10 weeks in the middle of the year, has this year made space available for other companies to use the theatre.

The first of these productions to fill the between-seasons programme is a Mason-Miller presentation of Cowardy Custard, — the title incidentally was chosen by Coward himself to add the final note to the incredibly successful original production at the Mermaid in 1972 — and has proved to be a very successful crowd pleaser here in Perth, with an extended season planned to move to the Octagon.

Coward’s aim, he said, was to amuse, and he had an uncirring sense of what would please his contemporaries. His is a style of glittering surfaces, elegance, irony and wit — he was an artist who wrote for and reflected his time.

To achieve a reproduction of Coward’s style and panache is a formidable task that this present production of Cowardy Custard did not quite achieve. This is in no way to denigrate the effective performances of the cast. In particular Gerald Hitchcock and Terry Johnson maintained a meticulous attention to style, and the audience had the added bonus of Terry Johnson’s very attractive singing. And Joan Sydney’s ‘Mad Dogs and Englishmen’ was the highlight of the evening — presented with her great comic talent.

But there was a sense that something was missing. The costumes for instance lacked colour. The theme was basically black and white, which created a coldness quite at odds with Coward’s gaiety. And at some points the production moved almost to parody, so there was the irony of parody on a parody.

All in all, the fine tuning, the assured arrogance that is at the base of Coward’s style, was lacking in this production.

The second production for June to appear at The Hole in the Wall was Uncle Vanya, directed by Ken Campbell-Dobbie with the Actors Company. The Actors Company, a fine group of performers, had recently lost their venue at St George’s Hall and moved Uncle Vanya to the Hole.

Director Ken Campbell-Dobbie chose to interpret the play very literally and successfully as a study of character. Romantic gloom, boredom, claustrophobia and over-mannerly stylisation which is the frequent, unfortunate interpretation given to Chekov gave way to an emphasis on character and conflict, which was evocative and relevant.

We observed and felt the frustration of Alexander Serebryakov, the retired professor whose body is failing and who is no longer the centre of academic acclaim: we were drawn into the pain of Sonya’s recent loss their venue at St George’s Hall and moved Uncle Vanya to the Hole. Director Ken Campbell-Dobbie chose to interpret the play very literally and successfully as a study of character. Romantic gloom, boredom, claustrophobia and over-mannerly stylisation which is the frequent, unfortunate interpretation given to Chekov gave way to an emphasis on character and conflict, which was evocative and relevant.

We observed and felt the frustration of Alexander Serebryakov, the retired professor whose body is failing and who is no longer the centre of academic acclaim: we were drawn into the pain of Sonya’s recent loss. We were involved in the passion of Uncle Vanya and Mikhail Astrov for the beautiful but shallow, Yelena, the aging professor’s young wife.

That we understood and sympathised with the characters is the real success that Ken Campbell Dobbie and the actors achieved with Uncle Vanya despite some slowness in the first act and awkward set changes. We cared about the people, were moved by their unhappiness and intrigued by the subtle interplay of personality upon personality and the perception of the frailty of the human condition that we all share, despite time or place. Particular reference must be made to the performances of Andrew Warwick as the Professor, Lionel Farrell as Mikhail Astrov, and Libby Stone as Sonya. I trust that there will be more such productions from the Actors Company.

An auspicious start

ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

by Collin O’Brien

When the forces of law and order go to farcical lengths to protect themselves, perhaps the only way to depict such behaviour in the theatre is through farce. Certainly the actual events on which Dario Fo’s Accidental Death of an Anarchist are based were more outlandish than a Feydeau could possibly dream up. But then we all know the propensity of people in custody to fall over in their cells and damage themselves — they have even been known to fall on a policeman’s boot, to judge by the injuries. Even more astonishing is the propensity suspects have to overcome with an uncontrollable urge to fling themselves out of interrogation-room windows.

Comedy, even bleak, black comedy, is a way of distancing us from grim reality, but at its best to reveal the true nature of that reality. In the new Winter Theatre’s presentation of Accidental Death the script was made topically Australian, as it should be, and was at its best in the second act when the analogies between the Italian and Australian context were drawn. In the first act the sheer frenetic pace of the farce proved wearing after some twenty minutes, but the topicality of the second act restored both play and performances.

Ross Col directed the play with skill, and the company (and the public) were fortunate to have the services of Robert Alexander whose work I have admired in Sydney. While lacking the skill and range of Alexander, the rest of the cast compensated to a degree with sheer energy. It was an auspicious start for the new company, committed to providing a somewhat more wayout, but nevertheless necessary, aspect of a vital theatre than the
more established companies can afford to provide consistently.

Director, Ross Colk; Designer, Jill Halliday; Lighting, Keith Edmundson; Stage Manager, Christina Parry.
Cast: Maniac, Robert Alexander; Bertozzo, Ross Bryant; Pissani, Grant Cottrell; Constables, Glenn Swift; Superintendent, Michael Graham; Feletti, Denis Kirby.

(Professional)

Lack of real affection

ON OUR SELECTION
by Cliff Gillam

In anticipation, a good nostalgic night out with Dad and Dave and old-time music. In the event, more tedium than mirth and no real engagement. John Milson’s production wrestles with a script too firmly bogged in a very thin and dated romantic melodrama as the action’s core, and too infrequently enlivened either by the rich possibilities of the idiom and humour of the original, or by musical diversions.

Some very fine performances, notably by James Bean as Dave and Carolyn McKenzie as Sal survive far too many other performances where single level interpretations reduce the characters to lifeless ciphers. Some of the acting was in fact worse than coarse, it was downright bad.

Tony Tripp’s design, all outback detritus and cunningly arranged spaces is one of the production’s real pluses, and it is properly abetted by Duncan Ord’s lighting. But on the whole, the lack of zest in the production seemed to betray a general lack of real affection for the material.


Director, John Milson.
Cast: Dad, Geoff Gibbs; Mother, Margaret Anketell; Kate, Helen O’Grady; Sarah, Carolyn McKenzie; Davie, James Bean; Joe, Rodney Southern; Sandy, Harry Davidson; Lily, Julia Moody; Billy, Tim Walker; Maloney, Ivan King; the Careys, Rod Hall; Piano, Derek Bond; Cranky Jack, Jay Walsh.

(Professional)
A.C.T. (49 7600)


THEATRE THREE (47 4222)

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, Repertory production directed by Pamela Rosenberg. To Aug 8.


REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (47 0781)


For entries contact Janet Healey on 49 2669/48 4807.

NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)


PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (232 8570)

Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf by Edward Albee; director, Peter Williams. Albee's now classic marriage drama that punctures the American dream. To Aug 16.


PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211)

Bondi Pavilion Theatre: Trap For A Lonely Man by Robert Thomas; director, Peter Whitford; with Russell Newman, David Grant, Trevor Kent, Barry Quin, Olive Brown, Norman Hayes and Maggie Blinco. Throughout Aug.

Q THEATRE (047 215735)

No Names... No Pack Drill by Bob Herbert; director, Doreen Warburton. Most produced Australian play this year — nostalgic evocation of wartime Sydney. Bankstown Aug 5-8; Orange Aug 26-29.

STUDIO SYDNEY (358 6096)

Norm and Ahmed by Alexander Buzo; director, Alexander Buzo; with Peter Carmody and Monroe Reimers. And The Death of Minnie by Barry Dickins;

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

(358 4399)
Drama Theatre SOH: Lulu adapted by Louis Nowra from Wedekind’s Earth Spirit and Pandora’s Box; director, Jim Sharman; with Judy Davis, Kerry Walker, Brandon Burke, Ivar Kants, Malcolm Robertson and Ralph Cotterill. Sharman’s spectacular production has had mixed critical response. A rare opportunity to see this once shocking German Expressionist piece. To Aug 29.

Theatre Royal: Chicago by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, director, Richard Wherrett; musical director, Peter Casey; with Nancye Hayes, Geraldine Turner, Terry Donovan, Judi Connelli, George Spartaels and J P Webster. Sell-out success production of this Broadway musical about corruption and the media in the thirties. To Aug 29. For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200/909 3010

QLD

HER MAJESTY’S THEATRE (2212777)

LA BOITE THEATRE (36 1622)
Wings by Arthur Kopit; director, David Bell. Fascinating play about an aviatrix who learns to cope with the speech disorder aphasia. To Aug 15. The Enemy Within by Grazyna Monvid; director, Malcolm Biaylock. A moving play about women with a conscience in Hitler’s Germany. Aug 21-Sept 12.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY

(221 3861)
SGIO Theatre: I Sent A Letter To My Love by Bernice Reubens; director, Kevin Palmer; designer, James Ridewood and Graham Maclean. Beautifully crafted play set in Wales about the unrequited search for love of a middle-aged spinster and her crippled bachelor brother. Aug 21-Sept 5.

Edward Street Theatre: Upside Down At The Bottom Of The World by David Allen; director, Robert Chuter. Drama-

isation of D H Lawrence’s time in Australia, based on Kangaroo. QT’s second alternative Tangent production. To Aug 8.

THE TN COMPANY (352 5133)

TOWNSVILLE CIVIC THEATRE

(72 2677)

Travelling North by David Williamson. Some say Williamson’s best play — about love in old-age and city/country differences. Aug 24-26. For entries contact Jeremy Ridgman on 377 2519

VICTORIA

ANTHILL THEATRE (699 3253)


AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP

(347 7133)
Bold Tales by Peter King. Adapted from short stories by Frank Moorehouse and Peter Carey. To Aug 12. The Clown Theatre Kids Show, each Saturday at 2.00pm throughout Aug. Sunday Play Readings: Back Theatre, 2.00pm.


PLAYBOY THEATRE COMPANY

(63 4888)
Downstairs: Farewell Brisbane Ladies by Doreen Clarke; director, Kevin Palmer; with Monica Maughan and Maggie Kirkpatrick. Set design, Sue Russell. Comedy about mateship between two ageing “ladies of the night” by SA’s state company. To Aug 2.

Television Theatre and its characters. To Aug 22.
True West by Sam Shepard; director, Rex Cramporn; with David Cameron and Peter Cummins. Design, Eamon d’Arcy. Australian premiere of Shepard’s latest bizarre work about the confrontation of two brothers; which represents the true West? Aug 19-Sept 6.


TASMANIA
POLYGON THEATRE (002 34 8018)
Seascapes by Edward Albee; director, Don Gay; with Hazel Alger; Noreen Le Mottee, Allen Harvey and Don Gay. A modern comedy about evolution. In rehearsal during Aug.

SALAMANCA (002 23 5259)
Trees devised by company members; director, Les Winspear; with Richard Lawrence, Mark Bromilow. A look at trees.

Annie’s Coming Out by Richard Meredith; director, Richard Davey; with Jude McHenry, Fiona Stewart and Mary McMenamin.

THEATRE ROYAL (002 34 6266)
Phone theatre for details.

For entries contact Elly Kamal on 02 29 1818

S.A.
THE STAGE COMPANY
Space Theatre: Cyrano, a musical by

Paul Haines and Ian Owens; director, Brian Debnam; musical director, Michael Morley. In a cabaret setting. To Aug 8.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY
(51 5151)
Maggie Theatre: Currently playing schools throughout the state.

One Up My Sleeve (primary) a play about mathematicians.

Hey Mum, I Own A Factory! (secondary) a play about women in the workforce.

Playhouse Theatre: Squirtz, a political revue by Doreen Clarke, John Romeril, Stephen Sewell, Jack Hibberd, Patrick Cook, Tim Robertson, Barry Oakley and others; director, Neil Armfield; designer, Stephen Curtis; lighting, Nigel Leavings. Aug 7-29. The show looks at games played in the world of power politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular, featuring grotesque and extravagant performances from Max Gillies, Evelyn Krape.

TROUPE THEATRE (271 7552)
Oxford St, Unley: Annie’s Coming Out by Ron Hoening; director, Peter Dunn. Based on book by Rosemary Crossley and Anne MacDonald about the problems of the handicapped. To Aug 22.

For entries contact Edwin Relf on 267 5988

W.A.
HAYMAN THEATRE WAIT (350 7026)
Tom Didgit and the Spragits of Sproon — a Shavian masterpiece of wit and social comment. Aug 18-Sept 12.

HOLE IN THE WALL (381 2403)

NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY
(325 3500)
Playhouse: Pygmaion by G B Shaw; director, David Addenbrooke; sets, Tony Tripp. The original script for My Fair Lady — a Shavian masterpiece of wit and social comment. Aug 18-Sept 12.

PERTH ACTORS COMPANY
(380 2441)
Dolphin Theatre: The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams; director, Hal Davis; designer, Henry Bateman; with Paul English, Anne Spencer, Elizabeth Caia, Martin Dzebili. Strong personal drama as well as Williams’ metaphor for between the wars America. To Aug 15.

WINTER THEATRE (335 5444)
Princess May Theatre: The Girl Who Lived On Venus Street by Wanda Davidson and Ross Coli; music, Denis Follington. An original musical about a prostitute who dreams of following in the footsteps of her idol — a successful nightclub singer.

For entries contact Margaret Schwan on 341 1179

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STEPPING OUT
First Prize, 6th Annual Dance and Film Festival New York, April 1981
Jury Prize, Oberhausen Festival for Short Films, May 1981
WATERLOO
Best Documentary, Sydney Film Festival, 1981
FRONT LINE
Nominated for Best Documentary Feature 1981 Annual Academy Awards
PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE
Rouben Mamoulian Award, Greater Union Awards, Sydney Film Festival, June 1981.
Joint First Prize, International Studies Category, American Film Festival, 1981
MEATHEADS
Fiction Award, Greater Union Awards, Sydney Film Festival, June 1981
CLIMBERS
Silver Plaque, Chicago International Dance Film Festival, 1980
WORKING UP
Silver Plaque, Chicago International Film Festival, 1980
PINS AND NEEDLES
Certificate of Merit, Chicago International Film Festival, 1980
PATRICK
Best Foreign Film, Academy of Science Fiction and Fantasy and Horror Film Awards 1981
HARLEQUIN
Critics Prize, Special Prize and Best Actor (Robert Powell), 10th Paris International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantasy Films
Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography and Critics Award, International Festival of Fantastic and Horror Films — SITGES 1980
BREAKER MORANT
Nomination, Best Screenplay adapted from another source, 53rd Annual Academy Awards 1981
1981, Nominated Best Foreign Film, Golden Globe Awards
Jack Thompson, Best Actor, Capetown Film Festival 1981

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Australian Film Commission
LEADING LADIES

The busiest girls in the business are Judy Davis and Angela Punch Macgregor who, as I write — but by the time you read they may be into double figures — have finished, or are making, The Winter of Our Dreams, Heatwave, Hoodwink, We of the Never Never, The Best of Friends and Double Deal. Wendy Hughes is in competition with A Burning Man and Partners. When I telephoned Errol Sullivan about The Killing of Angel Street he said, “It’s the film that doesn’t have Judy Davis or Angela Punch Macgregor in it.” What it does have is Elizabeth Alexander.

THE BURSTALLS

If you sometimes wonder how many Burstalls there are, the answer is three. Tim is the grand old man (if there is such a thing as a GOM in the local industry apart from, of course, Ken Hall). Tom is his son who produces and or directs and Dan is a cinematographer. Tim is directing Kangaroo, based on the DH Lawrence novel about his brief visit to Australia. Guess who is the first assistant director? Right, Mark Egerton.

BETT-BETT RETURNS

It was a long shoot, and sometimes uncomfortable, for the crew and cast of We of the Never Never. Things — tempers, anyway — improved when the real caterer arrived at Mataranka, taking seven days on the journey. In Darwin, Rea Francis, who is a consultant to Adams Packer films, found Bett-Bett, the little black girl of Mrs Aeneas Gunn’s story. Bett-Bett is now a 90 year old lady (looking 70, Rea says) living at Humpty Doo near Darwin. When Mr Aeneas Gunn died she was only eight. Her father, a seaman out of Liverpool, went to the station, picked her up and took her to Darwin where he placed her with a foster mother. She had never been back until Rea arranged for her to pay a visit during filming.

STARS FOR STARSTRUCK

By the time you read this Wall To Wall (produced by Errol Sullivan and Ross Matthews) will be at the editing stage and Starstruck will be half shot, if you will excuse the expression. Stephen Maelane (pronounced as in clean) is the motivating source here as the originator of the idea, the scriptwriter and an associate producer. The film is a rock musical, for and about young people, and largely by them. Stars may emerge, but in any case it has a star studded array of designers and crew — Russell Boyd, Luciana Arrighi, Brian Thomson, Brian Bansgrove, Cameron Allan. Catering is by Meals on Wheels, and Gilliam Armstrong directs.

REORGANISATION REQUIRED

Will it happen again? Last year a batch of films hit the screens at the same time (late July) in order to qualify for inclusion in the Australian Film Awards. Some that might otherwise have done well got lost in the crush and were never seriously seen again. Another thing, this time of the year is cinematically dead — Federal Budget time, winter and general gloom not conducive to leaving the heater and the television set for the cinema. It should not be beyond the capacity of the industry to rearrange itself.
— reflecting poor production quality

By Elizabeth Riddell

For anyone who is not committed to seeing everything that the Film Festivals in Sydney and Melbourne have on offer for two weeks every day in the hours between 9am and midnight, a good deal depends on luck. That is, the films you can arrange to see without dislocating your entire business and social life may be all that you most wanted or everything that you could most easily do without. The two festivals just over did not aspire to a theme — and why should they? — and there have been some complaints in both cases about the quality. But isn't there always? It may be that the festivals are simply reflecting a couple of years of poor quality production everywhere.

I have to say that I was lucky, in that I was able to catch The Red Sweater; Mon Oncle d’Amerique, Sitting Ducks (which if any exhibitor is smart enough to pick up will fill his cinema for weeks and weeks and weeks, promoted the right way), The Trials of Alger Hiss, The Handyman (L’homme a Tout Faire), Die Verlobte (The Fiancee) and Health, and among the shorts Karin Altmann’s marvellous Putting It On, Survival Run, Baxter Earns his Wings, Hearts in Paradise, Making Weekend of Summer Last (which should be seen by every Australian producer/director/screenwriter) and Walkabout to Hollywood.

I don’t think the average Festival audience, if there is such an animal, pays enough attention to the often exquisitely crafted shorts which say in three or five or 15 minutes what many features fail to get across in one and a half murky hours. I wonder would a whole morning or afternoon of shorts have its own special attraction?

This year there were 16 films labelled New Cinema (in metaphorical brackets, “minimal”, a word that has escaped from the painters’ world into film). Several films in this category had been shown earlier at the Edinburgh Festival. Probably the weirdest was Peter Greenaway’s The Falls, from Britain, in colour, which ran for 185 minutes. In Greenaway’s own words, “This is an investigation into biography. An ideal history of the world is most perfectly told by a history of all its subjects.” This being manifestly impossible, Greenaway picked 92 surnames beginning with the letters FALL, out of 19 million case histories of victims of the Violent Unknown Event, or VUE. About 100 minutes after the film started we went out for a cup of coffee to restore our flagging spirits, and did not return. Nevertheless, The Falls is a valid item in a Festival program, so don’t let’s knock it.

Also in the new cinema section was The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter, made by the talented Connie Field, which recounts a section of women’s history in the US when women were called from the ironing board and baby minding to work in industry with the slogan DO THE JOB HE LEFT BEHIND. They were dumped unceremoniously when the war ended and the boys came home to take back their jobs. Rosie is splendid stuff and will surely get a screening in selected local cinemas. Others of these films that the public may expect to see include Alger Hiss, Mon Oncle d’Amerique, Health, The Handyman, The Fiancée as well as Sitting Ducks.

Health is an extremely entertaining film by Robert Altmann, whose Popeye is being shown commercially throughout the country. It was interesting to compare its brilliant rhythms with his heavy-footed Quintet shown as part of the festival’s retrospective section. Altman can always get money to make films — or so it seems — but he cannot gain acceptance at the box office. Of the five features he produced and directed between 1977 and 1979 for 20th Century Fox, A Perfect Couple was seen hardly at all and Quintet got a limited release (none at all in Australia) while Health has had no release in key US cities and none in Europe. In fact Altman films never do well in Australia, and this includes Nashville. Popeye may break the pattern of non-acceptance. Health is a satire on presidential elections. It is set in St Petersburg, Florida, a convention
FESTIVALS

Jessica Harcourt in For the Term of His Natural Life.

Robert Altman centre with hotels of 1930s architectural extravagance. It purports to cover the election of a new president to the organisation simply called Health, the two candidates being Lauren Bacall as dotty, spaced-out Esther Brill and Glenda Jackson as super-pure Isabella Garnell who is so afraid of addiction to tea or coffee that she drinks hot water only, fresh from the kettle. Apart from these two Altman has co-opted many of his old team — Henry Gibson, Paul Dooley, Carol Burnett (of Nashville and The Wedding), James Garner appears as a hustler and Dick Cavett, Walter Cronkite and Dinah Shore as themselves. It is a deeply satisfying spoof of the kind of hype that America understands so well and which is becoming part of the Australian scene.

There is one aspect of the Sydney Film Festival that must disturb its admirers and participants, and that is opening night. Last year's The Fog was bad enough, but this year's opening program of a reconstituted 1927 film, For The Term Of His Natural Life and Epic, a film about the reconstituting of this film, together with the Greater Union Awards presentation and some speeches failed to instil a sense of joyous anticipation into the audience, whose members had, apart from honoured guests and the media, paid for their seats. For The Term Of His Natural Life was directed by an American, Norman Dawn, whose professional career became somehow confused in the minds of Australian producers with that of Allan Dawn, a celebrated director of the Hollywood era which included Gloria Swanson. The National Film Archive of the National Library in Canberra took on the task of sticking surviving bits and pieces of the film together. Some of the bits were in Australia, some of them in the US. It was probably natural for them to then make a film about the restoration, and they did. But it was unfortunate that on opening night the audience was presented not only with the film, which in spite of its macabre interest is pretty heavy going, but with the second film which included large chunks of the first. There was a rather charmingly bizarre appearance by Jessica Harcourt, who was featured in FTTOHNL but in general proceedings were repetitive to the point of boredom, and those members of the audience who did not bother to conceal their feelings said so, and keep on saying so.

There must be a way out of the dilemma of opening night, and I am sure the director David Stratton — often hissed but much admired — will find it.

I should make a special mention here of the premier Canadian film, The Handyman, like The Tracer in last year's festival, can be seen as totally Canadian in treatment, yet of universal human interest.

In the late 1970s the Canadian government enacted the Capital Cost Allowance for Certified Canadian Features, for which read the Commonwealth Treasurer's cobbled together tax concessions. American distributors were set this summer, Canadian papers reported, to launch 25 Canadian films. The Handyman, like The Tracer, is a comedy of character and non-shattering events, of disappointments and small pleasures, a vehicle for the low-key playing of Jocelyn Berube, who turned to acting from nightclub singing.

Some big companies in the US have announced that they will no longer be making the small "quality" pictures ($2 million to $4 million budgets) because (the argument goes) they will then have to spend the same amount on promoting it, and that's too much to spend on a low budget movie. Canada hopes to take up some of the slack, and so probably will Australia.
getting a lot of things right

I don't think it can be denied that the short Australian films which compete for the Greater Union Organisation Awards and the Rouben Mamoulian Award, and which lead off the Film Festival, get better every year. That is, they are more technically competent; the directors, lighting experts, editors and sound people have increased their capacity for pointing the performers and the machinery in the right direction. But this does not imply that the product is necessarily more stimulating, entertaining or informative than it was last year or the year before. While getting a lot of things right, film makers may omit the essentials such as creative imagination, a fresh view, or a challenging concept.

The passing years do not, indeed, seem to have modified many film makers' determination to preach at their audience, which may well from time to time prefer to have their ribs rather than a thump over the ear.

As usual, I did not agree with the judges verdict, except in the case of Public Enemy Number One, the film by David Bradbury about Wilfred Burchett which took out the Mamoulian and should have got the award for the documentary. The one thing wrong with Enemy is that Bradbury failed to bring from Burchett an admission that some of his idols had, and have, feet of clay. In any case it is rather a relief to find Burchett sad but not censorious, unlike others who have backed the wrong horse.

The judges this year in the documentary section were Barbara Chobockey, Steve Crofts and Sue Murray, in the general section, Tom Cowan, Geoff Gardner and Barbara Gibbs; in the fiction category, Anne Brookesbank, Rex Cramphorn and David Elfick, the nine of them representing various branches of the industry.

Waterloo by Tom Zubrycki came first in the documentary section, from a short list of Dust to Dust, Violation and the aforesaid Public Enemy Number One. Waterloo is a long, confused — but then the situation was confused, over several years — account of demolition and development, bureaucracy and plain people, in an inner-city Sydney suburb. The director marshalled a lot of people awkwardly to take an individual stance before the cameras but failed to give any impression of concerted action or purpose. Maybe there wasn't any. Zubrycki fell into the same trap as did Sabina Wynn with her Dust to Dust. In other words, both produced radio with pictures, talking heads against urban or rural backdrops.

Violation, 26 minutes produced, scripted and directed by Beth McRae, was again talking heads, women who had been raped recounting what happened to them and how they felt about it. Film added nothing to the sorrowful story, except in a few instances.

In the general category the eight minute film Grooping, with four directors — Alexander Proyas, Salik Silverstein, Tony Vaccher and Norman Neeon — photographed eerily by Proyas — elicited boos and howls and hisses from an audience of its peers. It won the award in rather strange company — a negligible two-minute item called Cocktail Canape that was so so like an actual Friday night wine bar act that it could scarcely be called a parody, the work of Paul Schneller: a disgusting 25 minute wallow with live and dead animals by the flesh-obsessed Ivor Durrant called Self Portrait, Blood Red (evoking what exhibitionist delusions?) and a 30 minute — far too long — blindingly clever exercise in colour fragmentation by Paul Winkler.

The bucks' party, or any party where young men predominate, occupies a secure place in the Australian mythology, so I suppose it is no surprise to find that Meatheads (38 minutes, Wayne Moore Productions) won first place in the fiction category. It was produced, directed and scripted by Wayne Moore and offered the usual thick necked workers, this time butchers, giving their mate a send-off into matrimony. There is a limit to the interest to be derived from repetitive jokes and or abuse. I might have given the award to Radium, a 25 minute fantasy about a man's ascent to death directed, edited and scripted by Ian Lang and acted out by Robin Cumming, Amanda Ma, Alan Hopgood and Steve Millichamp, for its attempts at fantasy, or indeed to Exits, a film about the way some people — two cinema usherettes and their manager, a cab driver, a boozy young man — behaved on the day that Sir John Kerr sacked Gough Whitlam from government. The principals of Exits, who are obviously going to do better, were Pat Laughren, Paul Davies, Carolyn Howard and the photographer, Paul Davell.

The other competitor in this section was Bushed, an animated film about an Aboriginal and a kangaroo, displaced persons. It was funny, in a lively, coarse way.

The institutions which led to the production of these films were the Australian Film and Television School, three; Creative Development Branch of the Australian Film Commission, three; The Swinburne Institute of Technology, two; Women's Co-ordination Unit, NSW Premier's partment, one.
Pick of the flicks

WATCH FOR THESE...
A short list of films of more than usual interest, currently showing
around Australia.

THE COALMINER'S DAUGHTER
with Sissy Spacek and Tommy Lee Jones,
both impeccable cast. She got the best
actress Oscar for her role as country-and-
western singer

THE ELEPHANT MAN, a real sur-
prise and not a bit frightening, about
deformed John Merrick who found friends
and life away from a Victorian freakshow.
John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins.

BREAKER MORANT, Bruce Beres-
ford's version of the non-hero who fought
in the Boer War and paid for his own and
others' sins. Edward Woodward, Bryan
Brown, Jack Thompson, all fine.

THE STUNT MAN is a marvellous
piece of show-off by Peter O'Toole and
others, in a story you will be hard put to
follow. Well worth a try.

ORDINARY PEOPLE, directed by
Robert Redford with Mary Tyler Moore
and Donald Sutherland and, best of all,
Timothy Hutton as their son. You may
argue against the psychology but not the
direction or performances.

THE LAST METRO has Catherine
Deneuve and Gerard Depardieu semi-
underground in German-occupied Paris,
routing a theatre and a love affair, directed
by Francois Truffaut, whose The Man
Who Loved Women is also well worth
catching.

KAGEMUSHA, by the Japanese mast-
er Kurosawa, in Japanese with English
sub-titles. The story of a lookalike dupe of
two 16th century Imperial brothers, and
how not to put your trust in princes. Fast
cavalry, Kurosawa's stunning deployment
of what seems like thousands of extras;
colour, sweep, violent death, even some
humour.

SISTERS, by the German woman
director Margarethe von Trotta, is a
poignant but never gloomy or mawkish
story of two sisters and a third girl living in
the shadow of big business and ambition.

TESS. Roman Polanski chose Nastassia
Kinski, 17-year-old daughter of a German
actor, to play the Hardy heroine. It may
not be Hardy, but it's fascinating, and
beautiful to look at.

THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA
BRAUN was the pride of the film festivals
before the last. Fassbinder's story has
everything to turn you on, including a
believable plot and the best blonde German
star since Dietrich.

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS
TWICE is an example of a film that, by
being as explicit as custom allows, loses
something of the erotic impulse. Lana
Turner and John Garfield were actually
more exciting in the roles than are Hope
Lange and Jack Nicholson. All the same,
worth seeing as a good example of
depression sleaze.

ALTERED STATES: An unlikely
collaboration between Paddy Chayevsky
the writer and Ken Russell the flamboyant
(The Music Lovers, Devils of Loudon)
director. It has some very scary bits and
some unintentionally funny bits, a new star
from the stage, William Hurt.

EXCALIBUR: one knight in armour
looks much like another, and Nicol
Williamson talks a lot of gibberish as the
magician Merlin, but there are some
spectacular scenes of bloodletting and
some great scenery. Made by John
Boorman, of Deliverance.
NSW FRIENDS — GLOOMY FUTURE
The future of the NSW Friends of the Australia Opera seems gloomy. The recent resignation of the Executive Officer, Iain Mackerras has been followed by the laying off of the two remaining staff members. Only essential commitments will, it seems, be maintained for the balance of this year.

It was no secret that in recent years the Friends, established in 1970 to assist the company, had been in difficulties and had become, in fact, a drain rather than a prop for The Australian Opera. On the other hand, the company’s recent report identifies fewer than eight productions in the period 1971 to 1980 which had been sponsored by the support body.

FUTURE SHOCK — TV AND OPERA
Last month a seminar in Melbourne on televising the live performing arts, especially opera, brought together a group of experts and interested organisations from all over Australia and New Zealand. Based around the visit to Australia of Michael Bronson, Media Director of New York’s Metropolitan Opera who has been responsible for that company’s extensive television programmes, the seminar was conducted at the premises of the Victoria Board.

Representatives of the ABC opera, theatre and dance companies, CAPPA, Musica Viva, Television New Zealand and major performing arts centres around the country heard Mr Bronson lead discussion on a wide range of issues related to the transfer of the product from the stage to the screen. Sessions dealt with such matters as the relative roles of the producing body and the television company, the ‘future shock’ of new media technologies and industrial implications of television opera.

Seminar participants came away with much to ponder in the proposed marriage between opera and television which Patrick Veitch, new GM of The Australian Opera has made such a publicly important plank of his policy for the future development of the company.

GLOBE ARISES WITH CAV/PAG
Globe Opera in Melbourne seems suddenly to have arisen from a long sleep. A recent production of Carmen starring Suzanne Steele seems to have heralded the change. Until then, this essentially amateur-based body had skittered around the fringes of operatic activity in Melbourne a city which already hosts major seasons each year from both the Victoria State Opera and The Australian Opera.

An injection of experienced professionals appears to be providing much of the new impetus for the group which will be tested again in a season of the war horse, double-bill Cavalleria Rusticana and I Pagliacci opening on August 28 with Ronald Dowd, Maureen Howard and, again, Suzanne Steele, in leading roles.

IMAGINATIVE FUND-RAISING
One of the most imaginative arts fund raising ideas to emerge in some time was The Australian Opera’s ICI Collection. This was a series of limited edition lithographs taken from original artwork commissioned from leading Australian painters on subjects in the company’s repertoire. So far four have appeared by luminaries such as Fred Williams (The Magic Flute), Leonard French (Boris Godunov) and Charles Blackman (A Midsummer Night’s Dream).

Essentially, the upfront costs of the operation were borne by ICI with the opera taking the surplus profits. Now they have added a new string to their bow. This time it’s not a lithograph but limited edition numbered photographic reproductions of a work by the late Sir William Dobell entitled Sydney Opera House, 1969 (during the construction stages, of course). Like the ICI Collection, everyone, including collectors, benefits and the opera gets the profits. It has much to recommend it over the ‘mendicant order’ style of fund raising.

VSO — PURSUING YOUTH
Despite its many ups and downs one of Victorian State Opera’s most consistent policies has been the maintenance of its touring operas for school children. The programme is now in its ninth consecutive year and has been marked throughout by a vigorous policy of commissioning new works for classroom presentation. 1981 has seen a new piece by Melbourne composer Peter Narroway, The Dragon and the Mandarin which has been on the road since the beginning of June and has...
MORE FEATHERS THAN LAS VEGAS

The production of opera in Australia has not, in the main, been responsive to the major theatrical and artistic influences that have coursed the world this century and remains sadly locked into a phase of "ulterior" decoration belonging, generally, to no discernible period of artistic endeavour and certainly to no known schools of thought — except perhaps to the absence of thought. Meantime, managements have by and large meekly accepted the role of curators and resigned themselves to fighting rising costs.

In the recent history of opera production here there have, of course, been individual exceptions from the various companies which if they have not exactly broken new ground, have provided some evidence that in developing an attitude to the works in hand, somebody, somewhere was at least thinking. Of The Australian

by Justin Macdonnell

If opera is, at its best and by wide consensus, the supreme amalgam of the most dynamic elements in the theatre arts, why is production of it frequently so appalling?

Opera one could, for example, mention Lenz, Wozzeck, Mahagonny, Katya Kabanova, The Rape of Lucretia and A Midsummer Night's Dream. The State Opera of South Australia, especially during the Adelaide Festivals, has shown theatrical insight in its coolly elegant production of Death in Venice and, earlier, in the laser design for The Excursions of Mr Broucek. In the ongoing music theatre seasons of the Victoria State Opera and in their Pelleas and Melisande or the glacial simplicity of La Clemenza di Tito a tendency to break out of the often self-imposed production straightjacket was discernable.

Looking at the above list, it is frightening to realise that they are almost all works of the 20th century. It is as though decisions about production and the resulting clarification for a modern audience were necessary only when the musical material itself is unfamiliar. Is it attributable to boredom with the inherited repertoire or a failure of nerve that we are hardly ever treated to other than four square conventionality except when the works themselves are "new"?

Let us hope that the days are gone when in order to be "relevant" producers felt the urge to produce The Ring in plastic bags, to set The Merchant of Venice anywhere but in 16th century Italy or nail chairs to the ceiling in order to acquire "a new perspective". The Marriage of Figaro,
for example, requires working doors in plausible walls if its internal dramatic demands are to be met. But could they not, for a change, be in a Spanish nobleman's villa rather than in a Viennese palace? Is it necessary for Rodolfo and Marcello to occupy a garret the size of Versailles?

Take the latter case. A distinguished British opera producer has been heard to say that the Bohemians should not obviously possess any object which they might reasonably already have sold or pawned. Not a bad starting point for a piece whose mainspring is poverty. If one hasn't considered the questions of kingship and power and how families and individuals contend for it, it is a poor beginning for Otello or Macbeth.

And yet one has seen endless productions of these very pieces and wondered if anyone has thought at all.

If Peter Hall can produce a Figaro in which every nuance of social behaviour, age and sex relations and class distinction is observed — strictly within the musical context — and where decoration is present to clarify these matters and not simply because the designer likes the period, it is clearly possible. If John Cox's production of the not easily handled Patience is successful, it is because there is a body of opinion musically and dramatically at work in which an artistic movement and a school of painting and the plastic arts are used superbly well to point the action and the satire. Moshinsky's A Midsummer Night's Dream provides another incandescent example of a keen theatrical intelligence stripping down a work and adding what is necessary and useful — as well as beautiful — but in the cause of the opera and not meretriciously for its own sake.

Observing the many lumbering production monstrosities around one is forced to wonder whether honestly presented, well-lit, well sung and musically sound concert versions in which the performer and performance can appear with dignity might not be preferable.

Again one is not suggesting that the unique theatrical experience of opera should be abandoned in favour of concert series, but confronted with the flabby, third-rate ideas permeating so many productions one needs seriously to question what is wrong when it so patently need not be wrong and when there is abundant evidence that it is possible to get it right — at no greater financial cost.

Is the dramatic action of Macbeth — surely one of the least naturalistically inclined works (whether it be Shakespeare or Verdi) genuinely clearer for being buried under kilos of fur?

Is Dame Joan Sutherland a greater artist (or even a happier woman) secure in the knowledge that her hat may have more feathers than there are in Las Vegas? Or Miss Zschau for having the longest train of any Tosca in history?

I have yet to meet a singer who believed that more clothing was conducive to a better exercising of his or her art.

These are, perhaps, but minor sins or lapses in taste and concern but, when some of the greatest masterpieces in any theatrical medium are produced in so intellectually thread-bare a fashion often in a variety of Italo or Teutonic gibberish that all sense goes quite out the window; when time after time producers and designers have been led (by a failure of confidence in the product presumably) to smother many a revived unknown work so that whatever intrinsic merit had led to that very revival is lost; when acknowledged but lesser masterpieces of operetta are padded to gargantuan proportions until they sink under the weight of insipid interpolations and sheer meaningless tat; when, seemingly, every effort is made to interpose between the performers and their audience every barrier which money can buy to rational artistic communication; when all too often the very function of the producer and designer to clarify the action for the audience has been twisted into quite the reverse; one can't help but think in the words of the popular song "There's got to be something better than this".

If it is a failure of nerve it is by no means confined in opera to this country nor in this country by any means to opera alone.

The same unwillingness to pursue the courage of their selection may be seen in the Sydney Theatre Company's lamentable Dickensian production of The Merry Wives of Windsor or in the many lugubrious efforts of Nimrod with other works of Shakespeare spoken in spaghetti English or set on carousels.

Not that simplicity is necessarily cheaper or austerity of production a financial saving. Equally abundance of detail and lavishness of decor do not necessarily fail to communicate. Robert Helpmann's recent Alcina, which by his own admission left not a sequin in Sydney, was an excellent example of the use of boldly applied abundance to make a set of unfamiliar performance conventions blindingly clear to its audience.

But if the weight of externally applied physical circumstances were to be considered in its proper light as an aid to communication rather than an ordained necessity pandering to the lowest theatrical instincts of "dressing up" we might be a little further along the road to developing our critical faculties within opera and leaving fashion parades where they rightfully belong.

Surely an art form which absorbs over 6 million dollars of public money in Australia each year ought to regard its product with more seriousness and bring to bear on that product a greater human and artistic perception.

Surely the largest theatrical organisation in the country, as The Australian Opera proudly, and rightly, proclaims itself, should be a leader in the field of theatrical communication and a pacesetter in developing skills of direction and design which would aid that communication rather than so frequently a slave to a performance tradition long dead in the rest of the theatre and mercifully dying in opera in many other parts of the world?
Three great sopranos
by Ken Healey

It is tempting to describe an unforgettable period of 24 hours towards the end of June as "The Day of Three Sopranos": Carden, Sutherland, and Marilyn Zschau, in that order had scored triumphs in Handel’s Alcina (a first performance), La Traviata (a matinee), and Tosca. A little reflection, however, helps define the experience in terms of the span of opera over a period of nearly two centuries, from early eighteenth to early twentieth. More specifically, it was a study in development of emotion, which is peculiarly apt since exposure to those three operas in such rapid succession is an emotional experience not often available.

Sir Robert Helpmann’s production of Handel’s finest baroque opera comes just over twenty years after Zeffirelli first tried to make it accessible to modern audiences by means of a stage within a stage: people of Handel’s time were seen watching the monsters of antiquity as classically depicted in Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso. Helpmann’s approach is more direct: first and foremost that of a dancer-choreographer. He and his designer John Pascoe have settled upon the elegance of the early eighteenth century as a visual basis. Disappointingly, there are few spectacular stage machines creating effects. In fact, some rather turgid rolling billows managed to creak disconcertingly during an otherwise magical vocal moment when Alcina sings slow and unaccompanied in the second act. Naive and amateurish smoke machines also dimmed the enchantment, but otherwise stage settings which gave an effect at once insubstantial and eerie helped launch a successful, if predictable production.

To return to the presentation of emotion, the distancing effect of placing the story in classical antiquity helps convey generalised, somewhat elevated emotion called up by a literary text. Singers represent the embodiment of evil (Alcina), heroism (Ruggiero), love (Bradamante), and wisdom (Melisso). Handel’s long musical line perfectly expresses the carefully measured intensity of feeling — heightened mainly in the sense of elevated. The singers are also, of course, required to be consummate technicians, and in this respect the opera was well served.

Joan Carden alter an unremarkable beginning, rose to the demands of the aria ‘Tornami a vagheggia’, in which Alcina expresses her need of Ruggiero. Thereafter, the intensity of her singing was conveyed by a ravishing vocal tone which set her above even the very high standard of Margretta Elkins and Heather Begg as the lovers, Ruggiero and Bradamante, and the impressive young Anne-Marie McDonald, whose Oberto was flawless. Paul Ferris showed that his well-focused lyric tenor is ideally suited to Handel’s music (he was Oronte), but that fine actress Angela Denning sang Oronte’s lover, Morgana, with a kind of in-built trill. Donald Shanks was a reliable Melisso, and the specially recruited chorus sang with a hint of an edge on the tone at the top. But Te Kanawa’s beautifully accurate singing did not move me; Sutherland brought tears to my eyes and then kept them coursing down my face.

Little wonder that with such a response in the midst of the three operas I should look back on them in terms of emotional communication. This strong production is well cast, with Richard Greager an involved, intelligent Alfredo, and Jonathan Summers in ringing voice as Germont, making sounds such as one imagines the young Allman may have made. Sutherland, too mature in age and too robust in stature to be in any naturalistic sense a credible Marguerite Gautier, brings to Violetta an instrument of emotional communication not available in Dumas’ play. Her singing, not just her voice, is supreme. In the pit, Richard Bonynge elicited the lightest, most rhythmically supple Verdi playing during Act I that I have heard from him. Summers sang of his daughter in Act II with a simplicity which matched the music, bringing that scene of confrontation with Violetta to a pitch of sustained dramatic anguish that I never expect to see surpassed. The young baritone as older man successfully immortalising the mature diva as consumptive girl encapsulated the genius of romantic opera, playing against type by musical means.

John Copley’s production of Tosca bids fair to be the hit of the current Sydney season, and indeed of the Australian Opera’s entire year. It deserves all the acclaim that comes its way. Tosca is displayed for what it is, a physically violent horror story, seen as though magnified. The brutal passions of individuals are ugly when compared with the wrecked romanticism of La Traviata; the treatment of evil in Alcina is a stylised world away. And this Tosca shows us why opera has had such a difficult time trying to find its way since verismo. Romantic love is tragically done down with huge musical and dramatic blows. The operatic way ahead had to be away from realism. But in which direction?

That question is unlikely to occur to many during the totally engrossing length of this production. Copley and musical director Cillario supply the subtext that constantly enhances the brute power of John Shaw’s Scarpia, the dazzling but hardly profound Floria Tosca of Marilyn Zschau, and the amazingly touching, simple Cavadarossi of Lamberto Furlan. Since his first, petrified assumption of this role in 1970, Furlan has improved greatly. But no one could have foretold the sudden advance in relaxation, credibility, presence
The A0's Tosca, designed by Michael Stennett and Allan Lee. Photo: Branco Gaica.

even, since his Des Grieux in Melbourne in May. Shaw has never been a subtle performer, and his rapist, torturer and murderer of a Scarpia hardly exhausts the possibilities of the role. No matter. His battle with the delectable, formidable Zschau is the finest piece of coarse operatic drama one is ever likely to encounter.

When on the battlements of Castel Sant'Angelo Tosca and Cavaradossi sing rapturously in unison octaves, Puccini stops the orchestra for a few bars, and we celebrate human physicality expressing in a transport of love its triumph over the brutality of the previous act. And over the cruelty about to erupt on stage. This is not high and complex art; it is not even nudging the dramatic tradition onwards. But as a reminder of the heady stuff that is opera at its most earthy, there is nothing to rival it.

The major strength of the production was the singing and, in most cases, characterisation. The Bohemians themselves were splendid individually and convincing as a group, with James Christiansen's Marcello walking off with the acting laurels. Vocally his performance was also distinguished, though there was the occasional rough patch.

Thomas Edmond's Rodolfo was, as is to be expected, well sung; the voice well-focussed and ringing and the phrasing sensitive. He also seemed less wooden than in the past, though there were still some lapses. Keith Hempton's philosopher and Roger Howell's Schaunard were much more than the bland supporting figures they sometimes become: the roles were clearly delineated without relying on obvious mannerisms, the singing accurate and full of understanding.

State Opera's La Boheme

by Michael Morley

In a recent radio interview, John Copley suggested that, unlike, for example, Tosca, Boheme was almost production proof. It was clearly a wise decision on General Manager lan Campbell's part to choose the work for his first venture into the dangerous arena of opera direction.

Some moments strongly suggested
Catherine Duval (Musetta) and Marilyn Richardson (Mimi) in Slate Opera’s La Boheme.

The main problems were with the female roles — though “problem” is far too strong a word for Marilyn Richardson’s Mimi. Ms Richardson is a marvellous performer in, for example, Janacek, Strauss or Wagner: dramatically convincing and vocally stunning. I hope it doesn’t sound ungracious, but I can’t find her voice appropriate for Mimi. The sounds were soaring, the notes all there, the musicianship beyond question: but the voice seems too wide, too gutsy, too dramatic for the role. However, given this qualification, her reading of the part was dramatically persuasive — which is more than can be said for Catherine Duval’s Musetta, insensitively sung and totally devoid of character.

Denis Vaughan’s reading of the score was accurate, though without much feeling for Puccini’s idiom. Several plusses to the chorus: the demands Puccini makes of them in Act 3 are severe. Most of them were met in this performance: the singing was energetic, accurate and very well-drilled. With Bill Bamford as chorus master the State Opera is well off indeed, and the chorus are sounding already more precise and musical than for some time.

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Carmen and Mikado in Brisbane

by Val Vallis

With a two-week season of Carmen alternating with The Mikado at Her Majesty’s Brisbane, the Queensland Light Opera Company has been celebrating its twentieth birthday. Donald Smith, now resident here, was extensively billed to sing Don Jose to Suzanne Steele’s Carmen. In the event, serious illness occurred and Gino Zancanaro stepped in at very short notice.

He hadn’t been completely integrated into the production on opening night but acquitted himself well vocally. Suzanne Steele’s Carmen was out of focus with the production as a whole. It was too Eartha Kitt-inish to do justice to the Merimee-Bizet gipsy, nor did John Tasker’s production catch the vitality of their conception.

There was an authentic tang to Georg Tintner’s conducting of the Queensland Theatre Orchestra that found no equivalent even in the production of the tavern scene — although that and the mountain pass scene came nearest to the opera’s requirements. It is strange that when listening to recordings of Supervia, Price, Berganza and Horne one is able to visualise the tension between the principals in the final confrontation, yet producers often seem unable to actualise it.

And at what social level are the cigarette girls to be cast? My best Carmen was a Tyrone Guthrie one in 1953, where it was mattress-licking blouses, faded black skirts, bare feet, and never a whiff of tourist-poster Spain or a glimpse of high heels to mar the realism of the action. The QLOC chorus sings superbly and it deserved more vital production.

Over its twenty-year span the Queensland Light Opera has presented at least four different productions of The Mikado. David Macfarlane, the company’s moving spirit, has been the chief “upholder and preserver” of the G&S tradition in this state. The present production, perhaps more ambitious for being the celebratory occasion, didn’t have the sheer good spirits of his last Penzance and Pinafore. Perhaps being both producer and conductor took its toll as his pace with the orchestra was lacking the sprightliness it is capable of.

Dennis Olsen was the Ko-Ko. To make a comment in the Cardus vein, Olsen must be the nimblest G&S performer of all time, and it is a little to be regretted that the star which his performance inhabits is so compounded of air and fire that the performances of such reliables as George Thom, Ian McAdam and Mark Penman seemed earthy by comparison. And particularly in need of a personality was Brian Messner, the Nanki-Poo. From his printed past record I expected much more vocally, and had I been Yum Yum, I’d have gladly settled for Ko-Ko as a life companion rather than this particular wand’ring minstrel. The said Ko-Ko got what he deserved — a comparably brilliant Katisha in the person of Bev Shean, doing far and away the best she has ever done.

Max Hurley’s original sets, simple, stylish, were further enhanced by the poetic lighting of Anthony Everingham.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA AUGUST 1981
ACT PLAYHOUSE (49 7600)

*Turn of the Screw* by Benjamin Britten.
A new production by Brian Bell, with designs by Peter Cooke. The second production of Britten's enigmatic work based on the Henry James novel that the Canberra Opera has presented in the last seven years. Aug 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28.

NSW

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (2 0588)

Opera Theatre SOH: *Alcina* by Handel, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by Sir Robert Helpmann. This rare opera seria has Joan Carden in the title role of the alluring enchantress.

Les Huguenots by Meyerbeer: another first for the Australian Opera — conducted by Richard Bonynge, produced by Lotfi Mansouri with design by John Stoddart and Michael Stennett. The opera is composed around events leading to the infamous massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve.

*Rigoletto* by Verdi: the well worn revival of John Copley's production is now conducted by David Kram, designs by Michael Stennett and Allan Lees.

Jenufa by Janacek: now in its eighth year of revival, John Copley's splendid realisation of the Czech masterpiece with designs by Michael Stennett and Alan Lees is now conducted by Stuart Challenger.

NORTHWEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA COMPANY (26 5160)

Carmen by Bizet; director, Tito Capobianco; conductor Denis Vaughan; designer, Hugh Colman; choreographer, Gigi Denda. Aug 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22.
A first production with a state opera company for the distinguished Argentinian-born producer. His *Carmen* also heralds the return home of the acclaimed Australian mezzo Rachel Gettler.

WA

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)

Opera Viva: *Oklahoma*; directed by Geoff Gibbs; musical director, John Hind; set by Bill Dowd; with James Bean, Caroline McKenzie and cast of 65. Aug 13-22.

WA OPERA COMPANY

Touring: *La Serva Padrona* by Pergolesi; musical director, Gerald Krug; directed by special guest from overseas Jacobo Kaufmann. A comic one act opera plus favourite and operetta highlights.

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A monthly report on live concert music in Sydney, which I hereby commend to your mercy, ought to begin by mapping the arena with a brief excursion into statistics, personal and musical.

Personal first. Each year I attend about 250 music events, most of them in the guise of a professional listener — a trade identification more widely recognised when put as “music critic”. About two-thirds of these music events become the subject of reviews. Because it is essential for a durable critic to be able to refer to past events and to become aware of trends, and also because my interest in music is historical and sociological rather than technical, I have kept statistical data on all the live music which has disturbed by silences during the last 35 years or so. This information, maintained in both chronological and alphabetical form, is relevant stuff for thesis-writers and researchers wishing to chart the shifting taste of performers, promoters, planners and, above all, music consumers who pose as voluntary ticket-buyers.

The musical picture revealed in this way shows to what extent we are willingly fettered to tradition. A list of 5,403 concerts to the end of last year, covering 36,214 performances of 14,214 different works by 1,981 composers, shows that the dozen most popular composers — if one accepts that frequency of performance reflects popularity — are, in order, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Debussy, Bartok, Handel, Haydn and Tchaikovsky. The most frequently played Australian composers are Sculthorpe, Raymond Hanson, Arthur Benjamin, Malcolm Williamson and Richard Meale.

Only 24 of those 1,981 composers have appeared in programmes each and every year since 1947. Apart from the 12 already listed, there are (alphabetically) Britten, Dvorak, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Prokofiev, Ravel, Rossini, Saint-Saëns, R Strauss, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Wagner.

Let me spend a moment at one more statistical base camp before we move out on my actual mission. What are the most popular works of the repertoire? Here they are, in categories.

**Symphonies:** Brahms 4, Brahms 1.


More information on request. Now to Sydney music in June.

Let us check first on how the top six composers fared.

Well, three of them did not fare at all. During June, I heard no music at all by Schubert, Brahms and Schumann. There may have been some, of course, in concerts I did not attend; while I went to 20 music events, that exhausted only me, not all the possibilities. Mozart was represented solely by the overture to The Magic Flute, with which Harold Farberman, the American conductor making his first Australian tour for the ABC, began Sydney appearances which initially reverted to rather sluggish tempos in Mahler No 1 but gathered confidence in Prokofiev No 5. Beethoven, also, was represented by a single work — the Appassionata sonata which surfaced with some rather flat contours in a generally promising student recital by pianist Neil Semmler.

Bach was more conspicuous, entering three concerts. First came a flute and keyboard sonata at a lack-lustre recital by flautist Jane Rutter, then the D Minor three harpsichord concertos cluttering away in Old Darlington School with soloists Winsome Evans, Nicholas Parle and Christopher Wagstaff, and finally the BWV 994 Fantasy & Fugue in the Semmler programme.

The relative quiescence of the top six left opportunities for many others.

A music festival titled Apollo and Pan covered a broad spectrum, from a Stravinsky song recital by sopranos Susan Falk and Cheryl McGuiness, to a Polish evening of baroque and dance, with Chopin mazurkas from Nicholas Routley as a bonus. In this festival and elsewhere, Australian music made a plentiful showing.

Among composers prominently featured were Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards and — literally, because a Percussion Quartet allows plenty of scope for prominence, especially when played by the fine Synergy Ensemble — Colin Bright. The Sculthorpe works included Koto Music I (we missed II because the necessary tape was misplaced), Landscape II and the evocative Irkanda I, which was played at one of several enterprising programmes of the Seymour Group (directed by Anthony Fogg) by the accomplished violinist Spiros Rantos.

Ross Edwards was represented by Laikos, an incongruously sequenced but often appealing chamber-work, and Monos I for solo cello. Other local composers whose names appeared included Robert Irving, Michael Smetanin, John Carroll, Graham Powning (an attractive wind sextet at a recital by the Double Reed Society), Donald Hollier with 12 highly emotional sonnets for piano played by Dennis Hennig, and James Penberthy, whose short saxophone concerto had Peter Clinch as virtuosic soloist, with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in a round of subscription concerts under Farberman (for the other series, violinist Ruggiero Ricci played the second Bartok concerto with great assurance).

Finally, a few more stray notes more or less at random. Niklaus Wyss, the young Swiss conductor working in America, vividly conducted an ABC youth concert devoted to works written by teenagers — a rare Boito symphony of overture length and operatic mood, symphonies by Bizet and Britten, and a set of early Chopin variations with Sonya Hanke as hard-worked piano soloist. The New York Kammermusiker, consisting basically of two oboes, cor anglais and bassoon, gave smooth Musica Viva recitals conspicuous for very brief programmes of arrangements and rather inferior music; fine as these musicians are, their repertoire is simply non-existent. The California State University Choir from Long Beach presented a similar profile — an excellent body of performers, but abominable mixtures in their choice of music; a single recital ranged from the Renaissance to amplified pop music.
WILDSTARS TO SYDNEY
After an on-again, off-again period, when backers and money seemed to be uncertain, the Australian Dance Theatre is now definitely to appear in Sydney in September with its Melbourne, Adelaide and Edinburgh success spectacular, Wildstars. They open on Friday September 4 at the Theatre Royal, and with a two-programme repertory season tacked on the end, play till September 26.

BACKSTAGE: AB INTO TV
The Australian Ballet will by now have finished shooting the pilot for a television series designed for children that they have commissioned the TV production house, Willard Kings to make. Called Backstage, it will feature AB artist David Burch and actress Olga Tamara as co-hosts for the programme. They were unanimously chosen by a panel after watching dozens of audition tapes from Sydney and Melbourne.

The series plans to take children behind the scenes of a ballet company, into the workshops, the studio; it will deal with the elements which go to make up the dancers' lives — training, makeup, costumes, choreography, music... There will be a mime segment, children who are having a first lesson, more advanced ones and a letterbox segment for questions.

The Australian Ballet feels that while not everyone may want to be a professional dancer, everyone can enjoy dancing and everyone is potentially able to appreciate watching good dancing. They look on the programme as a stimulus for young audiences, to make them want to find out more, and whilst it is specifically designed for the young, its content is potentially of universal interest.

QUEENSLAND BALLET SEMINAR
The Queensland Ballet recently held a two-week seminar, entitled Ballet Seminar '81, at its Brisbane studios. It had Ann Jenner leading a team of internationally experienced artists who held classes and seminars during the fortnight period.

The Theatre Board gave a special project grant to fund this classical ballet seminar in which the emphasis was on the qualities of performance — technique, style and presentation. Other artists working at the Seminar included Kathleen Gorham, Kelvin Coe, Dale Baker and the Artistic Director of the Queensland Ballet, Harold Collins.

WA BALLET IN RESIDENCE
The Western Australian Ballet Company is in the middle of a two week period in residence in the Pilbara for the WA Arts Council. They will be visiting Paraburdoo, Tom Price and Dampier/Karratha where they'll be conducting evening and schools performances, open classes, keep-fit and jazz ballet classes. All the activities will be free, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Hamersley Iron.

ACT
CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)

NSW
SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY
(264 7988)
Regent Theatre: Poppy by Graeme Murphy. Murphy's full-length ballet about Jean Cocteau, revised since its first Sydney showing, to "all new, sensational New York version". Aug 13-29.

DANCE CONNECTION (692 0555)
Seymour Centre Downstairs: Icarus. No further details available.

QLD
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (221 2777)
Australian Dance Theatre: Labyrinth choreographed by Christopher Bruce; Paradigm choreographed by Margaret Wilson; Flibbertigibbet choreographed by Johnathon Taylor. Part of ADT's national tour — unfortunately the technicalities of Wildstars prohibit its performance at Her Majesty's. Aug 25-29.

QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY
(229 3355)
Touring: Carmen Aubrey — Aug 4; Canberra — Aug 6, 7, 8 (plus Colonial Sketches on Aug 7).

SA
FESTIVAL THEATRE (51 0121)

VIC
PALAIS THEATRE, ST KILDA
The Australian Ballet: Kettentanz, Afternoon of a Faun, Monotones, Carmen. The first three are part of the AB's Programme 3 with Afternoon of a Faun a highlight as danced by guest artists Leonid and Valentina Kozlov. To Aug 6.

WA
HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)
The Australian Ballet: The Three Musketeers Aug 13, 14, 15. AB's popular costume ballet.
A bite of the big apple

The success of the Sydney Dance Company's New York season has been widely recorded at home. Naturally, not everyone liked everything they did, but the majority opinion was wholehearted enthusiasm for the company and what it had to show.

Jill Sykes reports on how the Sydney Dance Company was "sold" to New Yorkers.

Being on the spot was an invigorating experience, a bit nervewracking at first but eventually a thrill to be surrounded by a whole new community discovering the delights of the Sydney Dance Company. Some people homed in on individual performances and works, others reacted to Graeme Murphy's theatrical flair and unclassifiable style of choreography, Carl Vine's music and Kristian Fredrikson's designs.

Full credit is due to the performers on stage: their skill, daring and vitality seemed greater than ever under the impetus of dancing in New York. Even so, this could have gone unheeded if they had simply lobbed into town without the carefully orchestrated presentation which surrounded them.

Almost exactly a year beforehand, the SDC's New York press agent, Tom Kerrigan, had been out to Australia to see the company. The repertoire for its American debut was put together by the SDC's artistic director, Graeme Murphy, and his assistant, Janet Vernon, in discussion with Kerrigan — though not without some agonising over trans-Pacific differences.

Murphy and Vernon went to New York on the way back from their Italian tour at the end of last year expressly to meet and talk to the press and people involved in the tour. As the New York season approached, these local interviews appeared as well as magazine pieces commissioned from Australians such as John Cargher and Kim Walker as Cupid. Photo Branco Gaica.
myself. The Wall Street Journal dance critic, Peter Rosenwald, was also able to preview them from first-hand knowledge gained on visits to Australia.

“...All the way from Australia.” Kerrigan’s catchy advertising theme, had an intriguing sense of the astonishing about it. Though it wasn’t until I started being questioned by New York dancegoers that I realised what a sound approach it was: “Were these dancers actually born in Australia?” asked one. “Where did they go to get their training?” said another, perplexed. We might as well have come from the moon.

To be fair, I should place these questions in the context of a New York dance audience, which tends to be fragmented into followers of particular companies or styles, and rarely looks outside its own city’s varied offerings. New York seasons by America’s regional companies always seem to be a source of amazement to those who attend; could there really be such talent beyond the boundaries of New York, New York?

So a company of dancers “all the way from Australia” had a novelty value all its own — especially since it wasn’t spearheaded by an international star, as the Australian Ballet has been on its visits to America. Conversely, it was more of a challenge to sell.

Back in Sydney, a special photo session was called for the American tour. The results provided the basis of publicity shots which turned up around New York in the form of a much-prized poster of Kim Walker as Cupid on his skateboard, thousands of full-colour leaflets and a souvenir program. Branco Gaica’s photographs were another widely admired aspect of the American venture.

Advertisements appeared in the prime spots of The New York Times — an expensive exercise which seemed worth it to me for two reasons: not only to inform the public what was happening in the season, and when, but to indicate that the company meant business. There was a tough, professional feel about the season even before it began. The advance publicity left no one in any doubt that the SDC was unusual, that it couldn’t be neatly classified with any familiar group. Indeed, the publicity material went out of its way to try and prevent such assumptions, though it wasn’t entirely successful. On the other hand, the comparisons were not uncomplimentary: Bejart, Jiri Kylian, Martha Graham and Glen Tetley to name a few.

The three New York programs were carefully constructed by Murphy, Vernon and Kerrigan to build up to the work that was expected to steal the season, Poppy. And it did. But even this was a delicate balancing act, as the SCD has so many facets that one evening could not contain all of them.

The result was a first-night program which remained true to the main advertising thrust — Cupid on a skateboard — and gave everyone plenty to talk about, whether they liked it or not. This controversial work was Daphnis and Chloe, which was seen as an example of rampaging sex by some dance critics who obviously don’t venture to the more outrageous corners of their own tiny island of Manhattan.

The most amusing expressions of dislike came from the reviewers of the Daily News: “the glitz-'n-grope Daphnis and Chloe”, Newsday, which described the same work as “a disastrous amalgam of high camp, low camp and summer camp”; and Women’s Wear Daily(?): “An American choreography develop are accustomed to his eclectic style and his tendency to concentrate on subtle details, theatrical concepts and elusive ideas rather than grand sweeps of pure dance that fill the stage, if not the mind. It is a big change to adjust to, and not necessarily every dancegoer’s ideal.

The fact that many people had a grasp of the Murphy approach by the time they saw Poppy may have contributed to its success in New York. But this two-act work is even better than it was when last seen in Australia, having been given a thorough revision for its American debut.

In his notice for the August edition of Saturday Review, which he generously allowed me to preview, Walter Terry says Poppy is “not only visually attractive and sometimes daring, but it is also a penetrating portrait of a unique artist.” Francis Steegmuller, the American biographer of Cocteau, told Murphy that his book had come to life. And Anna Kisselgoff began her New York Times review: “Don’t miss Poppy... Wayward, witty and highly theatrical, right down to its inevitable male nude scene, this stage biography of Jean Cocteau is an engrossing evening in the theatre.”
A national style emerges

by Bill Shoubridge

Here’s an idea for the world’s thinnest book; English, American and Australian people of letters write about the dance.

V S Prichett once wrote a piece putting down ballet as “the most foolish and cruel of the arts”; Shaw knew barely enough to detest the rigid specimens of it he had seen; and Germain Greer was once moved to write that “in a pas de deux, the ballerina, always bobbing on the arm of her man is seen as his chattel”. She might also have written, with equal ignorance and a lot less paranoia, that he was her slave and constant support. All in all it’s not a very good record. The French have a better one. Alfred de Musset, Gautier and Verlaine all wrote rich prose in praise of the most natural national style being built up in our country.

Criticism of dance in Australia has a long way to go for the same reason that the art form itself has a long way to go; there’s very little in the way of tradition and constantly reinforced experience. Many audiences, and so too the critics and (self-appointed) commentators, still wriggle in that almost past, period of literary review when the “intellectuals” were annoyed with Australia for not being witty and beautiful in the way that Europe was witty and beautiful.

For a long time, critics have seen nothing more in the offerings thus far presented than the dancers’ proficiency and, when the time came the inventiveness (what a quaint cliche) of the choreographers. Very few of them have bothered to watch dancers closely, witness them develop and note the gradual rise of a national style in Australian dancers — by which I mean the individuality of the dancers and not the tastes of their audience.

One hears so much rubbish spoken during ballet intervals, and so much gossip parading as information that one sometimes wonders if the forays made elsewhere in the world in the last 50 years and lately here in Australia have ever actually happened. But the truth is we are seeing a natural national style being built up in our dances, and it is not one built up on superficialities.

Ballet dancing in Australia is no longer a savage discipline of a decadent European soiree society imposed on rustic and free-spirited Australian bodies (with all the apologetics that went with it). What we’re seeing now is a dancer well disciplined (most of the time), but not constrained. As Graeme Murphy mentioned in his interview in last month’s issue, that is the style that he wants to engender within his own company and he does.

The fact that Janet Vernon is the ideal body for Murphy’s choreographic purposes does not detract from what Nina Veritenikova or Susan Barling have to offer in terms of technical purity. It’s just that the three of them project themselves and that technique in different ways. Barling always seems deferential, it’s the flow of movement that we see first with her, then we notice the dancer that’s projecting it. Whether it’s because she prefers it that way or because she can’t shine out as a personality first and a dancer second is only something she could tell you.

Veritenikova on the other hand always makes you feel you’re seeing a dancer having a great time whether she’s suffering or exalting. The fact that sometimes she’s out of phase somehow with other dancers is seen as secondary to the joy of vivre that gets you in.

Janet Vernon on the other hand — the closest thing the Sydney Dance Company has to a prima ballerina, as with Pamela Buckman of the Australian Dance Theatre — gives you the feeling she’d go backstage and scourge herself if she was ever out of phase with anybody. Vernon and Buckman are such perfectionists when it comes to outlining technique that sometimes it gets in the way of what they are dancing. Watching them go through some of the contortions of Murphy’s or Taylor’s choreography with that intense frown that comes upon them is like watching a mathematician grappling with a problem of engineering.

A case in point is the pas de deux in the SDC’s Sheherazade. When Vernon does arabesque back, then folds into arabesque forward I at least am fascinated by the fact that here’s a physiological problem being worked out. Audiences love dance to look terribly difficult, and they want to rejoice with a dancer when she succeeds in making it look easy. Vernon and Buckman know this and that’s why their dancing has the algebraic intensity it does. Vernon at times dances her part in 3rd Conversation like a locomotive with a full head of steam and it’s intimidating, but then she covers her coiled spring with velvet when she does the Lykanion in Daphnis and Chloe and the strength is silky; she never, ever lets that spring relax however.

Of her time with the SDC, we now see almost no remnant in the performances of Sheree Rayment, she is almost faceless. Put her in one of the big classic roles like Coppelia or Raymonda and she dis-

Michela Kirkaldie with Gary Norman in the AB’s Suite en Blanc. Photo: Branco Gaica.
appears. She was propelled into principal status with the Australian Ballet before she was ready. She's always been a serene and relaxed dancer but there are occasions now when she just falls apart. That deep sway in her back may help her to lift and define her shoulders and clear her head in croise but it works against her in allegro work and then she blurs and splinters.

Michela Kirkaldie is about the only one at the moment who can successfully carry a major role right to the end of the evening. Her image is large and voluptuous, there's a full stretch in attitude and a clear line when she is being partnered, but here again is a dancer that needs the right sort of role.

I've watched Lynette Mann come up through the ranks gradually and she now has a lot more poise, assurance of style and command of body grammar than she did when she first danced a really shaky Nutcracker pas de deux a few seasons ago. She is, or could be one of the best allegro dancers the AB has got when in a character or comedy role, but she visibly baulks before the chasm of something like Raymonda.

She, and Daniela Panfanea have together a trait that I somehow think has filtered down to them from the days of Lucette Aldous, they both have a tendency to sell, themselves first and the dancing second. It's not a laudable trait and one which I hope they'll lose with further experience.

Marilyn Rowe has always seemed the exact incarnation of the "Australian" dancer to me. She's not dancing at the moment and, with the problems of a new baby and widowhood on her hands, it is doubtful if she ever will again. This to me is tragic, because she hasn't yet fulfilled herself as a dancer and audiences will miss those lovely evenings in the theatre that she gave us.

Rowe was the only worthwhile thing in the Sleeping Beauty production of a few years ago. She entered completely into the role and yet it was substantially different from anything that I personally had seen from any European ballerina essaying it.

When Fonteyn, or Chauvriere or Merle Park danced the part of Aurora, one was always aware of chivalry, of breeding and good form; of manners. Chivalry is something acquired with difficulty in Australian dancers, and that is only to be expected, but when Rowe danced Aurora one was inexorably swept into the human drama and the fairy tale excitement. To see her in Act I in the birthday celebrations was to witness a young, vibrant and beautiful girl, full of vivacity and spirit, struck cruelly down only to arise in the last Act, a serene and totally realized woman full of love and relief.

It was that naturalness, that spaciousness of personality and body image that can and does define the female Australian dancer. It's not the grandeur of the Russians, the silkiness of the English or the Olympic athleticism of the American dancer, it is a commonsense approach that has absorbed certain aspects of all of the above and distilled them into something that will with time become unique; a sense of drama, of play and control.

It would be a pity if Marilyn Rowe, if she chooses no longer to dance, could not be brought in to personally coach some of the younger girls coming up through the AB major company or the Dancers touring group, just as it would be a shame not to have some lasting effect from the presence of Valentina Kozlova within the company this year.

But the Australian Ballet has a lamentable record in capitalizing on the wealth of experience it has at its call. I remember a case in point with the recent revival of Butler's Threshold. No single member of the original cast (Alan Alder or Garth Welch) was invited to coach the new cast in the intricacies of their part, with the result that the work was a dismal flop. One also recalls the short change given to Anne Woolliams when she came to remount Cranko's Onegin and Romeo and Juliet.

It is not enough for the AB to focus all their energies in a new production of a ballet of a film of a book at the end of every year and squeeze the rest of the repertoire around it. As the record stands at the moment most of those blockbusters are so flimsy that they'll never last more than a few years, and the dancers in them are always left threshing about in unfamiliar water.

A company style is not created through always mounting new costume dramas, it is created through the strength of tradition and through previous generations passing on their experience to others. If things go on as they are at the moment, the AB may do well at the box office (but such things are always beholden to the laws of diminishing returns) and yet still be bankrupt in terms of tradition and experience and acquired style.

**Gallery Dances**

In the two or so years since I last saw the Kinetic Energy Dance Company they seem to have gone even further downhill. What they used to offer was a fairly wide cross section of dance pieces from a mass of choreographers. Now they seem content with the work of director Graeme Jones, and sad to say it has little content. In his Gallery Dances, we are treated to what purport to be vignettes of people observed whilst observing in an Art Gallery.

Interspersed with the twittery weavings of his "characters" there are what I take to be abstractions of certain paintings or sculptures, "The Discus Thrower or Javelin" and so on. There may be a connecting theme, thin as it is, but there is no connecting image apart from an irritating obsession with the flexed foot which I have a fear is Jones' idea of Modernism.

The repetition and lack of breadth in the dancing as well as the choreography gives the whole evening a warmed over and passé feeling.

As I've said before about the One Extra Dance Company (which apparently doesn't exist any more) and the Australian Contemporary Dance Company, the Kinetic people are going to have to rethink their whole point of view as to what they're going to present. At the moment they are offering the same kind of stuff that the bigger companies are giving us, and the bigger companies are giving it to us with more depth, wit and ability.

**Gallery Dances** looked to me like something that the Ballet Rambert back in the early 60's might have dished up in a workshop performance, it gives us nothing distinctive. Unfortunately, despite all the allusions in the programme notes, the dancing was just a lot of posturing and rolling to alternate moments of silence and inane piano rags (the Steve Reich "Music for a Large Ensemble" they used in the interval as background would have been far more worthy of treatment).

If they want to progress, these dancers are going to have to rework their output and change direction and, although this may be getting personal, they really should change their name. A name like Kinetic Energy these days really is a bit passe. How about something like the Movement Union (as opposed to the Union Movement); it's fresh, different and intriguing, and if the company can match it with a vibrant direction in choreographic processes they will go a long way.
John Heilpern tells how he found a guide book in North Africa which began "It is not easy to write a book. First you have to find a book. Then you have to write it." The simple truth of this should be a lesson to all those who have rich, interesting or great lives — and then have to write books about them.

Doris Fitton's *Not Without Dust and Heat* joins the long line of Australian theatrical memoirs which meander through decades of fascinating theatrical history without ever managing to give a coherent account of it all. Just as things are getting interesting theatrically, Miss Fitton suddenly takes us on a trip to Aden or Europe and we are plunged into the world of tourism. The names of the people she knows and/or loves roll on like a giant subscriber list on an Independent Theatre Club Night. Like many such amateur memoirs the book is a strange mixture of personal detail and theatrical history.

As a personal account of a busy life in the theatre Miss Fitton's book is very interesting. Her privileged upbringing and apparently charmed life (if her memory, or writing style, are not now deceiving her) freed her from the personal anxieties ordinary people are prone to. She could afford to be firm but always gracious, in control but always generous and friendly. Everything or everyone in the book is fine, talented, brilliant, lovely, dear, delightful or fascinating. When she has to stoop to recount the sordid political matters that occasionally concerned even such a refined theatre as the Independent, a faint air of distaste creeps into her style — before it is quickly driven out (as is the issue) by another flurry of old friends.

This is the most frustrating thing about her book. Miss Fitton is very interesting writing about, for example, the formation of the Trust and the well-intentioned but misguided anglophilia of its founders. Hugh Hunt's rejection of Australian help (refusing an offer from John Alden on the grounds that he would do his own Shakespeare, thank you) and the gradual crowding out of companies like the Independent by the new British imports (such as Hunt and Robert Quentin) make interesting reading. All too soon, however, we are back with the dear old friends. Miss Fitton misses an opportunity to drive her nationalist point home when she comments on the success of the Trust's tour of Judith Anderson in *Medea* in 1956. According to contemporary newspaper accounts the season of four plays toured was entirely paid for by the success of a new Australian play — *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

As an account of the 47 years during which the Independent dominated Sydney's amateur "art" theatre scene this book is disappointing. The theatre's "philosophy" — to present "the world's best plays well done" — was always rather vague. Its writer-centred, theatrical do-goodism was admirable during the lean years of the '30s to the '50s but towards the end it had begun to look to most Sydney theatregoers rather old hat. Apart from that goal Miss Fitton's main purpose seems to have been merely to keep the theatre open. Her mentor was Stanislavsky but what she took from him was his advice on the pragmatics of running a theatre company rather than anything else.

The late decline was sad because the Independent's achievement was immense. Some 600 productions of plays which might not otherwise have been seen, scores of now well-known actors, directors and administrators, and generations of enthusiastic audiences: this was what the Independent gave to Australia.

My criticisms above, then, are made in sorrow rather than in anger — also because the Independent guided (very firmly, as was its wont) the first five years of my interest in theatre. The night I stayed up reading *Not Without Dust and Heat* I had an old anxiety dream I used to have as a teenager acting there. I dreamt I was back in the lower dressing room, under the stage; it was opening night and I had forgotten to learn any lines. I woke up full of memories of the "Indy".

It took me years to shake off the Indy's influence. People are forever recounting the great and wonderful productions that first drew them into a passion for theatre. Doris Fitton and Peter Summerton supplied mine, and I will always be grateful for that. Poor memories, perhaps, but my own.
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