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designed by
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September 22 to October 31
Drama Theatre
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ARTISTS AND CRITICS

The antipathy that often exists between artists and critics might be said to have reached a head in Adelaide over the past few weeks. A battle has raged between, in particular, the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust and the State Theatre Company on the one side, against the arts writers of the Adelaide Advertiser on the other.

Moves in the fight have included heavy criticism of the STC's current season by the paper, in particular, of the revue Squirt, and more specifically of the content and cost ($3,000) of a full-page advertisement for that show in the Advertiser (biting the hand that feeds one?). Further adverse comment on the general running and control of arts bodies in South Australia led the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust to withdraw all their publicity including paid advertisements from the newspaper.

Even SA Arts Minister, Murray Hill, has been caught in the cross-fire, wanting neither to condone the "left wing" content of Squirt, nor to let the issue of future funding cutbacks appear in any way partisan. He has, however, gone so far as to go on record as saying "...we maintain the thrust of arts support at all levels in the state, but we reserve the right to reduce allocations where wasteful expenditure has occurred". And further, that he hopes the standard of STC productions will rise again when Jim Sharman takes up the directorship.

It is sad when bad blood comes to exist between arts companies and personnel, and the press, for they are two aspects of the same industry and very much inter-dependent. It could be said that journalism is the subsidiary activity, relaxing on the primary product of the art as grist for its mill; but equally the art cannot exist in a vacuum — its fundamental requirement is an audience and it would be hard pressed to find a sufficient one without the dissemination of information and widening of the debate that the media provide.

The job of the critic is, by definition, likely to bring him into disfavour with those he criticises. But the label is often a misnomer in that it has the unfortunate connotation of antagonistic comment. The reviewer is rarely given credit for his positive responses — which are in most cases in the majority — and too often remembered only for his negative ones. The contemptuous attitude of artist to reviewer is notorious worldwide, but in the long term effect of keeping them away from theatres; to praise artists for a production or performance that did not succeed could be to hinder them from finding where success might lie.

It is ironic for both sides that theatre is probably the only industry of which the critics are also the front line of advertising, yet it is essential to the reviewer's integrity that he resists the temptation to write "puffs" in the mistaken belief that this is promoting an art form he loves. He must feel, with Shaw, that "the dramatic critic is the servant of a high art and not a mere advertiser of entertainments." Equally, the artist can hope for, in the words of Charles Marowitz, "the best criticism...which because of its soundness and substance unintentionally has the effect of promotional copy."

Where there are issues it is the role of the media to enter the dialectic, but objectively and not with guns blazing. The recent rounds fired off in Adelaide seem to have become somewhat personal on both sides, which can do nothing but lower esteem for both the writers and the companies involved. Mutual respect is the key not only to good relations, but also mutual growth, and to be strongly nurtured rather than letting the situation arise where, to quote Shaw again, theatres "instead of looking up to (the press) as their guide, philosopher and friend, they regard (it) merely as the author of a series of weekly outrages on their profession and privacy."

In the meantime, the General Manager of the State Theatre Company, Paul Illes, has handed in his resignation. Not that this is directly attributable to the recent press criticism, though his comments (see INFO) make it clear that he has not been happy with Adelaide media response. No doubt, he would agree with this final quote from GBS: "I have never been able to see how the duties of a critic, which consist largely of making painful remarks in public about the most sensitive of his fellow creatures, can be reconciled with the manners of a gentleman."
MOMMA'S TRIUMPH

Momma's Little Horror Show, currently playing at the Kleine Komedie, Amsterdam, has already been to Rotterdam, Groningen and a number of other provincial cities in Holland as part of its tour of State Theatres in Germany and Holland.

So far it has met extremely favourable response as it follows in the footsteps of the Circus Oz tour completed earlier this year. Of the fourteen major reviews it has received, thirteen have been highly favourable, the fourteenth being penned by a rock'n'roll writer who hated every minute of it, though his reaction does seem to have at least been partly dictated by his misunderstanding of the title — something which happened even in Australia.

It is believed that the French promoters are thinking of dropping "Horror Show" out of its title for Momma's pivotal season in Paris at the Palais de Glace in République — a commercial season which is scheduled to run through December and into January.

Some quotes from the Dutch reviews translate as follows: from Het Binnenhot (Hague, circulation 200,000) "Momma's is visually spectacular, an exceptionally inventive production". Director Nigel Triffitt's vision has been described as "eclectic", one paper adding that "he embellishes the production so exquisitely and perfects it so glowingly that we are won over".

Another read: "Momma's breathes a typical Anglo-Saxon show atmosphere which gives an essentially simple story "quasi-serious overtones". It also described the work of the puppeteers as "perfectly co-ordinated and brilliant".

Meanwhile, a Dutch Transport outfit, Airfast TNT, a transport business affiliated to our own TNT, has been giving substantial assistance with transport to the Australian Puppet Theatre (the group behind Momma's). After seeing the show in Amsterdam, one of their agents, a Mr Fred Veenendaal, was able to persuade his company to sponsor their tour. It is the first time the company has been successful in its bid for commercial sponsorship.

At a Writer's Guild meeting recently, Timlin recommended that a majority representation of writers be present on the Board of the APG. "At the moment, the APG is an actor's theatre," he said. "It needs to be re-structured. It should go back to being a writer's theatre as it was in 1970."

WHARF PROJECT

The effect of the NSW Budget Speech, delivered on August 26, 1981 on the Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf Project at Walsh Bay appears to be one of further delay.

While detailed designs and specifications for the building are now finalized and ready to go out to tender, the shortage of capital funds has meant that building contracts for the Wharf Project will again have to be deferred.

In his speech, the Premier, Mr Wran, did however give his personal assurance that the building would go ahead "as soon as practicable".
LOVEJOY FOR NIDA
Mr Robin Lovejoy has been appointed as Head of the Designer's and Director's Course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. He will take up his appointment in February 1982.

Mr Lovejoy has had a distinguished career as an actor, designer and director in theatre, opera and television. In 1956 he won the Critic's Award for his direction and design of The Rivals.

More recently he has pursued a freelance career. He directed Idomineo with Joan Sutherland, for the Australian Opera. For the Victorian State Opera he directed Bizet's The Pearl Fishers, Debussy's Peleas and Melisande, and the highly successful Die Fledermaus.

He has been lecturing at NIDA on a freelance basis and last year he directed The Ballad of the Sad Cafe there.

ANPC ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
George Whaley has been appointed Artistic Director of the 1982 Australian National Playwright's Conference. The Chairman of the Conference is again David Williamson and Clem Gorman has been appointed Administrator.

ARMFIELD TO FREELANCE
Neil Armfield's resignation as Artistic Director at the Nimrod Theatre will take effect next March at the end of the current subscription season. Meanwhile he is busy with Squirts at the Universal Theatre in Melbourne. From there he returns to the Nimrod for Eyes of the Whites (Downstairs), and Steven Sewell's Welcome the Bright World (Upstairs).

According to Sue Hill, the Theatre Manager at Nimrod, the company feels under no pressure to fill the position Armfield will vacate, and is waiting for someone "suitable" to appear.

Speaking from Melbourne, Armfield said he was looking forward to the challenge of being a freelance director. He also sounds very confident. "There is an awful lot of work around," he said. "And after two years with a secure job like the one I had at Nimrod, it's very easy to lose the sense of one's own perspectives, of why one does things a certain way."

"I'm really looking forward to working in different spaces with different companies. I was getting rather tired of the confines of the actor/audience relation-

Neil Armfield

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ship as it was shaped by the Nimrod Upstairs.

"I'm also interested in doing more Australian work," he said, though he adds with considerable caution that he does not feel at liberty just now to discuss his programme next year.

**TV/FILM WORKSHOP**

The third film production and directing course, run by the Australian TV-Film Industry Workshop, is under way. Introduced in February 1981, the course is for those who do not have the opportunity to join a full-time government sponsored scheme such as that offered by the Australian Film and TV School, but would like to gain a working knowledge of video and film production and directing.

The 26 week course is divided into three parts — Introduction to Film and TV Production, Creative Director's Workshop, and Producing and Editing a Film. The instructor is Brian Adams in association with Basil Appleby and John Winbolt.

**AWG MOTIONS**

The first national Australian Writers' Guild conference was held at the Melbourne Town House in Carlton, between 11 and 14 August. Chaired by Cliff Green, it was attended by 90 playwrights and scriptwriters from all over Australia, and it finished with the AWGIE Awards on Friday 14.

Of the twenty motions passed, number (6) specifically related to TA and it reads as follows: "That this conference assures the funding bodies that the publications Theatre Australia and Cinema Papers have a vital role to play in the cultural and artistic scene, and urges them to continue funding of these publications at at least present levels."

Other motions referred to the lack of opportunities for Australian playwrights in the current theatrical climate and deplored the lack of adequate venues and funding for their work, especially work of an innovative or experimental nature.

**ILES RESIGNS**

In the wake of media criticism of the State Theatre Company of SA's current season, though not, he says, because of it, STC General Manager, Paul Iles has resigned from the company. He came to Adelaide at the tail end of George's season, stayed through the new regime of Kevin Palmer and Nick Enright, and is currently acting artistic director in the interim before Jim Sharman becomes Resident Director next April.

Iles feels he is "not the right person any more for the STC Theatre", he says "can only thrive on change and after two years the company is getting to the stage where its course is set on an exciting and ambitious plane. There is more that I can do for other drama companies than I can achieve here. The company is to have an astute Artistic Director, with taste, and it is still very exciting to be working so well with Jim Sharman in planning the 1982 season."

"However, I am defeated by the provincialism and lack of audience support for an admittedly adventurous program. The resignation had nothing to do with my relationship with either the Board of Governors or the new direction of the company. It is not another arts bust-up. I have made my contribution."

Paul Iles will be free-lancing in future, and his first commitment will probably be with the new Northern Queensland Theatre Company for whom he has already acted as consultant.

**SNIPPETS...**

A new live theatre and bar... to be called the PITS will be established at the Canberra Rex Hotel. PITS, an abbreviation of Pie in the Sky will house a fully professional company of actors and musicians. Its first production in early September will be The Naked Vicar Show by Gary Reilly and Tony Sattler... ARTS Ltd. — a national non-profit organisation assisting the arts in Australia on behalf of the private sector, recently distributed its nomination forms for the 1981 Business in the Arts Awards. The Awards recognize outstanding examples of corporate support for the arts in Australia. Closing date for nominations is Friday, September 25, 1981, and these should be made to ARTS RESEARCH, TRAINING and SUPPORT Ltd, 9 Rush Street, Woollahra, NSW 2025... The Fairfield Players, in conjunction with the Fairfield Festival will present a play about the founding of Fairfield and the problems facing newcomers to the area. Set in the mid-nineteenth century, the production is being staged as a combined community arts project. Opening date is October 17, and the venue is Bossley Park Progress Hall, corner Mimosa Road and Quarry Road, Bossley Park.
by Norman Kessell

A take of more than $1 million in 13 weeks from two productions at Sydney's Theatre Royal must be the showbiz success story of the year.

First it was Ronald Harwood's The Dresser, which set a new record with a gross of $517,674 from an attendance of 88.54 percent of capacity for its six and a half week run.

That, however, was immediately toppled by Richard Wherrett's Sydney Theatre Company production of the Fred Ebb — Bob Fosse musical, Chicago, which in its six and a half week run took more than $550,000 with an average attendance of 96.65 percent of capacity. It set another record in its fourth week by playing to 99.4 percent of capacity.

And as MLC Theatre Royal Company director Frederick J Gibson points out, that was with a top ticket price of $14.90, compared with the $US27.50 he paid to see the show in New York. Gibson told me ticket prices have to rise soon, probably to $18.00 at the Royal.

The Dresser was a joint production by the MLC Theatre Royal Company, Helen Montague, of London, Wilton Morley, of Sydney, and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, but for Chicago, which had already played four sell-out weeks at the Opera House Drama Theatre, the deal was a box-office split. Gibson provided the theatre and the promotion, the STC the production.

Gibson said he had lost money on two earlier STC transfers — Simon Gray's Close of Play and Bob Herbert's No Names, No Pack Drill — but for those his involvement had been a guarantee against loss.

Chicago looked like a bigger gamble than either of those. After seeing the Broadway production, he had reported that "it did nothing for me" and that he doubted it could work outside America, a view he shared with most other Australian managements. Trust general manager Jeffrey Joynton-Smith told me: "We would not have put a penny in it."

However, Gibson said he saw a model of Brian Thomson's set, the sketches for Roger Kirk's costumes and learned something of Wherrett's production ideas and these, coupled with the fact he had a theatre with a vacant date, persuaded him to take a chance. The rest, as they say, is history.

Gibson also said that being able to promote the show from the start as a two-venue presentation was a big help.

Chicago is now at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre until Nov 30. It will be at the Adelaide Festival Centre from Nov 26 to Dec 2, then will open a return Sydney season at the Royal on New Year's Eve.

And talking of takings, that schmaltzy tuner Sound of Music, one of the biggest money spinners of all time, looks set to do it again. A month before the London revival opened on Aug 17 there was $2 million in hand, the biggest advance in West End history, according to producer Ross Taylor.

Doreen Clarke must be the most-produced of Australian women playwrights. Her works have been staged in Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin. Her newest, The Sad Songs of Annie Sando opens in Adelaide's Price Theatre Nov 20, an STC of SA production directed by Margaret Davis, designed by Stephen Curtis and in the cast Isobel Kirk, Stuart McCreery, Jacqui Phillips and Christine Woodland.

I hear Edward (Breaker Morant) Woodward will be back in Australia next month for a concert and legit tour. He'll be doing Coward's Private Lives, following, as I understand it, in the wake of the club and country centre circuit tour recently made by fellow-Poms Leslie Phillips and Andrew Sachs with Not Now Darling.

Another visitor next month will be former film star Stewart Granger, here to promote his autobiography, Sparks Fly Upward.

Commerce, journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia, reports that a recent survey showed a night out in Sydney costs nine percent more than in New York. According to the study, which covered rentals, entertainment and general costs, all had risen faster here than in other cities examined.
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A LIFE IN THE DAY OF JACKI WEAVER
Today we are rehearsing Act Two; I have to cry quite a lot, and the stage manager is so moved, he cries too.

When we break at 1.30pm, I go and see my agent Gloria Payten. I pick up my weekly cheque — that's rehearsal money, and my mail, of which there is quite a stack. Today I've got ten requests for personal items of clothing to be auctioned at charity functions. I've also got a couple of requests for recipes — Celebrity Recipe Requests. There's a letter from a little girl I sponsor in Bolivia — she's five years old and her name is Margarita. I love getting her letters.

There are some bills, and several fan letters, some from kids who want to act, the others from middle-aged ladies who want to mother me. I think I'm everybody's idea of a favourite niece.

Next I'll go and see Kerry Patterson — also in the agency. She looks after all the girls and does things like take phone calls and pass on messages. Every week I get at least one offer of a TV commercial. She'll say to them that she thinks it's unlikely I'll do the ad; I've only done about eight in 20 years.

Kerry has a film script for me to read with a view to me doing it in nine months, after the play is finished, and she's also got a few messages for me from friends who couldn't find me at home.

But I've also got some shopping to do. I grab a health-shake — which is full of eggs and yoghurt and fruit juice, and head off for David Jones' cosmetic counter. When the women at the make-up counter see me coming, they stand up and cheer. I spend a fortune there... at least $100. Lipstick is a major item, I need two on either side of the stage (in case one breaks), as well as one in the dressing room.

That done, I run to my building society where I make a withdrawal which I take to my bank three blocks away and deposit it there so that I can keep just ahead of the cheques I have written. Both the staff at the building society and the bank are familiar with that pattern.

I've also got to buy some shoes. Shoes and books are my main extravagances. I often buy Charles Jourdan — he makes the best shape, and today I am going to buy some really expensive ones, gold kid with very high heels. They are to wear to tonight's party.

But it's back to rehearsals again. This afternoon we are going over the songs with the pianist for about half an hour, followed by some time with the disco dance. Then we will do a full run through. That done, we have notes from the director, Philip Cusack, for twenty minutes or so, followed by a wardrobe fitting, which I hate. It just means more dressing and undressing, and getting pins stuck into me!

During tea-break I ring my son who has gone to my mother's house after school. I check that he has had a glass of milk and that he has started his homework.

Back to the flat at last, I put on some classical music, maybe Mozart, feed my son, do ten minutes deep relaxation using a technique I learnt several years ago from a yoga teacher.

I have to eat my own dinner at least two hours before the show starts at 8.00pm, which is pretty early, but if I don't I feel terrible. I drink endless cups of ordinary tea — I've probably had a dozen by now, which wouldn't matter so much if I didn't take so much sugar. At least I don't smoke. Next I have a shower and wash my hair again. While it dries I return a few urgent phone calls... this time the Woman's Day wants to interview me about the show.

At 7.00pm I arrive at the theatre, my best dress over my arm and carrying my Gucci makeup bag — which is a great shape and looks very pretty. I run up the stairs, rather than take the lift. I hate running into members of the audience at this stage. I sign on, walk downstairs and say hello to the stage manager, see my dresser who is always putting clothes out on both sides of the stage and delivering clean laundry to the dressing room.

I clean my teeth, wash my hands, take off my jewellery and then put on the jewellery I wear in the show. Then I sit down in my dressing room. It's the best moment of the day... when the job starts. I start making up, and put on my wig, which takes ages; I've got so much hair each strand has to be separately pinned.

The dresser comes in at 7.45pm. I take everything off and put my tights on first. Then radio-mike. Then bra. Then first costume. All the other costumes would be already set up on either side of the stage since I don't get back to the dressing room at all.

I work right through interval, redoing my face, changing my wig. By this stage the radio-mike is coming
unstuck and it has to be taped on again. After the show I climb into my best Jill Fitzsimons dress and leave for the party in a private room in a club with our investors.

I might read for two hours when I get home, but after a "typical" day like this one I'd probably sleep fairly well.

Is that everyone's idea of what a star does?" she giggles.

John Waters and Jacki Weaver on set in They're Playing Our Song.

They're Playing Our Song

Australia's biggest hit musical is returning.

Don't miss it!

Opens at Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, Oct. 23.
MYLES talks about his career and the role of Mozart in MTC's Amadeus with SIMON HUGHES.

For a man who is about to tackle the rich eccentricities of Mozart in Peter Shaffer's Amadeus, Bruce Myles looks oddly unassuming and quietly Australian in the lounge of his renovated Hawthorn weatherboard. But talking to him about his twenty-odd years in theatre you are immediately impressed by the man's depth of experience and gentle passion for his art.

A Sydneysider, Bruce Myles started out in the fifties as a radio actor in the soapies. Stage work eventually came through groups like the Trust Players who presented a season of Australian plays before Bruce left for New York and London. What he calls a training and study period lasted for ten years and reached some sort of apotheosis when he played Hamlet at the Salisbury Playhouse. So why does an actor who has heard the call from Mecca decide to return to Australia?

"In the early seventies" he says, "I became really interested in what was happening back here. I was very attracted to what was going on here politically, socially and theatrically. I felt it would be very silly not getting home and being a part of it." And so in 1973 Myles found himself performing in such seminal plays as Stork, Jugglers Three and Last of the Knucklemen.

"The interesting thing was that for an Australian actor I earned a considerable amount of money and everything I did was Australian material." In fact, despite his classical expertise and experience, Bruce's abiding interest was always in the new local writing. And considering the nature and extent of his training as an actor there could well have been anomalies in his situation. "It was very difficult for an actor of my generation to get a grounding in Australian material. You were always having to stick on your Yank or Pom cap and so it was hard to match a European background with the rawness of Australian writing. But that was very good for me."

Although the technical facility of English actors usually far surpasses their Australian counterparts, Bruce hastens to add that Howard Brenton and Steve Berkoff, two playwrights he has worked with and knows well, are attracted to the Australian/American scene because it is much more passionate than the English. If that is so how does the "safe, middle-class subscriber ambience" (my words) of MTC compare with the excitement of Off-off Broadway or Berkoff?

"I guess I've had a terrific range of work to do for a new director and always the plays have been things I've particularly wanted to have a go at. Either to do with the themes of the piece in terms of looking at our society or just as an exercise in exploring new theatre skills. So I haven't found that particular dilemma... it's got to be all seen in the context that I'm a new boy as a director. It's a very new skill I'm learning." Indeed, in the last three years Bruce has directed no less than fifteen plays ranging from Fassbinder to Chekhov, Brecht to Oakley, and

Bruce Myles (Barney) and Sandy Gore (Nancy) in the MTC's Kid Stakes.
performed in three quite diverse spaces. "How many directors get an opportunity to learn their business like that?"

It is not with regret, however, that Bruce Myles as Mozart once more treads the boards at MTC. Rather he relishes the chance to concentrate on his role and nothing else after his long bout as director. And how does an actor prepare to play the part of an extraordinary artist who dashed off his first oratorio at age eleven? We recall the rigorous preparation for Richard III and Bruce insists that he will again be donning the tracksuit for Amadeus. An actor works to a particular pitch and if that actor happens to be Bruce Myles then he needs to be fit to perform well. He is also amazingly frank about the reception an actor might anticipate.

"When you take on a big piece you're sort of going to blow it anyway. Somebody's going to say, now why did you do it like that? If you're really trying for something you can come a bloody great cropper but you can always back yourself up with technique — to support what ideas you've got."

While MTC are staging one of the big successes of the London season, Myles makes no bones about his opinion of playwright Peter Shaffer. People might recall the slick production of MTC's Equus several years ago but many rather thought it a shallow play beneath its sensational theatrical skin. Bruce is inclined to agree saying that Shaffer is "sometimes too clever in that he doesn't allow the audience to feel greatly for the character, there are not the dimensions of a Chekhovian portrait, for instance." But he adds wryly that Shaffer would probably defend himself, protesting his only intention is to present "a bloody good night in the theatre."

From all reports of its premiere season, that is exactly what Amadeus promises to be. If nothing else, Shaffer is a brilliant tailor who sets up the last night of Mozart's life as seen through the eyes of a rival. His passionate hatred for the composer makes this one of the most grotesque portraits imaginable. The play's time sequence is beautifully structured and Bruce Myles seems itching to take on the "unconventional, arrogant, crude and totally unpredictable genius of Mozart." Apart from brushing up his French and Italian which Mozart spoke impeccably ("And I don't," admits Bruce) he is enduring the dubious pleasures of daily five-finger exercises on the piano. Hopefully, he won't suffer the traumas Dirk Bogarde experienced in his portrayals of Liszt.

The energy and enthusiasm Bruce Myles brings to a part are infectious, for you feel that even if he did "come a bloody great cropper" as he puts it, he would still come out of it with his artistic integrity intact. Whatever the outcome you may be sure that like the man himself Bruce Myles' Mozart will have great character and sensitivity.
PLAYING OUR SHOW — Mason Miller Productions

by Donna Sadka

There is a perverse irony in the fact that a young WA company, Mason Miller Productions, for whom theatre production is a passionate hobby rather than a source of income, have to date succeeded in an area where many a desperate investor has bitten the dust.

Bill Mason, wearing a beard which makes him look older than his 24 years, is the front man of the company. After university he spent two years as tours manager with the WA Arts Council learning a lot about putting the right shows in the right places, and one year doing freelance promotion before taking his present post as manager of the Hole-In-The-Wall this year.

His partner, Rory Miller has his own city business in the technical side of theatre (Stagecraft) and as far as Mason Miller is concerned prefers to stay in the background.

Neither displays either the flamboyance or the ambitious push usually associated with professional entrepreneurs. Their company is not listed in the phone book yet, they don't have an office let alone a secretary, but under the double M banner they have presented three popular, and by all accounts successful, shows in the first six months of this year: Charley's Aunt, The Importance of Being Earnest, and Cowardy Custard, all directed by Ray Omodei with Jake Newby as business and production manager.

Bill Mason says he now realises the risks they took when they mounted Charley's Aunt, but they learnt a lot about what not to do next time. Their concept of the company was ongoing but, as he says, when you haven't got a lot of money behind you you don't make great plans. Which seems to be their modus operandi — moving one show at a time, putting the profits into the next one, and holding their own.

“So far,” says Miller, “We've not made a fortune but we've put people in work, paid the bills and done shows that audiences wanted to see.”

Decisions are made very informally; they are essentially a pragmatic group not prepared to go out on a limb for some wild artistic dream nor to present “junk theatre” for a fast rake-off.

Mason stresses the crucial importance of casting and they are proud of the fact that they have not resorted to imports for box-office bait, but use all West Australian casts. Omodei used a comparative unknown, Jim Bean, in Charley's Aunt and Earnest after which the young actor was snapped up by the Playhouse and is now booked up till February 1982. In Custard the director had the wit to use tiny opera singer Terri Johnson in her first straight role and audiences were charmed to discover a beguiling singer who could act and look good into the bargain.

Advertising is another priority and by local standards Mason Miller do it big, on buses and hoardings as well as the usual outlets of TV, newspapers and handbills.

But obviously choice of material is their most important strength and because they have no continuing overheads they are in the happy position of not having to stage a show they don't believe in just to keep going. They have cancelled a theatre booking for September because they couldn't find exactly the right vehicle and the people they wanted are not available, but Mason says they will keep their eyes open till the right script turns up.

“Always one dreams of having a really smash hit,” he admits, “but in the meantime there is a great charge to be had out of sitting in a theatre on opening night and thinking 'This is our show... we've done it!' ”
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THEATRE AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 1981 15
ROCKY'S RESPECTABLE

KEN HORLER discusses the Rocky Horror Show revival with WILTON MORLEY.

If Hair can wow them in the Leagues Clubs more than a decade after the event, why shouldn't Rocky move across town from Glebe to the Theatre Royal a mere seven years later? This was the view of the London agents when they granted the rights to the Australian revival to Wilton Morley. "No Glebe sleaze please", said the London money, "we want it in a real theatre". The original team, Harry M Miller (producer), Jim Sharman (director) and Brian Thompson (designer) might have fainted right away at such entrepreneurial caution, but they were the conditions which Morley was happy to accept.

It wasn't as if Morley was hot in the pursuit of the Rocky revival nights. He says that by happen chance he was asked to vet the Oz applicants in London and thought "Why not me?" The original teams had just finished the sequel to the Rocky film Shock Treatment, to be released in Australia in December, and only Brian Thompson, the designer, might have fainted right away at such entrepreneurial caution, but they were the conditions which Morley was happy to accept.

So, against strong antipodean competition, Wilton Morley secured the rights and attempted to flog off shares in the ventures. "A dismal failure," he says, "I didn't have the patience." Morley then went to his old pals who were happy to take a share of the action; Wilton took 45% for himself, JC Williamson took 30% and Phillip Emmanuel, a London chemist who came here with Berkoff's East, took up the remaining 25%.

The pre-production costs are estimated to be $300,000 and the weekly running costs $60,000. Earlier Morley productions had included Same Time Next Year, Once A Catholic, The Old Country, The Dresser, and The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin (with Nimrod). Of these shows, only one was Australian.

Morley had earlier professed a commitment to Australian writers, directors and actors and was aware of this dilemma when he came to cast the show with Brian Thompson. He says that his choice of Japanese-American choreographer-director David Toguri came only after three Australian directors had turned him down. Rodney Fisher wasn't available, Neil Armfield felt suspenders and fish net stockings weren't his bag and Terry O'Connell was busy in Queensland.

So his choice was the man who had already directed it successfully in Queensland, Los Angeles, Japan and Oslo and who had been the choreographer on Hair and Superstar. Besides, London was insisting on director approval and the Australian money can't have been unhappy.

For reasons of economics the show had to be cast and Equity squared off before the imported director arrived. Approval for the use of an imported director had been given to the Department of Immigration by Damien Stapleton of the Australian Theatrical Amusement Employees Association, which was odd since directors cannot be members of that union.

The director arrived three days before rehearsals began to find most of the show already cast. In the final selection Morley relied heavily on Brian Thompson. Two or three parts remained to be confirmed and the argument with Equity over the employment of Perry Bedden (UK as Riff...
Raff) had to be resolved. Bedden had played the part successfully in London for two years but unlike Daniel Abineri (Frank 'n' Furter) had not acquired an Australian wife to make it sweet with Equity.

In the result, the casting can be seen as commercial-cynical: the employment of new, young, beautiful people plus a mix of "names". Antoinette Byron who plays Janet has been in The Restless Years. Jay Hackett who is Rocky, played a surfer in the movie Puberty Blues. Steve J Spears doubles Eddie and Dr Scott. Kerry Myers who plays Magenta has been a model and done bits on TV. The narrator will be played by Stuart Wagstaff, and by Molly Meldrum from ABC's Countdown in Melbourne.

I asked Wilton Morley about the use of imported actors and reminded him of his earlier protestation "the best thing that could happen would be a ban on overseas actors" (TA June 1977). "I've changed my mind," he said engagingly. "After all, Dan Abineri is the best Frank 'n' Furter since Tim Curry. He'll be different from Reg Livermore. More heterosexual."

"My target audience is the 13-30 age group, but I hope it will reach a wider audience."

"The time has come for us to be fiercely Australian" (TA June '77) — so I put to him the promotion of Australian shows. "I'm a bit lazy. I don't get to see everything I should. I talk to Bruce Pollack of Nimrod and Paul Iles of the STC of SA about their shows."

The cult movie of Rocky must rub off on the revival of the stage show I suggested. "Not necessarily, it may be the same three hundred who go to see it every Friday and Saturday night. I can't count on them. Sure, my target audience is the 13-30 age group, but I hope it will reach a wider audience. Yes, we'll have the usual merchandising and hope to turn out a four track EP with Festival."

Soon at a theatre near your place the Rocky Horror Revival.
HUSTLING FOR THE INNOVATIVE

CARRILLO GANTNER, Executive Director of the Playbox Theatre Company, talks to KATE LEGGE.

Hours and hours of work went into the facts, figures and forecasts set out in a 34 page “Submission for Government Assistance”, the hefty document which will determine the future of Melbourne’s Playbox Theatre Company.

1980 was a bad financial year for the company. Although expenditure was contained at budgeted levels, the Downstairs theatre failed to produce a box office hit and a six figure deficit was incurred.

Part of the problem lies with the size and status of two theatre spaces which prejudice the company’s chance of commercial success. In the tiny Upstairs theatre, even a sell-out, one-man show can not recover costs.

The Downstairs theatre has an audience capacity of 300 and a stage which restricts the range and style of productions. “We are constantly battling against the limitations of a small pocket proscenium,” said Carrillo Gantner, the company’s Executive Director.

This situation is further aggrevated by an artistic policy which is committed to presenting contemporary theatre. “While we want to survive we do not propose to chose plays cynically, on the basis of box office success,” Mr Gantner said.

While the Playbox waits for next year’s funding figures to be announced, a mood of pragmatism has settled over the administration, as
staff consider their fate. Whatever happens, no one is prepared to compromise artistic standards.

Next year's proposed programme reflects the Company's commitment to contemporary drama. In the first half of the year, the Company wants to stage a trilogy of plays by American playwright Sam Shepard. To balance the American bias, a trilogy of plays by Louis Nowra, will be performed later in the year. This choice conforms with the company's original objective to present the work of non-naturalistic writers. If the commercial potential of these productions seems dubious, the need for more accessible theatre has not been ignored.

A new play by Melbourne playwright Therese Radic, called A Whip Round for Percy Grainger, is nicely timed to coincide with the year set aside to commemorate the life and music of this composer. And negotiations are underway to tour a production of The Fall of the House of Usher by Steven Berkoff and the London Theatre Group. In Melbourne, it would be staged at the National Theatre in St Kilda, to cater for a larger audience and boost box office revenue.

This kind of ploy — the "loss leader", which helps to sell other plays scheduled in the same season has already worked for the Playbox. It is part of a strategy which Gantner calls, "learning to combine lofty ideals with pragmatic realities". In the struggle to survive, the company has been sharpening its wits and competing with other powerful arts organisations for private and corporate sponsorship.

More than $30,000 has been raised this year for specific projects, carefully tailored to suit the company's resources. It is not the first time that the Playbox has beaten the Melbourne Theatre Company at the funding game. However, its success in the market for government funds is notorious.

"Big companies can always cut back, drop a venue, or go more commercial and still keep a very high
"A company like the Playbox is stretched to the bone...if you cut back on the product there is no longer any justification for its existence."

Profile. Very small companies manage to survive on their wit and energy, if they haven't got many assets to service. But a company like the Playbox, is stretched to the bone already. If you cut back the product there is no longer any justification for its existence."

Signs of a strong comeback after last year's outstanding financial deficit and the recent appointment of Rex Cramphorn as Resident Director signify a turning point in the company's history, but it will be difficult to take any more steps forward without adequate funds.

A document attached to the 1982 submission, raises the possibility of forming a "developmental stream" of eight actors who would work partly in isolation, but could also be involved in the mainstream productions for both the Upstairs and Downstairs theatres. The concept was initiated by Mr Cramphorn and draws on his experience with the Performance Syndicate, and last year's "limited life" Shakespeare project.

Although such a project would be expensive, Mr Gantner believes the ensemble of actors will produce a "creative buzz" that might be reflected in box office sales. "It would also be another step towards assembling a permanent company."

"The funding bodies applauded Rex's appointment, so it would be a great pity if they decide not to support this idea," Mr Gantner said. It also promises a solution to the problem of finding a stronger image for a company which has sometimes been accused of being random and eclectic in its programming.

Mr Gantner admits that the Playbox product has been diverse. "Some companies are based around the magnetic energy and ideas of one director, whose path they follow single-mindedly. I have worked more as a gatherer of various talents, by trying to create opportunities for other people to use our resources.

"I have tried to make brave choices, some would call them stupid, in search of theatre with more edge." This attitude has, perhaps, been more successfully demonstrated in the range of initiatives the Playbox has taken elsewhere.

Some of these include the development of work opportunities for Australian artists through the international exchange of a director or actor with an American company in Seattle; the initiation of a live theatre directory for all performing arts companies, in The Age and The Herald; and the organisation of exchange tours of interstate productions with the Nimrod and the South Australian Theatre Company.

"Melbourne theatre is undergoing terrific change, not only because of a lack of money, but because of a change in venues. The opening of the Arts Centre will have a profound effect on all that we do. Just looking at the experience of Sydney and Adelaide, indicates that the building itself will interest audiences — for a couple of years at least. I think it's important that we should be part of that."

Mr Gantner hopes the Playbox will be one of many companies able to take advantage of the Arts Centre's facilities for drama. "Ultimately the Victorian Arts Centre Trust should package seasons which offer the best of all our work, so that audiences can become familiar with a range of theatre."

"But in the short term, I think the move will have a harmful effect on the small companies. The big companies are arguing that they will need all the money to get themselves established there. That is a very powerful argument for the government, which will have spent $200 million on the Centre. There ought to be positive discrimination in favour of the companies which are not based there. Audience attention will be focused on the Centre anyway, with all the PR for the opening."

Mr Gantner is sure the Ministry has heard this argument loud and clear, but the Playbox is not taking any chances. While their outlook is far from secure, the company will keep its head down and continue to hustle in a climate of uncertainty.

"I have tried to make brave choices, some would call them stupid, in search of theatre with more edge."
Crossing the Tasman

In August this year, as part of a Tasman Exchange Programme, a delegation from Australia visited Auckland, Wellington, Palmerston North, Dunedin and Christchurch on a fact-finding tour. They were MICHAEL FITZGERALD, ALAN EDWARDS, BRUCE MYLES, WENDY BLACKLOCK, PHILIP PARSONS (Convenor), BRIAN ADAMS, KATHARINE BRISBANE and GERRY LAWRENSON. All made contributions to the following report by KATHARINE BRISBANE.

The first shock of recognition comes with the JCW monogram emblazoned over the proscenium arch of the blue and gold His Majesty's Theatre in Auckland. Too many posts support the gallery for today's audience and the place is an earthquake hazard. It will probably come down under new legislation.

What must surely have been the most beautiful of all the Firm's houses, the Theatre Royal in Christchurch, was saved by public intervention hours before the bulldozers moved in to make it a car park (as happened with Adelaide's Theatre Royal in the 60's). Nowhere in Australia is one so sharply aware of the lost empire when Australia and New Zealand were joined in one great theatre economy.

The days of the great tours are long gone. For the most part sad productions like the current Oh Calcutta!, much altered, hire these theatres now.

When JCW sent their accountant to the National Playwrights' Conference forum a few years ago in a last desperate appeal to keep the old chain alive, he found indifference. A new, local theatre was burgeoning. The Firm's imported work seemed wholly irrelevant and we let it die. But at a certain price. The disappearance of the chains made the national exploitation of commercial success intolerably difficult. Again our theatre was a cottage industry. Productions seldom travelled interstate — and across the Tasman practically never.

But with the 80's, movement within Australia is growing; and a pioneer to cross the Tasman this month is the Court Theatre's production from Christchurch of Blood of the Lamb, by NZ's paterfamilias of playwrights, Bruce Mason (see inset).

Wendy Blacklock, co-ordinator for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, is managing the tour here. As one of the delegation she was impressed by the theatre spaces available to an enterprising entrepreneur, particularly in the small-scale circuit; and by the encouragement given by such organisations as the Students' Arts Council.

Touring will, of course, never again be what it was in the days of the Firm, Fullers and the Tivoli circuit — but what is of interest today is the fact that they thought in terms of a total industry.

Within Australia we still need to make more of what we have. But at the same time excellence costs money and the larger the market the greater the chance of excellence. For the playwright as well as the performer in NZ a potential audience of three million could be expanded by mutual awareness to another 14 million. And vice versa. The NZ playwright has a strong voice now. A larger market could affirm and increase the status of the profession in both countries by the exchange of training, practice and excellence.

These were the motives behind the establishment of a Tasman Exchange Program, which brought three NZ directors to Australia on a fact-finding tour to NZ.

The tour was intensive, incorporating subsidised theatres, drama schools, TIE teams, Arts Council personnel, commercial houses; and building projects such as the restoration of the Old Customs House in Auckland by an enterprising American developer to be a theatre and community centre; and in Christchurch the arts centre converted from Gothic stone university buildings. It was a crucial time for drama — the Springbok rugby tour had brought New Zealanders into the streets as never before, with a passion which helped us to understand something of the country, its history and aspirations.

On the last day a meeting in Auckland ratified the establishment of a Tasman Theatre Foundation in Sydney; and in NZ the Association of Community Theatres was appointed the responsible body. Their task will be to facilitate exchange projects proposed by theatre practitioners. The first move in 1982 will be a working visit by two people from each country to the other.

So far the scheme has been assisted with funds from the Australia New Zealand...
The group was disturbed by the apparent poor status of the NZ artist in decision-making and the low rates of pay; the fact that up to 80% of theatre income was derived from the box office; and by the immense problems that faced the Federal funding body, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. They felt that moral support to artists by the profession here, and advice in the administrative and marketing areas could be of assistance in raising the confidence of theatre practitioners.

In contrast Brian Adams, who worked with a NZBC camera team, said he was impressed by the obvious film experience of the actors with whom he worked and the skill, efficiency and economy of the technicians — a reflection of the sophistication of the NZ film industry, from which actors derive their best income.

On the question of what NZ could offer the Australian artist, Michael Fitzgerald said: "Firstly theatre-in-education in NZ is developing and talented people are working in the area. In both countries there is a great deal of rethinking and reshaping going on, in company with the development of an indigenous theatre."

He was impressed, as Alan Edwards was, by the theatre restaurant system which helped funds for theatres in small communities like Palmerston North. Centrepoint Theatre's program is far from the music hall format. Its 1980 program of eleven plays ranged from Ibsen to Ayckbourn and included two NZ plays and such unlikely choices as Ruckin's Ashes. We saw the most creditable Small Craft Warnings, by Tennessee Williams.

"Beyond an obvious benefit for younger theatre artists, especially designers, being involved in an exchange, there are many opportunities to experiment and develop for technicians, craftsmen and administrators. The NZ companies perform at least 10 plays a year, their eclectic repertoires include the classical and provocative, their venues range from the traditional proscenium to unusual alternative spaces. Their companies also operate on the basis of an ensemble of artists contracted for a year at a time.

"More particularly NZ opens up the possibility of an exchange of senior artists, especially directors, who could find stimulation from the challenge of both working and teaching at, say the Court or Theatre Corporate."

The delegation left NZ with a feeling of admiration for the hard work and harbouring of small resources which they felt was a lesson to the Australian theatre. And some of them will certainly return to work for a time when the opportunity occurs. Spontaneous plans were also made. It may be that Bruce Myles' MTC will visit NZ, and that the mind-shattering production of Ron Elisha's Einstein will visit NZ, and that the mind-shattering production from the Mercury, Auckland, of Barrie Keesee's Barbarians, will come to Australia. Meanwhile we have Blood of the Lamb for a start.

It is the Tasman Theatre Foundation's hope that further exchanges will be facilitated from a perceived need and growing friendships: that another kind of total industry will assert itself, but on a different basis from that of the old gilt and gingerbread JCW days.

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Elizabeth Moody and Judi Douglass in Christchurch Court Theatre's Blood of the Lamb. Gordon Chater has described Blood of the Lamb as "the most exciting play I have read since The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin." Blood of the Lamb was written by Bruce Mason, one of NZ's foremost writers. His play explores its controversial topic with a dialogue which, Chater says, "bubbles with quick, erudite wit and is constantly dotted with puns and wordplay."

It is a remarkable play about two women who live for 20 years as man and wife, and will show the work of one of NZ's finest actresses, Elizabeth Moody. It will play in Sydney and Newcastle.
That was the season that was

by Karl Levett

As the new season begins to stir, a quick look back at the 1980-81 season before it disappears into the theatrical mists.

The Video Factor

The schism between Broadway and Off-Broadway grew wider this season as Broadway clearly defined itself as a home for musical entertainments. Only a couple of dramas, the imported *Amadeus* and the home-grown *The Fifth of July* survived this musical flood. Even comedy, long a staple of Broadway, seemed to be swamped in the musical tide.

This does not mean, however, that this was a golden hour for the American musical. Second-class musicals competed with musical revue and the fact that a cliche of a show, *Forty Second Street*, could win the Tony summed up the problem.

That all this mediocrity proved extremely popular and that Broadway had a bumper season points to the heart of the matter — Television. Its overt influence is that no show can open and run without a blitzkreig of television commercials (the Truth in Advertising ruling, incidentally, doesn't seem to apply here — on the *Evita* commercial there was Patti Lupone when I knew she was stamping her feet in Sydney). These commercials have succeeded in locating a huge new audience, unused to the theatre but wishing to be part of it.

The indirect influence of television is an audience whose concentration span is limited and who seek spectacular but conventional material. This is an audience that only goes to the theatre one, two or three times a year. *Newsweek* in its review of *The Pirates of Penzance* saying that "if you see only one show this year, this is the show to see" tells you which way the wind is blowing. This phenomenon, plus Broadway's prohibitive price structure, has made many regular New York theatregoers flee to greener and more creative fields of Off and Off-Off Broadway with only occasional forays back to the Broadway fold.

Company Roll Call

Much of the strength of New York theatre lies in its Off-Broadway theatre companies. Their variety and individual characters provide the spice for the
Beyond Therapy and William Hurt in Childe Byron. These performers with their wider fame and personal followings bring box office clout and can measurably assist a playwright or performing group. Although The Fifth of July is the best American play of the year, its success on Broadway is probably due entirely to the drawing power of Christopher Reeve, and then Richard Thomas who replaced him. The latest actor to join this new breed is Kevin Kline who after wonderful work in On The Twentieth Century, Loose Ends and The Pirates of Penzance is about to make it big on the screen in Sophie's Choice. Kevin Kline indeed could be the definitive actor for the eighties — sensitivity, a sense of reality plus a touch of foolish romantic dash.

The Bigger They Are...

The game of Get the Famous Playwright continued to be played by leading critics. Edward Albee deserved all he got for trying to reduce Lolita to a pulp paperback, but Arthur Miller with The American Clock demanded kinder treatment. The play's strengths were greater than its faults and with gentler handling might have lived through sufficient rewriting to emerge as a worthy play.

A Bunch of Bouquets

Lanford Wilson: for his Talley Trilogy, begun with Talley's Folly and The Fifth of July and this season's A Tale Told; for being a combination of William Inge and George S. Kaufman and the most substantial American playwright currently writing.

Roberta Maxwell: for her performance in the title part of Mary Stuart, a lesson in stage concentration.

John Lone: Director of, and Actor in The Dance And The Railroad; versatility matched with great style.

Harris Yulin: for his touching performance in A Lesson From Aloes.

John Lee Beatty: for his showing us where the Talleys live; after the Boathouse in Talley's Folly and the wide, white, verandah in The Fifth of July, transforming the tiny Circle stage into the Talley parlour complete with staircase; imaginative, evocative creations all.

Michelle Shay: for her performance as the heroine/villainess in Meetings.

Eva Le Gallienne: for her charm and her performance in To Grandmother's House We Go; a class act in a not very classy season.

UK

Directors' classics

by Irving Wardle

Upon assuming command of the National Theatre eight years ago, Peter Hall declared a new policy towards classical dramatists, namely that they should be treated with the same respect as the classical composers, and not cut about, rearranged, and generally manhandled as he and his RSC colleagues had been in the habit of doing in the service of topical relevance. At the time this sounded
dangerously close to the discredited doctrine of “obeying Shakespeare’s intentions” (whatever those may have been), and since then it has been interesting to watch the NT striving to put it into practice.

No NT director has come closer to doing so than Peter Gill who built up a great reputation for austere textual illumination at the Riverside Studios before joining Hall’s team last year and continuing the good work with acclaimed productions of Turgenev and Molieré. In Much Ado About Nothing (Olivier), his first Shakespearean essay at this address, the approach is beginning to show signs of going stale.

It goes without saying in a Gill production that costumes will be in period, settings reduced to the barest simplicity, and the text left to do its work without being propped up by a directorial concept. In this case, his regular designer Alison Chitty has supplied a group of mobile walls, brick on one side pannelled on the other, backed by a quartet of revolving periaktoi affording distant rural and urban perspectives. The visual gesture of the show, therefore, is to cram Leonato’s vast estate (where he entertains the whole of Don Pedro’s army) into the modest property of a Warwickshire gentleman.

The general atmosphere of the production is extremely winning. The company seem less to be keying themselves up to a performance than sharing a work they love with the audience. And so far as the central partnership of Michael Gambon’s Benedick and Penelope Wilton’s Beatrice goes, there will be no complaints from me. All the fun is there, and a good deal less spite than usual; and the undecorated intensity of the “Kill Claudio” scene goes a long way to justifying all the sacrifices that have led up to it. However, there are plenty of sacrifices. Some conceptual approach is needed to a performance than sharing a work they love with the audience. And so far as the central partnership of Michael Gambon’s Benedick and Penelope Wilton’s Beatrice goes, there will be no complaints from me. All the fun is there, and a good deal less spite than usual; and the undecorated intensity of the “Kill Claudio” scene goes a long way to justifying all the sacrifices that have led up to it. However, there are plenty of sacrifices. Some conceptual approach is needed to

At the NT’s Cottesloe studio there is another rare entry from the aliens’ queue in the form of Calderon’s The Mayor of Zalamea. The director is Michael Bogdanov, on past showing a hell-raising exponent of director’s theatre to whom it was an article of faith that the first move with any classic is to put it into modern dress. Not so on this occasion. Clothes, music, environment are all of the Spanish Golden Age; and the effect is to reveal the piece as a blazing masterpiece marred only by the intrusive modernisms of Adrian Mitchell’s translation.

Based on an event of the 1580 campaign against Portugal, the play tells the story of a captain, don Alvaro, who is billeted on a wealthy peasant, Crespo, as his regiment is passing through Zalamea. Alvaro rapes his host’s daughter expecting to incur some minor military punishment. Unluckily for him, the wronged father is elected mayor of the town and settles the business for good in his own court. The subtitle is “The Best Garrotting Ever Done.”

In other words, Calderon is extending the patrician honour code to include characters of the lower rank; and the social paradoxes this engenders are memorably imprinted in the marvellous partnership of Daniel Massey’s unreleasable patrician Alvaro, and Michael Bryant’s Crespo. A performance simultaneously conveying his sense of personal worth and social baseness. In the crucial scene, he prostrates himself before his noble captive, offering all his goods and his freedom in exchange for an honourable marriage; then stoically rises to his feet and dispatches his daughter to a convent and the contemptuous Alvaro to the garrotte.

Two footnotes from the Edinburgh Festival along the same lines: a Birmingham Rep Theatre As You Like It, updated to the world of Marie Antoinette pastoral, with the result that the courtly runaways seem merely going down to the bottom of the garden rather than returning to nature; and a version of Racine’s Britannicus by the Theatre de la Salamandree not only set in the Palace of Versailles, but in the Versailles of today — with off-white paintwork and an informative placid in the unit fireplace. I cannot see much political connexion between Racine’s examination of the birth of an absolute tyranny and the exit of Giscard, but the spectacle of a supposedly museum tragedy played in an actual museum of the same epoch generates extremely potent theatrical discharge.
Impressive economy

UPSIDE DOWN
GYPSY

by Janet Healey


Cast: Lawrence, Bob Philip; Frieda, Meg Simpson; Jack, Mark Reedman; Victoria, Sue Gasinsky.

(Professional)

Gypsy by Lawrence, Styne; Sondheim. Tempo production at Theatre 3, Acton, ACT. Opened August 2, 1981. Director, Ian Howard; Musical Director, Rose Ianno; Choreography, Jan Carey; Stage Manager, Robert Taylor.

(Atter)

There's a special fascination about shows dealing with the lives of historical personalities. One wonders whether the writer will be able to walk the tightrope between a documentary treatment and an imaginative projection of his characters' inner lives. And can a play about, say, D H Lawrence do any more than dramatise the widely-accepted image of the great novelist's personality?

In the case of David Allen's play, the answer to the second question is, regretfully, no. But having said that, I hasten to add that this is a cleverly crafted play in which, though he says nothing new about Lawrence, the playwright succeeds in synthesising many of the puzzling and controversial aspects of Lawrence's character into a believable whole. He does it, too, with impressive economy of effort, contriving to say a great deal about Lawrence's life and character in a relatively short and simply constructed piece of theatre.

Uprise Down at the Bottom of the World is a suitably brain-teasing phrase for Lawrence's brief stay in Australia, during which he wrote Kangaroo — not so much a novel as a kaleidoscope of impressions, some acute, some wildly inaccurate, all poetic. The play is based on the novel, but Allen wisely ignores the details of Australian politics in 1922 (which Lawrence never really grasped) in favour of the broader theme of universal brotherhood that is characteristic of all Lawrence's work.

The Jigsaw Theatre Company, now comfortably ensconced in its new quarters at Gorman House, gave this play the well-considered performance it deserves. Against a starkly effective set — the cottage at Thirroul — Lawrence (Bob Philippe) and Frieda (Meg Simpson) acted out the complex emotional drama of their relationship to the mingled awe and contempt of their Australian neighbours Jack (Mark Reedman) and Victoria (Sue Gasinsky).

Meg Simpson's Frieda was a powerful performance, perhaps a little too heavenly Teutonic, but evoking the blend of aristocratic hauteur and provocative sexuality which so tantalised Lawrence. Sue Gasinsky made the most of the small role of Victoria, all wide blue-eyed innocence with just a hint of precocious sexual awareness in her embryonic relationship with Lawrence.

The men did not quite reach this standard. Bob Philippe's Lawrence intermittently captured the frightening intensity of the character, notably in his portrayal of never-quit-explicit impotence, but at other times it fell away, so that in the battle of wits and wits with Frieda, which should always be in pose, he too often seemed to be losing. Mark Reedman's Jack had the right feeling of Ocker gaucherie, but there was too much of it; when called upon to say something intelligent he failed to sound convincing.

Lighting and sound effects, extremely important in the flashback episodes, were totally professional. And it is a tribute to producer Graeme Brosnan that the guiding intelligence behind the production never became obtrusive, allowing the play to stand or fall on its own merits. It stood.

Meanwhile at Theatre Three, Tempo was presenting Gypsy, the story of the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee. Here the aim is to present a penetrating but light-hearted account of the stripper's rise to stardom, dominated by the inevitably ambitious stage mother.

Tempo's productions are rarely slick or professional, and this was no exception. There were long pauses between scenes where the impetus of the show faltered, and the orchestra was not really up to the demands of this rather difficult score. On the other hand, the company always displays an infectious enthusiasm, which does a lot to make up for awkward moments; and sometimes it throws up a superb individual performance.

This time it was Carol Starkey's Louise (Gypsy). She caught to perfection the pathos of the unfavoured, untalented daughter, pushed on to the stage to feed the vanity of a frustrated Mum, and blossoming suddenly into sexy stardom. The metamorphosis from awkward teenager to glamorous siren was beautifully managed; and I am still haunted by her singing of "Little Lamb".

While not up to this level, the rest of the production just got by. The cast, headed by Shirley Thomas as Rose (Mum), sadly just missed finding the emotional depth that I am sure is there, largely because the production inclined to noisy exuberance rather than controlled energy. But all praise to Tempo for giving Carol Starkey the opportunity to display an exciting new talent.
Oz classic with impact

THE SHIFTING HEART
by Michael Le Moignan


Director, John Krummel; Designer, Richard Zedioni; Lighting Designer, Tony Youliden; Stage Manager, Victor Ashelford; Production Manager, Francis Taylor.

Cast: Poppa Bianchi, Reg Gillam; Leila Pratt, Lois Ramsey; Gino Bianchi, Alan Wilson; Momma Bianchi, Philippa Baker; Clarky Fowler, Kit Taylor; Maria Fowler, Joanna Lockwood; Donny Pratt, Sidney Heylen; Det-Sgt Lukie, Rob Steele.

(Professional)

The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon is a minor Australian classic which richly deserves its current revival at Sydney's Marian Street Theatre in stockbroker-belt Killara.

It was not, even in 1956, a new theme for Australian drama: exhortations to "make the new chums welcome" had been common from the first. But Beynon's play had a new confidence: it is an accomplished and well-crafted piece of theatre, combining a fairly classical structure and plot with a refreshingly down to earth style of dialogue. There is a slight tendency to preach or underline the moral, but the portrait of the immigrant Italian family is drawn with telling accuracy.

Above all, the play has a voice. At the time of the first production, it may have overshadowed by its illustrious predecessor, Lawler's Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, produced in 1955, the first Australian play to win wide international recognition. But its message may be more relevant to the Australia of the 'eighties. Beynon's plea for a more tolerant attitude to people with different languages and customs has a strong theatrical impact in the Marian Street production.

Poppa Bianchi (Reg Gillam) in Marian St Theatre's The Shifting Heart.

felt her performance had great power but lacked variety and shading. Joanna Lockwood as the pregnant Maria, was very much her Momma's daughter, going through the change from submissive young wife to dominant young mother.

One of the virtues of the play is that all of its eight parts offer the actors some challenge and some potential. Maria's Australian husband, Clarky, starts the play as a crude and boozing ocker slob, achieves some dignity as the brother-in-law of the murder victim demanding justice, and finally atones for the sacrifice, symbolically, by raising a son. Kit Taylor, as Clarky, expressed brilliantly the dilemma of a man caught between conflicting loyalties to two different cultures.

The Shifting Heart has tended to be overshadowed by its illustrious predecessor, Lawler's Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, produced in 1955, the first Australian play to win wide international recognition. But its message may be more relevant to the Australia of the 'eighties. Beynon's plea for a more tolerant attitude to people with different languages and customs has a strong theatrical impact in the Marian Street production.

CLOUD NINE
THE ELEPHANT MAN

by Michael Le Moignan


Director, Aubrey Mellor; Designer, Vicki Feitshers; Musical Director Michael Carlos; Lighting Designer, Jonathan Cilddor; Assistant Director, Chris Johnson; Stage Managers, Anne Heath and John Woodland.

Cast: (Act 1) Clive, Barry Otto; Betty, Colin Friels; Joshua, John Hannan; Edward, Deidre Rubenstein; Maud, Cathy Downes; Ellen, Michelle Fawdon; Mrs Saunders, Anna Volska; Harry Bagley, John Walton.

(Act 2) Betty, Deidre Rubenstein; Edward, Colin Friels; Victoria, Cathy Downes; Martin, John Hannan; Tommy, Anna Volska; Lin, Michelle Fawdon; Cathy, Barry Otto; Gerry, John Walton; Bill, Anna Volska.


Director, Hayes Gordon; Designer, Shaun Gurton; Lighting Designer, John Blankenship; Stage Manager, Ian McGrath; Producer, Judy Ferris; Assistant to the Director, Sandra Bate.

Cast: Carl Gomm, David Cahill; Frederick Treves, Patrick Rowe; Ross, Bishop Walsham How; Snork, Colin Taylor; John Merrick (the Elephant Man), Michael Ross; Mrs Kendall, Helen Flaherty; Princess Alexandra, Julie Herbert; Will, Lord John, Michael O'Brien.

(Professional)

Two excellent new plays from the Nimrod and the Ensemble provide a fascinating contrast of styles and dramatic approach from the two Sydney theatres, here seen almost at their best. Nimrod's Cloud Nine is a provocative comedy of manners, which archly invites the audience to share the joke. The Ensemble's Elephant Man is a subtle and powerful piece of theatre which elicits a strong emotional response, a direct enlarging of our humanity.

Cloud Nine provides the first thoroughly enjoyable evening I have spent in Nimrod's Upstairs Theatre since Celluloid Heroes. Caryl Churchill's script, first performed at the Royal Court in London last year, shows a wonderful wit, a remarkable intelligence and a keen awareness of theatrical effect. Aubrey Mellor's production is a delight from start to finish.

Cloud Nine is a sharp-tongued satire of sexual role-playing. The first act is set in an outpost of British Colonial Africa in Victorian times, the second act in a city park in the present.

The play's argument, which is cogent and cleverly illustrated, is that the fundamental concept around which the British Empire was built was the family unit, as conceived by the stern writers of the Old

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Testament, as performed by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and as assiduously aped by thousands of would-be Royal Families in all the outposts of Empire.

This family unit forces all of its members to play the parts assigned to them without regard to character or suitability. So, to an extent, does the play; the Victorian matron, Betty, is played by a young man (Colin Friels), thereby underlining the ridiculousness of conventional feminine behaviour; the oldest son, Edward is played by a girl (Deidre Rubenstein), which makes the traditional exhortations to manliness sound equally crass.

The text is richly comic: mother-in-law Maud (Cathy Downes) has many of the best lines. "Young women are never happy" she observes "then when they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were ecstatic."

It is Maud again who puts the Victorian theory of discipline in a nutshell, talking to the baby about her doll: "Where did Vicky's naughty baby go? Shall we smack her? Just a little smack? There, now she's a good baby."

Appropriately, the characters are constantly reminding each other of their roles:
Maud: "Betty, I am your mother." Betty: "Clive gives you a home because you are my mother." And later: Harry: "You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife." Betty: "I think I shall go and hide again."

Caryl Churchill's acerbic script makes the social conditioning process seem arbitrary, cruel and absurd. She reserves her sharpest barbs for the patriarch himself, Clive, played with a magnificently masterful air by Barry Otto: "You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand."

Clive is the personification of supremacy, white, male, adult, husband, father and master. He is also sexist, racist, hypocritical and self-deceiving. Self-righteously secure, he rebukes his old friend Harry, the explorer (John Walton): "You don't do it with natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen... Rivers will be named after you, it's unthinkable."

The script is littered with such bons mots: and the astute reader will have gathered that I am trying to work as many
of them as possible into this review. There is the exotic, erotic Mrs Saunders (Anna Vojska) who declares she could never be a wife again "because there is only one thing about marriage that I like."

The second act of the play argues that while the British Empire has crumbled to dust, the insidious totem of family responsibilities continues to exert a damaging influence, often crippling hopes of individual happiness. Freedom and loving friendship, Churchill's argument concludes, are attainable only if each individual has the courage to avoid the role pre-determined by the family, and choose a role suited to his or her personality and talents.

For such a sharp and witty play, there are some extraordinarily touching moments: Michelle Fawdon, as Lin, the lesbian single mother, strikes a level between humility and a just self-pride that is beautifully heroic. Deidre Rubenstein's monologue, as the newly divorced grandmother, and choose a role suited to his or her personality and talents.

The biggest laugh of the second half was reserved for the new patriarch, Martin (John Hannan), who tries to hide his alarm at seeing his power crumbling like the Empire did, behind a thin mask of free-thinking tolerance. His almost instinctive tyranny is less well disguised and more vigorously resisted by all. His attempts at hectoring his wife are deliciously trans­figured daily to admire uniformity and conformity in physical appearance. The instinct to reject mutations is strong in most species, although they are indebted to human contact and warmth he so desperately craves. Rejected by his own mother on account of his misshapen head and body, he has been deprived not only of love but of touch, and the moment when he first sets eyes on a naked female body is a remarkably intense piece of drama, which sets off a complex range of emotional and intellectual reverberations.

In The Elephant Man, as in Cloud Nine, Victorian paternalism is perceived as the villain of the piece. Merrick's father- figures are first a "manager" who exploits him as a sideshow attraction and then steals his money, and later a well-meaning doctor whose concept of charity is unwittingly oppressive.

The poor elephant man becomes a celebrity; he is visited by royalty (it is set in the eighteen-nineties) and his needs are supplied for life. But physical needs are not emotional needs, and the elephant man dies for lack of love and understanding.

More than previous generations, we are trained to admire uniformity and conformity in physical appearance. The instinct to reject mutations is strong in most species, although they are indebted to the process of mutation for their very survival. One of the distinguishing marks of humanity as a species should be an open-minded and compassionate attitude to individuals that are different or deformed. But instincts are not easily over­laid by cultural conditioning.

Old Testament concepts of guilt reinforce those instincts: the elephant man stands accused by his own ugliness.
Savagely simple
TRAITORS
by Sue Williams

Director. Robert Kimber; Designer. Barbara Cox.

At the risk of offending the conservative Darwin populace, DTG took a bold leap into an Artaud-style drama in the production of Stephen Sewell’s Traitors. The panoply of sex, violence and nudity was arguably too threatening for the local patrons, who did not clamour for more, although no one left at interval. But this production’s success cannot be measured by the box office; it is perhaps the finest drama Darwin has yet seen.

The bold, unflinching interpretations of the actors and the bare bones of this stark play created a compelling metaphor of alienation and betrayal. It is one of the play’s strengths that the language is almost savagely simple, and devoid of imagery.

The drama is of post-revolutionary Russia: the conflict between the Bolshevics under Stalin and a small faction of Party members loyal to Trotsky and anxious to hold to the ideals of the proletarian struggle. Portrayed is the tension and paranoia of secrecy and fear of detection of the oppositionists and the Siberian suppression of criticism that, cancer-like, grew tight, clean and controlled on the physical brutality was woven chill as the powerbroker, bowing to the will of the omnipotent Stalin.

The stark design by Barbara Cox was designed to extract a confession from the political prisoner he is then commanded to execute. From the poised and suavety of the early scenes to the wracked and hunted suicide, he performed Krasin’s decline superbly.

But it was Ken Conway’s portrayal of the tortured Rubin that crystallised the play’s power and horror. His razor-edged control on the physical brutality was balanced by Terry Kenwick’s finely-wrought chill as the powerbroker, bowing also to the will of the omnipotent Stalin.

Marilyne Hanigan as Anna fulfilled audience expectation — she is a natural actress — allowing the audience to concentrate on the play’s tensions. And in her relationship with Kerry Lazian’s Ekaterina there were moments of warmth and humour that contrasted well with the savage, inhuman fear of the play.

The production’s flaw was the characterisation of Mother Dybenko by Jessica Knight, who managed only to present a caricature of a crone and thus undermined the tool of nauseating fear possible in the figure of this spy.

The technical difficulties of Traitors were well-matched by Tim Gow, who, apart from Robert Kimber, is the company’s only professional. But professional or amateur considerations are not relevant — in anybody’s language DTG’s production was exciting.

First class performance
I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE
by Jeremy Ridgman

Director. Kevin Palmer; Set Designer. James Ride-wood; Costume Designer. Graham Maclean; Lighting. James Henson; Stage Manager. Patrick Whelan.

As well as being cursed with an unfortunate and unrepeatedly mawkish title, Bernice Rubens’ first play is seriously flawed. Frustratingly episodic and over-long, it moves uneasily from the proposition that a middle-aged spinster, living with and caring for her paraplegic brother, can engage in an anonymous lonely hearts correspondence with him, to a climax in which he leaves her for marriage and she, first struck down by psychosomatic paralysis, dies of what can only be described as a broken heart.

Perhaps surprisingly, bookended between the farce and the melodrama is an engaging and frequently invigorating lyrical drama on the theme not only of disablement but of the power of imagination to stoke the fires of life and love. In structure, theme, poetic tone, even in the choice of setting, a cottage on the edge of a South Wales coastal community, Rubens seems to raise the spirit of Synge’s Playboy. For the ironically named Amy, the “loved one”, epistolary communication with her brother’s hopes and needs is part of a quest for warmth in a world darkened by the paralysing shadows of chapel, parental guilt and the rural routine; in the end, she, like Pegeen, escapes her chances of spiritual liberation while the apparent losers in her life forge ahead into unforeseen independence.

Perhaps the structural faults of the play are those of a writer turning for the first time from fiction to the stage. Rubens also makes what might be the novelist’s mistake of striving for a dual dramatic identity for her protagonist, having her step regularly into a direct address relationship with the audience which, miscalculatingly, develops in Voltarian ingenuousness (“Did
review

you hear that, my lovelies?) as the tragedy approaches. Marilyn Allen handles these moments well and pushes through the play's shifts in tone and expectation a characterisation of rare breadth and subtlety. Robert Alexander's Stan, wheedling but witty, is a perfect foil and there are first class supporting performances from Kaye Stevenson as a hidebound puritan for whom a pinch on the bum constitutes an orgy, Frank Lloyd as her brother, crippled also and striving for the love of a feckless wife, and Jennifer Blochside as an actress, initially all Local Rep glamour, but retreating in bathetic ignominy before the challenge of portraying the pen-pal of Stan's fertile imagination. From Kevin Palmer, one might have wished a firmer hand with the blue pencil, but his astute casting and careful tonal modulation have gone a long way to unifying the play's somewhat disparate elements.

Conviction
no joke

THE ENEMY WITHIN

by Veronica Kelly

The Enemy Within by Graanya Movid. La Boite Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened August 21 1981. Director, Malcolm Blaylock; Stage Manager, Richard Clarke.

Cast: Magda, Lisa Hickey; Sophie, Fiona Winning; Mrs Kellerman, Sandra Hines; with Narelle Arvidacono.

At La Boite, an intensely serious play about Hitlerian fascism, acted with finesse and conviction by a four woman cast. It examines political responsibility as it affects women, through whose eyes are seen the birth, ascendency and fiery defeat of German fascism, and whose acts of support, connivance or resistance form the play's moral pattern.

In 1932 Magda is a schoolgirl, dad is in the SS, and her petty bourgeois pastrycook mum forbids her loyalty towards her friend Sophie, whose father is a communist, ordering the girl, hunted by storm-troopers, from her house. Magda, rudely but incompletely reclaimed by her family with their rancid class, race and anti-communist views, is enticed towards release from her self-division and distress by the offer of a "privileged" and valued role in the new Germany. She is coerced and cajoled into supporting "her" men rather than the moral claims of humane justice. Her part, it turns out, is loyally to provide the womanly comforts when her husband comes home shattered after a hard day's slaughtering, and unquestioningly, to give her body to be used as a confessional.

Just as the hidden strength of women fuels all the public work of the world, so too it has a fundamental role in maintaining the necrophiliac fever of fascism. Magda collaborates, and in return receives poise, security and happiness with her children and husband, a propaganda filmmaker. I'm only a woman, she tells herself. I can change nothing anyhow. Besides, it's not me they want to kill.

As the war progresses Magda becomes inescapably aware of what is really happening all over Europe, and of the contradictions of her position. Even the pro-Hitler Mrs Kellerman is obscurely aware — on a well suppressed level — of the savage alternative to total support for the Reich. Magda's sister-in-law Renate is an aristocrat of brisk elitist opinions. Her self-possession seems at first a source of strength, but it is she who spells out to Magda the insupportable truth; this is not war but terror, not in conquered countries but at home, and the life of every German depends on silent connivance in the daily mass murders of the disaffected. Silence at the deaths of others was once the price, now it must be silence still, even as the terror takes Magda's own family.

Finally, at the fall of Berlin, Magda and her mother hide terrified from a Red Army avid for rape and murder in revenge for their many millions of dead. Here they encounter Sophie, armed and truculent, who has survived by the hard and heroic path of concealment and resistance. The last scenes between these three are the play's finest, living up to the momentous and tough realities they deal with.

An excellent cast, with Sandra Hines outstanding as the genteelly dainty Mrs Kellerman, making this crucial part utterly believable. The Mrs K's really live, and though one can laugh at their twee bigotry, the conviction behind it is no joke. Lisa Hickey's Magda is vulnerable, generous-souled, cursed only by a dangerous moral conscience, but whose unquenched stirrings make her a credible recipient of the play's challenge: Millions die, and you dare to say, it's not my fault, I am a woman.
Decent and differentiated

A LESSON FROM ALOES

by Michael Morley

A Lesson From Aloes by Athol Fugard. AFCT and AETT, Playhouse, Adelaide SA. Opened September 4, 1981.

Director, Gillian Owen; Designer, Warren Field; Lighting, Walter van Niewkuyk; Stage Manager, Stuart Maunder.

Cast: Piet, Anthony Wheeler; Gladys, Olive Bodill; Steve, Philip Hinton.

In earlier works, such as Sizwe Bansi is Dead, The Island and Boesman and Lena, Athol Fugard has paid particular attention to the sufferings of the blacks and the inequities of the apartheid system in South Africa. Those fortunate enough to see Sizwe Bansi and The Island in 1976 are not likely to forget in a hurry the power of Fugard's vision and the commitment and energy of the two marvellously gifted black actors who formed the nucleus of his company.

However, it is not simply a comparison with these earlier works and performers which leaves this particular viewer somewhat dissatisfied by and disappointed with Fugard's latest play, which began its Australian season in Adelaide. The fundamental questions of betrayal and commitment lie at the heart of this work, but Fugard chooses to concentrate more on a domestic treatment of these themes at the expense of relating them to the wider political context. This is not to say that A Lesson from Aloes lacks any political thrust: the relationship between Piet, the Afrikaaner, and Steve, the half-caste, is one of the more subtle attempts on Fugard's part to explore the problematic situation of individuals seeking to survive under apartheid and preserve something approximating to an identity and sense of integrity. All high-minded and somewhat lofty-sounding concepts, but it has always been Fugard's strength to be able to relate these two and root them firmly in specific individuals and their problems.

After a bus boycott, Piet had joined a cell of radical blacks, to which Steve belonged, but he is now suspected of having informed on Steve, who has just been released from jail after serving a sentence for breaking a restriction order. I am uncertain whether it was because of Fugard's rather self-conscious deployment of the old retrospective technique so extensively deployed by Ibsen that made me feel somewhat perturbed by the first half, or the obvious setting up of expectations in the audience's mind as to the arrival of Steve. There is, for example, never much doubt that, for all the talk of a large dinner party, he is the only one who will eventually and belatedly turn up.

This he does in Act II, and Philip Hinton's performance as Steve gave the play a much-needed lift at this stage, introducing as he did a welcome note of differentiation and energy in his performance. For, in the first half, Olive Bodill's neurotic and hysteric Gladys had succeeded in inducing in me no emotion more complex than the wish to stand her under a cold shower. There is surely more in Fugard's portrayal of Gladys to allow the actress to look for other ways of playing hysteria and neurosis: the insistence on breathless diminuendo/crescendo/diminuendo delivery merely became tedious and unconvincing, and came perilously close to turning the character into simple caricature.

Anthony Wheeler's Piet was decent, honest, at times painfully phlegmatic: it was a low-key reading of the role and, one felt, perhaps a little too intent on seeking the audience's sympathy from the very beginning. One of the focal points of the play's suspense is surely the uncertainty which needs to be induced in the audience as to whether Piet really is a traitor: whether, as some of the cell suspect, it was he who betrayed Steve to the authorities.

One's reactions to the play might conceivably have been somewhat different had Gillian Owen's direction been more pointed and sensitive: but at no stage did the characters engage our attention and present their predicament in a way that enabled us to respond to the injustice of it all. Part of this is undoubtedly attributable to the choice of setting the play within the proscenium arch: why this had been done was beyond me, leaving as it did a moat between the first rows of the audience and the events on stage which no amount of overplaying could bridge.

And though no-one can doubt Fugard's commitment, honesty and command of dialogue, there were moments in the play where one began to feel that this restrained, subtle attempt to treat the situation in South Africa as it affected three people was just a little too conservative and restrained. Even the play's central symbol, the aloes which, with their spikes, stalks and tough leaves are able to survive the rigours of the South African climate, seemed somewhat contrived and literary. After all, Piet cultivates them, having turned his back, it appears, on political commitment.

One wonders whether the political realities of South Africa and the wilderness of its regime and the supporters of apartheid can be adequately combated by a play as decent and differentiated as A Lesson from Aloes. Fugard's belief in the necessity of a bloodless struggle to abolish apartheid must be given the lie to when one looks at what is happening in New Zealand at present, and recalls that a South African chief of police boasted that he could have fixed the demonstrators in Hamilton with a few carefully chosen squads of thugs. After all, they have had years of practice.

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A sign of the times

SQUIRTS

by Gus Worby


Director, Neil Armfield; Designer, Stephen Curtis; Musical Direction, Alan John; Lighting, Nigel Levings.

Cast: Max Gillies and Alan John.

(Professional)

The idea for the show which is now called Squirts is six years old. In those days at the APG its working title was A Night with the Right. This was a safe enough joke, it seemed, until the Whitlam Government was sacked and a night with the Right became Life with the Right. This was a different proposition. A lot of ideas were snap-frozen then.

What might have been a buoyant, irreverent evening of fine mimicry and some mockery has gone “off” in the thawing process. In an alternative theatre famed for its buffoonery, riot and sleaze, Max Gillies could have paraded his creations to hoots and catcalls yet bathed them in laughter. He still may be able to do that in a theatre like the Universal, or with a home-town following, but in the Playhouse there was neither the atmosphere, nor the inclination to see this array of magnates, potentates and “persona­lities”, as anything but grotesques, and little desire to cleanse the proceedings with laughter, even if the views expressed were shared.

Lack of humour is not a laughing matter, and the real-life models for these theatrical “squirts” are, almost without exception, humourless. Worse still they appear to share the same sense of humourlessness. This has stymied writers of diverse style but proven ability, and inflicts upon scripts and presentation a sort of mounting desperation. There’s so much to aim at — so little to hurt. It also makes life hard for the protean Mr Gillies and his hard-working off-sider Alan John. It is, simply, a sign of the times.

In the antedeluvian days of Australian-in-Empire, there were, according to Menzies’ Law, two kinds of politicians: statesmen and squirts. Statesmen looked at least a year ahead, squirts were pre-occupied with what was lapping round their ankles. This is a show about life after the Deluge, when the first article of political survival — learn to tread water and make people think that you’re walking on it — seems to lack something in the face of Armageddon. It begins with a Recessional and retreats from the elevation of our one and only Lord Warden to an LJ Hooker Heaven, through the Constitutional Crisis, to the Leadership Crisis and on to future salvation in the Burning, Fiery Crisis — courtesy USAF. There are stops along the way — cricketing reminiscences from the days of uncovered wickets and Whiter than White heroes, an unseasonal greeting from Her Majesty to her Objects, a heavy-handed media massage (like a leagues club in your own theatre), a punk lament, and a rerun of the “Wake-up-Australia” birthday flight with a napalm aftertaste.

Amongst these familiar facts of life, and at the cross-roads of history, Squirts makes one shattering revelation — a Gillies was there: Sir Robert Gillies, John Gillies Singleton, Elizabeth Regina Gillies, John Kerr-Gillies, Madame Kransky Gillies, Gillies Lang Hancock, and more. Who better then to represent them than Maxwell “Legs” Gillies? This temporarily hamstrung Max is perhaps the most fortunate of his clan, for all the others seem to have been permanently afflicted, as though, dare one say it, there was a stuff-up at the drafting gate. This doubtless accounts for the fascinating intrusion of a Tasmanian non-entity — Mr Nesbitt Gillies — a hillbilly Gillies, who made a memorable impression on the otherwise true-blue evening with his rocking chair, wellington boots, a shotgun and a plaque for services rendered. You can pick a thoroughbred a mile off. His more celebrated relatives were less complex specimens, merely bereft of teeth, hair, hearing, trousers, shanks humanity; simply addicted to booze, thin-lipped smiles, cue-cards and real estate; straightforwardly paranoid. One among their number however rivalled Nesbitt, with his prothetic jaw, orthopedic cothurni and rimless bifocals. One man of destiny in search of a plaque of his own and a word from the old oracle, stood head and shoulders above the rest — Mal the Black-Knight Gillies. There was indeed a statesmanlike quality to his “full and frank” declaration of war on the rest of the world — except Ronald US President Gillies.

But, y’know, there’s one sure-fire way to

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get the real measure of a squirt. You stand him, or her, against all the opposition. There's more point to a night with the Right when it's not bereft of a solid Left. I wonder if anyone will ever again stage a hunt for squirts in the Pickering Jungle, or give Petty another chance to loose his infernal machines on their world.

With Gillies at the centre, playing just half of his remarkable repertoire, and a couple more colleagues to lend a hand, that would be a Night to Remember.

Honesty and some power

ANNIE’S COMING OUT

by Gus Worby


Annie’s Coming Out makes only a moderate theatrical impact in Ron Hoenig’s adaption of the book by Rosemary Crossley and Anne McDonald. The fact that it isn’t a great play doesn’t matter at all. It manages to tell an amazing story with honesty and some power. What counts is that Troupe have again used the no-frills theatre to bring a truly heroic fight for life and rights to the attention of a public who might otherwise have missed it.

The production is measured in pace, slow but purposeful in its build, spattered in design. The dramatisation, like the story, is long and repetitive. Each element serves to emphasize the incredible obstacles, set-backs and violations endured and overcome by Annie McDonald in her attempts to convince mental health authorities that a diagnosis of “retarded spastic”, at the age of three, is in her case an undeserved and unjust life-sentence.

The dramatic heart of the story beats in the fierce and loving relationship between Annie and Rosie, the Assistant and playgroup leader at St Nicholas hospital, Melbourne, who discovers not only Annie’s intelligence and that of other “beanbags”, but speaks out for them all. Virginia Baxter and Tina Anderson capture the excitement, tenderness, and danger of this partnership. They, in keeping with the production, keep away from the anger and the hate. Baxter builds, with great care, a cocoon of concentration, and fixes a circle of attention around Annie, which permits Anderson to use a limited facial, vocal and physical “vocabulary” with skill and sensitivity. They achieve some quite special moments.

It is when the piece moves outside this relationship to admit other difficulties, other tragedies than Annie’s, in the maze of “community apathy, bureaucratic defensiveness and twisted possibilities priorities” that it loses momentum. Rosie’s encounters with the outside world must, of necessity, be brief (Annie is always waiting), and this means that they are not always convincing. These are the moments when the needs of the theatre make themselves most strongly felt. The writing is not always able to meet the challenge.

It is largely as a result of this lack of depth, for example, that Richard Collins, as Chris, is forced into providing “contrast” for the production as a whole, at the expense of more complex characterisation. As Rosie’s man, the mainstay of support, Chris is an important and potentially complex figure, but he is not well enough rounded in either playing or conception to fulfill all the extra-mural implications of stress, prejudice, and devotion to which he is expected to respond. In much the same way O’Connor sets up the superintending officer at St Nick’s, is set up by Hoenig. To be sure he avoids the evidence and sees Rosie as a troublemaker, but what makes him tick? His human fallibility is as much a problem for Annie and Rosie as bureaucratic impersonality. We see only the latter.

I make this point, not to minimise Annie’s battle with the system, but to suggest that there is another play within the story. It is a play about the myriad states of paralysis, incapacitations, stammerings of unintelligible and unacknowledged voices which surround Annie’s silence. Jo Turner’s strong rendering of the harassed and stigmatised nursing aides, Branca and Dawn, testifies to this. I think Ron Hoenig, Peter Dunn and the other members of the team wanted to tackle that play as well — without losing Annie. If this results in theatrical compromise it in no way lessens the impact of Annie’s liberation. She is out, thank God, and her freedom only serves to remind us of those still locked away, waiting for their Rosie.

Drought breaks at Hobart’s Theatre Royal

BETRAYAL

by Pamela Hyland

BETRAYAL by Harold Pinter, Tasmanian Theatre Company, Theatre Royal Hobart, Tasmania. Opened August 26, 1981. Director, John Unicomb; Designer, Don Boyce; Stage Manager, Carol Griffins. Cast: Emma, Claire Williams; Jerry, John Lavery; Robert, John Phelps; A waiter, David Pidd. (Professional)

When a state theatre company mounts a local production of a play for the first time in some years on its main theatre, one’s pleasure in the event must override any objections to its previous policies. The announcement that the TTC would stage Pinter’s Betrayal in the Theatre Royal was thus acclaimed in Hobart theatre circles as the breaking of the drought, and a healthy move away from their largely entrepreneurial role to one of challenging the position of the other local professional company, Polygon. TTC has staged local productions, such as Michael Lanchbery’s acclaimed production of Wedekind’s Spring Awakening, but these have been staged in what pass in Hobart for “fringe” theatres, not in the Theatre Royal.

So the first night audience was expecting a showpiece and opinion is divided on whether or not they got it. Was it the play or the production? Certainly, Betrayal is not typical Pinter. It lacks some of the biting blackness of earlier plays, yet there are, as usual, those gaps between what can be said, in which the overwhelming preoccupation pushes through, and in which language across the gaps takes on the form of comic nightmare. The programme stated: “One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.” This is to say that the silence says more than the prattle that breaks it, or at least it should. But there was not enough silence in this production. Only John Phelps seemed in control, unafraid of pause, confident and often menacingly close to the edge.

A relatively crackling pace began it all. It did not continue like that, but the main difficulty in the production was concerned with the use of pause and the development of tension. That this was uneven comes very much from the casting.
The performances in general lacked any physical detail that would convey to an audience the idea of life. Emma's self by herself. Emma's self by herself. The audience would understand why it was banned in the USSR. A more innocuous piece it would be hard to find. Nor is it much evidence for Gorky's claim that Erdman is "our new Gogol", or Nadezhda Mandelstam's that the play is "the best in the Soviet repertoire".

That sounds like one hell of a play. It obviously needs one hell of a production, for the MTC presentation is limp, unclear in line, not situated in any particular environment, and worst of all fails to take the ideas, the critical point of the comedy, seriously.

Semyon is an ordinary, insignificant human who is refused employment. He contemplates suicide, and is immediately swamped with offers from people who want to use his death as a gesture on their behalf. The Russian intelligentsia, Art, butchers, and race, the Church. In the end, he chooses life over death; all he wants is a "quiet life and a living wage".

It's the point of view of the ordinary man against both the revolutionary bureaucracy and the old regime in a text that was written in a particular economic and social situation in the Soviet Union. If pre-war Russia was awful, by the time Erdman was writing and trying to get the play produced it was pretty plain that the revolution was a flop, especially for the unemployables.

We would, I think, have a right to expect a production that took some note of the context of the play, especially in the delineation of the characters trying to use Semyon, and in the portrayal of the real background.

We would not expect some wan flutterings in the direction of constructivism on painted backdrops, and tacky representations of wooden walls.

The performances in general lacked any physical detail that would convey to an audience what they were doing. They all tended more to the half-hearted caricature than the full blown character, or even gross caricature which would have been better.

They seemed not to be aware that they were characters which represented something real, ideas that were real, let alone ideas and characters that bore some relevance to "unemployable" Australians, irrelevant "intellectuals", marginal unionists, dopey romantics and so on.

It's a play that needs a real ensemble playing so the efforts of Linden Wilkinson, Graeme Blundell and John Bowman, who

Wan flutterings and kosher comedy

THE SUICIDE

TRUE WEST

NEWS UNLIMITED!

THE COVENANT OF THE RAINBOW

THE GOLDEN GOLDBERGS

INTERROGATION OF ANGEL

by Garrie Hutchinson


Directors, Judith Alexander; Designer, Paul Roth; Lighting, James Lewis.

Cast: Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalnikov, Graeme Blundell; Maria Lukianovna, Rona McEldoe; Serafima Illinichna, Jacqueline Kelleher; Alexander, Dnisl Howson; Margarita, Beverley Dunn; Aristarch, Chris Hallam; with Linden Wilkinson, John Bowman, Kristopher Steele, Robert Hewett, Rhonda Cresey, Loyd Cunnington, David Letch. (Professional)


Directors, Rex Cramporn; Designer, Eamon D'Arcy; Stage Manager, Yvonne Hockley; Lighting Designer, Derek Nicholson.

Cast: Austin, David Cameron; Lee, Peter Cummins; Saul, Gus Mercuro; Mom, Eve Godly. (Professional)

News Unlimited by Roger Pulvers. La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened August 5, 1981.

Directors, Roger Pulvers; Designer, Peter Corrigan; Lighting Design, Jay Barton; Original Music, Eric Gradman, Bob Kretschmer, Mary Beech. Cast: George Rundock, Howard Stanley; Giorgio Dokrumski, Peter Hosking.


Cast: Doctor, Lisa Armatage; Bandlander, Nina Landis; Captain, Peter Hosking; Chaplain, Howard Stanley; Little Girl, Stephen Parratt. (Professional)


Cast: Zeke, Robin Cuming; Bumber Maurice, Gary Samolin; Rinkie, Cheryl Heazlwood; Grandma Watchatalking, Roy Baldwin; Zelda, Billy Hammerberg. (Professional)

Interrogation of Angel by Barry Dickens.

Cast: John Kenny, Gary Samolin; Sergeant Suck, Roy Baldwin; Sergeant Shithead, Robin Cuming; Rita, Cheryl Heazlwood. Both plays: Director, William Guh; Designer, Sandra Mastock; Choreographer, Cheryl Heazlwood; Lighting and Stage Management, Robert Geert.

Watching Judith Alexander's production of Erdman's The Suicide, it's difficult to understand why it was banned in the USSR. A more innocuous piece it would be hard to find. Nor is it much evidence for Gorky's claim that Erdman is "our new Gogol", or Nadezhda Mandelstam's that the play is "the best in the Soviet repertoire".

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They seemed not to be aware that they were characters which represented something real, ideas that were real, let alone ideas and characters that bore some relevance to "unemployable" Australians, irrelevant "intellectuals", marginal unionists, dopey romantics and so on.

It's a play that needs a real ensemble playing so the efforts of Linden Wilkinson, Graeme Blundell and John Bowman, who
have some idea of what they're doing, are to no avail.

It's simply an awful production.

Sam Shepard is a difficult writer because he appears to be so simple, a quality only present in the very best. It's a quality that demands the very best from actors and director, and nearly gets it with Rex Cramphorn, Peter Cummins and David Cameron.

True West has a budding screenwriter interrupted by his older, drifter brother. They're in their mother's house while she is away. At first young smart brother is dominant, but after a visit from the Producer, the roles become reversed. The brothers are two sides of the coin, almost the one person.

Shepard appears to be making a point about human nature inside families, brotherly bonds, double-sidedness. (Luckily the feelings generated by the images in his plays are more subtle than Shepard's explanations of them.) He seems to think, like O'Neill, that there is something rotten at the core of the American family, and for Shepard, especially those in the West.

The furthest West you can go from the Old World, before it becomes East, and where it's corrupt and ruined in the heart — that's Shepard's true west.

The younger brother goes out on a bet to steal toasters, to prove he can survive in the "desert", whilst the other brother tries to do, they swap identities so that they can write for their respective masters.

The Russian hates Soviet masters, admires the Western point of view, wishes he could write like that. The Australian hates capitalist masters, admires the revolutionary point of view, wishes he could write like that.

They decide to swap roles. Russian writes Australian's copy, and vice versa. It's a great success; they are rewarded. When the revolution they are reporting succeeds, they are both in trouble...what to do, they swap identities so that they can be punished for the line they believe in.

Do you believe that? That journalists are interchangeable, that they are hypocrites that they see one thing and write another to please their masters? There are arguments both ways, I guess. Time Magazine is Vietnam versus Washington Post or Watergate; Murdoch and the Australian, Fairfax/Syme and The Age.

As for the Soviet Press, I once played tennis with the man from Pravda and he believed every word he wrote.

The Pulvers plays are performed with great enthusiasm and elan, in time-honoured La Mama style, directed by the author at a vigorous pace, I liked Howard Stanley and Peter Hosking especially.

Barry Dickins is the best thing to happen to playwriting in Melbourne since you first laughed at Rod Quanton, or Jack Hibberd. Anyway he's getting better all the time, now that he's arrived at a style that is a cross between Joe Orton and Sam Beckett, if they came from Reservoir and the reasonable to the ultraviolent; from the romantic to the unreasonable.

One minute Sgt Suck and Sgt Shithead are asking questions, the next Sgt Shithead is in a tu-tu doing a bit of Giselle; one second one of them is about to shoot poor John, the next they are members of the Police Poetry Society.

It's difficult to describe the shifts, the combination of the banal and the extraordinary, jokes, but does remind me most of all of the arbitrariness of Joe Orton, it has that same feel of things not being what they seem; things, words, being taken on face value then turned upside down. It's mostly a comedy between the two cops, with poor John being the innocent caught in the mad house, commenting silently with his face. It's nicely controlled all the way through, and just when you think nothing more can happen, the whole dead policeman scene is topped by the arrival of the girlfriend, and her bizarre feminism, before she is shot as well.

The performances from Gary Samolin, Roy Baldwin and Robin Cuming are marvellous, and William Gluth has done a terrific job in pacing and imaging the piece. It's the best thing I've seen by Barry Dickins, one of the best comedies by anyone in Melbourne.
Revivals — pros and cons

PYGMALION

OKLAHOMA

by Margot Luke


Director, David Addenbrooke; Designer, Tony Tripp; Costumes, Steve Nolan; Lighting, Duncan Ord; Stage Manager, Richard Hartley.

Cast: Miss Eynsford Hill, Sally Boteler; Mrs Eynsford Hill, Liz Cainoeb; Freddie, Ingie Knight; Eliza Doolittle, Sher Guhl; Colonel Pickering, James Beatier; Higgins, Raymond Duparc; Mrs Pearce, Margaret Ford; Alfred Doolittle, Neville Teede; Mrs Higgins, Patricia Skevington; with, Carol Buford, Gloria Emery, Thelma Hood, Andrew Masterton, Ray Richardson, Patrick Spaul. (Amateur)


Director, Geoff Gibbs; Musical Director, John Hind; Designer, William Dowd; Stage Manager, Bill Hunter; Lighting, Richard Stuart; Choreographer, Barry Screigh. (Amateur)

Revivals of old favourites have their pros and cons. True, they will be more likely to attract that large proportion of the audience that wants to play it safe, but, rather unfairly perhaps, at the same time they expect something fresh and new. This means that the director has to work hard — either on innovations, or simply competing with the legends and memories of the past — make it bigger, brighter, faster, louder, or, most difficult of all: better.

David Addenbrooke’s *Pygmalion* at the Playhouse succeeds despite the innovations rather than because of them. He has juggled the text — including bits of the film-script, and has turned the chinlessly upper-class Eynsford-Hills into comic robots — one squeaking, another being a Derek Nimmo clone, which is jarring, though it does have its funny moments. Also, for some obscure reason, Higgins’ Hungarian ex-pupil talks with a fake-Italian accent discredited in all but ABC serials and looking like a waiter from the Greasy Spoon, which is clearly ridiculous, as the man wouldn’t have reached the back door of the Embassy, let alone the ball room.

But niggles aside, the production is strong on the things that matter. First of all, there is Sher Guhl as Eliza Doolittle. A little too strident in her early primitive squawks, she turns into a charmer once Higgins has taken her in hand, and makes a smooth transition from broad comedy to the wittier goings-on at the disastrously funny tea party, (notably in the recital about the unfortunate relative who might have been done in for a hat pin, let alone a hat). Looking quite stunning she reaches full adult status after the successful Ambassador’s Ball, in her self-assertion toward Henry Higgins, whom in human terms she has now left far behind.

Higgins, who has always been rather debonair, especially in the film versions, is played by Raymond Duparc as a more self-centred and petulant bachelor, which fits in much better with the facts we know about his inability to form adult relationships.

There is no attempt to be innovative about the rest of the characters — they are quite simply excellent. Margaret Ford is the kind, no-nonsense housekeeper Mrs Pearce; James Beaty gentle and conservative as the Colonel Pickering who calls Eliza “Miss Doolittle” and thereby starts her off on the road to self-discovery; Neville Teede dominates the stage with his garrulously philosophic Alfred Doolittle, and Pat Skevington manages to suggest human goodness under a classy and coolly ironic exterior as Henry Higgins’ fashionably dressed mum.

Clothes, in fact were applauded enthusiastically, as also the sets, when assembled during scene changes were accepted as a sort of magic-show by an appreciative audience.

*Oklahoma*, by contrast, does not fare so well. Presenting it at the show-piece His Majesty’s Theatre confers a spurious seal of quality that it does not really deserve.

The choreography, despite some inspiration from earlier *Oklahoma* productions, is repetitive and unimaginative; the ensemble work is clumsy, chorus and orchestra occasionally losing each other, and in at least one of the great comedy numbers the witty lyrics were inaudible even if one knew them by heart.

Stylistically and vocally Caroline McKenzie as Aunt Eller and Rosemary Harrison as Ado Annie were the only members of the cast who really knew how to handle the genre; Elaine Flint as Laurey was a pleasure to hear and James Bean as Curly a pleasure to watch (though in fairness, his voice is pleasant, though at present too slight). John Harrison, as Jud Fry, was most impressive, and the “Poor Jud is Dead” number turned out to be one of the highlights of the show.

Nothing remarkably hummable

VENUS STREET

TREATORS

TOM DIGIT AND THE SPRAGGITS OF SPROON

by Cliff Gillam


Director, Ross Coli; Designer, Jill Halliday; Music, Denis Follington; Lighting, Keith Edmundson; Choreographer, Penni White; Stage Manager, Sandra Eker.

Cast: Gabe Belasco, Michael Graham; Heidi Zunz, Marcelle Schmitz; Wayne Seeker, Grant Cottrell; Carol Glass, Jenny Vuletic; Sam Peek, Glenn Swift; Fabia Dolan, Denise Kirby; Roger Van Dail, William Kerr; Angel, Helen Tripp. (Professional)


Director, Edgar Metcalfe; Designer, Helen Godecke; Stage Manager, Helen Godecke.

Cast: Anna, Gillian Lomberg; Ekaterina, Alisa Piper; Mother Dybenko, Sharon Kershaw; Joseph Rubin, Andy King; Anita, Sharon Kershaw; Krasin, Bernie Davis; Lebeshev, Edgar Metcalfe; Guards, Peasants, Michal Van Schoor and Alisa Piper. (Professional)


Director, Tony Nicholls; Stage Manager, Ken Happgood.


The launching of any new theatre company is always attended by some uncertainty and misleading. Will the company offer challenging plays? Will it find adequate performers? Will it cope with the financial pressures which make an independent theatre company such a bad business risk?

Fremantle’s new Winter Theatre, brainchild of director Ross Coli, proved with its first three play season to be a winner on at least the first two counts. We’ve been offered a very find production of Dari Fo’s
review

Accidental Death of an Anarchist and a challenging, if less unqualifiedly successful, all-female version of Errol Bray's The Choir. The third and last offering was a new musical Venus Street, penned by Perth writer (and former actress) Wanda Davidson, with music and lyrics by Dennis Follington. Ms Davidson's exploration of bohemian low-life, interweaving aspiring singers and actors with prostitutes, undercover cops and bikies, opened with a stunning first scene and continued to engage with concise characterisations and slick plotting throughout Act I. The second act was less satisfying, with relationships left undeveloped and a somewhat perfunctory plot resolution.

Dennis Follington's score was fairly innocuous — in command enough of various musical idioms (doo-wop, hard rock, a sort of mock-Coward, torchballads etc) to allow for some well-performed numbers, but there was nothing musically, that really struck; no irresistible hooks, nothing remarkably hummable.

Ross Coli's crisp direction energised a cast of youthful and talented performers, among whom Jenny Vuletic, Denise Kirby, Grant Cotterell and William Kerr scored points for both singing and acting, while Glenn Swift's portrayal of an undercover cop stood out as an intelligent, finely observed piece of acting.

Venus Street will never open on Broadway, but the production did offer evidence that Ms Davidson threatens to be a writer of real consequence and that the Winter Theatre is a very valuable addition to West Australian Theatre. May they thrive.

More Australian writing at the Hole-in-the Wall, this time "other-sider" Stephen Sewell's powerful piece on the growth of (and the traumas inflicted on the committed communist's psyche by) Stalinism. In a sense Sewell follows Louis Nowra into that exciting area of historical, ideological drama focussed in non-Australian contexts which Nowra so successfully opened up with his Inner Voices, but were Nowra edged into the surreal, Sewell stays with the brutally real. Traitors impresses most with Sewell's deft handling of historical material. The cruel jockeying for Party power after Lenin's death, the cunning displayed by Stalin as he outmanoeuvred and eventually, with the aid of the expanded CHEKA, crushed the Trotskyist opposition is clearly and swiftly outlined by the device of bringing together (as lovers in a world of expanding paranoia) the CHEKA agent Krasin and the Trotskyist intellectual feminist Anna in the context of the vicious power-struggles of the late 20s.

Humane and compassionate in his view of the people caught up by — and pounded to dust in — these struggles, unflinching in his confrontation with the fact of the Revolution-Gone-Wrong, and wise in his recognition of the pressures of being Russian brought to bear on purely Revolutionary ideals (the play is bracketed by a prologue epilogue set during the latter, early-winter stages of the Nazi offensive into the Russian heartland in World War II), Sewell has written a play which deserves, and got, in Edgar Metcalfe's fine production, committed performance.

In a fine cast Gillian Lomberg (Anna) and Bernie Davis (Krasin) gave strong, intelligently studied performances. As the shrewd opportunist on the rise in CHEKA, Lebeshev, Edgar Metcalfe was superb. Ailsa Piper, as Ekaterina, did not quite achieve the very difficult transition demanded by the role (from naive peasant schoolgirl to committed revolutionary and partisan guerilla) but nevertheless worked hard in the service of the play, while Gerald Hitchcock (filling in, on only one day's notice, for the injured Andy King) did some good work in the part of Rubin.

Publicized as unique "non-visual" theatre, "The Theatre of the Impossible", and devised specifically in this International Year of the Disabled as an exercise in theatre for the non-sighted, Theatrestrong's Tom Digit and the Spraggis of Sproon (WAIT) belied the portentousness threatened by the publicity and turned out to be a fun, light-hearted romp. The blindfolded audience was treated essentially to a radio play performed live, and by numerous voices at work on a script concocted by the Company and director Tony Nichols from an unholy mix of sci-fi serials, Goonish sound effects, multiple very old jokes and some excruciatingly bad puns. This aural experience was supplemented by some olfactory cues (garlic, cheap perfume, anaesthetic, etc) and some tactile cues (simulating flying birds, crawling pythons and affectionate giant octopi). The verve and enthusiasm of the large student cast lifted the trite comedy of the script and we all had a good time. Voice-over in far left-hand speaker. Is that all? And why aren't there any blind people here tonight?
VIC

AUSTRALIAN NOUVEAU THEATRE


AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (3477133)

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (2594355)
Playbox Theatre: Same Time Next Year; director, Don Mackay; with Kirsty Child and Peter Adams. Amusing two-hander comedy about an annual affair. To Oct 7.

BALLARAT THEATRE
WORKSHOPS (053/314519)
Equus by Peter Shaffer; director, Bruce T Widdop; designer, Robert MacGowan. Shaffer's galloping success that outstripped them all. To Oct 13.

BANANA LOUNGE COMEDY ROOM (4192869)
A succession of the best of Melbourne's underground comedy. Late shows, Fri and Sat.

COMEDY CAFE THEATRE BYO RESTAURANT (4192868)
Carnival Knowledge written and presented by Peter Moon, Ian McFadyen and Eddy Zamburg. Throughout Oct.

COMEDY THEATRE (6623233)

CROSSWINDS COMMUNITY THEATRE (057/623366)
Stronger Than Superman by Roy Kitt; director, Mick Carter. Performed by Crosswinds in conjunction with Bouvierie St TIE Team. To Oct 23.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (6633211)

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (4196226)

Upstairs: Shows changing weekly.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (6544000)
Athenaeum Theatre: Amadeus by Peter Shaffer; director, John Sumner, designer, Anne Fraser; musical arrangement by Helen Gifford; with Bruce Myles and Fred Parslow. A controversial portrayal of Mozart in Shaffer's latest populist essay in deity and inspiration. Starts Oct 14.

Russell Street Theatre: The Truce by Sandy McCutcheon; director, Ray Lawler, designer, John Cervenka. Throughout Oct. Athenaeum 2:

Beecham by Caryl Brahams and Ned Sherrin; director, Ron Rodger, designer, Christopher Smith. Starts Oct 12.

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (052/22318)

PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (634888)


UNIVERSAL THEATRE (4193777)
Squirts, a political revue by Barry Oakley, David Williamson, John Romeril, Steven Sewell, Patrick Cook, Tim Robertson, David Allen and Steve Vizard; with Max Gillies. Looks at the games played in the world of power politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular. Throughout Oct. For entries contact Connie Kramer on 8619448.

NSW

ARTS COUNCIL OF NSW (357 6611)

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)

FRANK STRAIN'S BULL 'N BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 4627)
Hampstead to Hollywood; director, Frank Strain, musical director, Julie Symonds. Throughout Oct.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice; director, Harold Prince; with Karen O'Neill, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Peter Styles. One of the biggest and most successful musicals ever. Throughout Oct.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 1981

From Around The World

translated

Doreen Harrop. Starts Oct 23.

Green

by Emlyn Williams; director, Bruce Mason;

Blood of the Lamb

and their "daughter".

production about a lesbian couple

PHILLIP STREET THEATRE

Bondi Pavilion Theatre:

PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY

(498 3168)

The Shifting Heart by Richard

Marshall Barer; director, John

Melanie and Joanna Lockwood. One

of the first of the new Australian

dramas, but rarely revived, unlike

The Doll and One Day of the Year.

To Oct 12. Once Upon A Mattress;

music by Mary Rodgers, lyrics by

Marshall Barer; director, John

Milson. Based on the tale of the

princess and the pea. Starts Oct 23.

MARIONETTE THEATRE

Stables Theatre: Megalomania by

Geoff Kelso. Adult comic puppet

show with Geoff Kelso. To Oct 4.

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE

Pardon Our Privates; director, Peggy

Mortimer; with Ron Frazer. Through-

out Oct.

NEW THEATRE

On The Wallaby by Nick Enright;

director, Frank Barnes. Nick

Enright's very successful docu-

mentary/musical on the depression

years in SA. Throughout Oct.

NIMROD THEATRE

Upstairs: Last Day In Woolloomooloo

by Ron Blair; director, John Bell;

with Pat Evison, Les Dayman, Peter

Collingwood, Ron FaiK, Stuart

Campbell and Robert Alexander.

Blair's black comedy about Sydney


Downstairs: Pinball by Alison Lyssa;

director, Chris Johnson. Allegorical

feminist play about social stereio-

types and lesbian custody. Into Oct.

PHILLIP STREET THEATRE

Blood of the Lamb by Bruce Mason;

A Court Theatre, Christchurch NZ

production about a lesbian couple

and their "daughter".

PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY

Bondi Pavilion Theatre: The Corn is

Green by Emlyn Williams; director,

Doreen Harrop. Starts Oct 23. Stories

From Around The World translated

and written by Mark Scriven from folk

tales. Saturday mornings throughout

Oct.

Q THEATRE

Buried Child by Sam Shepard;

director Richard Brooks. Bankstown,

Oct 7-10 and Orange, Oct 13-17.

STUDIO SYDNEY

Wayside Chapel: I Sent A Letter To

My Love by Bernice Rubens; director

Graham Corry; with Leila Blake and

Ross Sharp. Movingly written story

of love and frustration in a Welsh

village. Into Oct.

REGENT THEATRE

An Evening's Intercourse with Barry

Humphries. Return of the latest


SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR

YOUNG PEOPLE

Free drama workshops on weekends;

includes playbuilding, mime, dance,

puppetry, design, radio and video.

Youth Theatre Showcase: ATYP in

1948 based on George Orwell;


The 2 till 5 Theatre production of I

Heard They Did It For Kicks;


The Belfast Romeo and Juliet

adapted from William Shakespeare

by Shopfront Theatre; director,

Kingston Anderson. Oct 16-17, 23-24

and 30-31.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

Drama Theatre, SOH (20588): Cat On

A Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee

Williams; director, Richard Wherrett,

designer, Ian Robinson; with Wendy

Hughes, John Hargreaves and Ron

Haddruck. Typically fetic Tennessee

Williams drama, with star cast. To

Oct 31.

THEATRE ROYAL (2316111)

The Rocky Horror Show by Richard

O'Brien; director, David Toguri,

designer, Brian Thomson; with

Daniel Albiner. Revival of the now

cult, sci-fi, rock musical. Starts Oct

6.

For entries contact Carole Long on

357 1200/909 3010.

QLD

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE

Not Now Darling starring Leslie

Phillips and Andrew Sachs. British

sex farce. To Oct 10.

LA BOITE THEATRE

No Room For Dreamers by George

Hutchinson; director, Bruce Parr.

Light-hearted yarn about William

Chidley, eccentric idealist and

soapbox orator of the early 1900's.

To Oct 17.

Mary Barnes by David Edgar;

director, Malcolm Blaylock. The

absorbing, true story of a

schizophrenic cured in an "alter-

native" psychiatric experiment and a

political essay on the hopes and

ideals of the '60s. Starts Oct 23.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

COMPANY (2213861)

Albert Park: As You Like It by

William Shakespeare; director, John

Tasker, designer, James Ridewood.

Adventurous, open-air staging of one

of Shakespeare's most popular

comedies. To Oct 10.

Edward Street Theatre: New Sky — A

Tangent Production. Mime and mask

specialist Judith Anderson in her

long-awaited, one-woman show: an

immigrant, her journey of discovery

in a new life under a strange new


THE TN COMPANY

Edward Street Theatre (bookings

352 5133): The Dadda by Eric

Fitzjohn; director, Bryan Nason.

Intriguing play laced with black

humour. Fruits of TN's Annual

Playwright's Project. To Oct 3.

TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie by Jay

Presson Allen; director, Robert Kelton.

Adapted from Muriel Spark's novel. An

unorthodox school teacher en-

courages her pupils to eschew the
stuffy conventions of pre-war Scotland. Oct 12-17.
For entries contact Jeremy Ridge- man on 377 2519.

SA
THE STAGE COMPANY (223 6283)
King Lear by William Shakespeare; director, Brian Debnam; with Wayne Bell, Deborah Little, John Heywood, David Hursthouse, Peter Crossley and Robin Harrison. Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy about human frailty and pride. To Oct 10.
STATE THEATRE COMPANY

ACT
ANU ARTS CENTRE (494787/ 493726)
CANBERRA THEATRE CENTRE
JIGSAW THEATRE COMPANY
Hum. A TIE program for pre-schools; director, Graeme Brosnan. War of the Words by Graham Pitts. A TIE program for primary schools; director, Graeme Brosnan. Performances in schools throughout third term.
PITS (PIE IN THE SKY)
THEATRE THREE (474222)
For entries contact Janet Healey on 492669 (w) or 486807 (h).

WA
HAYMAN THEATRE (3507026)
HIS MAJESTY’S THEATRE
(3216288)
HOLE IN THE WALL THEATRE
(3812403)
NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY
(3253500)
Playhouse: Sisterly Feelings by Alan Ayckbourn; director, Edgar Metcalf. Ayckbourn’s latest extremely funny look at middle-class mores. He has written four different outcomes, permutations depending on an onstage toss of a coin. Throughout Oct.
SPARE PARTS — PUPPET ARTS THEATRE (3353539)
Touring Metropolitan schools with Masked. Performed by Peter Wilson and Ian Tregonning.
For entries contact Margaret Schwan on 3411178.

NT
DARWIN THEATRE GROUP
(815522)
Moving On, Moving On... by Simon Hopkinson. Starting a Top End tour on Oct 9 at Groote Eylandt and then touring to centres before the Darwin season of Oct 20-31. A moving comedy about two women in their thirties on a coach tour through the Territory.
BIGGER PIGGIES
How about those two pigs now being groomed for stardom? Kenneth Cook's novel Pig was asking to be filmed, but the difficulty was one of casting — a giant from the paddock or something made out of foam rubber, a kind of Moby Pig. Then along comes another pig looking for an Oscar, called Razorback from a so-far unpublished novel by a journalist named Peter Brennan. The producer Basil Appleby hopes to bring Cook's pig in for $1.8 million while the producer Hal McElroy thinks in budget terms of $5.5 million. A bigger pig, see. The human heroes will be in one case an environmental scientist and in the other an advertising man.

GOOD RETURNS
Clarissa Kaye was in Australia with her husband James Mason while he made The Burning Man on location in the Blue Mountains of NSW, but nobody offered her any work in stage, screen or television, which seems a great waste of talent. She thinks Australia never did appreciate her, and she may be right... Melissa Jaffer is another one who left the industry (for hairdressing, a quieter life with regular hours) but returned recently for a bit in Starstruck. Who could help wondering how the Americans will get their tongues around Gallipoli? Gally-polly? The film has done everything to and for the box office since it opened, confirming everyone's highest hopes. It opened in New York at the end of August with Peter Weir and his stars, Mel Gibson and Mark Lee, on hand to celebrate.

HOME GROWN GAUCHERIE
Gaucherie prevailed at the presentation of the Australian Film and Television Awards, or Sammies, but at least the gaucherie was homegrown and not imported from Hollywood. The local brand is easier to take. The exception to general awkwardness — Barry Crocker having studied Johnny Carson but failed to understand the essentials — was June Salter who, suitably dressed, splendidly lucid and impeccably well-mannered, displayed occasional asperity mixed with genuine sweetness. For this relief, much thanks. An emotional moment with the great Enid Lorimer was a bonus. Still with the Sammies, Michael Parkinson looked better than he does on that terrible set at Channel 10. But where is the well-groomed, sparkling, interested, amiable Parky of the BBC? Something to do with the lights perhaps, or the wrong shampoo.

RULES OF THE GAME
Actors developing a new, rather special set of telephone nerves, occasioned by the ring that comes the night before shooting is to start. The voice at the other end says, "Sorry, don't front tomorrow, we still haven't got the money." By the time you read this, Mr Howard may have been persuaded to vary the rules in the great tax concession Snafu.

JUDY FOR GOLDA
Judy Davis is to play the young Golda Meir in the four-part TV documentary by Paramount on the life of the late great Israeli premier. Ingrid Bergman is to play Golda in middle life, and the story was that the last years of her career were to be portrayed by Pat Evison, the NZ actress who is more often in Australia, on stage and in films, than in her own country, so great is the demand for her services. From playing Nana, the grandmotherly pub keeper in Starstruck for Gill Armstrong (and David Eloff, who according to contract is not permitted on the set) and Steve McClean, she went into Ron Blair's play at the Nimrod, The Last Days of Woolloomooloo. The Golda role need not be taken as an indication that Judy is to be lost to Australia. The girl who spent a year at regional Penrith's Q Theatre will simply go where the good scripts are.

Mel Gibson (Frank) in Peter Weir's Gallipoli.

Ben Cross as Harold Abrahams in Chariots of Fire.
The Canadian film industry has shown that boom and bust can happen simultaneously. ELIZABETH RIDDELL contrasts that experience and the “renaissance” of the British film industry with the situation here.

A funny thing happened to a British and an Australian film on their way to... no, I won’t say that. I will simply say that a striking coincidence occurs with the British film Chariots of Fire and the Australian film Gallipoli, respectively launched in September and August on local audiences. The fact that both are set in the period of the First World War does not signify anything, since both sides of the equator are enjoying being nostalgic about their past — perhaps, some say, because the present is so beastly. The real oddity about these films is that both plots are pivoted on a foot race between the two heroes. In Gallipoli Mark Lee and Mel Gibson as Archy and Frank run against one another in a country town for a cash prize; in Chariots of Fire Ben Cross and Ian Charleson as Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell run against each other all over Britain and eventually reach the Olympiad in Paris in 1924. They became the two fastest men in the world.

The most marked difference in the plot treatment is that Abrahams and Liddell are not rivals in any grudge sense. If Abrahams is seen as a parallel to Frank, he lacked Frank’s surliness. His chip was about being a Jew at Cambridge, and about the Olympic officials banning his coach from the arena.

Coincidences apart, there are more than a few handy hints to be picked up by the Australian industry as it plunges forward into 1982, and one of them reinforces the belief of the serious people in the business that they should do what they know how to do, with the best writers and directors and aim at the universal rather than the international...
which are by no means the same thing.

The themes of Gallipoli and Chariots of Fire are universal — courage, competitiveness, friendship, adventure. Individual emotions and ambitions and events mirror the larger world. The audience can identify, participate, admire, regret.

The old argument, before Gallipoli (and before Picnic at Hanging Rock and My Brilliant Career and Caddie and Breaker Morant) was that Australians had better not make films on Australian subjects because not even Australians will go to them, so how could overseas audiences be persuaded, when they could not even understand the language, language meaning strike.

There is now a good deal of similarity between the British and Australian film-making scene. For some years the British have been used as a resource by the Americans, particularly as innovators of special effects. Films were made by Nicholas Roeg, etc. with American money, but there was in effect no such thing as a film industry. Then David Puttnam appeared, to make The Duellists with a mixed Atlantic cast and a director who had never made anything but commercials.

He was hasted off to Hollywood to make Midnight Express and briefly visited Australia ostensibly to “doctor” a film that was coming to grief but actually to have a look at the scene. Then he returned to take a chance on another director of commercials and documentaries, Hugh Hudson, for Chariots.

Simultaneously with the release here of Chariots another film has surfaced in Britain, Gregory’s Girls by a 33-year-old writer-director named Bill Forsyth. It uses people nobody ever heard of and is a comedy, and it has taken Britain by storm, or at least London where it opened in three cinemas.

The budget was what amounts to $400,000 Australian, mostly from the British Film Institute and Scottish Television. His second-from-now project will be with David Puttnam. People see Chariots and Gregory’s Girls as signalling the renaissance of the British film industry. It will have nothing to do with the comic strip simplicities of blockbusters.

If Britain is about to emerge from the tomb, Australia is, a concerned producer tells me, in a very grave state. The terms of the tax shelter do not work (as they did not work for Canada in the late 1970s when the slogan was “Any moron can produce a movie, and many morons do”) and half a dozen films have stopped dead in their tracks. At least in Australia, films put up for awards have had to be shown to the public, if only for a week. In Canada the story would break of awards going to films of which the public was totally ignorant.

Montreal became Hollywood North, with $250 millions of mostly American money poured into 130 films over three years under the “Canadian content” agreement which meant a Canadian born star was all that was necessary. Australia could become Hollywood South if everybody doesn’t watch it. Canada, they say, went boom and bust simultaneously.

Interested people argued for a long time for the Government, any Government, to give them a film industry. Now they have it, it would be foolish to use it to make standard (not good, just standard) Hollywood films. The reason that Australian investors got a fresh deal (promised in the October election) was probably because the Prime Minister noticed that Australian films were getting more space in newspapers abroad than Australian politicians (it would be hard to get less), but because of the interpretation by the Treasurer investment money has almost dried up. Hence the “grave state” mentioned by the producer, whose own track record is good. After all, it took Gallipoli from 1978 to get off the ground.

Matt Carroll, producer of Breaker Morant, is quoted as being against the internationalising of Australian films on the grounds that it will simply be counter-productive. He cites the “Australianness” of the films that have been successful overseas — equating success with critical acclaim and good box office in art, and somewhat bigger than art, cinemas — such as Morant, Picnic, My Brilliant Career, Caddie, and now Gallipoli. Gallipoli is done on a large canvas, larger than that of Chariots, but it couldn’t, as they say, be more indigenous. That’s the word, my concerned producer says, we have to watch.
Kostas — commendable attempt

by Elizabeth Riddell

The local industry has avoided the vexed subject of differences that arise between the native born and immigrants, and who could blame it when it has so many other difficulties to overcome? Catch's Child, an underrated film, was an exception, and in any case the problems there were in the main the products of a marriage between Greek and Greek that had come to pieces.

So Paul Cox is to be commended for his attempt to look the subject squarely in the face. Kostas is a film about a middle-class Melbourne, thirtyish woman, an art gallery director with a child and no visible husband, who falls into love and into bed with a Greek journalist who is driving a taxi to make a living.

He is a refugee from the Colonel's brutality, a rather sad figure living in lodgings kept by a crassulous pair of Australians, harried rather than supported by cousins with a milk bar, almost friendless, cheerful only when in Greek restaurants where he can listen to music, dance, and break some plates when celebration is called for.

He picks Carol up at the airport, presses his claim to attention, has a superficial success and loses her, only to regain her in an unlikely reconciliation (at the airport again) as he is about to leave to attend his mother's funeral in his Greek village.

Up until then the film is credible enough, mainly due to the performance of Takis Emmanuel as Kostas. It calls for respect and sympathy, and is several light years ahead, in an artistic sense, of his work in Caddie. His passion for Carol, played lackadaisically by Wendy Hughes, is possessive and proprietorial. He is less tense with other people and appears to be settling down in his awkward amour — Carol is trivial, treddy, ashamed of being seen with a Greek cabby but attracted to his obsessive devotion — when a row erupts at dinner in her house and a brawl, with furniture flying and rude words, ensues. This is quite a good scene, triggered by Chris Haywood at his most belligerent.

Graeme Blundell hovers anxiously, dodging the action.

It is hard to take the airport reconciliation seriously. The inference is that Kostas will return and that he and Carol will live happily ever after, but why should they? The factors that separated them are still there.

Wendy Hughes' lethargic performance — even when she runs to him across a lounge at Tullamarine it seems to be in slow motion, like a cigarette commercial — is a real minus. This is all the more noticeable when Chris McQuade appears for a minute or two, and livens every-thing up.

The film was produced by Bernard Eddy and directed by Paul Cox, screen play by Linda Aronson from an idea by Paul Cox.
Hoodwink — leaves a nasty taste

by Elizabeth Riddell

*Hoodwink*, said to be based on fact that is, a real occurrence in a real prison — is about a convict who, while in the remand section of a gaol awaiting trial, pretends to be blind so convincingly that only one old lag and a suspicious warder have any doubts about his disability. He manages to deceive two doctors — the regular gaol physician and a specialist from outside as well as a clergyman and his wife who are prison visitors. The events that lead up to this masquerade show him as a good-looking and insouciant, thoughumbling, bank thief to whom women are irresistibly attracted. He has nice old parents and a nice sister who wishes he would go straight but knows he won’t.

The faked blindness is the core of the story and, as can be seen, it is pretty ludicrous. There is more to blindness than staring straight ahead, asking for dark glasses and acquiring a white stick. This latter is rather lacy, a hinged affair folding three ways into a neat baton. Anyway, for the sake of the film his ploy comes off, and Martin Stang is last seen spending towards Sydney in a stolen car, ready for the next heist.

It isn’t all crime and cunning. The clergyman’s wife, Sarah, falls in love with Martin while handing him a plate of scenes after church, and persuades the authorities to let him go on piaenies with herself, her husband, and their two children. She confesses that her husband does not pay her much attention. While he and the children are off looking for banksia, Martin and Sarah enjoy a little alfresco love.

Martin discovers what others have before him, that making love to a religious woman is dangerous. She will confess not only to God but to her husband as well.

But Ralph the husband forgives Martin after a short display of temper, and both husband and wife suggest that Martin should tell all to the authorities. They themselves will not, to coin a phrase, dob him in.

As the credits come up nobody has much of a future, although crime has temporarily paid off. One would not care to be Sarah left with her memories, her weekly plate of scenes, and the knowledge that Ralph holds all the cards.

The plot of *Hoodwink* is full of holes and much of the action based on false assumptions. Why, for instance, did Martin be horrified to find that his father had been beaten up by police after Martin’s escape from his parents’ house? He would know they would take their revenge, however unjustly. Why should Ralph protect him, even if Sarah does? How could two doctors be fooled about his eyesight? Apart from that, why should one of the doctors be a foreigner who has to use an interpreter during his diagnosis? Can you see the prison authorities standing for that?

The dialogue is in general so banal as to be at soapie level, and even Judy Davis, who plays Sarah, can do little with it. Her gormless, pigeon-toed, hill-billy Sarah is almost believable, but Dennis Miller looks too street-smart for his role as Ralph. John Hargreaves is well cast as Martin Stang — brashless, flashy, a horn lover who sees himself as a winner. There are a few good scenes, notably one in which police invade a hideout Martin is sharing with Lucy, played by Wendy Hughes. Some of its merit comes from the fact that nobody speaks more than a few laconic words.

Much of the film’s emphasis is on Martin’s extreme bedworthiness, with Lucy, a girl named Marian (played by Kim Deacon) and Sarah. Unfortunately Australian cinematographers do not seem to be able to solve the problems of the naked female body... When photographing love scenes they continue to make the neck, upper arms and bosom look ugly and unattractively. That, or the ladies are too self-conscious to deploy themselves gracefully.

In either case, practice may make perfect. It can’t be too soon.

The performances vary from active to passive, rather according to the uneven screenplay. Only Judy Davis and Kim Deacon, especially the latter, really rise above it. For some reason I can’t identify, the film leaves a rather nasty taste in the mouth.

It was produced by Pam Oliver and Errol Sullivan and directed by Claude Whatham, with a screenplay by Ken Quinnell and photographed by Dean Semler. The NSW Film Commission is the principal investor and the film is being distributed by Hoyts.
The plot is a bit of a mess but the film’s entertaining qualities and the performances of William Hurt (rescued from Altered States) and the beguiling Sigourney Weaver make it worth a visit. The place, New York.

**THE WINTER OF OUR DREAMS:** An absolute must for several reasons — Judy Davis and Bryan Brown, John Duigan’s storytelling and direction, human values, its quality of being recognisably Australian.

**ROSIE THE RIVETER:** Gone commercial from the June Film Festival. Rosie grew out of a Rosie the Riveter reunion of 300 former Rosies, American women workers in the Second World War. Hilarious and very touching.

**MON ONCLE D’AMÉRIQUE:** Alain Resnais’s extraordinary and dazzling film with Gerard Depardieu and other French players about three characters whose lives criss-cross, carrying out the theories on human aggression held by a physician and biologist named Henri Laborit. The humans are his mice. The film won prizes at Cannes, San Sebastian and Venice.

**GALLIPOLI:** Of course. But by now everybody knows about Gallipoli.

**ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK:** There is no doubt about this. It is a horror film, minus a monster. Who needs a monster, with such de-humanised humans? Very clever sets and special effects.

**TESS:** Hypnotically beautiful, if not quite what Thomas Hardy had in mind in his Tess of the D’Urbervilles. Tess is a hapless, frail creature here, victim of men, without seeming to have any passions of her own. Nastassia Kinski is beautiful and young. If not exactly Tess, and the male performances are splendid.

**THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE:** As somebody said, a very Californian mixture of rye and Coca Cola, with Jack Nicholson suitably scummy as the drifter Frank, and Jessica Lange as Cora, who temporarily lunetns him. This is the fourth version of James M Cain’s novel of the same name: two of the others being French and Italian. It clearly has a great interest for film makers. This is the smartest yet.

**THE CANNONBALL RUN:** For those who like noise, hot metal, stunts, Burt Reynolds and a glimpse of Sammy Davis Jnr, Dean Martin, Roger Moore and more than a glimpse of Dom DeLuise and Farnan Fawcett.
NEW DIRECTIONS AT THE CON

Since taking up his appointment at the beginning of this year as head of the Opera School at the NSW Conservatorium, Myer Fredman, formerly of Glyndebourne and more recently the highly successful Music Director of the State Opera of South Australia, has been working quietly behind the scenes to establish a new force in opera training in Australia.

The overall situation for the teaching of young aspiring singers — both vocally and dramatically has been described by more than one critic over the years as frankly a mess, with a plethora of institutions and private studios offering a range of courses and individual packages. Since 1968, the NSW "Con" Opera School has provided the only full-time accredited course exclusively in opera studies available in the country, and despite efforts in other states, with government cutbacks in educational spending looks set to remain that way for some time.

Sensibly, and not surprisingly given his personal background as coach and conductor, he has placed vocal attainment and ensemble tuition at the centre of his teaching programme while not neglecting their logical extension into the staged arts.

Veteran producer, Stefan Haag, has been engaged to teach in acting and production and, more recently, Michael Beauchamp, previously resident producer with The Australian Opera and currently associate producer at Glyndebourne, has been brought in to direct the first full scale production for the School — Monteverdi's The Coronation of Poppaea opening at the Verbruggen Hall on October 13.

Hopefully, we shall be looking, in the not too far distant future, at an institution which may in operatic terms parallel the crucial role which NIDA has played in securing professional training in theatre generally.

NEW ZEALAND HITS THE RAILS

In a unique spirit of co-operation between opera and a government body, the National Opera of New Zealand recently toured its new production of The Marriage of Figaro from Auckland through both Islands to Dunedin by rail. As a gesture of sponsorship in kind the national railways system transported sets and costumes to each of the four main centres free of charge and were credited as a major supporter of the company. Perhaps Il Duce Muldoon has made the trains run on time. It would be a brave company in Australia that would trust their — now taxable — properties to any aspect of this country’s public transport system.

VOSS AT LAST

After the razzamatazz that preceeded the deadly silence that followed Sculthorpe's Rites of Passage in 1975, Richard Meale's Voss based on Patrick White's novel with libretto by David Malouf looks set for a happier and more orderly introduction to the Australian public.

The work, now nearing completion is currently scheduled for premiery by The Australian Opera in 1983. Before then, however, the Adelaide Festival will showcase a 10 to 12 minute section in March next year. Hopefully, the AO will between then and its opening also take the opportunity to involve their performing company and audiences, by seminars and other workshop showings of the piece, more productively in the process of encountering the contemporary idioms than on previous occasions.

HIDDEN SUBSIDY?

Can the Music Board of the Australia Council have been more productive in investing in the state opera companies than its niggardly funding over the past seven years would suggest?

With the engagement of Anthony Jeffrey as consultant and interim titular head of Queensland's embryonic Lyric Opera pending the appointment of a general manager — now being advertised — it brings to three out of five the number of state companies managed by former staff members of the Board.

Ken Forbes and Ian Campbell are both erstwhile senior project officers while Jeffrey is the previous director of the Board. In all cases the Australia Council position was their first major administrative role in arts management. Both Victoria and South Australia have flourished under their present incumbents. Jeffrey, more recently commercial administrator of the Australian Opera, with particular responsibility for fund raising, will undoubtedly want to steer the company firmly into a course of support from the private business sector in Queensland.

Meanwhile there is no truth in the rumour that Clive Pascoe is to be the next King of Moomba.
PETER COOKE, DESIGNER
by Ken Healey

Where else but in Australia could a designer tackle Aida, Faust, and La Traviata before he's 30?

The rhetorical questioner was Peter Cooke, free-lance designer of operas, of which he has now tackled no fewer than 22. He had returned to Canberra where he went to school and where his mother still lives, to design Britten's The Turn of the Screw for Canberra Opera. The venue was the Playhouse, the most intimate opera theatre in the country, with neither a fly tower nor adequate wing space. It was a home-coming in more ways than one.

"This is a special occasion because The Turn of the Screw at the Canberra Playhouse was my first opera design. Towards the end of 1974 I was assigned to John Tasker's production for Canberra Opera's part of my assessable work in my final year at NIDA," he said.

That production was so visually impressive that sets and costumes as well as producer and designer were bought by New Opera, the predecessor of State Opera, South Australia, and taken to Adelaide. Peter Cooke recalls that the design, expanded for the larger stage at Adelaide's Opera Theatre, took on a heavy look. This time he and producer Brian Bell have striven for something very light that will keep moving with the music. Locations are only suggested, sometimes with deliberate vagueness, inviting the audience to do some imaginative work.

Listening to Peter Cooke talk in what vein one is left in no doubt that stage design is a primary form of theatrical communication. He praises the designs of the Australian Opera's Katya Kabanova and A Midsummer Night's Dream, pointing out that theatre companies have been realising such designs for ten years past. He rejoices that the seemingly narrow and conservative world of opera is at last catching up.

Why not stay with theatre, then? Surprisingly, it is not easy for Peter Cooke to find a satisfactory answer. He is inclined to understate his innate musicianship, although he does not hide it when stating a preference for Britten's music over that of Gounod's Faust. Certainly, his five years after NIDA as resident designer at the QTC were happy and fulfilling enough. The basic attraction of theatre expressed through music if obvious is unexplained; in addition, the influence of an opera producer seems to have turned Peter Cooke decisively to opera.

John Thompson, Executive Director of the Queensland Opera Company until its demise last year, was the crucial influence. Thompson clearly displayed tenacity as well as faith in the young designer; the first collaboration, Cost fan Tutte for a North Queensland tour, was "hideous". The word is said with a noticeable wince. But a big production of Carmen which followed "got me back on the rails".

"John Thompson has a special place for his encouragement through endless discussions. He is a most aware man: musically, dramatically, and in design values." In 1976 alone Thompson commissioned four operas from Peter Cooke, including Faust and The Magic Flute, while the young designer was working full-time for the QTC.

There is a tone in the voice that sounds like relief when Peter Cooke admits to spending more time these days over each production. He finds it important to resist the temptation to do more just to earn more money. This year regional opera companies have occupied him with La Traviata and Don Pasquale for Victoria, and The Turn of the Screw plus the coming Aida for Canberra. Only the Australasian Opera, for whom he designed Scarlatti's The Triumph of Honour, has not yet invited him back for a second production.

With already two productions of Il Trovatore as well as a twice-turned Screw behind him, Cooke's enthusiasm is all for the next project, the one opera that he never expects to do a second time: Aida. The set model.
a work of art in its own right, turned heads every night in the foyer during the August season in Canberra. "The project has captured a community spirit. They'd made over 100 costumes by early August for a mid-December production."

There is no doubt that the designer has the measure of the peculiar strengths of the smallest and least affluent of the regional companies, which has chosen to do the grandest of the standard repertoire operas, "It's a matter of knowing what talent is here. They've given themselves enough time to do it. Anne Brabin-Smith is a tremendous set constructor, and Ellen Blunden's amazing as a production co-ordinator."

The secret of Peter Cooke's addiction to opera is revealing itself; it is the power and scope of the teamwork. "For this production, in a venue bigger than the Opera House concert hall, the logistics will be more difficult than the craft, and producer John Milson has it all calculated exactly. He even knows how many Duntroon cadets make an army! And he knows that in Canberra there are support people working day and night to make it all happen."

The power of music cannot be long neglected: "I get an enormous buzz at the first orchestral dress-rehearsal. That will be a great occasion at Aida, and something not often experienced." With music such a great attraction, what about designing a ballet? "I've had one tempting offer, but couldn't fit it in."

There was also a big television series. He turned it down too, for the same reason. Suddenly, without drama or fanfare, there emerges a story of commitment to opera companies, the difficulty of finding continuous work as a free-lance designer; and the importance of what Cooke simply calls "trust and follow-through" with companies to which he returns regularly. He does not use the word, but he is talking about loyalty on his part, and it goes far towards explaining why this patently talented designer is invited back again and again.

"Design is a study in observation — whether of temperature or colour, or whatever..." Could there be a hint in that very certain statement of some of the reasons for that hideous Così in North Queensland, where all those elements are so different from those in Sydney, Canberra, or Melbourne? The place of designers in our arts community is something that Peter Cooke speaks easily about. He is active in the Design Association, and is a member of the committee for the Prague Quadrennial. He enjoys watching other designers work, and was stimulated by a visit to London to plan with Anthony Besch, State Opera of South Australia's production last year of Lehár's operetta, Land of Smiles.

Despite the tiny population of working stage designers in Australia and their remarkable camaraderie, there is no recognisable national style. In fact, no company has really developed and retained a house style.

As the interview winds down and one feels for the weariness induced by a working day that has so far come beyond a 6pm costume fitting session, and will go on to lighting in the theatre after dinner, some unexpected, diverse thoughts meander into the conversation. For example, the story of designing a stand for a disc jockey and dolly girls at a life-style exhibition. That is an experience not available to a designer who is tied to a theatre company.

Thoughts turn to the future, and the key word is once again trust. Peter Cooke will stay with opera for 1982, but is unable yet to name productions for which contracts are still unsigned. He feels little control over the flow of work that will come. When the Queensland Opera Company folded, four design projects were scrapped. A change in the general management of a company can mean that the designer must start again from scratch to build up that all-important network of relationships.

Peter Cooke is remarkably relaxed about it all. There is no doubt that he sees interviews and publicity generally as a chance to further the cause of design. His designs speak eloquently for him, and he in turn is an articulate spokesman for them.
**OPERA review**

**Standards of musical direction**

by Ken Healey

Four operas in August (three of them for review) served to emphasise the truth that the quality of the music is central to the success of this art form. I heard Britten in Canberra, Bizet in Adelaide, then Wagner and Donizetti in Melbourne. The English, French, German, and Italian traditions were thus represented by operatic scores of quality and I found myself comparing standards of musical direction.

Canberra Opera returned to Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* in the 300-seat Playhouse. Where seven years ago John Tasker had elicited from designer Peter Cooke a series of trucked architectural features, each spotlit behind a gauze. Brian Bell induced the same designer to ask more of his audience. This time the gauzes were behind the singer; a single, open setting of arresting simplicity being used to suggest the environs of Bly, where Henry James's ghost story is set.

The production was impressive, memorable, almost moving. What held it in check was the fact that Donald Hollier's chamber orchestra had progressed as far only as mastering the notes in the score. Rhythmic shape, the feel for style, the ability to convey nuance, were all missing.

The most impressive element in the production turned out to be a performance that of Merlyn Quaile as the governess. A newcomer to opera in Australia, this singer uses her fine, warm lyric voice as an extension of an appealing stage personality. The other adults all had mixed success; Margaret Cleary found the tessitura of Mrs Grose a little high for comfort, and missed some of the motherly simplicity of the character. Raymond Görring's tenor has just the required English dryness for Peter Quint, but his diction has never been impeccable; Jeanette Russell's robust figure and voice will be seen and heard to better effect than as the wraith, Miss Jessel. Celia Feldman was quite the strongest Flora I have encountered, and Christian Huf-Johnston was an average Miles, his voice now more comfortable at the lower end of the treble range.

Brian Bell's production was daring; very much of the 80's, I thought, because it chose not to show too explicitly, but to blind its ghostly towers in the air, using light, gauze, voice, and movement. Mediocre playing from the pit combined with less than adequate diction from two or three singers limited the production to a *succes d'estime*. The ingredients were here for a rivetting night's opera.

Dramatically, Britten's opera in Bell's production was a clearly delineated contest between a far from neurotic governess and the ghost of Peter Quint. The boy Miles is the object of the struggle. It is a pity that the object of the more uneven contest between Don Pasquale and that trio of gay deceivers, Malatesta, Norina, and Ernesto, is not as clearly delineated by Donizetti's librettist in one of the world's most delightfully tuneful comic operas. Which is the means and which the end in *Don Pasquale*? Duping the old duffer, or securing the lovers' happiness? I suspect that the former, instead of leading to the latter, is an end in itself.

If *Don Pasquale* is primarily a fairly cruel come-uppance for a crusty old bachelor, then the Don had better be hard-baked. Towering of voice and presence, Noel Mangin's Don for Victoria State Opera turned out to be as soft as a jelly and nearly as sweet. It was dramatically about the only weakness in John Milson's masterly production (if one discounts the annoying sight of a young major domo playing at senility).

One could for the most part enjoy Mangin's expansiveness in the role, but there was neither struggle nor enlightenment when the Sophronia-Norina duplicity was revealed. That was a shame because the oileacious Malatesta of John Wood and the keen intelligence of Deborah Cook's Norina deserved a more able foc. So did the dash and spirit of John Pickerings's Ernesto; his malleable silver tenor made light of most of the role's formidable demands; he looks as good as he sounds, and he put the question to Heather Begg's formidable double bass playing in *Patience* by playing immaculately the long trumpet introduction to his soulful aria which opens the second act, and singing the calubaleta for good measure.

I cannot share the almost universal enthusiasm for the tiny but agile coloratura of Deborah Cook. Neither altitude nor accuracy provides any trouble to this voice, but if it turned itself inside out and stood on its head, I should say, "So what". In short, it is the ideal voice for Lakme's "Bell Song" or those canary warbling of Dinorah heard, thankfully, only in aria contests at old-fashioned eisteddfods. The pity of it is that outside that voice is an actress possessing virtually every quality of wit, commitment, and...
figure desirable in a young lyric coloratura soprano.

To return to the centrality of the orchestral playing, I must say that this Pasquale was exquisitely served by the players prepared by Richard Divall and conducted at the matine performance I attended by Andrew Greene. Peter Cooke's designs (revised from an original by Hugh Colman) were nicely integrated into the total production; not even I could quibble at the ripple of applause that greeted the fourth act garden scene.

And so to a performance in which the music was not only central, but everything: the concert version of Wagner's Die Walküre which the Australian Opera and the ABC presented in the Melbourne Town Hall. It was a triumph. Wagner's incessant theorising about music drama, like Brecht's theorising, pales beside the impact of his creative works. Nevertheless, if there is any opera composer the summit of whose achievement I want to approach gradually, score open on knee, that composer is Wagner and that summit is the Ring cycle. So much for the celebrated unity of drama and music. Of course it is unified, in that the drama is inherent in the music. But at a distance of 111 years, and with so much narrative separating the confrontations between Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegmund and Hunding, Fricka and Wotan, and finally Wotan and Brunnhilde, there is much to be said for making the pilgrimage to the Wagnerian shrine step by step. As a learner, one can concentrate so much more assiduously on the score and its realisation if one does not have to look at the stage picture.

It was not a concert but an opera which Charles Mackerras and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (100 strong if one counts the irreplaceable stierhorn player) gave us. The drama was shaped by instruments and voices.

The vision and the prodigious effort of concentration of Mackerras was rewarded by some sterling singing from Rita Hunter (Brunnhilde), Donald Shanks (Hunding), and Lauris Elms (Fricka). Not far behind were the Sieglinde of Nance Grant, Robert Gard's Siegmund, and all eight Valkyries. Raymond Myers was at once splendid and disappointing as Wotan, his lower register resonant, wise, and godlike in being insufficiently tortured; but at the top one could never be sure of the voice above an Eb. May his full vocal health return before the opera is inevitably staged; this enterprise is too special to carry any such discernible weakness.

Carmen — musicology misfires

by Michael Morley

If the State Opera's production of Carmen at times seemed to numb both the spirit and the senses into a sub-Wagnerian state of suspended animation, neither the singers nor the orchestra could fairly be blamed. At three hours and forty-five minutes playing time — admittedly with three intervals — it managed to be the longest production of the work I have sat through.

Unfortunately, it was not a question of heavenly length, but simply of Denis Vaughan's pedestrian and often moribund tempi. Mr Vaughan's musicological abilities are beyond dispute, and in case the uninitiated listener should miss the point, he has managed, in the programme notes for each production this year, to point out the Beecham connection and his own detective work on Sullivan's, Puccini's and now Bizet's scores. Unfortunately his academic discoveries do not — as, for example, is the case with Carlos Kleiber's work on Puccini and Weber — yield musical results. Rhythmic unity is essential to Carmen; there was precious little in this performance, and it was certainly not due to any failing on the orchestra's part, who played honestly and accurately.

Given the basic weaknesses of the tempi and rhythm, there was, however, much to admire in the work of individual singers — most notably, Judith Henley's Micaela. The sound as well-focused, expansive, true and the tone quite beautiful; if this is a sample of Ms Henley at her best, her Rosina will be worth going a long way to hear. Moreover, her characterisation made the role much more interesting than the somewhat pallid and two-dimensional figure we are often given.

Rachel Gettler's Carmen was strong, sensuous and mostly well — if not excitingly — sung. The director's idea of having her lying languorously on her back for some of her solos was a neat and effective suggestion of the voluptuous yet narcissistic aspect of the character. And, even though it may sound odd, I must confess that for some reason beyond me, Ms Gettler's tone sounded warmer and truer in the supine position.

Jerald Norman's Don Jose certainly looked the part — tall, dashing and handsome. But the relationship with Carmen really only caught fire in the final act.
Earlier, the electricity seemed to be lacking, and Mr Norman a little uncomfortable. And the voice, though strong and ringing, lacked colour and contrast; it was as if this Don Jose had scaled all his vocal peaks by the end of Act 1.

There were good cameos from David Brennan, Keith Hempton and William Balmford, and an Escamillo from James Christiansen which was a great disappointment after his Marcello; he seemed ill at ease vocally and with the character.

Tito Capobianco’s production had good moments, especially the final act, and the early exchanges between Carmen and the soldiers. But the fluency and dynamism which the music requires the characters to capture seemed hampered and restricted by Hugh Colman’s design.

Finally, if I might be allowed a musicalological query: Mr Vaughan sets much store by fidelity to the composer’s “original intentions”. Yet nowhere does he indicate why he chose to do the recitative instead of the spoken dialogue — a far more fundamental and problematic point than any of the minute details he chose to draw attention to in his notes. Trees catching the eye instead of the wood?

INTO THE FUTURE
A week-long workshop in August organised by the Victorian College of the Arts School of Dance brought together young choreographers and composers and produced an astonishing variety of results. Thirty-eight dancers from the school volunteered to spend a week of their holidays as "instruments" of the choreographers' inspiration — and often contributed creativity as well as performing skill to the short works that were prepared each day.

A lottery system matched different dancers, choreographers and composers daily. You might get one dancer or four to work with, a sitar player or a clarinettist, a classically inclined choreographer or one experimenting in a minimalist style.

Only one of the choreographers came from the school. The others were from the Adelaide College of Arts and Education, the Australian Ballet School, Melbourne State College, Rusden State College, Adelaide's Centre for the Performing Arts and dance groups in Tasmania, Victoria and New Zealand.

While most of them were at the embryonic stage, they were remarkable for their flexibility, originality and capability in tackling the exercises put to them by moving their dancers in pleasing and interesting ways. It was a most encouraging look at Australia's dance future.

THE OTHER MARTHA
One of the planners and participants in the VCA Dance School's workshop for choreographers and composers was Martha Hill — "the other Martha", as she is often referred to in order to distinguish her from Martha Graham, with whom she danced from 1929 to 1931.

At an age when most people have gratefully flopped into retirement, Martha Hill continues to power the Juilliard School's dance division in New York. She was its founding director in 1951, and her influence on dance continues to spread around the world through the pupils who go through its intelligent and practical course.

In Australia, they include Nanette Hassall (performer and choreographer with Dance Exchange, now teaching in Melbourne) and Carole Johnson, director of the dance section of the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme.

Martha Hill first came to Australia in 1976 to take part in the Armidale choreographic school from which Graeme Murphy emerged so excitingly. She was delighted then by the dance standard she saw and confident of its potential. Five years later, she is even more enthusiastic.

"Australia is the new frontier for dance in the Western World," she said in Melbourne last August. "Viewing it from New York, we have already seen wonderful dancers from Australia and this year we had the triumph of Graeme Murphy's company. Now, being in Australia and looking at what is going on here... the renaissance of the arts in Melbourne... I can speak directly about the School of Dance which, under the direction of Anne Woolliams and Jan Stripling, is phenomenal in quality, freshness of approach and breadth.

"They are training dancers who can go anywhere in the world. But what is more important is that these dancers — who could get into many companies in the United States — are deciding they are going to make their professional life here in Australia. If I were young, I would beg Australia to let me come and stay. To work.

"We in the US are related to Australians in that we have many of the same racial heritages, but the Australian mix is different. There is a special quality in the arts here that must be preserved, particularly since we have such easy communication across the world. I am happy to see the arts "speaking Australian" and want it to stay that way."

SEPTUAGENARIAN FIREBALL
Another fireball septuagenarian swept through Australia's dance world in August: Joan Lawson, of the Royal Ballet School in London. Her studies with Margaret Morris and Astafieva in London, followed by instruction in Leningrad and Moscow, gave her both a lifelong dance background and a store of anecdotes which she tells with informative vigour.

While she came to Australia at the invitation of the Australian Ballet School, Joan Lawson did not confine herself to its pupils. She saw young dancers from big and small schools in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide, and was generally impressed by the standard.

Only one thing consistently worried her; the point work. It was either up or down, she said, demonstrating a flat foot stiffly hoisted to a 90 degree angle. Looking for the source of the problem, she went to the point shoes that are made and used in Australia, and found them constructed quite differently from those in Europe: stronger and longer lasting maybe, but much less flexible. So concerned was she by the situation that she is taking the problem back to England with her to discuss it with colleagues there.

MARTYN JONES REAPPOINTED
Marilyn Jones, the first artistic director of the Australian Ballet to have come up through the company, has been reappointed for two years. This will take her to the end of 1983 and add up to five years in the job.

TRIALS OF KINETIKOS
The five dancers who make up Kinetikos Dance Theatre, Perth's contemporary dance group, are working hard in reduced circumstances this year to maintain their performance output.

All members of the group earn their living teaching with Terri Charlesworth's Graduate College of Dance, and until late last year Graduate College support and administrative back-up made possible a regular program of Friday and Saturday evening soirees in the Graduate College's recycled church hall premises.

Australia Council Theatre Board funding during 1980 and again this year brought Australian choreographer Jacqui Carroll to Perth to work with Kinetikos. The group has also been running a metropolitan schools performance program. This year they received a small grant from the WA Arts Council which covers the costs of organising and choreographing a schools program but does not include provision for costumes or salaries.

For the rest of 1981, the problem is to
find a performance venue to call home. They are trying out two-night stands at Churchlands College, at the University of Western Australia's Octagon Theatre, and in the main hall of the Perth Institute of Film and Television at Fremantle. They have great hopes of Fremantle where the Education Centre's new and successful Winter Theatre productions have been attracting lively, young audiences and where the dance group may have the chance later this year to work in association with drama.

ONE EXTRA WIN
Rhys Martin, a former member of Sydney's One Extra Dance Theatre has won a choreographic competition in Cologne, West Germany, in a contest between 28 entrants, many of them internationally experienced, from eight countries. He danced in the ballet with two One Extra colleagues who have been working in England, Caroline Lung and Lloyd Newson.

Meanwhile, back in Sydney, One Extra Dance Theatre's artistic director, Kai Tai Chan, is gearing up for a workshop season to be held at the Cleveland Street Performing Space in October. A revised version of Family Portrait, an expanded Eggs on Toast and a new dance work will make up the program with an experimental piece being devised by Kai Tai Chan, designer Silvia Jansons and lighting expert Kevin McKie. In 1982, the group will reform on its original basis of a permanent core of six dancers with the aim of keeping them in work for 30 weeks of a year.
by Jill Sykes

The success of the Australian Ballet's latest venture in original three-act ballets can only gauged by what is seen on stage, and The Hunchback of Notre Dame doesn't get its first airing until the 14th of this month, with a season in Sydney to follow from the end of November.

But if teamwork, effort, craftsmanship and planning count for anything, it should be a tautly constructed dance dramatisation with exciting visual and aural appeal. Victor Hugo's classic novel has been compressed by the stage director George Ogilvie to a scenario that encapsulates the themes of love, lust, ugliness and beauty in the original. It has been designed by Kristian Fredrikson with not only his usual flair for dressing the rich, but also his ability to enhance the individuality of every character on stage — every detail down to the leather mouthpiece for the epileptic beggar has been planned.

Music by Bartók has been selected by the Australian Ballet's music director, Dobbs Franks, and shaped with minimum interference to the original. While all these preparations were going on, the ballet's choreographer, Bruce Wells, was waiting in the wings. A young American who is resident choreographer of the Boston Ballet, he spent a week in Australia in January batting ideas around with the three other principal members of the creative team. In March, Ogilvie went to him for a second consultation, and many a communication was sent across the Pacific in between.

It wasn't until August that Wells finally saw the AB dancers, measured their abilities and began work on the choreographic expression of all the other aspects of the production — the one by which it will ultimately be judged. A preview of his unfinished efforts suggests that he won't fail them in the area of craftsmanship, though he may not crown their achievements with peaks of choreographic inspiration. Only time and the finished product can tell.

Certainly The Hunchback of Notre Dame has come a long way since its inauspicious beginning a year ago. Subscribers may recall being invited to pay up for a 1981 program which included this work choreographed by Peter Darrell: "NOW a few full-length ballet spectacular". The capitalised "now" proved to be premature. Darrell, who is Artistic Director of the Scottish Ballet, pulled out of the project and another choreographer had to be found for the non-existent but heavily promoted product.

Wells had been spotted in Peking when two AB executives went to see his version of La Fille Mal Gardee while the Australian company was on tour in China last year. He was later invited to submit ideas on the Hunchback project, and did so. But he heard nothing until he had a summons in the middle of the Boston Ballet's Christmas season, in which he was dancing the Cavalier in The Nutcracker. He couldn't get here until the AB had dispersed on holiday, but he got the job nonetheless.

"The dancers here have a level of maturity to accept a challenge. I have never worked as a choreographer with a company as developed as this," says Wells, a former soloist with the New York City Ballet. "At the Boston Ballet, I don't have dancers of the level of Kelvin Coe, or with the maturity and training of the Kozlovs. And that is affecting my interpretation."

The principal dancers involved in creating the main roles, at least two to each one, are Michela Kirkaldie and Valentina Kozlova as Esmeralda; Paul de Masson and David Burch, Quasimodo; Kelvin Coe and Gary Norman, Frollo; Dale Baker and Leonid Kozlov, Phoebus; Lynette Mann, Joanne Michel and Terese Power, Fleur.

Wells danced out his own choreography as he worked, going into each session with an idea of what he wanted as a whole but with no specific dance phrases in mind. "I go in and just start moving," he says of his choreographic approach. "I find I have a physical response to what I am doing; I feel when I have done enough of one thing and need to go on to the next thing. I could dance it all out first in my bedroom, but I find I have a stronger physical response to myself in the studio. And it's much faster working that way."

Bartok's music being neither oompah-pah or pom-tiddley-pom, Wells wrote out a complete exercise book of counts before he began. Every musical phrase in the score was there, and each choreographic phrase grew out of it with the help of the AB's principal pianist Wendy Pomroy at the piano and the tape recorder controls.
It's an exciting selection of music which was chosen after Dobbs Franks had flirted with the idea of a French composer, trying everyone from Massenet to Messiaen, and then turning to the Russian romance of Rachmaninoff. Once he'd thought of Bartók, he couldn't imagine why he hadn't chosen him in the first place: "I don't think there is any composer who has more of a feeling of dance. As a producer, George breathed heavily when he heard it; as a choreographer, Bruce could hardly stay in his seat; as a musician, I was in orbit."

"There is a great deal of humour in Bartók, but all of it has a slightly bizarre edge to it. It's never hahaha; it always has an element of tragedy, which is perfect for the ballet. We have made a point of never using less than a movement or, in the case of the excerpts from *The Wooden Prince*, a complete section. I have had to orchestrate only one piece and write one bridging section. It is phenomenal how it has all come together. Mind you, we listened to a trillion hours of Bartók."

The jigsaw score is made up from movements and sections of the *Concerto for Orchestra*, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*, *Dance Suite*, *Suite No 1*, *Divertimento for Strings*, *String Quartet No 4*, *Contrasts* and *The Wooden Prince*, one of the two ballets that Bartók wrote. And nearly all of them needed to be written down to a coherent piano version for rehearsal — a mammoth task in itself.

"We decided against a leitmotif, as it has been done to death. Instead, we tried for a continuity of mood and dramatic entity, as dictated by the music. I think the sound you will associate with Esmeralda, for example, is the clarinet: it is often the featured instrument when she is dancing. All we had to do was to try not to use any main clarinet expositions for anyone else."

George Ogilvie is keen to give Victor Hugo his due as the starting point of the whole operation: "As I read the novel, I could take out a lot of it and actually mime to it. So when I had to translate that into dance terms, it came very quickly. Then it was interesting to see how the design developed and built the script. And after that, it was so exciting to see Bruce work — to see months of chat coming out on the floor, to my mind everything we have ever talked about."

Ogilvie is, of course, best known for his productions of straight theatre and of opera. But he worked with Dame Peggy van Praagh two years ago on the AB's new production of *Coppelia*, making use of his mime training, though, ironically, that was done in Paris with Jacques le Coq at a time when he believed only in searching for Truth through realism and wouldn't let a dancer into his studio.

"Hunchback really could not have happened without the experience of *Coppelia*. Before that, I was scared that the language of ballet might defeat me. And I would only take on a story ballet, in which I feel I might be of some use. What I find so helpful is that the dancers know how I work and come up to me to discuss their characters. It is just such a fascinating process..."

As preparations continued in the AB's Melbourne headquarters, it was hard to know who was most excited. Even quiet Kris Fredrikson was quite voluble about his commission to design and supervise the making of nearly 200 costumes of the medieval period, an unusual time for a ballet to be set. He is determined that *Hunchback* should not be just another ballet extravaganza to delight the eye, and hopes that he has done his bit towards making the participants seem like real people, rich and poor, sad and happy, good and bad. "We are hoping to create a real society and not just a ballet society."

With all these hopes ahead of them, it was no wonder Bruce Wells couldn't resist a topical gesture for support when he visited the Cathedral of Notre Dame for the first time earlier this year. He lit four candles in the names of Franks, Fredrikson, Ogilvie and Wells.
A Taste of the Big Apple for Perth

by Terry Owen

The West Australian Ballet Company brought a rare taste of New York to Perth audiences in August.

The company's spring season of four works at His Majesty's Theatre included George Balanchine's Allegro Brillante, and a pas de deux by ex-New York City Ballet dancer John Clifford, now heading the Los Angeles Ballet.

The costs of presenting Allegro Brillante — and these included two American guest artists, and rehearsals in Perth with Victoria Simon, one of Balanchine's four assistants — were met by a Texas organisation, Criterion Foundation Inc., a non-profit body which spends some of its money on making sure that American dance is seen outside the US.

Guest artists Johnna Kirkland and Clark Tippet did the Foundation's work very nicely, thank you. Ms Kirkland, who was a guest with the WA Ballet Company last year in their revival of KAL, is principal ballerina with the Los Angeles Ballet. She trained at the New York City Ballet's School of American Ballet, and has danced in many Balanchine works.

Clark Tippet is a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre, the New York-based company which has built a powerful reputation and an enormous audience with a repertoire that includes all the dance classics and major modern works, and a policy of starring world-famous guests. Mr Tippet has danced leading roles right across the repertoire, and is a beautiful partner.

Ms Kirkland was all dreamlike, boneless grace in the Clifford pas de deux which pays homage to the great Russian Imperial Theatre classical tradition. Clark Tippet's powerfully calm stage presence and athletic bulk were a marvellous foil for his ethereal partner.

There was more homage to the Imperial tradition in Balanchine's lovely Allegro Brillante, danced to the Tchaikovsky 3rd Piano Concerto. Artistic Director Garth Welch and Victoria Simon as visiting teacher schooled the company hard to meet the combination of speed and elegant classicism that is Balanchine's trademark. There were awkward moments, and some sloppy footwork, but the guest principals pulled the work together and delivered the big moments of this pure dance piece with a classy assurance we rarely see in Perth.

The programme's opening work, Family, is a commissioned piece for six dancers by Australian Dance Theatre dancer-choreographer Joseph Scoglio, set to one of Beethoven's late spring quartets.

It seemed to me a risky business using such sublime music to underwrite a dance essay on family relationships, but after a close-to-banal opening sequence the work developed its own dramatically satisfying momentum.

Scoglio used the generous stage of His Majesty's fully in sequences of partnered solo dancing full of the supple, sinuous energy on the ground and in the air that characterises his modern dance vocabulary.

It was good to see a classically strong performer like Timothy Storey enjoying the chance to work in a different dance medium.

Jacquie Murphy, also new to the company this year, has the long, powerful line and speed to suit Scoglio's choreography. She will hopefully do the role of the mother greater justice when she learns to project through the steps and the technique to the meaning of what she is dancing.

The full company was used for The Tempest, Garth Welch's well crafted piece which whipped through a synopsis of Shakespeare's play at a fast clip. Produced for a secondary schools programme earlier this year, the work has lots of energy and appeal. The costume design and John Williams' music are reminders of how much we all enjoyed Star Wars.

The choreography was a lively, sharp-edged line which Michele Ryan and Geoffrey Rayner in particular handled well. A bit more stagecraft and theatrical wit all round would put a polish to the piece's high energy level.

Like most triple bills, this spring programme worked the small company of 12 dancers fairly hard across an interesting diversity of dance styles. The result was an exciting and satisfying mix, with successful new works by Australian choreographers, good company dancing, and the heady thrill of seeing internationally acclaimed guest stars live up to their reputations.

The success the company had with its 6.30pm start family performances of Peter Pan last May encouraged them to repeat the idea. This time they varied the programme for the family audiences, giving them Peter and the Wolf and Charles Czarny's agreeable Sunny Day, as well as the Balanchine ballet and the pas de deux.

Appealing to the whole family as the basic audience unit for dance in Western Australia is an ongoing strategy for the company, which will be presenting a new Garth Welch production of Cinderella at His Majesty's in November.

Johnna Kirkland and Clark Tippet in Balanchine's Allegro Brillante.
Poppy — a testament of Murphy

by Bill Shoubridge

Having returned from their USA tour, full of the approbation, sanction and bewilderment of American audiences and critics and before setting off for seasons at Sadlers Wells and the Hong Kong Festival (government pittance from the Australia Council permitting), the Sydney Dance Company managed somehow to get the Regent Theatre for a return season of Murphy's Poppy.

They have shown that a local company need have no fear of the huge (2000 seat) capacity of the place and that Sydney audiences (pushed no doubt by the knowledge that the company is a hit in the Big Apple) have grown alarmingly, due to the SDC's self confidence.

The Company will also be taking the new Poppy on its next tour (one of their dearest wishes is to let France see it) and presumably will return even more flushed with success from that venture.

Once upon a time, three years ago to be exact, Poppy was a watermark. It represented not only the first attempt to make a full length ballet by an Australian choreographer, composer and designers, but the first real attempt by a so called "regional" company to do it on their own.

Bill Pengelly and Graeme Murphy in the Puppet Tango in Poppy. Photo: Branco Gaica.

Jean Cocteau stands more securely at the centre of his universe than he did formerly and there is a more substantial whiff of that Cocteauesque poetry that Genet described as a mingling of "incense and formaldehyde".

Much as been made in publicity about the changes in choreography and score and how Kristian Fredrickson revised the costume designs, but the structure of the piece remains basically as it was and for me, this is why the ballet as a whole remains unsatisfying, though at the same time as exhilarating and aggravating as it always was.

Act 1, describing the experiences and incidents that shaped Cocteau up until the death of his lover, Raymond Radiguet, still darts about, but now, with a keener cutting edge to parts of it (the Paris Salon scene for example) seems more pernickety than ever. Murphy still lifts us up on his shoulders to have a peek over the wall at a moment in Cocteau's formative years but then gets tired and drags us on to the next "significant step".

Act 2 with its first dazzling flash of light, urinating electronic noises and endlessly shuffling guardian nurse throws us uncercenomiously into the luminescent maestrom of Cocteau's mind, madness and poetic universe. From here on in one follows an ever changing panorama of character, choreography and effect, so different from the jagged, jittery structure of Act 1.

It has many difficulties for a viewer not familiar with anything of Cocteau, difficulties different in kind and manner from those previously. There is no differentiation in costume for the various "icons" of Cocteau's creativity; Orpheus and Euridice
are initially unrecognisable from Merlin and Guinivere. This I suppose could be put down to the "Mr Sheen" job that Frederickson has done with the set and costumes, but they always were terribly bland and ineffectual theatrically, and still remain so.

It rankles more that the wilful and rich drama of Act 2 we used to see has disappeared. Murphy has tried to blend and ratify what was there before, but somehow he's merely emulsified and homogenised it. What manages to save it, however, is the basic choreography; it has changed and for the better. It is practically the only element that has differentiation, and it has it in purely "movement" terms. Hitherto we have seen Murphy's "testament" in terms of his theatricality, his affection for the exotic, perverse and untried, his awareness of the flickering changes between farce, lyricism and the black underbelly of life and a sense of the implacability of Fate and evanescence of existence. What we now discover is his "testament" in terms of his own principal means of expression, the mathematics and vocabulary of its form. These wonderful communicative moments of dance come spinning out of a steadily treading theme — nothing exists to be beautiful in its own right, it exists only to expand the general horizon and deepen the perspective.

What makes it sometimes difficult to fathom and follow is Murphy's occasional inability to clarify and compress sometimes intractable material and tie it together.

Take the moment towards the end of the ballet when down comes the front scrim and short, tantalising excerpts from Orphee, Testament du Orphee and Beauty and the Beast are shown. In the earlier version, these were shown simultaneously on three huge screens at the back of the stage and they blended into an enthralling kaleidoscope of motion and sound. Now (whether by design or by the limits of the Regent Theatre stage) they come between the audience and the ballet.

*Poppy* is a work I love seeing and love arguing about, but I wish there could be more of Cocteau in it. But these are "impressions of Jean Cocteau" and Graeme Murphy's impressions at that, so, as it is so it will remain.

The chorus of alleluias in the press both here and in America has been long and loud about *Poppy*. I, having a resistance to the conception and form, am just like the teetotal aunt at the cocktail party.

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**ACT**

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*Nina Veretennikova, Carl Morrow and Graeme Murphy in Poppy. Photo: Branco Gaica.*
Heady musical excitement

by Fred Blanks

If all of Mozart's surviving music were played end-to-end, it would take just under eight and a half days to get through it. With Haydn, you would be listening for just over 14 days — but then, he lived a lot longer. Handel's music would take 12 and a half days, and for some other famous composers the durations are as follows: Schubert five and a half days, Bach nearly seven and a half days, Beethoven almost exactly five days, Purcell just a few hours less, and Dvorak three and a quarter days.

These figures come from a study which I undertook a few years ago and which became the source of articles published here and in England. The subject was the diligence of famous composers. Let us take the investigation a little further.

If you consider the actual life-span of the composers, and also the number of years during which they actually composed music, and then divide the hours of music composed by the life-years and the composing-years, you arrive at a direct comparison of their legacy of effective work. There are snags in the calculations (for example, much music is out of print, and one has to time it by making estimates or comparing it to similar available pieces) but even so the results are fascinating. This is not the place for listing them all, but let me quote my own conclusions from one of the previously published studies:

The most frequently performed composers wrote, on average, just 114 minutes of music for every year of their lives, and 174 minutes for every year of their composing activity. On a basis of total life span, the most diligent composers were Mozart, Haydn, Schubert and Handel; they were the only ones to write more than four hours of music for every year of their lives. On the basis of composing years, the productivity prizes go to Schubert, Purcell, Mozart and Haydn with over six hours of music for each active year.

Kurt Sanderling conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.
One could almost think that the first three of these composers had a premonition of early death, and compensated with a hectic working pace. Some composers, like Chopin, Debussy and especially Ravel, built a reputation on a remarkably slender output of less than an hour of music — in the case of Ravel, less than half-an-hour — per year of his life. By and large, composers worked harder in Vienna than in Paris.

It appears, therefore, that composing less than a couple of hours of music per year — call it half-a-minute's music per day — will not impair your chances of being remembered as a great composer. If the quality is right!

So much for hard-working composers.

Changing direction, let us look at some of the hard work by performers during August, a month in which many of the leading indigenous groups materialised on concert platforms. Most of them brought forthworks that must be regarded, except for a smudged note here and there, as definitive.

Both these artists came from the ABC stable. Two further examples of musical memorability came from Musica Viva. The Quartetto Beethoven Di Roma tapped into a cycle of part-songs which David Bollard and David Stanhope revelled their way through a fantasy by Percy Grainger on themes from Gershwin's Porgy And Bess.

A populous parade of imported musicians was audible during the month. Two large and youthful assemblies gave Conservatorium concerts on their way home from the Fifth Australian Youth Music Festival in Melbourne — the 96-member Youth Orchestra of Greater Philadelphia with forthright fortissimos in works by Rimsky-Korsakov and Dello Joio, and the 46-member Hong Kong Jing Ying Chamber Orchestra which was conspicuously careful with Western music by Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Delius but genuinely exciting in oriental works by Doming Lam and Tong Leung-Tak.

But the five most heady musical excitement I have left until last, and had they been played end-to-end, they would fortunately have taken up a goodly proportion of available music-time.

East German conductor Kurt Sandering mesmerised the Sydney Symphony Orchestra into playing of a spirit and precision that they do not often make available for other conductors; his performance of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique had all the broad and persuasive sincerity that one would expect from a conductor who had a long association with orchestras in Moscow and Leningrad. With him we heard Cuban-born pianist Jorge Bolet, who can apply something like a hundred kilos of piano power to the keyboard, and did so to exciting effect in the two piano concertos of Liszt; these performances that must be regarded, except for a smudged note here and there, as definitive.

The Leonine Consort, appearing for Musica Viva in the Heritage Series centred in the NSW Art Gallery, introduced The Company of Lovers, a cycle of part-songs in which David Matthews, a young English composer who has spent some time here and who treats voices sympathetically with an idiom that reminds you of his studies with Benjamin Britten, sets Australian poems by Judith Wright and David Campbell. The Synergy Percussion ensemble of leading bangers from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, also had a gallery venue when the Seymour Group presented them in the S H Ervin Gallery of the National Trust on Observatory Hill. There they produced virtually every conceivable pitched and unpitched percussive noise in four works that showed how much contrast is available to their medium — a melodic and vaguely oriental sonata with piano by Peggy Glanville — Hicks, Hydra by Gerard Brophy, How The Stars Were Made by Peter Sculthorpe (recovering from a serious car accident) and the Percussion Quartet by Colin Bright. All four composers were present to face the music.

The University of NSW Ensemble, now led by violinist Geoffrey Michaels in place of John Harding who must devote most time to the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Sydney String Quartet, played Vox Balaenae (The Voice Of The Whale) by the American avant-gardist George Crumb, who does for the cetaceous breed more or less what Messiaen did for birds, namely allow his fantasy to run rings around the sounds he imagines them making. In the case of the crumpled whale, the transfiguration is for flute, cello and piano.

Then there was the Mittagong Trio (violinist John Harding, cellist Nathan Waks, pianist John Winther) with Musica Viva recitals in the Seymour Centre; their finest playing was reserved for the dramatic Opus 50 trio of Tchaikovsky. Nothing new from them, nor from a group of ancient instrument and music amateurs called Castle Consort appearing for Alliance Francaise. But an unusual facet of novelty came in a two-piano recital in which David Bolland and David Stanhope revealed their way through a fantasy by Percy Grainger on themes from Gershwin's Porgy And Bess.

The New Swingle Singers, incredible acrobats of the voice, slick in presentation and mercurial in musical responses.

Finally, there was a chance of hearing a Stradivarius violin, allegedly once played by Paganini himself, when Miha Pogacnik, born in Yugoslavia but largely American-trained, performed solo sonatas by Bach and Bartok. Though not yet quite equal to the grandeur of the Chaconne, he has the front-line of the violin brigade firmly within his sights.
The quotidian raised to the metaphysical

by John McCallum


Barry Humphries’ comic monologues are closely linked with his own performance of them. At least in the short term, the main appeal of A Nice Night’s Entertainment will be for his enthusiastic audiences to relive their favourite moments — hearing again in imagination the ringing tones of Dame Edna, the meanderings of Sandy Stone, and the whole host of characters through which Humphries has recorded and commented on the Australian scene. When occasionally you come upon a sketch which you have not heard, the effect is suddenly rather flat. Without the nuances of Humphries’ comic delivery the monologues can easily be read as rather straightforward, nostalgic lists of the minutiae of Australian social life.

If the book is to have the lasting value which its presentation suggests the publishers expect, then it is fair to look for other qualities. One of the traditional tests of a published theatrical script is, is it playable, by other performers? Humphries is a great performer, there can be no doubt. One of the chief interests in this book, however, must be his quality as a writer of material which others may one day perform.

The pleasant surprise which this book offers, then, is that many of the pieces read as much more than a simple record of a great theatrical artist’s material. Many of them, of course, are specifically related to their original performance. Some are in fact rather obscure to read. The early Sandy Stone scripts, and those for characters such as Buster Thompson (a “loutish ex-public school boy”), Rex Lear (“ventripotent”), Neil Singleton (a pretentiously left-wing “intellectual”) and Big Sonia (a “masculine” woman folksinger) rely very heavily on the accuracy of their original social observation. It is alarmingly easy to read whole sketches without at first realising the number of gags in them. This is the trouble with satirical material where the laughs depend on recognition of the objects of satire. Like all satire it is transient. Once people forget what Harpic is, a whole dimension will be lost.

There have been comparisons drawn between Humphries and the early Buzo — in that both have a wonderful eye for the minutiae of Australian suburban life, though Buzo’s observations serve a more universal artistic purpose. With some of the scripts in this book Humphries demonstrates the same. In particular the later Sandy Stone sketches (ironically, after he “died”) show a mature comic vision which transcends the feeling that some of the earlier sketches were written simply to prove that Humphries is extraordinarily conversant with the trivialities of Australian social life. “Sandy Stone (you can’t win the Lucky Spot all your life)” and “Sandy and the Sandman” are something much finer. The worthiest tribute I can pay is to quote it:

“I'm a firm believer that we're all given a little warning we're going to cash in our chips just to give us a chance to rustle up a little speech for posterity. That's how I know for certain that what I had just then — that shocker — was nothing more or less than tantamount to being a nasty dream. A dream! I mean, if, for argument's sake, I'd been awake and I really had dropped off the twig, cashed in my chips, kicked off, pegged out, found the road too weary and the hill too steep to climb, fallen asleep in the arms of the Almighty, let the matter drop, or been gathered — if I'd been gathered my last words would have been ridiculous. My last words would have been a lot of twaddle and a lot of hou-ha.

My last words would have been:

"Only half a pint today please Milko. Money under brick. P.S. Nothing tomorrow."

This capacity to raise the quotidian to the level of the metaphysical is what makes Chekhov, Beckett, Grass and divers other 20th century chroniclers great. Humphries is up there with them only in isolated moments, but considering that he has to perform the material himself this is an extraordinary achievement.
ACROSS:
1. Dad’s attempt to make a crust? (6)
4. Strange gel I fire with fine jewellery (8)
10. Lozenge much needed for nous? (5,4)
11. Lazy, we hear, doesn’t have... (5)
12. ... violence — or not in anger (7)
13. Sort of clothes for going o/s? (7)
14. Helpers caught in air raid escaped later (5)
15. Show drunken Vince a gin sling (8)
18. “For, as I am a man solidus I think this child to be my lady” (King Lear) (8)
20. Correct the journalist who hangs around males (5)
23. How to demean give revolutionary a cage (7)
25. Trespass at home with a model? Offensive! (5)
26. Characteristic of artist to enfold himself in a bird (5)
27. Month-old baby? (2,7)
28. Usually find one character behind a number at the edge of the heath (8)
29. Agree to a rise, it’s said (6)

DOWN:
1. Sort of muscle needed to distribute late crop successfully (8)
2. Knock out Edward for not measuring up (7)
3. Gave practice runs with vehicle for the last ride decked in colour (9)
5. Embellishments on Mans’s 1 portion (14)
6. Admit a small bay? (5)
7. Trouble caused by dog backing into stranger (7)
8. Oriental flower shows at this time of year (6)
9. Player rehabilitates meagre bundle with two quid (6,8)
16. Varied reactions about the works of his hands (9)
17. Supporter of publicity in this place up north (8)
19. Style of ball delivery finished weapon (7)
21. Copy a bird (deceased) (7)
22. Vinegary expert on twitch (6)
24. See father and Spanish uncle in the courtyard.

SOLUTION No. 34

The first correct entry drawn on October 25 will receive one year’s free subscription to TA.
The winner of the last crossword was Mr Colin Copnell of Potts Point, NSW.
Ron Blair's
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IN
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