Culture in Sydney's west? Parramatta's Cultural Centre, corner of Church and Market Streets, is set to prove that life doesn't stop at Annandale. At present, however, the diet is staple stuff: Leonard Taite stars in The Mon (sic) Who Made Australia, and June Bronhill stars in a musical comedy version of The Sentimental Bloke. (Perhaps Wogs Out Of Work could make a trip west?) There are sizeable discounts for groups of ten or more.

'Don't miss il 'cause wogs do it better'' runs 'Whistling in the theatre' is the guest company at the Anthill Theatre, South Melbourne, producing Ship of Fools from March 23 to April 9. Written by Australian Andrew Bovell and directed by Robert Draffin, the play takes up the medieval practice of locking the 'criminally insane' on ships and casting them adrift without a destination. The status of the secondary labour force is the contemporary parallel. 'Whistling in the Theatre' is fresh from the Adelaide Fringe Festival and sports a highly talented but largely untested crew.

The Hermitage Museum in Moscow is almost empty, according to its curator. You can see part of the reason why at the exhibition Masterpieces From The Hermitage is showing until May 1. Other attractions include The Artist and the Patron: Aspects of Colonial Art in NSW (also till May 1) and the second annual Moet et Chandon tour for bubbling young artists, until May 13. Hours are Mon-Sat 10-5, Sun 12-5. There is no entry fee.

Sometimes a beer just can't quench a thirst. When you're at the pub with friends and you don't feel like alcohol, a good one is bitters, lime and soda, which is the same price as a beer and very refreshing.

In the tangled undergrowth of wine snobbery, much the most dangerous creepy-crawly for the idle passerby is the obsession with what is known as 'boutique' wines — wines from small, serious minded wineries where exclusivity, rather than consistency, is the key. But for the wine drinker on a budget it's the big company wines which promise the best quality at an affordable price. The ultimate "boutique" rhine riesling is Petaluma's at $13 or so; Toljana's 1983 ($6) is a very different but comparable quality wine. Most boutique chardonnays sell for between $15 and $18 (Leeuwin Estate's for $25), but Wynn's 1985 Coonawarra or Rothbury's 1987 Hunter or Cowra Chardonnays are two different styles of a high quality for around $10. Lindemans (newish) and McWilliams (oldish) Hunter semillons are decidedly more complex wines at the right age (McWilliams now, Lindemans after a few years) than the currently vogueish Sauvignon Blancs and Fume Blancs (the latter an increasingly slippery title). Yet, the former sell for $6 to $8; the latter, $12 or more. Among the more fashionable red styles, Sippel's Black Label 1985 Cabernet Sauvignon ($8 or less on special) is at least as interesting as Coldstream Hill's (despite its dinky label) at $16 plus. And while Pinot Noir grapes might make marvellous red in Burgundy, in Australia they tend to make fabulously overpriced upmarket Beaujolais. A lighter bodied shiraz (such as Lindemans 1983 Hunter River Burgundy at $7 or so) is a much better deal.

FREEBIES: The Valhalla Cinema in Glebe Pl Rd, Glebe, is Sydney's best known venue for repertory films. And ALR has five double tickets to give away to the opening of the Valhalla's exclusive season of The Legend Of The Suram Fortress, opening on April 30. Compared by the NY Daily News to Kurosawa's Ran, and described by the Village Voice as a 'Soviet Caravaggio', The Legend is a 'delicious mixture of gravity and humour ... unique and inimitable' (Time Out) and 'pure joy' (London Guardian). All you have to do is one of the first five people to ring ALR on 281 2899 after 10 on Friday, April 15.