

ON STAGE

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A nice little theatre in the centre of town

Described by John Sumner as 'a nice little theatre in the centre of town' **Frank Van Straten** explores the surprising story of the Russell Street Theatre.

After nearly four decades of theatrical history, the Russell Street Theatre stands derelict and forgotten, a stone's throw from the contemporary exuberances of the new Federation Square.

The site at 19–25 Russell Street occupies 594m² with a frontage of 16.6m. Its early history is yet to be documented. There certainly was a building there in the 1880s, with a ground floor built of stone and a second storey of iron. The present building was used as a warehouse or factory in the early years of the 20th century.

In 1922 the building was purchased by the Australian Church, which had been founded in Melbourne in 1885 by the Scottish-born religious reformer the Reverend Dr Charles Strong. From 1887 the church had occupied large leased premises at 22 Flinders Street, but by 1920 these were too big for its dwindling congregation and the rent was far more than they could afford.

It held its last service there on 30 May 1920.

From June 1920 until June 1922 the church leased the Playhouse Theatre for its Sunday services. The Playhouse,

later renamed the Garrick, was in South Melbourne, just across Princes Bridge (Mirvac's plush Southgate Avenue Quay West apartments now occupies the site).

In 1920 the church had identified the Russell Street building as suitable for conversion, but it was subject of a lease that was not due to expire until 1 January 1922.

Eventually the church purchased the site and the building for £9000 (\$18 000). An appeal was launched for funds to cover its reconstruction and refit, including the relocation of the magnificent Fincham & Hobday organ, the pulpit, the seating and other furnishings from the Flinders Street building.

Though renovations were not complete, the Russell Street Australian Church opened on 18 June 1922. Sadly, it did not flourish. The church was still burdened by debt—£5000 (\$10 000) had been borrowed to facilitate the move—although there was a little extra revenue from occasional lettings of the auditorium and the upstairs conference room. Meanwhile the congregation continued to age and fall away.

In 1927 the old *Morning Post-Herald* building on the corner of Flinders and Russell Streets, and the buildings between it and 19 Russell Street, were demolished



..to make way for Union Theatres' (later Greater Union) vast new State Theatre.

This opened on 23 February 1929.

The Australian Church struggled on. In 1939 Colin Badger, then Director of University Extension at the University of Melbourne, was invited to address the congregation. 'The building I entered,' he recalled, 'seemed to me to be somewhat run down but showed signs of former prosperity and it was commodious.

'There was a large auditorium seating about 400. In what might be called the sanctuary end of the hall there was an elevated platform with several rows of choir stalls. In the middle of the platform was an ornate carved wooden enclosure with seats on either side of a prominent pulpit. Behind this rose the pipes of a large and excellent organ, played by an accomplished organist.

'The congregation was small and elderly. My well advertised presence had not drawn a crowd.'

In the 1940s the front section of the building was let to supplement the church's meagre income. Tenants included Pioneer Tours and Parlor Cars and the Victorian League for the Hard of Hearing.

After Dr Strong's death in 1942 the fortunes of his church declined even further. By 1951 it was obvious that it would have to be dissolved.

By this time Colin Badger was director of the Council of Adult Education.

'I thought immediately about the church's valuable and centrally situated property and resolved to make an effort to secure it as a site for some kind of cultural centre which might at the same time serve as a memorial to Dr Strong,' Badger said.

'I went to see the church authorities and suggested that we should ask the state government to buy the property to be held in trust for use by the CAE as a cultural centre, and that the proceeds from the sale should be put towards a suitable memorial for Dr Strong and the church.

'I stressed the importance of holding the property, so dear to many members of the church, for use as a cultural centre and not to be used for commerce, which I thought Dr Strong himself would have disliked intensely. In 1955 the short-lived Labor administration of the Hon. John Cain Snr was persuaded to buy the property.'

Negotiations had begun in March 1951; they were not concluded until July 1958.

The last service of the Australian Church was held in the Russell Street building on 10 July 1955. The church was finally dissolved in February 1957, the funds realised from the sale of its assets being devoted to the Charles Strong Trust 'for the promotion in Australia of the study of World Religions'.

Perhaps the church was short changed. 'The price paid for the building,' reported the Council of Adult Education's newsletter, 'was well below the true commercial value of the building and site and there were further benefits, since the very fine organ was bought by the University at a low figure and transferred to the new Wilson Hall.'

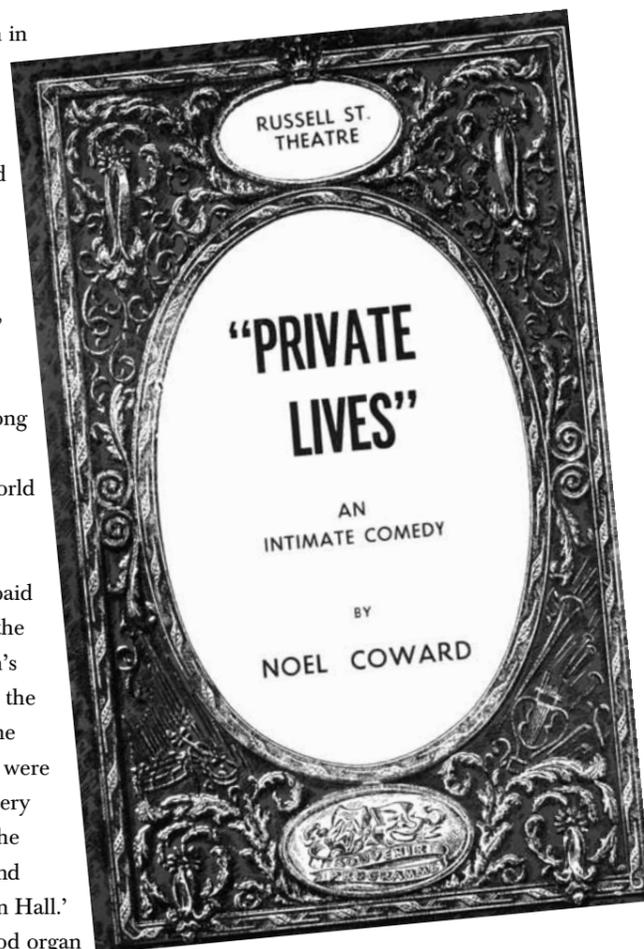
[Its handsome blackwood organ case was moved to Sacred Heart Church, Rathdown Street, Carlton.]

But there was a surprise in store.

'What appeared to be a triumphant forward step did not bring immediate results. Once the organ was removed it was clear that the building would need extensive renovation and repair to make it an effective adult education centre.

'It had originally been hoped that it might serve many purposes, housing the CAE discussion service and providing some office accommodation, but investigation and discussion narrowed the scope to the two essential purposes: one, an auditorium fitted with a stage and stage equipment for which there was a real need in Melbourne, and the other a room suitable for lectures, discussions, conferences, to be used, for the most part, by the growing Adult Education Association.

'Estimates were prepared by the Public Works Department after the most thorough investigation. Hopes of immediate action were doomed when it was revealed that the total cost of reconstruction would be high. The government was heavily under



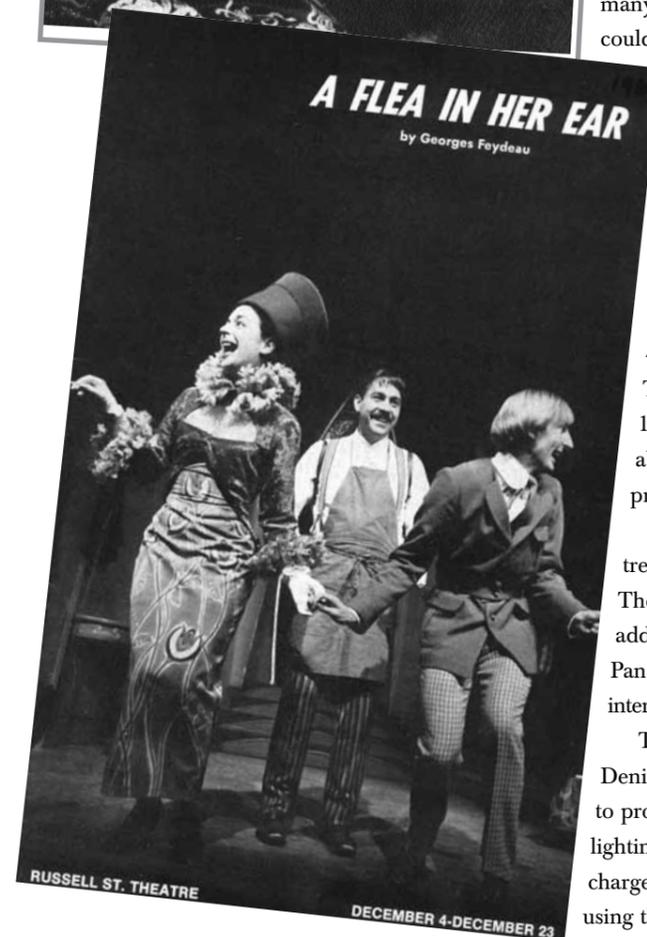
pressure and could not meet the Council's request.

'There followed a long period of waiting and planning, with the building empty and derelict. From 1955 until early 1958 no action was taken.

Finally the Minister of Education was able to gain the support of the government. The estimated cost of the most modest reconstruction was then thought to be approximately £7500 (\$15 000). It was agreed that the Council could proceed, and call for tenders, on condition that it contributed half the cost. The major problem was how to find the money to carry out any kind of conversion. Eventually the cost spiralled to £25 000 (\$50 000).

'With the help of the Adult Education Association of Victoria and the generous support of many amateur dramatic groups, we at last raised almost all our share and the work was put in hand.'

The chief architect for the project was the Public Works Department's Ray Davey, with Norman Gates as supervising architect. The building contractors were W.H. Langdon and Sons. Work finally started in



December 1959.

'I wanted a building that could be used as a theatre,' Colin Badger explained. 'My main concern was for the amateur dramatic societies which were rather worse off in the

metropolitan area than in many country towns. I had no intention whatever of beginning a theatrical company in Melbourne under CAE auspices. That, I thought, would lead to pointless competition with the three repertory theatres in Melbourne at that time; it was our business to assist them in every possible way, not compete with them.

'Yet a CAE theatre, I thought, could serve many desirable educational purposes without impinging on the field of professional theatre.'

It was Badger who named the promising little venue 'The Russell Street Theatre'.

Badger continued: 'While it was not difficult to adapt the auditorium for theatrical purposes, there were many problems. The stage that could be built would be shallow and

there was little wing space [and no flying facilities]. There was no room at all for storage of scenery or drapes; dressing rooms had to be fitted into a narrow area and were inconveniently placed.'

It seated approximately 400 on a gently raked floor. The stage was 6.25m deep by 11m wide with 5.5m height above the stage floor. The proscenium was 7.3m wide.

The rear stage wall was treated for use as a cyclorama. There were three sets of tabs in addition to the house tabs, a Panatope, and cue light and intercommunication systems.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of Denis Irving, Strand Electric agreed to provide an appropriate stage lighting and control system at no charge to the Council when it was using the building.

When outside organisations were in occupancy a normal hire fee applied. In return Strand could present lecture-demonstrations of stage lighting practice for two one-week periods each year.

Finally, on 20 July 1960, the State Lieutenant Governor and Dame Mary Herring attended the gala opening performance at the Russell Street Theatre and Conference Rooms.

The first attraction was a jolly eight-handed English revue called *Look Who's Here!* It was presented by John Sumner's Union Theatre Repertory Company—its first city venture away from its home at the Union Theatre at the University of Melbourne.

Anne Fraser designed, Betty Pounder choreographed and George Oglivie directed; the colourful cast included Joan Harris, Fred Parslow, Bob Hornery and the legendary Mary Hardy.

H.A. Standish was one of the few columnists to bother to mention the new venue. He told *The Herald* readers: 'It was a nice idea to open this cheerfully done-over little theatre with a gay revue. But revues are tricky things, and this one didn't pan out. I came away looking forward to this Company doing a play again.'

Sumner recalled: 'It was most exciting to be in a nice little theatre in the centre of town. But I was too confident: I ran the season too long, for five weeks overall—at about one-third capacity.'

Nevertheless the season considerably increased the UTRC's profile and, more importantly, it proved the suitability of Russell Street at a time when Sumner was keen to reduce the Company's dependence on the Union Theatre.

Laurel Martyn's Victorian Ballet Guild was the new venue's next occupant. Their season ran from 30 August until 10 September, with a repertoire including a revival of the Guild's 1956 success *Voyageur*, with music by Dorian Le Gallienne and choreography by Laurel Martyn. Antonio Rodrigues danced the title role.

Russell Street's third attraction was a Council of Adult Education production of a revival of Noël Coward's *Private Lives*. Edward Brayslaw, June Clyne, Paul Maloney and Audine Leith played the leading roles. Harold Baigent, the CAE's drama officer, directed.

It opened on 21 September 1960 and was a smash hit, packing the theatre nightly until 29 October.

To be concluded in the next issue of ON STAGE. ■

It's students who give theatre hope for the future

Sian Waruszynski, Melbourne University Post-Graduate Diploma in Arts Management student and administrative assistant at Union House Theatre, was deeply involved in mudfest 7.

Students may not know much, if anything at all, about the goals and aspirations of the Victoria Theatres Trust, but this doesn't mean that they lack care about the future of theatre. In fact, huge proportions of students rely on arts and entertainment and in particular the performing arts, as an outlet for the stresses of full-time study.

Never was this more apparent than in August 2001 when the two-yearly Melbourne University Student Union Arts Festival, mudfest7, livened up the Parkville campus for three glorious weeks.

Students of all ages, academic disciplines and backgrounds took the opportunity to get creative and participate in what became the largest mudfest ever.

Overall there were 84 programmed events (the majority of these being theatrical) and apart from a small sample, they were all directed, created and performed by students.

With so many events planned, one of the main challenges for the mudfest steering committee was how to find venues. Nevertheless, students are well known for ingenuity and desire to look outside the square; subsequently what seemed impossible quickly became achievable.

Not only did mudfest7 rely on conventional theatres like the Guild, Union, La Mama and the Carlton Courthouse; it also saw one girl performing to sell-out audiences at her own home and another performing in the Rowden White Library.

Even Union House Theatre (formerly known as the Melbourne University Student Union Theatre Department) chose to produce their events outside of the 'theatre'.

The grand opening fashion parade was in the Grand Buffet Hall, more usually engaged for university conferences, dinners and convocations. This extravaganza featured student dancers, comedians and actors wearing clothes not from famous designers, but instead from students' closets or their mothers' wardrobes. The MTC

costume department also sponsored the event, lending a range of beautiful gowns free of charge.

Second event produced by Union House Theatre was *Tour de l'Amour*.

Directed by Jane Woollard and Annette Evans this was a romantic journey where ticket holders were treated to students performing snippets of poetry, music,



movement and song as they were led around the campus.

Costs of both these events were kept to a minimum of \$5 (including champagne) and \$2 (including soup) in an attempt to attract as many as possible to (perhaps for the first time) a theatrical experience.

For three weeks, wherever you turned at Melbourne University, you were confronted by theatre that was unique, full of voice, and moreover was all about having fun and breaking free from the mould.

Working in the hub of mudfest, at Union House Theatre, I managed to see over 20 performances in 21 days. Nina Bonacci, this year's festival coordinator could claim even more!

So what does all this go to show? It certainly proved to me that although

theatre in Victoria might not have much funding to rely upon there is still a vibrant culture for it, and it is possible to produce rich art on a poor budget.

No matter what, young people will always have something to say—and what better way to say it than with a creative voice? Some of this year's mudfesters will go on to be doctors, lawyers and chemical engineers, others like Barry Humphries, Barry Kosky and Magda Szubanski before them, will continue to pursue their love of drama.

Either way these mudfesters have now experienced the magic of theatre and will, I am sure, continue to attend, enjoy and rejoice in theatre for years to come.

□ Union House Theatre operates two theatres in the Melbourne University Student Union—the Guild and the Union. There are seven staff members in this organisation: an administrator, artistic coordinator, dance coordinator, stage mechanist, head technician, production manager and administrative assistant.

With their combined expertise this group of professionals support students interested in the performing arts by holding workshops, helping them source funding, providing technical advice, assistance and back-up, giving dramaturgical and movement advice and much, much more.

Each year Union House Theatre and the Melbourne University Theatre Board also offer opportunities to student playwrights and actors to apply to work with professionals from Playworks or in the MTC summer school. Such opportunities offer students considering careers in the arts environment the chance to experience what it is really like at first-hand.

If you or your organisation can offer any kind of mentorship to interested students in any aspect of theatre (artistic, management or technical) please don't hesitate to get in contact with Union House Theatre by phoning (03) 8344 6975.

By doing so you'll be helping to create the next generation of theatre workers. ■

A right royal romantic leading man

Part 3: 'Manly and vigorous, yet tender, sensitive and spirited' Julius Knight was a superstar of his day. In this third part **Elisabeth Kumm** continues her examination of his career.

At the conclusion of his second Australian tour in June 1899, Julius Knight returned to England, departing with the promise of returning at the earliest possible time. Despite every desire to return, however, it was four years before he set foot on Australian soil again.

Following his arrival in England he advertised in the theatrical journal *The Era* that he was 'at liberty'.¹ In due course, Herbert Sleath offered him a position at the Adelphi Theatre in London, playing the lead in a new drama by Seymour Hicks and Fred G. Latham, entitled *With Flying Colours*. The play, which opened on 19 August 1899, proved a huge success, and Julius Knight's performance as Lieutenant Richard Dare was well received. *The Era* (26 August 1899) for example declared:

'Then there was Mr Julius Knight, one of the most earnest, energetic, and interesting of nautical heroes. Always easy and well bred, neither blatant nor feeble; manly and vigorous, yet tender, sensitive, and spirited, Mr Knight supplied an admirable representation of the much-tormented martyr of the machinations of the villain and the villainess...In his love-making he was emotional, animated, and intense, and altogether a better rendering of the role of Lieutenant Richard Dare RN, could not have been desired.'

Yet despite Julius Knight's initial success, after only 24 performances he stepped down as Lieutenant Dare and was replaced by Herbert Sleath, who played the role for the remaining 86 performances.²

Once again Julius Knight was 'at

liberty', a state he appears to have entertained for the remainder of the year and some months into the New Year. The Melbourne journal *Table Talk* commented on Julius' predicament:

'According to a correspondent writing



from London, Mr Julius Knight, at date of writing, was still disengaged, whereat he was prone to boast of his success among the "colonial people", and to condemn the unappreciative tastes of English managers. When in Melbourne, Julius suffered severely from "swelled head". It is to be hoped that, for the sake of the London people themselves, the inactivity of the knightly Knight will render him less liable to throw his affections at the heads of those about him.³

It appears that Julius Knight remained unemployed until July 1900 when he joined forces with the American actress Miss Elliot Page, who had been a member of his company when he was in Australia in 1897. Together they toured the English provinces with *Forget Me Not*. The play was not new to Knight, as he had played in it opposite Miss Fortescue during a provincial tour some five years previously.

Julius Knight's English career continued to founder, with only sporadic appearances recorded, until 1902 when he appeared in the first production of George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, a play originally written in 1894 but banned by the Lord Chamberlain. In 1902 the play was still considered 'immoral' (it deals with prostitution), but due to a loophole in the law it was possible for it to be performed by a private dramatic club so long as they derived no income from its staging.⁴

This was the situation when, on 5 January 1902, members of the Stage Society performed *Mrs Warren's Profession* at London's New Lyric Club. The cast comprised Julius Knight as Praed, Fanny Brough as Mrs Warren, Madge McIntosh as Vivie Warren and H. Granville Barker as Frank Gardner.

The same month Julius Knight appeared at the Avenue Theatre, London in *After All*, in the role of Walter Orchard. The play, which starred John Martin Harvey as Eugene Aram, had had its premiere at the Theatre Royal in Dublin the previous October, after which it went on tour, reaching London in January 1902.⁵ The London season ran for 25 performances.

Next, Knight toured the English provinces with Lillie Langtry in *Mademoiselle Mars*. Lillie Langtry was a society actress, celebrated more for her beauty (and the

fact that she had been the ‘official’ mistress of Edward, Prince of Wales from 1877 to 1881) than her acting ability. Nevertheless in 1881, when Edward’s attentions turned to Daisy, Countess of Warwick, she adopted a stage career, which she pursued with some success until her retirement in 1918, at the age of 66.⁶

Prior to its provincial tour, *Mademoiselle Mars* had been produced at London’s Imperial Theatre, with Lillie Langtry in the title role and Lewis Waller as Napoleon, the role subsequently assumed by Julius Knight.

In October of the same year Julius and Lillie were at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, performing in *Virginia*⁷, a play that was subsequently revived—as *The Cross-Ways*—at the Imperial Theatre, London on 8 December 1904, for one night only, by Royal Command. Julius Knight did not perform on this occasion.

Next he joined Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s provincial touring company, playing Prince Dimitry Nehludof in *Resurrection*, opposite Lily Brayton. The play, based on the novel by Leo Tolstoy, had first been produced by Beerbohm Tree’s company in London in February 1903 with Tree as Prince Dimitry and Lena Ashwell as Katusha.

At the conclusion of the tour he was invited to visit Australia, as a principal of

Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s No.1 Touring Company, with *Resurrection* and other plays from Beerbohm Tree’s repertoire; an offer he must have been overjoyed to receive.

Australia again

In August 1903, the steamer *RMS Orient* arrived in Melbourne carrying members of Beerbohm Tree’s company. In addition to Julius Knight, there was his leading lady Maud Jeffries, Arthur Wontner, Rose Pendennis, Olive Noble, Eardley Turner and Norman Jeffries.

Maud Jeffries, an American actress, had previously been seen in Australia in 1897–98, when she appeared opposite Wilson Barrett his first Australian tour in a repertoire that included *Claudian*, *The Manxman*, *Virginius*, *The Silver King*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*.

The Beerbohm Tree Company opened their Australian tour at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Melbourne on 12 September 1903 with *Resurrection*. On his reappearance Julius Knight received a hero’s welcome which *Table Talk* declared ‘made the very rafters ring’.⁸

Resurrection was followed, on 10 October, by *Monsieur Beaucaire* by Booth Tarkington, a romantic drama originally performed by Lewis Waller’s company in London in 1902, with Waller in the title

role and Grace Lane as Lady Mary Carlyle.

As Beaucaire and Lady Mary, Knight and Jeffries were well received. Of Knight’s performance *Table Talk* reported: ‘His is an excellent, well-sustained performance all through, which adds another feather to this favourite actor’s cap’.⁹

The next production was Hall Caine’s *The Eternal City*, which opened a month later on 7 November. It featured Julius Knight as David Rossi and Maud Jeffries as Donna Roma Volonna, a courtesan. The play had first been performed in London with Robert Taber and Constance Collier in the leading roles, and Beerbohm Tree as Baron Bonelli, the role played by Arthur Wontner in Australia.

The Eternal City was followed by a series of revivals prior to the commencement of the company’s Sydney season on Boxing Day 1903. In Sydney, they opened at Her Majesty’s with *Monsieur Beaucaire*, followed by *The Eternal City*, *Resurrection* and finally *The Sign of the Cross* on 12 March 1904.

The last named play had proved a highlight of Knight’s previous Australian tour. The present revival was well received, although *The Sydney Morning Herald* thought it was ‘a trifle below previous standards’. Nevertheless, the same reviewer noted: ‘The great success is still made by Mr

Capitol now given international recognition

followed by the Palais in 1927, and the Regent and the State Theatres in 1929).

With its sumptuous lighting effects, elaborate foyers, full orchestra and huge theatre organ, the Capitol treated cinemagoers to a totally new phenomenon in film entertainment, and was widely admired by its patrons.

It was designed by internationally noted architects Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony Griffin. The Griffins were undoubtedly the most creative and best-known architects in Australia in the early 20th century.

The Capitol development was the largest commercial work executed by them, and the theatre auditorium is generally considered one of their greatest works.

The Capitol’s auditorium, with its cave-

like crystalline modelled plasterwork illuminated by concealed coloured lights, is a unique architectural expression and highly advanced in concept and design.

It displays the Griffins’ interest in the decorative possibilities of crystalline geometry, and in architecture expressive of the natural world and the forces of nature, of which they were the greatest exponents worldwide. It is extremely unusual because theatres and cinemas worldwide almost invariably used revival/exotic or art deco styles, and were rarely designed by *avant-garde* architects.

The upper foyers, with their stepped, illuminated ceilings, decorated columns, and interpenetrating voids, are equally notable.

The threat of demolition of the theatre in 1964 generated one of Melbourne’s first

Julius Knight, whose rendering of Marcus Superbus is probably the most effective piece of stage-work of his career’.¹⁰

A month later the company returned to Melbourne for the première of *The Darling of the Gods*, ‘a story of Old Japan’, an American play first performed at the National Theatre, Washington in 1902.

In 1903 it was brought to London, where Beerbohm Tree produced it at His Majesty’s Theatre.¹¹

Sumptuous production values

For the Australian première, at Melbourne’s Her Majesty’s Theatre on 2 April 1904, Julius Knight appeared as Kara, with Maud Jeffries as Yo-San. The play was sumptuously mounted and Julius Knight’s performance as the soldier, Kara, was admired, although *Table Talk* thought ‘in the indoor scenes the innate courtesy and suaveness of the Japanese could well be more emphasised’.¹²

Towards the end of the run of *The Darling of the Gods*, Maud Jeffries’ engagement to Mr Nott Osborne, who had recently joined the company, was announced. Mr Osborne was in fact a wealthy pastoralist who had fallen in love with Maud ‘across the footlights’ and joined

the company to be close to her.¹³

The Darling of the Gods was followed by a revival of *The Sign of the Cross* and *The Silver King*. This last named play ran until 1 June 1904, the final night of the season, when the company was given ‘a warm send off’ by a ‘large and enthusiastic audience’.¹⁴

With the conclusion of the second Melbourne season the company was to have disbanded and returned to England, but Clyde Meynell, the general manager, negotiated with Beerbohm Tree to extend the tour under his management. Thus, a reconstructed company was assembled, with Julius Knight and Maud Jeffries being retained as the leads.¹⁵ ■ To be continued...

Footnotes

- 1 *Table Talk* 17 May 1899
- 2 It appears that Julius Knight left the company following a disagreement with Herbert Sleath.
- 3 *Table Talk* 22 February 1900
- 4 Foreword, *Plays Unpleasant* pp 181–182
- 5 *The Last Romantic* p 159
- 6 *Lillie Langtry* p 232
- 7 *Melbourne Punch* 13 November 1902
- 8 *Table Talk* 17 September 1903
- 9 *Table Talk* 15 October 1903

Melbourne’s architectural jewels, the Capitol Theatre and Capitol House now have upgraded heritage classifications, taking the theatre itself up to international heritage standard.

conservation campaigns, led by the National Trust, the Institute of Architects, and noted architect and commentator, Robin Boyd. Their actions ensured that the upper part of the auditorium was retained as a new, smaller cinema, rather than being totally demolished. The ceiling was classified in 1966 and the facade in 1978.

Barkly’s recognition

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) also recognised the importance to the state of the Barkly Theatre, Footscray.

Built in 1914 to the design of Blackett & Forster, it is the second oldest essentially intact and architecturally notable cinema in Victoria. First classified in 1990 it now carries an upgrade to State class. ■ [See item, ‘...and in Victoria?’, page 9]

- 10 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 14 March 1904
- 11 *Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled* p 176
- 12 *Table Talk* 7 April 1904
- 13 *Table Talk* 5 May 1904
- 14 *Table Talk* 2 June 1904
- 15 *Table Talk* 2 June 1904

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- M.Wilson Disher, *The Last Romantic: the Authorised Biography of Sir John Martin Harvey*, London, 1948
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- Australian Dictionary of Biography Who Was Who in the Theatre Table Talk Punch Melbourne The Age The Sydney Morning Herald The Era.*

NSW National Trust champions heritage cinemas

With none of the old live theatres left in Sydney, the National Trust of Australia (NSW) has launched a drive to save the few original picture theatres still operating in the state's rural areas.

Why not?—asks the Trust's **Graham Quint**.

The losses are staggering. Of the 660 cinemas and theatres active in 1957, some dating back almost a hundred years, now less than 20 significant ones survive. Further, of the 2040 cinemas in NSW, only 10 single-screen heritage value venues remain intact and in operation.

Each is a monument to the distinctive architecture and social mores of the first half of the 20th century. They have withstood the onslaught of television, video and the Internet; their new challenge is the inflexibility of the film distribution industry. Tragically, they are now all under serious threat of closure and demolition.

The year 2000 was the 167th anniversary of continuous live theatre in Sydney, but all of the historic live theatre buildings in Sydney and its suburbs have been lost. Other states have their historic theatres—the Princess and Athenaeum in Melbourne, the Royal in Hobart, the Princess in Launceston, His Majesty's in Perth, and Her Majesty's in Ballarat.

Sydney's losses are tragic. Gone is the original Theatre Royal on a site whose theatre use dated back to 1855; gone is the 1886 Criterion Playhouse in Park Street. Gone is the first Tivoli, built originally as the Garrick in 1890, and gone too is its successor, the former Grand Opera House of 1911. Gone is the Palace of 1896. Gone is the original Her Majesty's in Pitt Street; dating from 1887; it was regarded as finer than Perth's His Majesty's, which has been restored at a cost of \$8 million. And, in the Sydney suburbs, gone is the Elizabethan Theatre at Newtown, built in 1917.

Ironically the only historic cinemas to survive in Sydney itself, the State and the Capitol, now predominantly stage live theatre, although the Capitol has been fitted out for movies and has shown some of the classics.

Many years ago I was challenged by a developer who claimed that the Trust wanted to keep too many buildings as

This article is an edited version an address by Graham Quint, the National Trust of Australia (NSW)'s Acting Conservation Director, to a Cinema Owners' of Australia Association conference. Although the accent is on cinemas, several of the points raised will strike chords with VTT members.

museums—unaltered and increasingly unviable. Now this argument is raised in regard to historic single-screen cinemas—precisely the argument used in 1977 when the newly drafted Heritage Act was being debated in state parliament. The expressions 'white elephant' and 'millstone around the owner's neck' were used to describe the then dilapidated Cremorne Orpheum Theatre. Thankfully, the Heritage Act was passed and an imaginative new owner breathed life into it.

Most importantly, though it has undergone several refits and additional theatres have been added, the main Orpheum auditorium is largely intact—a fine example of adaptive re-use with sympathetic treatment of the theatre's heritage architecture and décor.

A similar approach has been used with the Randwick Ritz—its main auditorium is intact, complemented by a number of additional screens. However, a whole range of other theatres in Sydney's suburbs that could have been similarly treated are now lost forever.

Taking stock of 10 theatres

In regional New South Wales lower development pressures have left more theatres intact. There are 10 theatres currently under examination by the Trust and that we are trying to help remain viable. They are: Manildra Amusu (1936), Mudgee Regent (1935), Grafton Saraton (1926), Bingara Roxy (1936), Tumut Montreal (1929), Dungog Theatre (1913),

Scone Civic (1938), Leeton Roxy (1930), Wollongong Regent (1957) and Albury Regent (1927).

Each has heritage values for different reasons—some for their grand architecture, others because they are rare examples of very simple construction. All are Category 1 (the highest rating) in the Movie Theatre Database prepared by Professor Ross Thorne for the NSW Heritage Office. Incidentally, it is disappointing to find that in the two territories not one heritage cinema has survived.

If theatres are to survive they need a regular and, hopefully, a growing audience. Their owners will need to find lots of money for maintenance, money for upgrading projector and sound equipment and money for restoration work. The level of financial commitment may be the same but the areas of spending may be very different. Some of these theatres will follow the Albury Regent example and build additional cinemas. Others such as the Manildra Amusu may concentrate on showing historic classics.

Some theatres have been taken over by local councils and are operated by community organisations—the Tumut Montreal and the Leeton Roxy are examples. They still have to operate on tightly controlled budgets to meet maintenance costs and they need to be content not to show first-run movies. Many also provide an important live theatre venue for major shows touring Australia or local school use.

But what of those theatres still privately owned, often in the same family ownership for generations, that are trying to provide a traditional night at the 'flicks'—something that many people under 30 have never experienced? Most cinemagoers have never experienced any form of cinema other than a multiplex! No Saturday afternoon matinee, no Wurlitzer organ, no double feature.

Why can't we have just a handful of

theatres survive in Sydney, its suburbs, and in the country to allow younger generations to see what for many of us was so important? That's what heritage is really about. It's not just whether a building is 'angular' or 'moderne' art deco style—although it is important to be able to understand the differences between theatre architecture, just as churches may be gothic or Roman style.

One of the most important heritage values is the ability to pass on to the next

generation what was important to us, how things were, why we did things a certain way. These old picture palaces are the authentic settings in which we can pass on this information and be most likely to have it understood and best appreciated.

Does it really matter?

Why is it important to do this? Does it really matter?

As well as considering where we're going it is vital to remember where we've been. The Australia and the Australians we

are today have been shaped by our experience, our customs and mutually shared enjoyment.

The 'flicks', picture shows, the movies, call them what you will, were and are vital in forming our common culture. And buildings of landmark quality attract tourism and promote community pride.

If more than 300 historic cinemas can be conserved and operated in the United States, then it should be possible to conserve and continue operating 25 in Australia. ■

...and in Victoria?

Could we encourage our friends at the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) to use their website to promote interest in our irreplaceable heritage live theatres—and, indeed, the heritage cinemas—in a similar way?

For inspiration check the wealth of material accessible on the NSW Trust's website: www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au. Here can be found historical information, photographs and screening times for each of the endangered venues.

The Saraton at Grafton even offers patrons a free box of popcorn as a reward for visiting the site!

Meanwhile, the Edwardian baroque Barkly Theatre building in Footscray once again teeters on the brink of extinction, despite its Victorian Heritage Trust classification.

Storm damage to the theatre's fly tower in 1990 and minor fires in the 1980s have not significantly compromised the integrity of the cinema interior, which is mostly intact.

After years of neglect, accidental and deliberate damage, the building was bought

in November 2000 by developer George Grant. Grant's project was to restore the theatre and build 30 modern apartments on land at the rear of the property, where a wild storm some years before had demolished the rear projecting stage back to the proscenium wall.

The apartments have been built and all are now sold.

However, the theatre property was up for auction on 13 December 2001, offered as a restoration job or corporate headquarters, but was passed in at \$250 000 on a reserve of \$300 000.

At the time the Barkly was opened, 1914-15, there were few substantial theatre buildings in Melbourne's suburbs.

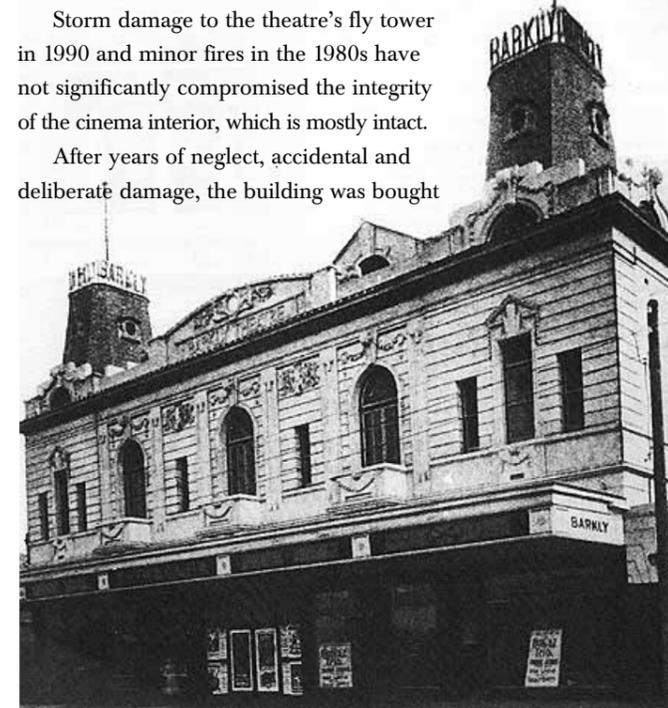
Constructed generally with theatrical performances in mind, they inevitably

became picture theatres. The Barkly, designed by W.A.M. Blackett of architects Blackett and Forster it had an orchestra pit, a fly tower and small wing space but no scenery storage; there were fairly spacious dressing rooms and assembly area below stage.

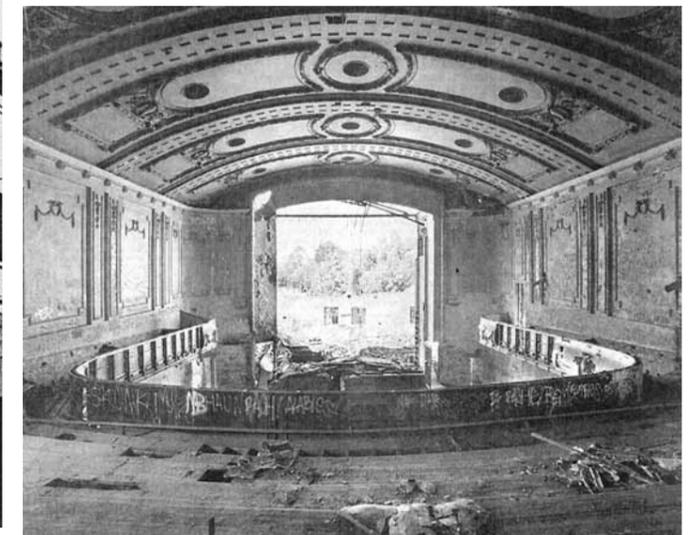
The auditorium was generously sized, seating 1403 (in 1953) on two levels, the walls and arched ceiling were panelled in raised plaster mouldings.

The circle was cantilevered, one of the earliest to demonstrate the principal, without sightline-obscuring column supports in the stalls. Its 21.3m span makes the Barkly's circle design highly imaginative in architectural terms.

The Barkly closed as a cinema in 1970. It became a reception centre, a bingo hall, and then remained derelict for many years. ■



The Edwardian baroque exterior of the Barkly Theatre, Footscray, in its heyday (left) and the ornate interior, despite showing the effects of general neglect and of the storm damage which demolished the stage area, still with much of the ornamental plasterwork intact.



A lesson in reuse from the old school

After many years in limbo, Sydney's historically interesting Pitt Street School of Arts has started a new life as The ArtHouse, a hotel and function facility, reports **Frank Van Straten**.

Parts of the School of Arts building at 275 Pitt Street, Sydney, date back to 1830, when the Independent Chapel was built at the south side of the property. A hall for the School of Arts was built to the north in 1836. The Chapel was developed into a larger theatre—more a concert room—in 1855, and in 1861 the present street frontage was added, the hall was enlarged and a small gallery constructed. The area on the right, became a library.

George Coppin's Lancashire Bell-ringers were a crowd-pleaser at the School of Arts in 1863 and 1864, and Coppin himself played to packed houses in 1863.

'My reception was all that I could wish,' he wrote.

The School of Arts became a popular venue for all types of concerts, minstrel troupes, magicians and speakers of every description. Harry Rickards made his Sydney debut there on 1 June 1872. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald* 'The stage was arranged very tastefully, the pier glasses and plants giving a very excellent effect'.

In 1887 a smoking room was constructed above the stage and the library was extended. In the financially troubled last decade of the 19th century use of the hall declined to such an extent that in 1896 it was closed. After many years' use as a library a second floor was constructed within the hall's space. Around the same time shops were installed at the front of the building.

In the 1930s the area opposite, the corner of Pitt and Park Streets, was Sydney's 'Poverty Point', a meeting place for out-of-work theatre people.

Over the years spaces in the building have had a variety of uses. Most memorable was the theatrical shop on the first floor frontage, run under the name 'Will Andrade' by veteran magician Harry Job from 1971 until 1988.

This was the city's main source for plays and theatrical make-up.

The building fell into disrepair and, eventually, disuse. It was acquired by Alan Bond and incorporated into the massive redevelopment planned for the area bounded by Pitt, Park and George Streets, but this stalled for many years.

In 1980, due to the efforts of a small group of concerned people, the School of Arts' historic value was recognised and it received Heritage listing. The Statement of Significance records it as 'a two storey sandstone façade whose ground floor has been drastically altered. The façade was erected in 1861 when the original building was extended to the street alignment (below).



'The façade is a good example of restrained Classicism in the Palladian style and is typical of late Georgian sandstone elevations now rare in Sydney.

'It is an important architectural link in the history of Australia, with considerable historical associations in the growth of Sydney. Important early educational and cultural activities have taken place on this site and above all is directly linked with the formation of the Sydney Technical College.'

Nevertheless, in 1988 the controversial Sydney monorail was constructed at first floor level, ruining the view of the building's elegant façade.

Eventually the redevelopment was reactivated as part of the Citibank-2 Park

Street project. The painstaking restoration was entrusted to Sydney heritage architects Tanner and Associates, with Megan Jones as project architect.

It was intended to reopen the building in time for the Sydney 2000 Olympics, but this was not to be. The need for the interior fit-out to accord with heritage provisions meant that the School of Arts did not start its new life as The ArtHouse until recently.

Finally, on 29 November 2001, it reopened with a gala party for more than 1200 guests, every one of whom had to present a piece of personally created artwork to gain admission.

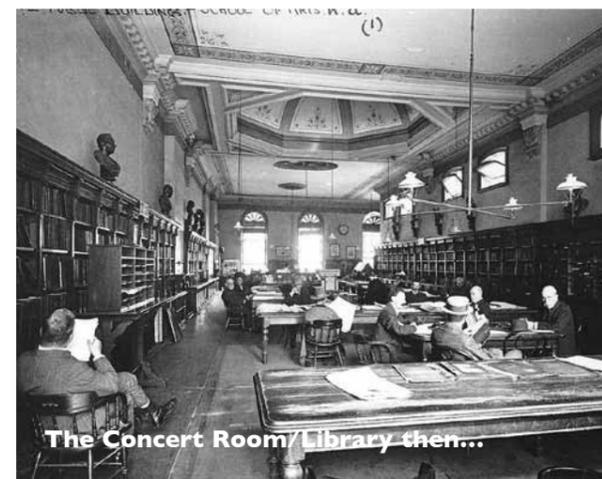
Although its operators describe it as 'a hotel' it is more accurately a series of attractive, evocative Victorian spaces that will host bars, a cocktail lounge, a restaurant, exhibitions, performances, receptions and functions. And thankfully there is not a poker machine to be had!

There are five distinct areas that can function separately but integrate to form the whole concept. For VTT members the most interesting is the Verge, named for one of the architects associated with the building's history.

The Verge is in fact the concert room (the former Independent Chapel) restored to its original two-storey splendour. Although the old stage has gone, the gently curved rear wall that backed it is still there, as are the 19th century plasterwork and the skylights.

Restored, too, are the elegant stencilled wall and ceiling decorations and frescos. As in the rest of the refurbishment, care has been taken to ensure that modern elements such as the bar and the DJ facilities have not impinged on the restored structure. Despite the fact that the gallery has not been replaced, the first floor entrance to it has, allowing visitors to appreciate the view that its patrons would have enjoyed.

The ground floor area to the north is now The Cocktail Bar. This is a far more intimate space than The Verge, although it can cater for functions of up to 150 people.



The Concert Room/Library then...



The Verge now...

The ambience is relaxed and there is an original open fireplace.

Along one wall is a series of illuminated boxes containing intricate, evocative, often tiny constructions by Shona Wilson, inspired by the 'ArtHouse' theme and constructed from scraps of metal, paper, and other material recovered during restoration.

At the rear of The Cocktail Bar is The Library—a small cosy space featuring a large wooden communal table and comfortable furniture. The walls are lined with shelves containing art books and magazines. The Library is suited for small functions of up to 20 people, and will also cater for sculpture lessons, poetry readings,

small intimate gallery exhibitions, and so on.

Upstairs, over The Cocktail Bar and The Library, is the The Dome, a lavish yet informal restaurant and bar. The room's features include four magnificent arched windows and an elaborately decorated central glass dome. Natural light floods through the dome and penetrates a rectangle of opaque glass set in the floor, thus allowing light to pass to The Cocktail Bar below. In a long glass case are old newspapers, bottles, builders' tools and other artefacts found during the refurbishment.

Finally, the old smoking room above what was once the stage, is now The Attic, a smaller space designed for corporate cocktail parties, private functions, launch

evenings and VIP hospitality.

The operators of The ArtHouse describe it as 'A series of exceptional spaces within a beautiful building—a 19th century building cocooned within a 21st century glass enclosure. It amalgamates two styles and eras into a functional, dynamic whole, reflecting the splendour of the past juxtaposed against the functional design principals of the present. 'The ArtHouse focuses on the arts and all things surrounding that broad theme, giving the space a

continued and ever-changing vibrancy and diversity. It is a vibrant and energetic venue that reflects the cosmopolitan and cultural society that Sydney demands.'

We wish it well.

For further information, visit <http://sydney.citysearch.com.au/E/V/SYDNE/0057/99/39/> or phone (02) 9284 1200.

The assistance of Megan Jones of Tanner and Associates and Ashley Bennett of The ArtHouse in the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged. For more on the architectural and social history of the School of Arts, see Ross Thorne's *Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1905* (University of Sydney, 1971) pp 133–137.

VAC garden honours Richard Pratt

Recognising his contributions through his seven-year term as its president, The Victorian Arts Centre Trust has named the lawn and gardens area between the Theatres Building and the Concert Hall 'The Richard Pratt Gardens'.

A dedicatory column was unveiled by the Trust's current president, Carrillo Gantner, Arts Minister Mary Delahunty and Mr Pratt himself, at a small ceremony on 14 November 2000.

The naming recognises Mr Pratt's role in providing leadership to the Arts Angels program, his support for free and family entertainment, his role as a major donor, an advocate of philanthropy and his support for a range of building improvements

including the extension of the spire with its unique fibre optic lighting system.

Other programs undertaken during Mr Pratt's presidency are the complete refurbishment of the Amcor, Patrons' and Commonwealth Bank Lounges, the car park upgrade, installation of a second escalator in the State Theatre stalls foyer, the outdoor Lawn Stage and the redevelopment of both the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and the Riverside Terrace.

In line with the Trust's fixed-term naming rights policy, and mindful of Mr Pratt's seven-year term as president, the name of the Richard Pratt Gardens will be in place for seven years.



Gus GOSS

On a recent prowl around the Victorian Arts Centre I checked on the marker that announces that the area

between the Theatres and the Concert Hall is now officially 'The Richard Pratt Gardens' [see item this page].

There are two very odd things about this. First, the inscription recording Mr Pratt's contribution is at ground level. Of course, I could read it easily, as I'm only your average-height cat, but any curious humans will need to prostrate themselves on the stony pavement to see what it says.

And, second, when they do, they'll find that the tense chosen for the text suggests that the worthy dedicatee has passed to the Great Green Room in the Sky!

- Gus, the theatre cat

Taking the long view of Melbourne

In this interview Margaret Manion and Martin Carlson, of the John Truscott Design Foundation Inc., talk with noted Melbourne architect **Daryl Jackson**, AO, B.Arch, FRAIA on the way to see the city as a people place.



Daryl, you have had a long and successful career in architecture, particularly public architecture, so let's start by asking you how, in the light of that experience, you see the role of architecture in the public domain.

DJ: I see architecture as very important in the public domain, and particularly in a city like Melbourne, which is a 'manufactured' city. It is a city whose design is crucial to its presence. Melbourne, like Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane, is one of the delta river cities of Australia.

Cities like Hobart and Sydney, on the other hand, have another kind of presence because their topography is all prevailing. In Melbourne the Hoddle grid set us up with eight blocks by four adjacent to the river. From that base we had to think up and design a city. Therefore the image that Melbourne offers now is one that comes out of that process.

It's a city born of thoughtfulness, one that reflects certain values judged to be of critical importance to its inhabitants.

As we look back, we might ask where has that thought and design process taken us; what are some of its positives?

DJ: I think one of the key positives was the decision to place high-rise buildings on the eastern and western hills, and to not build down in the valley—so when you look at Melbourne from the Shrine, or coming down the tollway from Tullamarine, you see two hilltops with fingers reaching into the sky. The buildings are clustered; they are not spread evenly across the

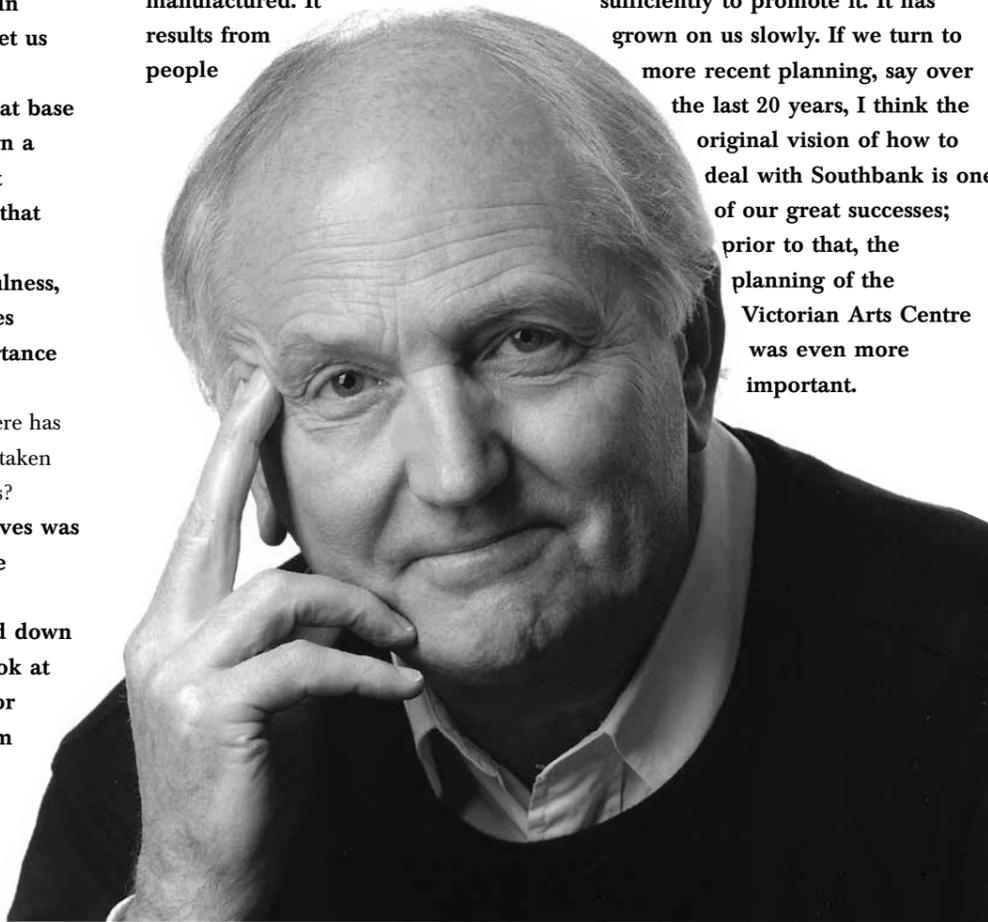
grid. This puts a kind of energy into the skyline, accentuating the topography of those two shallow hills. And basic to the quality of the city's design are the two great interior streets, Collins Street and Bourke Street. As you look down them from those eastern and western hills, there is a sense of a plinth of buildings, some five storeys high, with several towers rising from the plinth.

This puts, as it were, an interior into Melbourne, giving the 30-metre wide streets that Hoddle gave us a special relationship with the topography. Now this is manufactured. It results from people

thinking about the continuity of those boulevards, and about the way in which the buildings as street architecture abut each other and form a kind of wall. In contrast to other cities in Australia this gives Melbourne a very strong—if you like a European—block vision of itself. It is that block which overseas visitors note when they come to this part of Australia and see that it is very different from other Australian cities; and it is a condensation of the plan of the whole city.

Do you think we promote this view of the city?

DJ: We don't always understand it sufficiently to promote it. It has grown on us slowly. If we turn to more recent planning, say over the last 20 years, I think the original vision of how to deal with Southbank is one of our great successes; prior to that, the planning of the Victorian Arts Centre was even more important.



When we traded Wirth's Circus Olympia for the Arts Centre, it was a good swap! It brought a consciousness of the arts to Melbourne, via the presence of the architecture of those buildings. Whether you like them or not is in one way marginal.

The essential thing is their being there: the theatres doing what they do, and the National Gallery doing what it does, create around these buildings a sense of the nature and place of art in the city.

And we have another phase of this now being expressed in Federation Square.

DJ: Yes, I think Federation Square is doing a similar thing—and it is also increasing our consciousness of the city as a great place to be in. Melbourne has had a very optimistic view of itself over the past decade. Before then I think Victorians, and Australians generally, saw this city as a place to escape from. Culturally, we tended to think rather in terms of the beach and the bush; but really our hearts and minds are in the centre of the city.

I think we've now come to the conclusion that in a world in which manufactured existence is an important portrayal of culture, our cities also have their own significance. That's interesting—and reminiscent of a document called *Spirit and Purpose* that Eric Westbrook put together when the Victorian Arts Centre was being built. It envisaged the role of the Arts Centre in precisely the terms you've just used.

DJ: I think that the 19th century had this vision too. We see it in the story of Tom Roberts' life and when we read about the painters in the National Gallery Art School. Think, too, of how Redmond Barry presented the Gallery, the Library and the Museum as a triumvirate that would explore all aspects of the known world.

That is characteristic of 19th century thought; but it was also a pretty critical act for the future, one from which I think all of us who grew up in Melbourne have benefited.

And perhaps Jeff Kennett saw himself doing the same kind of thing?

DJ: I think the Kennett Government saw itself as manifesting a vision of Melbourne as a city that had to express itself through its cultural preoccupations and interests.

And in some ways the fact that the Victorian universities have all sought a city presence provides another visual element which ties in with this vision.

DJ: Yes, since the 1950s one of the key processes that has been at work in human culture is the communications network. This has drawn us into a global system. Communication is critical in our society and with it comes the increased importance of urbanisation.

Up until the 1950s Australians thought that, even though we were urbanised, it was the world exterior to the city that expressed what we were about; but now Melbourne has come into its own because of its vision of the city and its idea of concentricity, as opposed to polarisation.

Very few Australian cities represent this view of the convergent. The 19th century blessed us with both the Hoddle grid and with grand boulevards that, as we come into the city, draw us towards that interior series of blocks.

As another aspect of this notion of convergence, let's turn to some of those communal complexes in which you've been involved—for example your present work on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. When you take on such a commission, how do you position the priorities in relation to visual impact, performance needs, spatial relationships and creature comforts? How do all these fit in the manufactured whole that you've been talking about?

DJ: That's a good question. As with all art projects, on the one hand we have to deal with its various components with as much comprehension as we can muster, and on the other with as much apprehension of the artistic vision as possible.

In any public commission I always

try to sense how we should apprehend the problem artistically. Then how do we comprehend it: in other words, draw together its various strands. That is the reflective aspect, which goes to how we read culture. We often talk of a triple bottom line: the social, economic and environmental nature of life; but there is a fourth element, our cultural reading.

A place like the MCG speaks a culture that is special to itself. No one else plays Australian Rules or international cricket in circumstances where some 100 000 people turn up to a game. That sense of the MCG being Melbourne's living room is of critical value to me. What I think is part of our culture is the fact that Victorians see the MCG as a great place of assembly that is centred on those games.

It has always been thus, since the days when the site was a paddock or when in 1905 an exemplary series of Edwardian buildings was constructed around that paddock to form the sense of enclosure we value today. As we have grown, so we have expanded the ground to become a stadium of 85 000, 95 000 and 100 000 or so seats.

The continuing theme in all this is the exchange between the players and the game. That is what the patrons want to be part of; and that is the critical point.

Does the computer help in assessing these needs and their mix?

DJ: Not so much. I think that this sort of stuff comes from the reading of history and the developing of an understanding of how a particular culture is placed. Australians have a certain ironic quality about cultural matters, which I think is very healthy. We go to watch sport, because sport is important to us, or we participate in a musical performance because the music is important to us. We are not there listening to music because we think it is the thing to do.

Among the important values

that Australians possess is an authenticity about such matters. We do not need to be enticed to go to see Collingwood play Carlton. We don't need any razzmatazz or trumpet blowing. If we are at all interested we will be there. That is what I like about such places.

In terms of the rebuilding of the Melbourne Cricket Ground it is that confrontation of the patrons with the players and the game that you have to deal with. We are a society that is always facing up to a confrontation of one kind or another.

Do you have any concerns about what you are currently doing and enabling the public ownership of that venue to stay as it is?

DJ: This is a big issue. The cricket ground has been blessed in the history of its public trusteeship. The trustees have nurtured and cared for it over a very long period and the trustee deed remains critical at the present time.

There has also always been a sense of custodianship in relation to the Melbourne Cricket Club. It has a leasehold of a section of the ground for which it is responsible and it has taken care of ground improvements as part of this responsibility. Not everybody understands this. Membership funds, for example, have gone into paying for the upgrading and development of the ground and they continue to bankroll it.

Again, in my opinion, it is very much the people's ground, and its primary value is to remain that. Everybody should feel that they can go there, which is why a seating capacity of 100 000 is being worked at now.

There are debates every time we take something away and debates every time we put something back. We live in a dialectical society and, in this thoughtful city which we have been talking about, one expects such debates to take place. As long as there is equity in the way matters relating to public architecture are

debated and understood, then I am happy. People need to recognise that what is taking place is a review of our needs and that this may involve demolition and replacement.

In this sense planning and building are part of an organic process. Sometimes people don't understand that we need our future as much as we need our past.

In recent years we have been going through a big public building phase in Melbourne. That is exciting and it carries the people along with it, but then there is the challenge of actually being able to run these buildings, to maintain them and to energise them. What is your response to this?

DJ: In a way it's a matter of content and form. Content is vital to engendering form. If you built art museums and there was no art to exhibit in them then that would be a miserable—indeed a nonsense—exercise. Of course we should focus on the art, but we should not dismiss the idea that great collections should be celebrated by great architecture.

Again I think back to the 19th century and to visionaries like Redmond Barry. They knew, for instance, that for Melbourne to be up to speed with Lamarck and Darwinism and with all the intellectual developments in the field of natural history going on around the world at that time, it was important to have a great museum and that it was also of critical importance to have a building worthy of the collections to be housed within it.

As a pragmatic culture we sometimes tend to take the short view rather than the long one. We should be perennially alert to the visionary as much as to the pragmatic, and if there is a failure in Australian culture it is the failure to be sufficiently visionary.

You have worked for communities within communities like schools, and scientific organisations, as well as sports groups. How does this experience inform your architectural thinking?

DJ: We live in a democracy and therefore consultation is important. It doesn't mean everybody can decide everything because along with consultation goes authorship.

Sometimes when people come in here and want a house, I would like to say to them, 'I hope I am going to give you something you didn't dream you wanted'. This question of dreaming and how far society can project itself forward is not a value that everybody understands. There are those who are fantastic mainstream educators who are dealing with their discipline in the here-and-now—taking a bunch of kids through their VCE, for example, or an arts program. Whether they are also great visionaries one cannot be so sure.

Though these people must be listened to, I am always interested in dealing with both edges of the problem. I try to find a way of making a building that works but is also anticipatory of its future as an architectural object that will be significant and memorable. The difficulty with some consultative briefing is that it tells you in a very didactic way what has to work now, but it doesn't say how the building should work in 20 years from now.

I believe that you had a very interesting experience with the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, because while you were building you had seminars exploring how the complex would be used.

DJ: Yes I did, indeed. We ran those seminars at two or three layers of thinking and we were extraordinary blessed with having Gus Nossal at the end of the process because he is the consummate doer and thinker, or thinker and doer.

Gus would say 'How do I behave as a terrific client?' He understood the role of a client who wanted to develop a visionary building; but even *his* vision wasn't broad enough. There are now 400 people in a building that was designed for 200. So he underestimated his success factor and that of his successors.

The building is really stretched to breaking point now because his foundation was one of such great energy and success, and he developed an organisation that quickly outgrew itself. Nobody, not even Gus, realised that it would be so successful. So another factor to be taken into account is that as Australians we sometimes don't always know how good we are or we can be.

Earlier you referred to the importance of public buildings in the manufactured city; what are your views about the role of sculpture as an extension of that presence?

DJ: I think its role lies in the combination of things. As a piece of furniture is a much-loved part of a house, so it is with a piece of public sculpture or art. It's like a favourite chair or a particular piece of furniture in the living room, if you see the city as our dwelling place.

Take the clock at Flinders Street Station, for example: it's a familiar piece of public art. Almost irrespective of whether it is still telling the time, it is there as an icon, an understanding of time and of its relationship to the trains which arrive and take off behind it.

I get a great kick, too, out of seeing Burke and Wills on the Swanston Street corner in a particular way, because they speak of our history. How do you go about setting up criteria for public sculpture?

DJ: That is very hard to do. We could run a seminar on this topic and still not have the answer. It is true that in Chicago, for example, people invested in major public art pieces



by taking a given number of city blocks and concentrating on certain plazas and intersections, which they have highlighted with some fantastic large-scale pieces.

We tend to be a lot more casual about public sculpture. I suppose we haven't worked at it with the same degree of intention or application. I think we have given the idea lip service with things like the sculptures outside the Arts Centre and the Public Library, and on some street corners.

In the 20th century we have been somewhat more laissez-faire about such matters, than we were in the 19th. The epic journey of Burke and Wills, for example, was commemorated because it was seen as critical to Melbourne, the place from where it started. We haven't followed through in quite the same way with other sculptural pieces capable of making memorable connections with both our foundation and our future.

John Truscott had in mind what he called a sculpture trail, which he saw winding along the river, past the Victorian Arts Centre and up through the gardens.

DJ: Truscott's vision is very important to the consciousness of the city. He saw it as a piece of theatre and he was quite right to do so. He wasn't happy just to work the theatre from the interior of the Arts Centre. Rather, he saw the whole city as a stage for the theatrical aspect of our lives, where so many of the converging forces need to be articulated in order for us to understand them.

Would you like to comment on John Truscott's vision as it relates to the

present and the future?

DJ: I think that consciousness of design informed the way Truscott worked.

As a theatre designer he was aware of the stage set as the site for the critical engagement between the players, dramatic action and the patrons; and he applied the analogy of the theatre to human interaction in the city.

The backdrop to our lives, as it were, is the city. How Melbourne presents itself, how it reads, both to us and to the people who come here is of critical importance to how we live our lives. In this sense, design is a language; it is like a fifth dimension, the felt dimension.

Generally speaking, Australians haven't had to make the same commitment to the language of design as, say, to the language of agriculture. At least up until now we have understood the nature of raising sheep or cattle or of growing produce to a much more profound degree. Our farmers have known how to work this land and work it well.

We haven't had the same consciousness about our designed cities. Because many of our cities are predominantly topographic, we haven't valued their design element over the last 100 years as well as we might.

So I think that John Truscott has something to say about the importance of design in the city and how consciousness of this element is not only relevant to all the arts but indeed to all our endeavours.

So we have to keep our sights on the city?

DJ: That's right. Whether it's somebody who is running a restaurant,

The John Truscott Design Foundation Inc. was established largely by people who worked with John at the Victorian Arts Centre but who were aware that his interests and concerns extended beyond the confines of a particular complex and beyond any particular art form.

The Foundation has focussed on design, because we think the design element in our culture best expresses what John stood for, whether design in the theatre, the street or to do with the cultivation of the plants and flowers, which he loved.

We believe that if you want to commemorate someone's past achievements you have to do it in a living way, so that their values and their strivings really mean something to the next generation

is sitting in the gardens or on the riverbank, or who is having a drink in a café, they all have a stake in the design of the city.

Australians love their spaces to be presented as being very natural and easy. We have an amenable city, and we know that; but we have to keep the pressure on the button to see that its re-designing continues in accordance with cherished, thoughtful values.

This links, I think, with the growing consciousness, especially in younger

people, of the importance of the natural environment. Increasing concern for the way the environment looks and is treated relates to purposeful urban design.

DJ: I agree. This is design at a primary level—an ecological view of design, rather than wilful manufacturing. I wouldn't like people to think I was talking about this destructive type of activity.

Rather, I have spoken of 'manufactured' in terms of the build city vis-à-vis the natural environment. In that sense, we all live in a

manufactured world. How we can use resources, now we nurture them and how we draw them into our lives in a completely integral way is still another threshold to be won, and I think this is true of all design cultures.

The minute we conclude one large-scale project in this area, we start another, and so we are always confronting the rhythms of growth and decline and growth again;

In this sense design is part of the organic system of life itself.

Thank you very much, Daryl. ■

Looking at London

It's as 'always been there' as Nelson's Column, but a London institution is about to take a final curtain call. And the increasingly shabby West End is to benefit from a mayoral initiative.

London could shut its Trap

For the second time in its history the 'Last Days' sign could be going up for *The Mousetrap*, the world's longest ever running stage play.

With tourism way down and box office low, producers of *The Mousetrap* doubt the aged goldmine can see out its first half-century.

The first time the 'Last Days' notice went up was when the two stars of the first cast, Richard Attenborough and Sheila Sims, left after two years.

That 'Last Days' notice started a run on the box office that hasn't diminished until this year.

Since opening on 15 November 1952, more than 10 million people have seen it.

Yet its author Agatha Christie had so little faith in it she made a familial gesture by giving the royalties and rights to her nephew.

Since then over \$70 million has passed across the box office counter.

Thanks Aunty.

Even if *The Mousetrap*—the play—does close, it will live on in dozens of other productions which will now spring up all around the world.

The original deal for the play prevented any other productions, including film, until the initial run was over.

The film company which owned the rights from 1956, Romulus Films, has long been out of action, so it's anybody's guess who will bring *The Mousetrap* to the screen.

West End theatre gets a hand

London's mayor, Ken Livingstone, is committed to supporting the city's theatre. He has agreed to a £500 000 (\$1.4 million) cash injection to encourage more people to visit West End theatres. The money will pay for 100 000 free and discounted tickets, backed up by offers of free bus travel.

The move was welcomed by Sir Cameron Mackintosh, whose new musical *The Witches of Eastwick* closed early despite excellent reviews and audience reaction.

The mayor has also established a Tourism Action Group, representing businesses directly and indirectly associated with tourism, of which the theatre is a vital part. The group will suggest how best to promote London tourism, addressing concerns such as parking, public transport, patrons' safety and ticket prices.

And there are signs that at last the government is recognising the value and importance of theatre, culturally and financially. Secretary of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell, has recently met leading West End representatives.

Ms Jowell said, 'The government is determined to do what it can to help boost London theatre.'

Heritage grant for Roundhouse restoration

The much-admired Roundhouse in London has received a £2.42 million (\$6.7 million) restoration grant from Britain's Heritage

Lottery Fund, recognising the venue's contribution to the vibrant and diverse Camden area of London. This supplements the £13 million (\$36 million) that the Roundhouse Trust has already raised of the £25 million (\$69.5 million) needed to finish the project.

Completed in 1847, the Roundhouse is a superb example of impressive mid-19th century railway architecture, with cast- and wrought-iron supporting its slate roof. The restoration will reinstate the circular glazed rooflights so the public will see interior daylight for the first time in over 100 years.

The original locomotive entrance will be reinstated.

As a theatrical space, the Roundhouse has always attracted national and international artists and productions from theatre to dance to pop concerts.

Performers like its large and unusual stage area, reminiscent of a circus. The National Theatre's touring production *Oh, What A Lovely War!*, designed to be performed under canvas, was particularly at home there. The Roundhouse will continue to promote alternative works such as the recent productions of *De La Guarda* and *Bounce*.

Restoration will start in Autumn 2002, and should be completed two years later.

Boy George, he's got it!

A new theatre is to open in London's West End in January 2002. The venue—which will be called The Venue—is in the crypt of the French church, Notre Dame de France,

off Leicester Square.

The début production will be a musical, *Taboo*. Set in the flamboyant clubland of 1980s London, it is the brainchild of 1980s pop star and DJ Boy George.

The former Culture Club singer has written the music and lyrics for the show, while the story and dialogue are by Mark Davies-Markham, one of the writers on the hit BBC show *This Life*.

Taboo will feature Culture Club's two biggest hits, 'Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?' and 'Karma Chameleon'.

Adam Kenwright, the impresario behind the venture, describes The Venue as a 'very interesting space' with a thrust stage rather than the more conventional proscenium arch.

South Bank saga

In a recent tirade in London's *The Times* newspaper, Richard Morrison lamented the sorry state of the South Bank Centre.

South Bank includes the 3000-seat Festival Hall, built in 1951, Grade 1 listed, and still Britain's largest purpose-built concert hall.

'It has,' said Morrison, 'all the acoustical allure of a wardrobe.'

'For years this was secretly remedied by scores of little hidden loudspeakers; then

Many firsts for the Farnese

A 373-year-old theatre gem reopens in Parma, Italy.

The meticulously restored Teatro Farnese, said to be the Italian equivalent of London's long-gone original Globe, is welcoming audiences again.

The theatre opened in 1628. Designed by Giovanni Battista Aleotti (1546-1636), it was one of the first theatres to use the proscenium arch, masking the offstage space and aiding scenic illusion by separating the stage and auditorium.

It was ideal for opera, ballet and drama, and the spacious orchestra floor separating the audience from the stage could be used for extravaganzas and ceremonials of all kinds.

Built almost entirely of wood, painted to resemble marble, the Teatro Farnese could hold an audience of 3500 on steeply banked U-shaped tiers. Seating of this type became a common feature of European theatres and opera houses and was used in Australia in venues such as Astley's Amphitheatre in

even they went wrong. Now the acoustics guru Larry Kirkegaard, who has wrought a minor miracle on the Barbican, wants to rip out the false ceiling and the air-conditioning paraphernalia behind it, creating extra reverberation space, and replace tons of absorbent material with hard surfaces

'Britain's allegedly premier arts complex remains a turn-off for tourists and natives alike and an embarrassment to those who profess London to be a world-class culture capital.'

There are plans to build a new extension by Hungerford Bridge, thus releasing administrative areas in the hall for public use, and to restore the original logic and grandeur of the hall's entrances and foyers, which were considerably altered in the 1960s.

'It is all necessary if the Festival Hall is not going to slide into the second division of international concert venues,' says Morrison. 'But one problem is money. The other is planning permission.'

'The Borough of Lambeth said that the extension would block ancient views of St Paul's (an elementary mistake, if true), so its fifth storey had to be deleted. The cost has been "trimmed" to a mere £54 million (\$150 million). Of that, it says, £40 million (\$111 million) has been raised.

'On inspection this figure turns out to comprise £20 million (455.6 million) from the Arts Council (though the council says that it has agreed only in principle and is waiting to see "a realistic plan" and a further £20 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, though the fund has so far only committed £12 million (\$33.3million).

'Even then, £14 million must still be found from private sources. Not easy when the prime benefactor, Paul Hamlyn, was kept waiting so long he died without signing the promised £16 million (\$44.5 million) cheque!

'Stung by criticism, the South Bank now says that work can begin next year, which is just as well, because the rest of the "master plan"—to build a film centre for the NFT and a 1500-seat concert hall beneath a sloping "grass roof" on Jubilee Gardens, and lots of lovely revenue-producing office blocks, shops and restaurants all over the rest of the site—is unlikely to budge from the drawing-board for years.

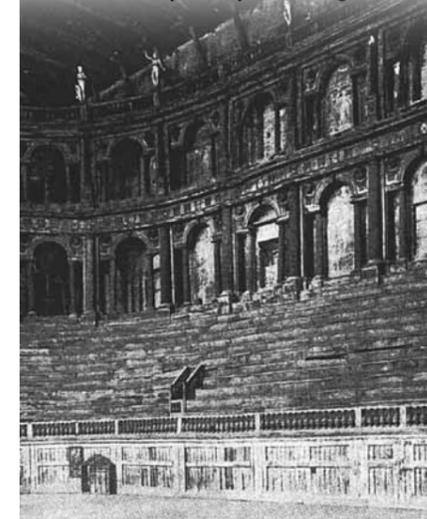
'What a mess,' Morrison said.

'Now the Culture Department is said to be planning a "big meeting" bringing together all those with an interest in the South Bank. Finding a date to suit that lot should take us into the early 22nd century.

'Meanwhile, the South Bank rots on.' ■

Melbourne (1854) and the Hippodrome in Sydney (1916).

The Farnese was one of the first theatres to use a curtain within the proscenium arch and the first designed for the use of movable scenery. Many of the ingenious



mechanical effects are still in place, including the complex plumbing devices once used to flood parts of the 40m stage for scenes involving naval battles.

Sadly the ceiling frescoes, gold detailing and the ducal box have disappeared, but the original wood and plasterwork remain.

Though the theatre closed in 1732, it survived because it is located inside one of Parma's great 17th century palaces, the Palazzo della Pilotta, the residence of the Farnese dukes.

It remained in limbo for over two centuries and suffered bomb damage in the Second World War.

Restoration started in 1956 and the building served as a museum until last June when Parma's Teatro Due reopened it with productions of *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*.

For further information visit: www.itis.pr.it/Progetti/1%20FARNESE/ ■

New arts incubator for Brisbane

The JWCCA in the Valley is a model for arts accessibility for smaller companies.

It's been described as a civilised, well-appointed home for smaller creative arts companies where they can develop new work, sustain existing work, teach, have artists truly in residence and be accessible to the other artists and the public—also as a model for other Australian states to emulate.

This remarkable facility is the new Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. It was created by architects Cox Rayner from two existing buildings, one an old office furniture store and the other the former Bushells Tea warehouse.

A new glass tower gives the building its unity and contemporary character.

The \$15.25 million centre houses seven of Brisbane's busiest contemporary arts companies: Expressions Dance Company, Rock'n'Roll Circus, the Institute of Modern Art, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, ELISION New Music Ensemble, The Arterial Group and the Queensland branch of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

Streetfront rentable shops will provide additional income and the adjacent main entrance gives easy access to the (as yet unnamed) 200-seat theatre in the centre of the complex.

The theatre has a large, lofty, flexible performing area with excellent lighting equipment. A push of a button retracts seating in a 15 minute operation, making

the space ideal for performances of all types.

Primarily a home space for the Expressions Dance Company, which inaugurated the theatre on 14 November 2001 with their program *Sketches III*, it is also being made available for hire by outside users. It will host Singapore's Odyssey Dance Theatre as a guest company in 2002.

The busy Expressions company tours schools and arts centres throughout Queensland as well as internationally, and runs choreographic workshops and community dance classes.

Rock'n'Roll Circus, one of Australia's leading physical theatre companies, has a studio providing height enough for performers to throw each other around.

There are facilities for rehearsal, management and the development of a Circus Training Centre. Community workshops will include a project working with young blind people.

Although the Circus will use the JWCCA as a base for national and international touring, it will give most of its hometown performances at the Brisbane Powerhouse.

The Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts is at 420 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006 and can be contacted on the website, www.jwcca.qul.gov.au

Brisbane's Festival Hall under threat

Owners of one of Brisbane's oldest rock venues have taken steps to prevent the site from being Heritage listed.

Festival Hall is up for tender and its owners have applied for a certificate to prevent its Heritage listing for the next five years. One application for Heritage listing has already failed.

John Wren, chairman of the company's board, claims there has been much misinformation about the planned sale, particularly concerning the venue's cultural heritage.

'Festival Hall has been commercially unviable for the past few years,' he said, 'despite our efforts to increase revenue.'

But Kelvin Johnston, of the Save The Music Campaign, claims the issue of economic viability is now a matter for government.

'John Wren has basically helped our cause,' Johnston said. 'We are aware that it could be a multi-purpose venue, so we see that as a viable alternative, and state and local government should invest in it.'

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Agency said: 'It is hard to predict how potential buyers will react to the bid for a certificate of immunity for the venue.'

'In most cases the one thing developers look for is the highest degree of certainty.'

Theatre programs' new accessibility

The State Library of Victoria's theatre program collection has been made available in the online catalogue, filed mostly by title, with some company files.

At the National Library of Australia, Canberra, a project to list all files in the PROMPT collection of the national collection is nearing completion. The huge collection, under a wide range of headings, comprises Australian theatre programs and ephemera.

The PROMPT list will be made available on the NLA's home page during 2002.

David Branson

3.2.1964–11.12.2001

Melbourne-born, Canberra-raised David Branson, actor, director, and musician, who divided his professional time between



the two cities, died in Canberra on Tuesday, 11 December as the result of a car accident.

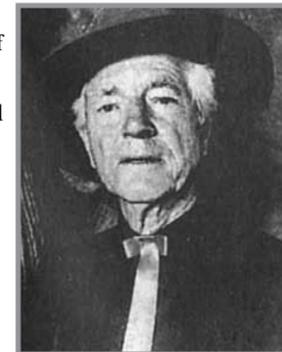
Educated at Dickson College, Canberra, where he touched drama through teacher

Stafford Bullen

1925–12.11.2001

One of the great figures of Australian circus, Stafford Leslie Bullen, has died, aged 76.

In 1920 Stafford's parents founded Bullen's



Circus, challenging this country's other great circuses, Wirth's, Perry's, Sole Brothers and Ashton's.

Stafford at age four, and with his sister and three brothers, went to school 'on the road', their teacher doubling as a musician in the circus band.

Soon Stafford was working as a contortionist, tumbler, clown, wirewalker, bareback rider, juggler, and eventually ringmaster. It was a hard life: young Stafford had to help erect the big top, train animals, play in the band and, above all, practise.

He became an expert animal trainer, with a particular affinity with elephants.

Early in World War II a young woman, Cleo Rinaldo, was invited to travel with the

Summer 2002

Exeunt

Ron Verburgh, he returned to Melbourne to study drama at Rusden College and the VCA.

A founding member of Splinters Theatre of Spectacle in 1985, he poured his apparently boundless energy into their riotous, cast-of-thousands, outdoor performances. Branson was involved in more than 20 works as performer and director and used live music, sculptural installations, video and fire effects.

His work in Melbourne became more frequent in the early 1990s with the Perseverance Hotel's Poetry Nights and Different Light series of performances.

Since 1988 he had worked often at La Mama, Carlton. In fact, just 10 days before his death he had completed directing John Ashton's and Jianguo Wu's *Beyond the Gates of Heavenly Peace* at La Mama.

circus for two weeks. Both her mother and Stafford's had been Tivoli showgirls. Stafford and Cleo fell in love and were married in 1953. Cleo worked as an elephant and horse rider, baton spinner and trapeze artist. Their four children travelled with them.

From 1965, when their mother died, Stafford and his brother Ken ran the business. In the 1960s, to counter the effects of television, Stafford Bullen began to diversify his activities. In 1965 he joined with the Tivoli Circuit to help the Edgley organisation tour the Great Moscow Circus in Australia.

Among other shows were *Disney on Parade*, the Monte Carlo Circus and the Moscow Circus on Ice. In 1968, Bullen's African Lion Safari opened at Warragamba in New South Wales. The following year Bullen's Circus finally went off the road.

With the Lion Safari attracting up to 200 000 visitors a year, Bullen transferred his energies to Bullen's Animal World at Wallacia, which included a permanent circus. At Casa Bullen, the palatial home he built next door, lion and tiger cubs, as well as the occasional elephant, could often be found exploring the back garden.

Before long Bullen was operating six animal parks in Australia and another in Auckland. He bred lions for export; by 1977 he estimated he had about 360!

Bullen's other business interests included property development, travel and

Earlier this year he had acted at La Mama in Alison Croggon's *Blue* and gave a remarkable performance in Graham Henderson's play *Meat*; Henderson's *Second Scream* he took to Canberra to critical acclaim.

In the ACT Branson was deeply involved with the Canberra Youth Theatre Company, as well as Freewheels in Newcastle, and was artistic director of Culturally Innovative Arts Inc.

At the time of his death Branson, who was a gifted violinist, was preparing a cabaret show, *Heart of the Black Sea*, at Canberra's Street Theatre, which was to feature Mikangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen, who had last been seen in the Speigeltent during the Melbourne International Festival.

entertainment, and British casinos. He attempted to buy into television in Brisbane and Sydney. For a few years from 1985 he based himself on the Isle of Man, travelling Europe with son Craig to buy animals for a zoo in Saudi Arabia.

As Sydney sprawled, Bullen battled stringent regulations on keeping exotic animals. Animal liberationists made him a target; he staunchly defended his record and the importance of his breeding program.

Bullen's Animal World closed in 1985 and the African Lion Safari in 1991. The family continued to maintain a private menagerie at Wallacia, hiring out animals for commercials and continuing to breed lions and tigers. Four years ago, Bullen's Mobile African Lion Safari toured Queensland. Early in 2001, Bullen was on the road again, with some elephants for Lennon Brothers' Circus.

Bullen lived and breathed circus. 'As a small child,' he said, 'I was filled with the wonder of it—the animals who became my friends, the big-hearted performers, the hard work. I later found the discipline of circus training invaluable in business. Under the big top there was a lot of laughter and the sort of comradeship you would never find in any other profession.'

Stafford Leslie Bullen is survived by his wife Cleo, a daughter, three sons and four grandchildren.

Out damned dot

Was Shakespeare computer literate? Judging from these quotes, perhaps he was...

- Will's lament upon crashing: 'The net has fallen upon me.' (*Henry VIII*, I, 1).
- Will's review of hypertext: 'There is magic in the web.' (*Othello*, III, 4).
- Will's cry when he can't click an icon: 'Mouse of virtue, answer me.' (*Twelfth Night*, I, 5).
- Why Will logs on at night: 'No man hath access by day.' (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, 1).
- Will after planting a virus: 'I put myself into thy file.' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, III, 3).

Keeping 'Keep Dancing!'

Thanks to generous funding by the Australia Council, the four year project of collecting and documenting thousands of metres of rare archival film have been completed.

'Keep Dancing!', a project managed by Michelle Potter, unearthed, identified and preserved the images, negotiated the acquisition of significant dance materials in all formats, and established the dynamic online Australia Dance Directory.

Look for it on the National Library of Australia's home page www.nla.gov.au

Louise Homfrey

22.12.1900–14.11.2001

The remarkable Louise Homfrey, actor, radio personality, mentor, and 'lady baritone' has passed away peacefully just a few



weeks short of her 101st birthday. Her long, colourful career began in 1926 at a pre-ABC 2BL Sydney, and the following year, with a trip to the UK and some singing engagements with the BBC.

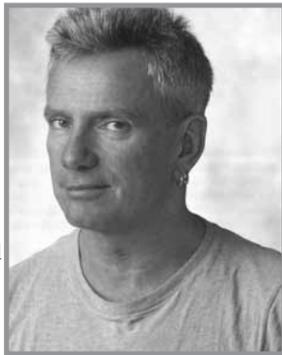
Back in Australia in 1929 she joined 2FC, the Tivoli Circuit, 2UW, freelanced on Melbourne radio from 1932, then took the helm of 3DB's Women's Radio Service in 1937 until a 'big row' ended the partnership in 1950.

After that she went into book distribution and retailing, became a stage director, actor and person-of-all-trades with

Richard Wherrett AO

10.12.1940-7.12.2001

One of the brightest, most inspired theatre practitioners in Australia, Richard Wherrett, died on Friday, 17 December, just three days short of his 61st birthday.



His interest in theatre began in the darkness of his local movie theatres in Sydney where he, his mother and brother Peter would escape his brutal father.

Educated at Trinity Grammar, Summer Hill, and at Sydney University, he returned to Trinity as a master in 1961, but, having made some stage appearances both acting and dancing, he left in 1964. This combination of teaching and acting served him well—the following year he did the London thing, becoming a teacher with the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art's E15 Acting School.

When he left RADA in 1968 he spent three years as a freelance director before returning to Australia in 1970.

Back on home territory, he was quickly made artistic director of the Australian Theatre for Young People and associate director of the Old Tote Theatre. His interest in encouraging youth into the theatre world lasted all his life and was one of his greatest joys.

With John Bell and Ken Horler he became co-artistic director of the seminal Nimrod Theatre. Among the extraordinary successes the trio engendered was the remarkable Bell-Wherrett actor-producer duo's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, and Wherrett's and Gordon Chater's *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin*. It was his greatest success at Nimrod and during its international tour in 1979 won best director, best actor and best play at the New York Off-Broadway (OBIE) Awards.

That was the year Wherrett was appointed founding director and chief executive with the Sydney Theatre Company. During his 11 years with STC he was to direct and program some landmark plays and productions in Sydney, interstate and internationally. These included John Bell in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Chicago*, which he took to Hong Kong in 1981 and 1983, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* which toured nationally in 1983-84, *Born Yesterday* (1984) starring his then partner Jacki Weaver, *Hedda Gabler* (1986) with Judy Davis and Colin Friels, *Emerald City* which toured nationally and to London in 1987-88), *Away* and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* which went national as well as to New York in 1987-88.

In 1989 he produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was set, controversially, in an all-night dance party.

By 1990, when he left the STC he had overseen its location to The Wharf theatre complex, and moved on to become artistic director of the 1992 and 1993 Melbourne International Festivals of the Arts. For this, his production of *Einstein on the Beach* was

Tin Alley Players, and tackled television and film.

On 26 November 2001 many of Louise's friends gathered to exchange happy memories in the Kiln Room at the Playbox Theatre Centre.

Among those joining in the nostalgic reminiscences were Meg Smith, Glenda Crawford, Brian Crossley, Beverley Dunn, Brian James, Monica Maughan, Malcolm Robertson, Frank Van Straten and James Wright.

[Louise Homfrey's amazing career was detailed in ON STAGE, Winter 2001.]

named by *Time* magazine as 'one of the seminal artworks of the 20th century'.

Back briefly with the STC as producer of *The Crucible* (which toured nationally in 1991 and 1994) and *The Life of Galileo* (1996), he spent the following 10 years in commercial theatre, with touring productions of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Shout! The Story of the Wild One*. He directed the film *Billie's Holiday* in 1995 which was chosen for screening at the Cannes Film Festival.

But without doubt his biggest audience was in September 2000, when he directed the lighting of the cauldron at the Sydney Olympic Games, brilliantly handling the temporary stalling (before 4.5 billion television viewers) of the cauldron's rise to the top of the stadium.

Awarded the Order of Australia for his services to theatre in 1984, it was one of many which, with the OBIE, included two Sydney Theatre Critics' Circle awards (1976 and 1990) and the Victorian Green Room Award in 1986 for his VSO production of *Turandot*. He served on the theatre board of the Australia Council, and on the board of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

During his brilliant career he nurtured the careers of so many prominent performers the list reads like a who's who of Australian theatre.

Richard Wherrett always said he wanted his funeral service to be at noon on a Friday. His wish was granted on 14 December 2001 at St John's Anglican Church, Darlinghurst; the order of service's credit page read 'Conceived and directed by Richard Wherrett'. ■

Miss Eleanor Goddard, Tragedienne

A case for closer study of provincial theatre in Australia

Historian of Her Majesty's Theatre, Ballarat, **Peter Freund**, looks at one of very few actresses of the Australian gold rushes who described herself as a 'tragedienne'.

The finest actress in heavy tragedy ever seen in Australia,' was how 'old Ballarat playgoer', William Furley, writing in 1904, recalled Miss Eleanor

Goddard, long-forgotten star of the 1850s. Furley's recollection is supported by contemporary commentary. A theatre reviewer in the *Ballarat Star* of July 1857 wrote:

'As an artiste her powers of conception and execution are eminently graphic. Her rendering of character has at all times a striking individuality about it that appeals alike both through eye and ear to the imagination and the intellect, and swerves at will the passions and emotions of the spectator with a degree of intensity possessed only by genius of a high order, and the result of a careful cultivation and training of great natural gifts.'

Miss Goddard was extremely popular in the provincial theatres of Victoria, in Bendigo, Ballarat and Castlemaine, but failed to build a following in Melbourne.

An examination of her life and career poses some interesting questions—about the relationship between male and female stars of that period; about metropolitan and provincial theatres; about the factors which contributed to the success or failure of our theatrical tourists of the 1850s.

A serious tragic actress is one of the rarest of theatrical beasts. Goddard was one of very few actresses of the Australian gold rushes who described herself as a 'tragedienne'.

Advertisements for her 1857 Sydney

season described her as 'universally admitted to be the Siddons of the day', which makes it all the more puzzling that a strong and skilled performer like Eleanor Goddard has virtually disappeared from

probably the American infant prodigy, Anna Maria Quinn, who performed the part in Sydney at the age of 10. Mary Provost was perhaps the most prominent female star to tour Australia in the 1850s,

but Goddard seems to have been the only one who aspired to the mantle of the great Sarah Siddons as an exponent of tragedy.

This brought her into direct competition with male stars G.V. Brooke and McKean Buchanan whose paths were continuously crossing hers.

During the time Caple was co-manager of Bendigo's Criterion Theatre, Goddard did a season as Buchanan's leading lady. There were evidently status issues simmering: according to the *Bendigo Advertiser*, after playing Lady Macbeth to Buchanan's Macbeth, Goddard refused to take a curtain call 'doubtless not appreciating the gallantry of leaving the ladies to the last'.

She shared star billing with Brooke at the Melbourne Theatre Royal in August 1857, not the first time they had appeared together. She had encountered Brooke earlier: at her 1849 debut at the Hull (England) Theatre Royal she was billed to play Desdemona to Brooke's Othello. On that night placards had to be put up that 'Mr Brooke was seriously

indisposed, and that his medical adviser had forbidden him not only to abstain from continuing his professional avocation, but that even the external air would be injurious to him'.

It seems that sudden non-appearances by Brooke were not unknown before his arrival in Australia.

The phenomenon of female stars taking on certain of the great male Shakespearean roles, particularly Hamlet, is very interesting and warrants further exploration.

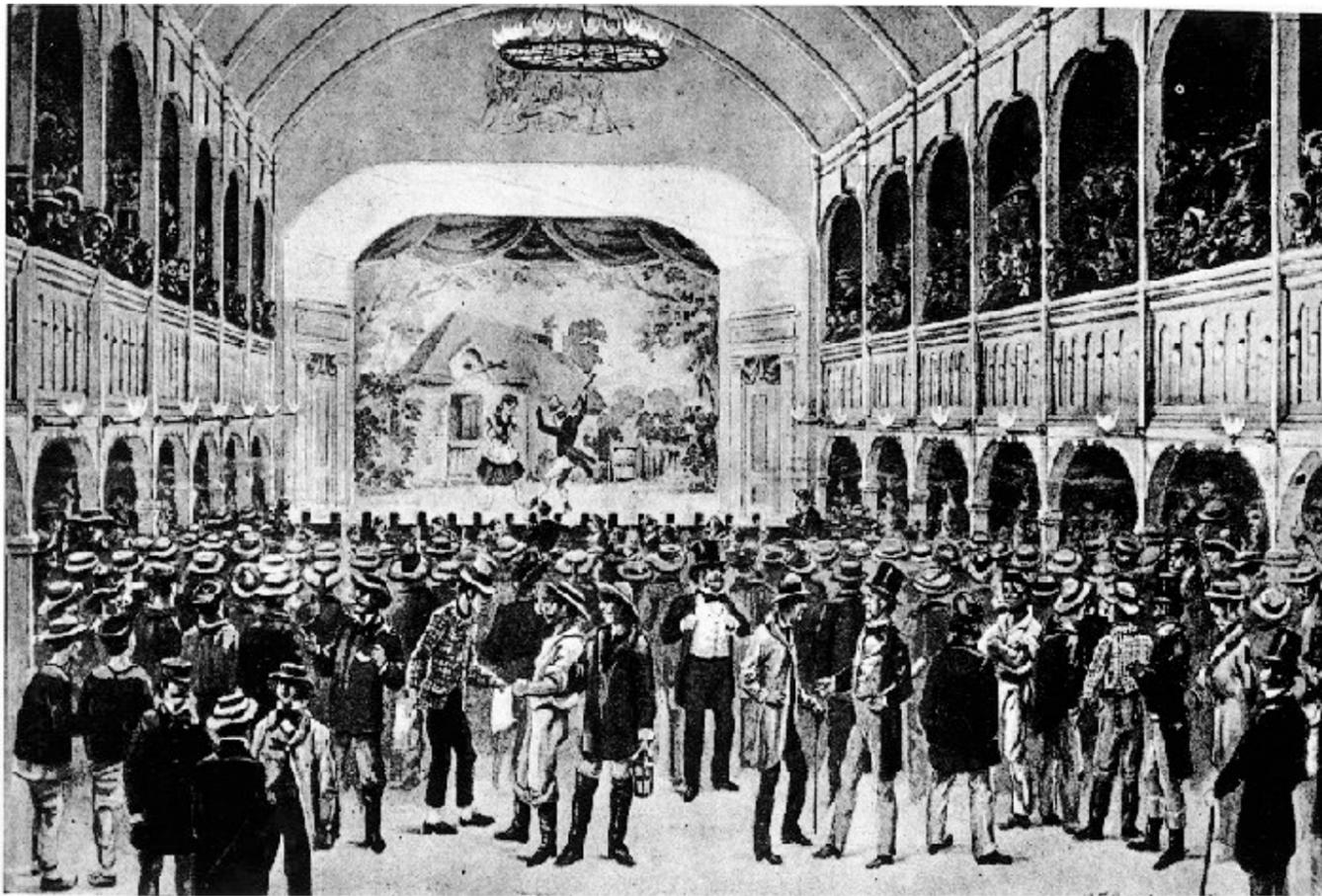


Miss Goddard as Adrienne Lecouvreur in Oxenford's *The Reigning Favourite*. (Daguerreotype by G.Villiers, Leeds, England, c.1850. Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library)

accounts of the theatre of the gold rushes, in spite of her achievement in premiering Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in Australia, and being a notable female Romeo and Hamlet.

There were of course other female stars touring at this period. Mrs Brougham not only achieved star billing, but also was a very competent theatre manager during her time in Australia, and pre-empted Goddard with a female Hamlet in Ballarat in 1856.

Australia's first female Hamlet was



While the tradition of female Hamlets goes back to Sarah Siddons and beyond, the revival of the fashion in the 1850s is attributable to Charlotte Cushman, the great American lesbian actress, who undertook the role in London in 1851, the same year that Goddard made her London debut at Sadler's Wells.

Undoubtedly the tragediennes were expanding the repertoire available to them, but there was also a clear challenge to the status of the male stars. Also at play were ways of portraying the sensitivity of youth on the mid-century stage. To quote the *Ballarat Star* again...

'Exception has been taken to female representation, but to our thinking, without effect. The youth of Hamlet has always proved a difficult obstacle to men of acknowledged genius. When age has set his seal upon the frame—and few men there are who attain such consummate excellence in their profession as to assure them a tolerable success in the character until it has—it requires too large a stretch of the imagination, and removes us too far from a realisation of its ideality to enable us to be altogether satisfied with a man's

representation of it.'

While pointing out that Hamlet is not an effeminate character, and therefore difficult for a woman to portray, he goes on...

'It is the youth and tenderness—the pathos—the melancholy and wayward subtlety of the character, however, in elucidating and portraying [sic] which men mostly fail, and women, when passable at all, most generally succeed.'

This discussion of female versus male Hamlets is an interesting precursor to the well-known debate as to the correct conception of the character that developed around Walter Montgomery and James Anderson's rival Hamlets in Melbourne in 1867.

It is curious that Miss Goddard became a provincial star during the time she was in Australia, as that had been her status in England before her arrival.

Her origins are unclear. Born in 1826, she claimed connection with the aristocratic Baynton Goddard family of Clyffe Pypard Manor in Wiltshire. She appeared with Caple's Company at the age of 20. Caple was trying to build a theatrical

Ballarat's Charlie Napier Theatre, 1857.

Goddard generally played the up-market Montezuma Theatre in Ballarat, but appeared at the popular 'Charlie' in 1857. This is a contemporary sketch by scenic artist Alexander Habbe.

management business in a difficult and unpredictable time, many of the established circuits breaking up as the result of the coming of the railways and the consequent rise of touring companies. Australia saw a similar but less dramatic development in the 1860s.

Goddard was Caple's leading lady, and then wife, in Lincolnshire. From there they moved into Hull and the Yorkshire Theatrical Circuit. As well as their provincial addresses they maintained a base in London, but it is not clear what sort of profile Goddard had in the metropolis. In 1851 she had the opportunity to appear as leading lady with Samuel Phelps' Shakespearean company at Sadler's Wells, succeeding Isabella Glyn.

Goddard's relative inexperience told against her, in spite of Phelps' coaching. She returned to the Yorkshire Circuit



Mr Caple as Macbeth and Miss Goddard as Lady Macbeth—a lithograph from a Daguerreotype by G. Villiers, Leeds, England c.1850. (Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library)

where she had an enthusiastic following.

By 1854, haggling over control of the Yorkshire Circuit made the viability of the Caple's Yorkshire business more and more questionable. He gave up the Circuit to undertake a tour of the Australian and Californian goldfields with Goddard.

The tour got off to a bad start as Melbourne, where they opened, was full of news of riots on the goldfields. The Eureka rebellion occurred in the middle of their season, and theatrical business dried up. George Coppin's return from England during their season and his preparations for the arrival of G.V. Brooke and company would certainly not have helped their business.

The pair put off their visit to the goldfields, sailing instead for Hobart and then Sydney for brief seasons before taking off for California.

Their second Australian visit in 1856–57 was more extended and more successful than their first.

Although success in Melbourne still proved elusive for them, the troubles on the goldfields were over, and business was booming in the new theatres that had been erected in the gold rush towns. Goddard met with a warm reception on successive visits to Ballarat, but it was Bendigo where they chose to make an extended stay.

Caple undertook the management of Bendigo's Criterion Theatre in partnership with Sam Howard. Under their management Brooke, Quinn and Buchanan all appeared there.

When Howard became joint manager of Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre, Caple and Goddard left the Bendigo Criterion to Mrs Brougham's management and joined him there for a season.

After Sydney, an extended Ballarat visit was followed by a final season in Melbourne where Goddard co-starred with G.V. Brooke before they returned to England. During this time Goddard recreated Isabella Glyn's role as the Duchess of Malfi in Orion Horne's adaptation of the play, first staged at Sadler's Wells in 1850.

The fortunes of one of the first serious tragediennes to tour Australia deserve closer study. It would be too easy for an historian of theatre in the gold era to look at Goddard's failure to develop a Melbourne following and dismiss her success in Ballarat and Bendigo as merely provincial success.

It is dangerous to apply metropolitan/provincial models to the theatre of the gold rush era in Australia without qualification.

Audiences on the goldfields were likely to have a similar cultural outlook as audiences in Melbourne, given that the bulk of the colony's population were new arrivals and were likely to have been exposed to the same standard of

performance in their countries of origin.

There certainly is evidence of the development through this period of a metropolitan/provincial divide. Melbourne critics may have looked askance at an artist like Goddard who was successful in the goldfields 'provinces'. Another example is the scorn and resentment evident in William Furley's statement regarding that ornament of the Melbourne stage in the 1860s, Barry Sullivan:

'I believe he came up to spy out the weaknesses of the land, but I suppose he thought us unworthy of having such an illustrious actor as his High Mightiness to shine in our obscure town, but we could do very well without him.'

Furley directly contrasted Sullivan's 'whims and restlessness' with the 'vigour and intelligence' of another Ballarat favourite, young English tragedian, Henry Neil Warner.

An artist like Eleanor Goddard illustrates the danger of examining the significance of performers simply on the basis of success in Melbourne. Too often the touring activities of these stars are dismissed in a sentence or two. There is a need to map the cultural landscape of Victoria in the 1850s to examine the distinctive characteristics of the goldfields theatres in the context of their communities, and the extent to which the Ballarat or Bendigo stages, for example, differed from the Melbourne stage.

It may well be that characteristics of certain performers tended to be admired more in one environment than another. The role of theatre managers, and entrepreneurs like Coppin, is also a key part of the picture.

Postscript

By 1858 Caple and Goddard were back in England making a return visit to Hull.

They then took the Dundee Theatre Royal for a season, where Eleanor had full houses to see her in the great Shakespearean roles, while theatre audiences in general were dwindling.

Caple and Goddard continued to make regular visits to Dundee and other Scottish theatres until 1860, when John Caple died in London. His widow soon acquired a new manager and a new husband—Robert Anderson (stage name Bob Douglas), whom she married in Perth, Scotland, on 8 September 1863. Her later life awaits further research. ■

The Turner touch

It's reassuring firstly to find that Geraldine Turner is one of Stephen Sondheim's favourite interpreters of his work, and secondly that she has just completed recording a new album of his songs.

The album, for the US label Bayview Recording Company, includes several of Sondheim's songs which have never been recorded before.

Geraldine Turner Sings the Stephen Sondheim Songbook is actually the second volume of the composer's work Turner—Australia's original Mrs Lovett—has recorded. This one, however, has the added advantage (as well as the never-before-recorded-by-anyone items) of songs which have been written specially for her to include.

With a group of Class A musicians directed by Brian Castles-Onion (who is also arranger of the scores and, incidentally, Mr Geraldine Turner) the album has been mixed in Sydney and is ready for a world release around March 2002.

Before any further production could take place the final mix was forwarded to Sondheim for his approval. Needless-to-say, it was given. The album will be available through Middle Eight Music and the VAC Shop, both of whom offer generous discounts to VTT members. ■

New performing arts museums

...in Perth

Western Australia's first dedicated Museum of Performing Arts has officially opened at His Majesty's Theatre in Hay Street, Perth.

The museum acknowledges the importance of the state's rich and colourful entertainment history, from the earliest days of the Swan River Colony, through the Gold Rush to the computerised present.

Situated adjacent to the DownStairs at the Maj Restaurant, the museum has a program of constantly changing exhibitions from its vast treasure chest, which includes photographs, programs, posters, press clippings, scrapbooks, scripts, sheet music, sound tapes, designs and an array of magnificent costumes.

Thanks to the generosity of private

collectors the world over, every genre of the performing arts is represented from music and opera, to dance, drama, vaudeville, revue, circus and stand-up comedy.

The museum's oldest Western Australian item is a silk program from a Perth amateur theatrical performance in 1854, just 25 years after the establishment of the Swan River Colony.

Even the room in which the museum resides has its unique history. Prior to becoming a successful restaurant frequented by Perth's elite in the 1980s, it served as a health club complete with a swimming pool.

His Majesty's Theatre historian and Museum of Performing Arts curator Ivan King, provides his theatrical expertise during informative tours of the theatre and museum.

Schools, tourist and other specialist groups are encouraged, and donations of Western Australian theatre memorabilia to the Museum of Performing Arts are always welcome. You can contact His Majesty's Theatre by phone on (08) 9265 0900; e-mail: hmtperth@peg.apc.org

...and in Brisbane

After a long period of research and preparation, the Queensland Performing Arts Museum opened with *Defining Acts: Australia on Stage*, an exhibition in the refurbished Cremorne Gallery at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex.

The theatrically designed exhibition explored the representation of the Australian character on stage. Starting with Federation in 1901, it traced the changing face of what it means to be 'an Australian' and showed how popular representation on stage reflected social attitudes and cultural values of the times.

Visitors shared the journey of the past 100 years with images that have shaped our perceptions of the Australian character.

The display featured six 'Acts': Celebrating Federation, The Bush Tradition—Bushrangers and Battlers; Growing Up—An Australian Voice Emerges; Vaudeville; Sing Out Loud—Musical Theatre; and Breaking the Bounds—Playwriting by Australians, about Australians for Australians.

Defining Acts: Australia on Stage was mounted with assistance from the Queensland Government's Centenary of Federation Community Assistance Program.

A Melbourne season is being planned.

For further information on the Queensland Performing Arts Museum, contact Beryl Davis, Collections Manager, on (07) 3840 7362 (beryl@qpac.com.au) or Christopher Smith, Curator, on (07) 3840 7516 (cjs@qpac.com.au). ■

Arts and bums

Looking at bums on seats, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported the performing arts industry's bottom line earning totalled \$1.634 billion in the 1999–2000 year.

Expenses were \$1.58 billion with wages the highest at \$364 million, contract payments for artists and production companies next at \$166 million, rent and hire at \$96 million and promotion \$90 million.

Pre-tax profit for the industry was \$50.8 million, a 4.8 per cent profit margin.

Music and theatre production organisations generated \$505 million in income, performing arts venues \$316 million and festivals of two days or more \$103 million,

Government funding of \$470 million outweighed box office takings of \$461 million. The balance was supplied by sponsorships, donations, bequests and royalties.

According to ABS, the 1437 arts industry organisations employed a total of 16 429 people as at the end of June 2000, adding 20 752 volunteers, more than 17 000 of them at festivals.

Queuing at the box office were 15.2 million paid attendances, 13.3 million of the patrons being for musical or theatrical productions, which gave 47 083 performances during the statistical year. ■

Gus goss



What would our dance community do with \$432 000? Believe it or not that's what the Australia Council has just given the Victorian College of the Arts to fund something called *Conceiving Connections*,

described as 'research into who goes to dance performances, why, and what their responses are'. The study began back in 1988 under the leadership of Professor Shirley McKechnie.

- Gus, the theatre cat

The Twentieth of May

These confessions of a chorus-boy, by ex-chorus-boy **Robert Foster**, are based on his experiences— with just a little author's licence here and there.

Next Week on the Twentieth of May 1999, You Are Invited to a Reunion to Celebrate the Fortieth Anniversary of My Fair Lady, the invitation read.

'Why the 20th of May? What's the significance of that date?' asked Jack.

'The 20th of May is Liza Doolittle Day, as the song goes, "Next week on the Twentieth of May we proclaim Liza Doolittle Day";' I sang.

'You obviously weren't a singer.'

'No and you know that,' I said, feeling a little hurt. 'I put a lot of training into becoming a dancer, in the Fifties. It wasn't easy doing it then—you had to work all day then study at night; not like today.'

Now it's a real business with all the dance studios about.

'I can remember trudging up Bourke Street to the King's Theatre in Russell Street in the middle of a Melbourne winter in a black duffle coat, clutching my Gladstone bag full of ballet flats and tights.'

We didn't realise how much style Melbourne had in the Fifties—the Paris end of Collins Street before the developers hit and the first of the Whelan the Wrecker signs arrived, those marvellous old mansions, the Spring Street terraces overlooking the gardens—today it would never be allowed to be destroyed.

The Oriental, with its Rib Room restaurant, all red and plush with its private booths around the walls. Ciro's, our own nightclub; Roland Bernard the Milliner; Russell Collins and Elizabeth Collins with

Georges at its peak; the store at the top of the hill. Then there was Bourke Street with its history all intact; Parliament House; the Windsor Hotel; the theatre district—His Majesty's, the Comedy and 'the theatre beautiful', the Princess. Never were these theatres dark. The Italian Opera Seasons, G&S, Evie Hayes in something, Marjorie Lawrence in *Aida*, the Borovansky Ballet and the National Theatre Opera and Ballet Seasons.

The green double decker buses. When you actually got dressed up to go to town, the suburban invasion of shopping centres hadn't been thought of and hadn't destroyed an outing to the city.

The stores, Cox Bros, Malcolm Reid's, Manton's then Walton's, Norman's Corner Stores, Foy and Gibson, the Leviathan, Darrod's, Buckley and Nunn, the London Stores, Hicks Atkinson and The Myer Emporium, famous for its double arcade of windows and a trip up the four floors of escalators to the Mural Hall, where morning tea was an added treat.

The Australia Arcade and Hotel, known for its six o'clock closing swill, Henry Buck's, and the H.P.Alexander tailor's shop where the little man tapped on the window.

This was the Melbourne we loved, where you could still have the milkman deliver a bottle of milk, with a jar of cream on Sundays, right to your front door.

Melbourne, June 1951...

I stood at the top of the cobblestone laneway that ran down the side of the King's Theatre, adorned, as it was, with

posters announcing the imminent arrival of the new musical *The Highwayman*.

The gloom of a winter's night closed in on me as I walked towards a single light globe at the end of the laneway, lighting a wooden door and a sign announcing the entrance of the school of dance. Entering, I climbed the dust filled wooden stairs to the third floor, passing corridors filled with doorways, obviously soon to be the dressing rooms of the cast of the new show.

'Here's the new boy,' boomed a voice from a blowzy blonde at the top of the stairs. 'Must be punctual, you know. Can't be staggering in halfway through a class. Once the orchestra's in, the curtain is up, the performance has begun—no use arriving then. The show is over.'

'I don't finish work till 5.30,' I replied.

'And where might that be?' she demanded.

'The Myer Emporium,' I answered.

'The ballerinas' graveyard. They all do a performance there at some stage of their lives.'

'Where do I go now?' I asked.

'Change boy, change. The dressing room is over there,' indicating a curtained off corner of the room, 'and you can call me Miss Jane, and what's your name may I enquire?'

'Robert.'

'No, we'll call you Robin. There are too many Roberts around now... Menzies, Helpmann. No, we don't need another Robert at this moment.'

'What if I become famous, no one



will know who I am,' I protested.

'Praise the Lord that that should ever happen, but should it be, by some misguided twist of fate, they will know who you are. Who would employ someone by the name of Peggy Hookham, but they did—thank you, Miss Fonteyn. Enough of this frivolity! Over here is our wardrobe department. George is in control.' A head appeared from behind a pile of tulle and a sewing machine.

'Nice to meet you, Robin—and welcome to the asylum.'

'Thanks,' I replied. He must be an old theatrical, I thought, by the hint of make up around his eyes, plus his hair looking like it came off at night.

'Hurry boy and change, I can't hold the class much longer, "Madame" will be furious, she's from the old Russian school of dance, Cecchetti's favourite pupil. Move it.' And I did.

Whipping aside the change room curtain I was suddenly confronted by five other potential students, who had been eavesdropping on my arrival.

'We want to be famous?' quipped a blonde boy.

'I want to play the Prince,' said another.

'More like the ponce with that sagging arse,' came another reply.

'You'd better hurry,' a dark boy addressed me. 'They really hate starting the class late.'

The day my tights dyed

I dragged a pair of black tights and an athletic support from my bag. The tights: Mum had dyed a pair of Dad's old long johns black and sewed up the important parts. The support was the ugliest piece of attire I'd ever seen, the elastic straps went in every direction other than the way they should and the support did everything but that, and to have one's rear end exposed to the world in the middle of winter didn't add any enthusiasm for the garment.

I donned the tights, shirt and ballet flats and followed the other boys into the classroom.

One wall was entirely mirror, the other had a long wooden bar set at waist height and the fourth had three chairs and a piano. 'Madame' was seated in the centre chair holding a long wooden rod. A short sharp

featured woman with grey hair pulled back in a bun, she rose from the seated position with her back as straight as the rod in her hand with which she banged the floor three times, everyone took their positions at the barre.

'Pliés in first, second and third position with porte bras.' She turned to the piano where a tall redhead sat surrounded by cigarette butts and ashtrays. 'Madam' nodded to commence, and the class began.

I tried to follow the person in front of me in both barre and floor work, but mostly in vain. I was told to straighten my back, lift my chin, strengthen my arms and to turn something out, referring to my feet.

At the end of the class everyone bowed

'Child,' yelled Miss Jane. 'Child, here,' indicating a position in front of her. 'What are these?' She clutched at my tights.

to 'Madame' plus light applause. Her acknowledgment was 'Class dismissed'. We all filed out of the room. As I neared the door she pointed at me with the rod, indicating my presence was required.

'Take this, my child, and read it carefully. It will help you when you return to your next class.'

She handed me a small book, *Ballet for Beginners*. 'In years to come you may hand this on to another, as someone once did for me.'

I thanked her profusely; my spirits suddenly soared as if I was being accepted into the world of dance. Clutching it closely in my hands I returned to the change room.

'Child,' yelled Miss Jane. 'Child, here,' indicating a position in front of her. 'What are these?' She clutched at my tights.

'Tights mean tight, not this mountain of sagging underwear handed down from your grandfather's bottom drawer—and I won't ask what you're wearing underneath! The audience comes to see men perform in tights, not what is performing *in* their tights.

'George!' she screamed, 'Help this child, and his anatomy so he can at least appear in public without exposing himself to the world around us.' With that she left to return to her office.

'Madhouse, my boy, madhouse! But

that's what we love about it. You'll get used to it. Come into my wardrobe.'

We went to the far corner where his sewing machine and costume racks were set up.

'This is my home and office. They call me the wardrobe master, and I look after all the costumes. I have for years. Take of your tights.'

'Here?' I asked.

'This room has seen a lot worse than what you have to offer.'

'But they're wet with perspiration.'

'Boy, if you could see some of the crummy crotches I've had to handle around here, yours will be a delight to behold.'

He popped some pins in the sides just before I removed the offending garment.

As I stood there in my shirt and jockstrap; he lifted my shirt and turned me around in a circle.

'Oh, dear, my poor boy, that belongs on the football field wrapped around a body much

bigger than yours!

'Do me a favour, donate it to the Richmond Football Club—they could do with all the support they can get.'

He dived into a carton and rummaged around to reveal a strip of cotton fabric with three-inch elastic sides and a narrow piece of fabric that ran up the rear.

'Try this. This is what you need. It holds everything where it should be.

'Some dancers fold a handkerchief into a square to give their bulge a more streamlined effect. With you I wouldn't bother. You've got enough to fill it anyway.'

I tried on the dance belt. It felt good, it felt tight and comfortable, but the rear strip of fabric tended to disappear completely—that I needed to get used to!

'It looks good.' He patted me on the bottom. 'Keep it as a gift from an old pro. Just remember me when you're famous.'

I clasped his hands and thanked him, 'You've really made my night with all your help. What can I do in return?'

'Nothing, not a thing. I've enjoyed this more than you'll ever know.

'Now go and get changed.'

Another pat on the bum sent me on my way. ■

To be continued...

Australian musical set for New York

It's happening! At long last an Australian musical is set to play in New York—

The creation of two bright young Melbourne theatre people—Dean Bryant, 24, (right) and Mathew Frank, 25, (left)—*Prodigal Son* (now called *Prodigal*) is about to open in New York.

Dean Bryant tells us how it all happened...

Mathew and I wrote *Prodigal Son* while we were studying at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts. The show was workshopped there by the third-year graduating students in September 1999. This worked well and was followed by a short season at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

In January 2000 Mathew and I produced *Prodigal Son* in The Attic at Chapel Off Chapel in Melbourne as part of the Midsumma Festival. We had really excellent reviews and sell-out audiences, so we relocated to the Chapel's larger space



for an extra week. There was so much interest that we staged a fully professional revival in July 2000. The show won the inaugural Green Room Award for Best Original Music and Lyrics, as well as Best Supporting Actor for Graham Pages as Zach/Kane.

The show was recorded and the CD is now distributed internationally. It's on sale in stores across the world, including Footlights, the famous show biz music shop in New York. But that's not how the NYC season came about!

We'd given a copy of the CD to our friend Linda Tullberg, an Australian theatre and cabaret enthusiast who lives in New York City. She passed it onto Jim Morgan, the artistic director of the York Theatre Company at a fundraising benefit. He listened to it, loved it, and got in contact with us.

We happened to have

booked to go to New York in June 2001 on a holiday financed by *The People in Your Pocket*, a children's show we'd written for the Centenary of Federation. It told the stories of the 10 Australians featured on our banknotes and we'd presented it for 16 000 children across Victoria and South Australia.

Jim Morgan wanted to do a reading of *Prodigal* while we were there, so we rehearsed for two days with an

American director and actors. We did the piece, books in hand, just before we left. It went over very well, even in American accents, and the York picked it up as one of their mainstage productions.

Every year the York does three new musicals in their off-Broadway theatre, six concert presentations of older 'unappreciated' musicals and up to 30 readings of new works. The York is a non-profit, subscription based company, and the only one in the world that does purely musical theatre.

We went back to New York in September to meet with eight potential American directors.

We had two-hour meetings with each and finally chose Victoria Pero, an up-and-coming director. We went back again in November to cast the actors. We took dialect tapes and videos of Australia TV programs to give to the actors we cast.

We're so proud that when *Prodigal* opens on 26 February it will be the first Australian musical to be produced in New York City.

It's pretty exciting to be taking an Australian piece back to where musicals were invented.

CD at Middle Eight

The original Melbourne cast recording of *Prodigal Son* is distributed internationally by Middle Eight Music, the on-line CD suppliers who generously offer VTT supporters a 10% discount on all purchases. E-mail: mem@bigpond.net.au; Web: www.middle8.com.

You can find out more about the York Theatre at www.yorktheatre.org ■

Theatre software breakthrough

David Sperling, a director of photography for movies and television, has developed a custom designed database that manages the thousands of details involved in a theatrical production, from the beginning of rehearsals through to the final performance.

The improved organiser allows more time to be spent on the creative process.

Play Rehearsal Scheduler (PRS) generates more than 60 pre-designed reports to create rehearsal schedules, scene breakdowns, cast, prop, costume, music, crew, and set-lists. With this standardised system, directors can have access to everything they need to know about cast and crew and tech requirements, with

multiple ways to view, sort, organise and report data.

Many US regional theatre companies and road tours are now using the database. It retails for around US\$65.

For further information, go to www.onsetsoftware.com/ ■

Backstage at The Maj, the scene is being set



A small group of former backstage staff of The Maj, Melbourne, including several VTT members, were given a special tour of the work-to-date on renovations to the stage area on 16 December 2001.

Hosted by Roger Shand, development manager for Hayden Enterprises, the group saw relics of the original Maj uncovered for the first time in over 70 years: painted-on wall décor from around the top of the old boxes, some charred remains of structural timber from the 1929 fire, the bricked outline of the original proscenium arch and the panorama of London for *Oliver!*, painted on the rear wall.

Already the proscenium has been widened by one metre to 11m. Several metres of asbestos have been removed from beneath the orchestra pit. The pit itself will be split level.

Stage flooring has been laid with a trapdoor grid and has been designed for maximum flexibility.

Ten metres above, at the fly floor, can be seen the 90 fly lines and the four panorama lines, including the spectacular new red velvet house 'rag' (see ON STAGE, Autumn 2001).

And just when will that 'rag' rise and what will it reveal? That's one of the best-kept theatrical secrets in Melbourne. But Gus, the theatre cat, says that *Cabaret* is scheduled for the stage mid-year, preceded by one or more mystery shows to run-in the new equipment. ■

[Photograph by Peter Barker Photography (03) 5975 5499; Internet www.photographer.mel.net. Reproduced by courtesy of David Penfold.]



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Send them to The Editor at the above postal address or e-mail to: davidcullinane@ozemail.com.au

Every effort will be made to return any hard copy illustrations if a specific request is made to do so, but no responsibility will be taken over their return.

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