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THE MOST SECRET SHAKESPEARE

by katharine brisbane



The Prospect Theatre Company's* touring productions of *KING LEAR* and *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* come to Australia with a vanguard of the sort of reviews a theatre manager dreams about.

"The Lear was to me a revelation" (Harold Hobson in the *Sunday Times*). "It is a great and terrifying performance and leaves you shaking and solitary and wishing to be silent" (*The Scotsman*). "An admirable interpretation . . . a discovery of the most secret Shakespeare" (Pietro Masserano Tricco in *L'Umanite*, Florence). "Timothy West seems to be the successor of Olivier . . ." (*Gazzetta Del Popolo*, Turin). "*LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* is a small but real enchantment . . . The verse sometimes seems so beautiful that it stops the blood" (*The Sunday Times*).

"This Prospect Company production under Toby Robertson and Kenny McBain is designed almost exclusively for laughs, and in this it's triumphantly successful" (*The Financial Times*).

"This production by Toby Robert-

son and Kenny McBain is more consistent and thoughtful than most attempts to up-date Shakespeare's plays. Its contemporary style arises from the text, instead of being imposed upon it" (*The Scotsman*).

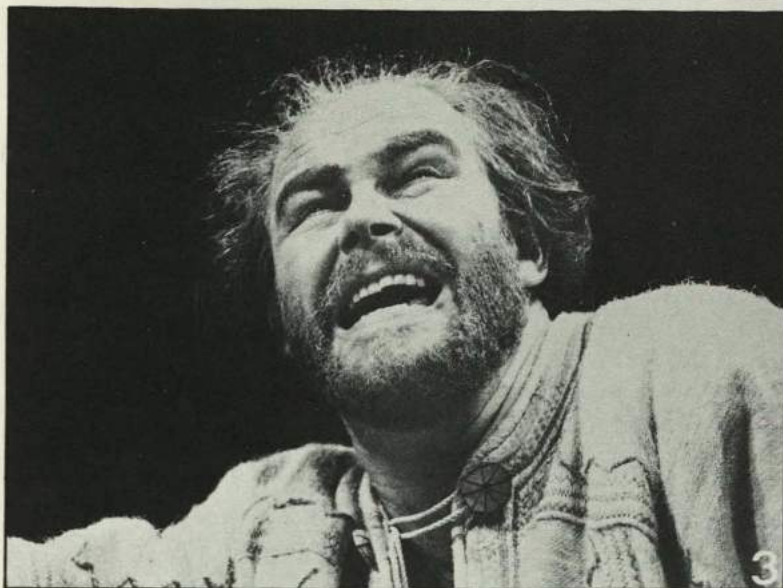
And so on.

Such reviews in reality are sometimes a burden to a theatre company, bearing down a weight of responsibility for always being brilliant in public, like a lionised guest at the best parties. But the Prospect is very new on the international scene; it has had, like all companies, as many bad notices as good ones and now moves about so fast that its newest reputation follows haltingly behind.

This is the case in Australia whither they would come entirely unknown but for their three television epics of *RICHARD II*, *EDWARD II* and a mod adaptation of *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA*. But the evidence is that we are to see the Prospect Company when it is just at the crest of its full maturity. It has done clever things in the past and it has resourceful, educated minds behind its policies. It

1. Michael Graham Cox (Oswald) and Trevor Martin (Kent) in *KING LEAR* 2. Ian Sharp (Moth) in *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*

Front Cover: Sir Robert Helpmann in *CINDERELLA*—photo Anthony Crickmay, London



has been a star-maker, introducing the beautiful Lila Kedrova's Madame Ranevsky in *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* to Edinburgh and London in 1967, which won her the Evening Standard Award for the best actress of the year; and making a coup of operatic style with the very young star Ian McKellen at the 1969 Edinburgh Festival when he opened as Richard II and Edward II on successive nights. These two productions also established, along with the previous year's performance as Dr. Johnson in *BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON*, the stature of their present leading man, Timothy West, in the protagonist roles of Bolingbroke and Mortimer.

They have made some adventurous choices for their classical repertoire—Otway's *VENICE PRESERVED*, for example—and they have had disasters, too. Ian McKellen's *HAMLET*, with which he followed Richard and Edward, bombed out despite respectful attention on a European tour. McKellen has now left the company and moved on to other things.

Such is the extent of their touring programme, they have mounted since their inception in 1961 only 20 major productions. They also have an almost unique problem in being the only theatre company in Great Britain without a theatre of its own. More than that, it is probably the only classical drama company in the world without a home of its own.

"Nowadays we live entirely on tour, although we have administrative offices in London," says the administrator, Iain Mackintosh. "One horrifying statistic is that since April 5 last year we have played 25 theatres—more by the time we open in Adelaide—of which six were in Europe. We also have a group touring the university campuses with an experimental production of *THE BACCHAE*. *LEAR* and *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* re-open in Britain at the end of February and play two weeks before starting an eight-week tour of Australia. Then we take them back to Britain and open at the Aldwych Theatre, the London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company."

This, though they are modest about it, is an accolade for the Prospect and a tribute to Timothy West's *Lear*, which appeared so suddenly and is recognised as the major interpretation of the mad king since Paul Scofield's at Stratford in 1962. Since they established themselves as a company touring Shakespeare they have lived in the shadow of the RSC.

Oddly—and yet not so oddly—the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Prospect Theatre Company came from the same incubator and still show the strong convictions of their early training, despite their endeavours to be as different as possible from each other. Toby Robertson, director of the Prospect Theatre Company and the man who directed Timothy West's *Lear*, is a Cambridge man like almost all the major directors of Shakespeare in Britain. He was up in the early 50's at a time which generated a major influence upon the new thought in the British theatre, and he came under the influence of such people as the don George Rylands, who in earlier times was instrumental in the development of the Geilgud style of

3. Timothy West as Lear

4. John Bailey (Don Atriano) in *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*



Shakespeare. On graduating, Mr. Robertson formed a co-operative known as the Elizabethan Theatre Company in which his colleagues were, among others, Peter Hall (who became director of the Stratford Memorial Theatre in 1960, which in his hands became the Royal Shakespeare Company in January, 1961), John Barton (then a Cambridge don, now the great grey eminence of the RSC and whose protégé a few years later was to be Trevor Nunn, now the executive director), Tony Church (a principal actor with the RSC who in the late 60's as director of the Northcott Theatre, Exeter, established a large touring company for the south of England) and Colin George (director for many years of the Sheffield Playhouse, one of Britain's major regional companies, and Britain's top theorist on children's theatre). Although they have all long ago left behind Mr. Ryland's theories of Shakespeare production—and he looks with surprise and some distaste at what he feels are vulgarities—the text has always remained of primary importance to these people and they have their different ways for means of

illuminating it. Last Adelaide Festival we were able to see two extraordinary illuminations from the RSC, *THE WINTER'S TALE* and *TWELFTH NIGHT*; this year we shall have the chance to compare them with a *KING LEAR* of startling aridity and a charming hippie-and-guru style *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* of a vastly different appeal.

"I think the important thing about our policy," says Iain Mackintosh, "is that there is a deep-rooted artistic principle which I think and hope you will see in *KING LEAR*. It is a concentration on the text, on stripping away the inessentials, on doing very bare stage productions—one can even say austere. The RSC prides itself as we do on its bare stage and its dedication to the text, but ironically our *Lear* goes further than they have ever gone. Quite literally there are two chairs and one stool and a 40-foot high backdrop. The costumes are in one range of oatmeal colour. The man in the street would not notice the lighting changes, they are so gradual. It lasts for three hours and it is the text.

"Now at first that sounds potential disaster. But we took the production to Venice and the surprise was that we had the best foreign notices we have ever had. The moral of this is that we discovered that what people are interested in, in a foreign country, is good classical acting."

Of the production the doyen of British critics, Harold Hobson, wrote: "Timothy West is an *enjoyable* *Lear*. The general public, people who go to the theatre to have a good time, are likely to take a higher view of Toby Robertson's Prospect Theatre production than are critics and professors. It is played in a bright, unvarying light on a bare stage, and though it lasts for three and a half hours, the performance is brisk throughout. It accomplishes a marathon race at a sprint, and both Mr. West and the audience are as fresh at the beginning . . . we plunge with enthusiasm into a perfectly straightforward reading of the text, and before very long we realise, perhaps to our own surprise, that the text is actually rather good."

And so we have this watershed

5. Timothy West (*Lear*) and Ronnie Stevens (*Fool*) in *KING LEAR*



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which all serious theatre companies reach in the end: by stripping away to discover just how much the theatre can do without they find a new strength both in themselves and their author. As the Florentine critic said: "The most secret Shakespeare." And with this has come the side of their work of which Mr. Robertson and Mr. Mackintosh are most proud: the fact that the great bulk of their audiences are aged under 25. "This is the most exciting fact of our lives," said Mr. Mackintosh, "and we believe it is because they like to see and hear the text."

It has taken ten years to reach their present status. The Prospect Theatre Company was born out of undergraduate productions at Oxford and founded in 1961 by Elizabeth Sweeting and Iain Mackintosh. A production of Vanbrugh's *THE PROVOK'D WIFE* by Toby Robertson made its way to London in 1963 and following this Prospect Productions was established at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, under Mr. Robertson's direction. From there they began regular tours and by 1970 had divided themselves into a resi-

dent Cambridge company and the present touring company.

In Mr. Mackintosh's words: "All the big old touring theatres in Britain have been in great trouble because with the rise of the resident repertory companies these old theatres were falling down. And the Arts Council of Great Britain wanted more activity in them. So we were faced with two invitations: one to do more work in Cambridge and become a resident company and the other to do more touring. Our solution was to form a second company now called the Cambridge Theatre Company." They cope with the rigours of touring and keep the company fresh by discouraging too much permanence—a policy quite opposite to that of the RSC. "Over six months, say, half of the company would have been with us before.

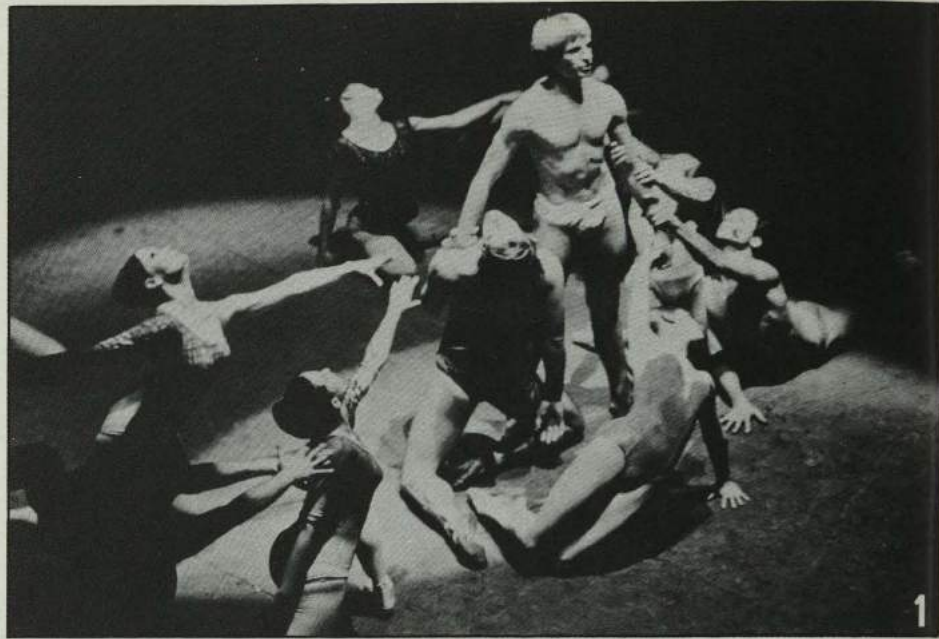
In any case," said Mr. Mackintosh, "our actors, like all stage actors, are paid very badly and because they have to live they do a lot of television and film work as well. It's hard to maintain artistic standards on tour. All the

subsidised companies in Britain have a specific job except ourselves. We are the only company that does not have a theatre. These things give us cause for concern but they also give us freedom to take up a challenge—whether it is to play Vienna or come here or make television. It makes for the adrenalin to run but it's a constant risk. Because one is only as good as the show that's on the stage that night. Except for this funny thing about television.

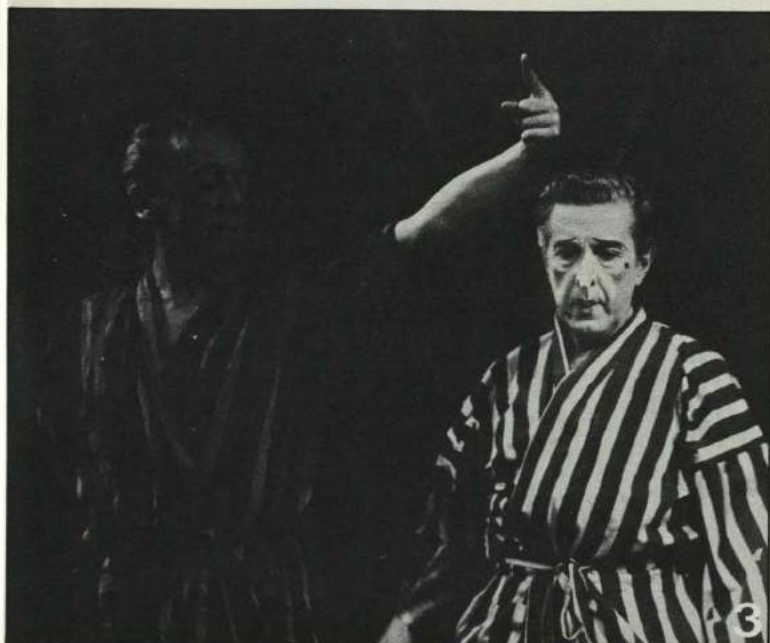
Those shows which have been shown here in a matter of months we made two or three years ago. This is where our future is lying. The fact that anyone in Australia has heard of us at all is purely because of TV. If we have a home at all, this must be where it is."

FOOTNOTE: Katharine Brisbane is the Drama Critic of "The Australian."

* The Prospect Theatre Company's Australian tour has been assisted by the Australian Council for the Arts.



THE
AUSTRALIAN
BALLET
CELEBRATES
ITS
FIRST
TEN
YEARS



That Sir Frederick Ashton, the greatest and most prolific personality in British ballet, has accepted an invitation to dance with The Australian Ballet is a fitting tribute to the reputation the company has achieved in its first ten years. Sir Frederick's association with ballet has been long and distinguished. He was one of the forces behind the transformation of the former Sadlers Wells Ballet into the famous Royal Ballet, and it was his refusal to do nothing but original works which led to the development of the widely acclaimed British style. Sir Frederick created CINDERELLA for The Royal Ballet in 1948 with himself and Sir Robert Helpmann in mind as the two ugly sisters.

The rapid artistic development of The Australian Ballet can be attributed to its Artistic Directors—Dame Peggy van Praagh and Sir Robert Helpmann. When The Australian Ballet Foundation was established by the Trust and J. C. Williamson's Theatres Ltd., Dame Peggy was invited to be the company's Artistic Director. She had to start from scratch. After conducting nation-wide auditions, Dame Peggy assembled the company which opened its first season in November, 1962. The Australian Ballet has been founded on her five-point plan, a plan which, at the time, she thought would take at least twenty years to fulfil. The first thing was to ensure that the company was permanent so as to enable the dancers to concentrate on achieving a standard. The second was to establish a ballet school to train future dancers, and the third to attract world-famous guest artists to dance with the company to give it confidence, stimulus and example. The impressive list of guests includes Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, Robert Helpmann, Erik Bruhn, Lucette Aldous, Sonia Arova, and Lupe Serrano. The fourth prong to Dame Peggy's plan was to bring out eminent choreographers and develop an Australian repertoire. The company can now boast of ballets from Ashton, Balanchine, Helpmann, Nureyev, Antony Tudor, John Butler and John Cranko.

The final aim was to establish the company internationally. This has been successfully accomplished through tours to Great Britain, Europe, Canada, South America and South-East Asia and was finally assured by the triumphant tour of the U.S.A. in 1970/71.

It is remarkable that all this was accomplished in the first five years of the company's existence.

Sir Robert joined the company as Co-Artistic Director in 1965 and brought with him his great creative talents and vast experience in all theatrical art forms. His principal concerns have been that the company receive continuous stimulation through a variety of guest teachers and that a specifically Australian style be developed through specially commissioned ballets by the best choreographers in the world. Sir Robert's personal contribution in this area has been massive.

With John Lanchbery's acceptance of the position of Musical Director, the company has taken yet another step towards consolidating its reputation and ensuring its future development.

It will be interesting to see where the next ten years will take The Australian Ballet. The omens are promising. A tour of the U.S.S.R. and Central Europe is being planned for May-July, 1973. The company is also currently investigating the possibility of filming a colour version of Nureyev's DON QUIXOTE to be begun in Australia later this year. It has been whispered that this film will be an extravaganza and that final dates for the commencement of filming depend on Mr. Nureyev's other commitments.

The photos of Sir Robert Helpmann and Sir Frederick Ashton from CINDERELLA have been printed with the kind permission of Lord Snowdon.

1. THRESHOLD
2. LA FILLE MAL GARDEÉE—Kelvin Coe and Lucette Aldous
3. Sir Robert and Sir Frederick in rehearsal
4. Sir Frederick Ashton in CINDERELLA

Der Rosenkavalier

When the curtain rose on the first Australian performance of Richard Strauss' **DER ROSENKAVALIER** at Melbourne's Princess Theatre on Saturday, March 4, it was the culmination of some eight months of tireless work by a small army of people. **DER ROSENKAVALIER** is The Australian Opera's most ambitious venture to date. It requires a marshalling of diverse and very special talents and the careful expenditure of a very large sum of money. The Australian Opera first commissioned its designs from Resident Designer Tom Lingwood in June last year and after basic discussions with producer Bernd Benthak he started work in his initial concepts.

His brief was to design 123 individual costumes and three settings—all of them to re-create in sumptuous detail the age of elegance which represented Imperial Austria at the height of its most gracious era—during the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa. In addition he had to design special period furniture for the sets, including such props as ornate clocks and screens. Work began on the making of costumes and the building of sets in October when rehearsals with individual singers also got under way. While carpenters and welders cut and assembled the sets in the Production Division's workshops of The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Sydney, buyers scoured Sydney manufacturers and agents for fabrics and trimmings to match the designer's costume requirements. Wig designs were sketched, heads measured and instructions sent to London where Albert Sargood, one of the world's top theatre wig makers, creates wigs for many of The Australian Opera's singers. Members of The Australian Opera's stage management staff searched antique and second-hand shops for authentic period ornaments and objets d'art for the production. These included perfume flasks, water jugs, crystal glasses, swords, and old books.

In the paint shops huge areas of canvas tacked to the floor were painted for back

drops, flats and surrounds for the production. At interstate theatres work was also proceeding on **DER ROSENKAVALIER**'S special requirements, including a stage trap-door in several theatres which didn't already have one and the removal of theatre seats to increase the size of the orchestra pit.

In January the company's musical forces were assembled to begin concentrated coaching and rehearsing of the singers and musicians. From London came the company's Musical Director, Edward Downes, and several other distinguished operatic coaches. The principals, including sopranos Rosemary Gordon and Nance Grant who share the role of the Marschallin, bass-baritones Neil Warren-Smith and Grant Dickson who will sing Baron Ochs, and sopranos Glenys Fowles and Janice Taylor who will sing Sophie, all entered a period of concentrated individual and ensemble rehearsals with piano. When the full company returned from holidays in mid-January full scale production rehearsals commenced in the Trust studios and these continued almost daily until the company's departure for final rehearsals in Melbourne on February 20. In mid-January the exciting young Australian mezzo-soprano Yvonne Minton, who will sing the role of Octavian in the production in Sydney and Melbourne, arrived to join the company in rehearsal. Although she is one of the most sought-after Octavians on the international opera scene, and has sung the role with resounding success on three continents, she, too, had to approach the Australian production as an entirely new venture.

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, The Elizabethan Trust Melbourne Orchestra, complete with its new players, rehearsed under Maestro Downes. Contacts were made to engage several children for the production. One of them, a little coloured boy, plays an important non-singing role in the opera and others are heard vocally. The singing children have to be coached by a local teacher and are not incorporated into the production

until the final two weeks of rehearsal.

The sets were finally assembled and scenic painters added their contribution. Trucked to Melbourne, the sets took their place on stage. Final dress parades were held to check the exact fitting of costumes. Last-minute alterations were made—an extra bit of embroidery here, and a touch of painting-down on a costume that was too gaudy and strips of gold leaf applied to highlight parts of the set.

Long lighting calls followed as the lighting cues for the production were carefully chosen and recorded and finally all the elements of the production came together for the most extensive series of dress rehearsals yet undertaken by the company.

With singers on stage, the lighting calls being run through, the orchestra in the pit and company's production forces assembled, the opera was first rehearsed act by act at separate rehearsals then finally together for two complete dress rehearsals.

Few people would realise on opening night how much work had been involved in getting **DER ROSENKAVALIER** to its final stage. Few will also realise that The Australian Opera will perform **DER ROSENKAVALIER** more times this year than any other opera company in the world attempts during a twelve-month period. At Covent Garden or the Metropolitan in New York, for example, **DER ROSENKAVALIER** may be performed eight or ten times in a year and then not revived again for four or five years. In 1972 The Australian Opera will perform **DER ROSENKAVALIER** eight times in Melbourne, six times in Adelaide, three times in Canberra and thirteen times in Sydney. Other companies may not be able to recoup their capital investment in a production like **DER ROSENKAVALIER** in a decade. The Australian Opera must try and get its money's worth in one year, even though new productions may stay in the repertoire for many seasons.

ravalier



1. Internationally acclaimed Australian mezzo-soprano Yvonne Minton, who sings Octavian, checks the placement of props before a rehearsal.

2. The Trust's head scenic painter, Pat Fackrell, puts the finishing touches to the back cloth for Act 2 of DER ROSENKAVALIER. The huge canvas is tacked to a studio floor for the painting job.

3. A thoughtful study of soprano Rosemary Gordon during rehearsal. She sings the role of the Marschallin, sharing it with Melbourne soprano Nance Grant.

4. Producer Bernd Benthak emphasises a point at rehearsal watched by Rosemary Gordon and Yvonne Minton with other members of the cast in the background.

5. Designer Tom Lingwood checks on the detailed finish of a section of the Act 1 set with painter Dennis Lord.

6. Soprano Glenys Fowles, who sings the role of Sophie, presents her finished Act 2 costume for the close scrutiny of designer Tom Lingwood.





NIMROD STREET

a new path in

In December, 1970, a small upstairs theatre opened its doors in Sydney. It was named Nimrod St. Theatre, after the somewhat squalid Kings Cross back alley in which it was situated, and as theatres go it could hardly have been more stark. Instead of comfort and amenity it had steep stairs, raked tiers of backless wooden benches, a cramped diamond-shaped acting space interrupted by a large timber pillar, and bad ventilation. Yet fifteen months later, by February, 1972, the theatre was into its ninth production, had presented six new Australian plays, had backs and cushions to its seats, a new staircase—and had caused more excitement in our theatre world than any three established companies put together. Already critics and public were calling it the “Nimrod” affectionately; by a happy chance, Nimrod, the Biblical king and a mighty hunter, who built Nineveh and three other fine cities, seems an image exactly suited to the build and thrust of this newest, roughest, and most exuberant of Australian theatres. To speak of “roughness” is not insulting; one of the Nimrod Street aims was to achieve “rough theatre”: new Australian plays that were anti-establishment, that dug deep into our comfortable culture, that used tough vernacular, that had real relevance to the social states about us.

Ken Horler and John Bell, two young men who have “arrived,” and in whose care lies the artistic direction of Nimrod Street Theatre, feel their “rough” period may be over. Bell, an actor of world power as well as perhaps our most

original director of the classics, defends Nimrod’s roughness. “Even the seating and the little, strange acting space all helped what we were after. We wanted to break away; in Sydney there was a lack of the sort of fundamental theatre we wanted to get down to. Australian plays weren’t being done, they weren’t even being found. Sydney needed a rough theatre to do plays like O’Malley, plays that would shake us away from the establishment rut we were in.” (Earlier in the year Bell had helped THE LEGEND OF KING O’MALLEY into life at N.I.D.A.’s Jane Street Theatre.)

Nimrod Street Theatre opened with BIGGLES, a tumbleweed sort of a piece in which authors Michael Boddy, Marcus Cooney and Ron Blair sent up a whole heap of folk-hero notions and Australian attitudes. It set the special Nimrod ensign fluttering in the breeze, and though some critics thought it slight, it was a great, immediate, popular success—which is a great way to start a theatre.

Before the opening, Horler and Bell had been in long consultation about the sort of theatre they wanted. Bell, who had returned in early 1970 from five years in England, spent mostly with The Royal Shakespeare Company, was a tutor in acting with the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney, but some difficulties made it clear he would not there be getting the chance to produce plays as he wanted.

Horler had worked for some years with Sydney University theatre, where he had met Bell; John Bell, in fact, played Malvolio in Horler’s production of TWELFTH NIGHT (and a memorable Malvolio it was!)—and at this stage had been searching on his own account for a suitable place to convert to a theatre.

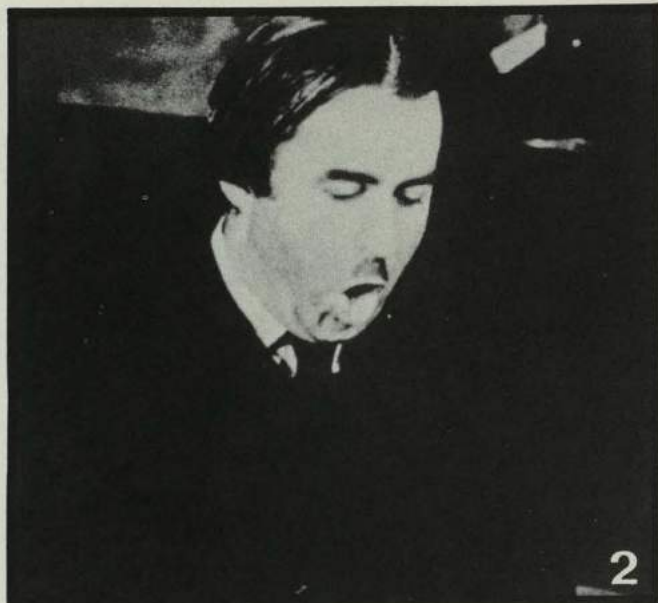
Bell’s disappointments at N.I.D.A. thus came at the right time: the two got together and in August, 1970, with a theatre board consisting of Horler, Bell, Mr. Justice Hope, Prof. Robert Quentin, and Lorna Curtin, a lease was signed for a derelict building in Nimrod Street, Kings Cross.

The building had been a stables, a Sunday school, a gymnasium; now it was merely a mess. Enormous energy changed in all into a workable theatre, though after the opening show the company ran into trouble with the then City Council. Nimrod Street neighbours had the ineradicable notion that the venture was to be a sub-culture discotheque, lit by gas, noisy and dangerous. The theatre had to make expensive alterations and mount its second production, Beckett’s *ENDGAME* in a downtown location.

Back home, the third Nimrod production was John Bell’s brilliantly conceived-and-carried-through “diabolist” version of *MACBETH*. It was one of the year’s outstanding pieces of theatre on the national scene; a Black Mass, a stage infected with devil worship and

our theatre

by kevon Kemp



black magic, ancient and modern all at once; an evening that, for all its way-out qualities, was supremely, convincingly Shakespeare. "It tested the theatre to the limit," says Bell. "That small acting space was a fantastic challenge to us all. We learned that the space had its own challenges, but the players responded to them. For all its strangeness, though, it isn't a space that imposes itself too strongly. After *MACBETH* we found we could work it very well, and now we have an enormous rapport between the audience and the actors."

Horler said, "In the next show we did, *FLASH JIM VAUX*, two actors came in who proved to be amongst the best we have had at working with our acting space—John Gaden and John Wood. 'Vaux' was a critical success, but we lost money on it with the public."

Horler keeps a close eye on the Nimrod track record with productions. Any theatre strives to pay its way; after eighteen months, Nimrod is what Horler calls "just afloat" financially.

To this point they have not received outright grants from the Council for the Arts as a regional drama company. They have had assistance from the Council's "Special Projects" fund, which has paid John Bell's salary, and have had minor help with productions of new Australian plays.

After the ballad opera of *FLASH JIM VAUX*, the theatre showed a double

bill of two new local plays *THE ROY MURPHY SHOW* and *CUSTOMS AND EXCISE*, which did reasonably well. A return to "rough theatre," with *THE ASSASSINATION OF THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH, OR SIR HENRY PARKES VINDICATED* lost the theatre a lot of money, but the following programme, a double bill which mixed English playwright Tom Stoppard's *AFTER MAGRITTE* with Australian David Williamson's *THE REMOVALISTS* was another great success for the theatre, but particularly for director Bell. He had seen The Pram Factory's production of the play, and whilst unhappy about certain aspects of it, realised the play's potential. The Nimrod production showed such promise that several theatrical managements are vying for the Australian rights to perform it.

This sort of post-Nimrod commercial success is a decided pleasure to Nimrod management, one of whose principal aims has from the start been to establish and produce Australian playwrights. Following *THE REMOVALISTS*, the Nimrod production schedule continued with a sort of Christmas adult pantomime which was another return to rough theatre, *HAMLET ON ICE*. Despite some critical demurs, it was a popular success, and gave way only recently to the current production, John Bell's interesting Victorian-dress staging of *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*.

Looking back on the nine programmes, there is no doubt that Nimrod directors

have stuck by their guns—Australian plays, relevant "rough theatre," some classics. This was the trend they thought would fill a void in Sydney theatre, but they are not about to become victims to a fixed notion of what the theatre wants. Says John Bell: "Perhaps the style we had last year, the rough theatre bit, has passed. We mined the vein of Australian history and attitudes very thoroughly, and now might be the time for a change. We do tend to do things that are relevant to the time, and we stay as flexible as we can. I think the one thing is not to plan too far ahead. What is coming? I think we might be turning to less realistic, less naturalistic plays. There seems to me to be a lack now of poetry and language, a dearth of heightened expression. This is very likely where we'll move."

Horler added: "I've just read a play on Vietnam, by a chap who fought there, and though it had a lot of faults it had this poetic, fantasy style about it. I sent it back to him with some suggestions, and I hope we see it again. I'm with John, I'd like to go more for language." Ken Horler, a Sydney lawyer, is the man who can stay to talk about Nimrod. John Bell, at the time of this interview, was rehearsing *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* (in which he plays Petruchio) for the Old Tote Theatre Company, as well as facing up to his normal Nimrod chores. He had to leave. Horler told us more of the Nimrod Street story.



"Our audience is getting to be a loyal one," he said. "Not that they come to every play we do, good or bad, but there is an increasing number of people who come to us regularly. They're prepared to back us in what we do."

"What we want next for the theatre are new premises. We have to get out of here some time soon, perhaps a year, probably not longer than that." (Nimrod Street is threatened by a new expressway.)

"We'd like something with about 300 seats, with a raked auditorium such as we now have, with a flexible and interesting acting area. We'd like to give more comfort, but we do not want to get too cosy. Being cosy can be fatal, we want to stay a little on the side of roughness."

"We have other aims in view, too—we'd like to do something about the actor's life and livelihood. Actors have been the biggest subsidisers of Australian theatre, and we'd like to organise so that they can co-ordinate their activities. We, like all managements, have the problems that come up with TV commitments and radio and doing commercials. We'd like to get together with other areas and rationalise all the calls on actors so that they can fulfil their stage roles without sacrificing those big-paying television jobs."

This is the other side of Nimrod—a

theatrical organisation that thinks seriously of the theatre as an industry.

Along with thinking about actors, Nimrod thinks about writers. Both Horler and Bell actively seek out writers—if they spot a novelist who might be able to write a good play, they suggest it to him.

They encourage active playwrights; they mourn the withdrawal from theatre of Patrick White—and, like so many in Australian theatre, ponder on ways to get our only major writer back into the theatre he graced so greatly.

Nimrod is proud of the simple organisation it has fashioned: "We have no bureaucracy," says Horler. "There is no dictation. If John wants to direct a play a certain way, that's the way he does it. Either he or I can give an immediate yes or no on artistic matters. This freedom has meant that actors are happy to work with us, they are eager to take jobs with us. This feeling comes through then in all we do—everyone is trying, all the time."

The message of Nimrod Street is that a new style of theatre has come to stay in this country. Perhaps the really stark years of Nimrod Street are over, and the hoped-for move to a new venue will bring new amenities—though not the dreaded "cosiness"—to this seminal organisation.



In Melbourne the Australian Performing Group, at their "Pram Factory Theatre," form a southern counterpoint to the main line sung by Nimrod in Sydney; both have notable records in encouraging new playwrights—with this important difference, Nimrod Street has been determinedly professional from its very start. Ken Horler was determined never to be involved in that shadowland of semi- or fringe-professional. Neither he nor John Bell believes that amateur and professional mix easily.

Wherever the Nimrod theatre goes from here, and whenever it makes its move, it will go on with a pure, hard-living professionalism. It will go on with the assurance, from a mass of theatregoers, that rough, irreverent, cocky, bawdy as it has been, it is marked with the sign of true theatre. May their houses increase!

FOOTNOTE: Kevon Kemp is the Drama Critic of "The National Times."

1. Max Phipps, Don Crosby, Jacki Weaver, Carole Skinner in *THE REMOVALISTS*

2. David Cameron, John Paramor, Terry O'Brien, Robyn Nevin in *MACBETH*



3. Carole Skinner in *THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH ASSASSINATED OR THE VINDICATION OF HENRY PARKES*

STAGEWORLD

The Australian Centre of the International Theatre Institute is alive and well and situated at the School of Drama at the University of N.S.W., under the direction of Mrs. M. Thiersch. Spawned by U.N.E.S.C.O., ITI aims to promote drama and theatre arts within and between countries and the Australian Centre has as its goal the build up of a reservoir of local and international theatre information. The Centre is responsible for publicising internationally new Australian plays and is always keen to receive news of current productions. Theatre professionals travelling overseas would be wise to call at the Centre before leaving—ITI facilities throughout the world are available to help with introductions, information and theatre bookings. Meetings with local theatre specialists can also be arranged. At home, the Centre will look after visiting personalities and provide an informal meeting place where writers, directors, actors and other theatre professionals can talk and exchange ideas.

The newly formed Tasmanian Theatre Company has as its first production Michael Body and Marcus Cooney's *CASH* which, from all reports, was a rollicking good evening's entertainment—a propitious start for the young company.

CINDERELLA won't be seen in Adelaide until March, 1973, when the Australian Ballet will present it for the opening of the new Festival Theatre. Sir Frederick Ashton will be invited to partner Sir Robert Helpmann in their incomparable roles as the two ugly sisters. The highlight of the programme will be the world premiere of Sir Robert's new ballet—to have a moon theme. The score will be commissioned from Richard Meale and decor and costumes will be designed by Kenneth Rowell.

4. Peter Rowley, Jane Harders, Drew Forsythe, in *BIGGLES*



1972 will be an exciting year for The Marionette Theatre of Australia. The single most important factor for the company is the appointment of Mr. Jan Bussell* as its Artistic Adviser. Of tremendous international standing, Mr. Bussell brings to Australia his extensive knowledge of all aspects of puppetry. He is President of U.N.I.M.A.—the world puppetry organisation, and with his equally famous wife, Anne Hogarth, is co-founder and director of THE HOGARTH PUPPETS, the largest puppet troupe in England. The Bussells are Great Britain's leading exponents of the art of puppetry and have become internationally known through their appearances in theatres in many parts of the world and, of course, through their extensive television work. They are particularly well known for that famous character of theirs, the endearing Muffin the Mule who for many years featured on the B.B.C. Their creative genius is such that the Bussells have proven beyond doubt that puppetry is a serious adult medium of expression, worthy of recognition on a level with any other of the performing arts.

One of the largest touring puppet companies of its kind in the world, The Marionette Theatre of Australia is, with The Australian Opera and The Australian Ballet, one of Australia's three national touring companies. Because productions by the company are for many of Australia's youngsters their first introduction to theatre, it is determined to continue touring country areas as extensively as it does at present. In order to squeeze the maximum number of performances into one year, the company is in the process of mounting three completely separate stage sets—including bridges for the puppeteers—for each production in its repertoire. The sets and company will travel independently, and at different times, thus ensuring that no precious time is lost waiting for sets to arrive at each location.

The company is recognised as the leader of puppetry in Australia—a role it takes very seriously and, with the coup of obtaining the services of Jan Bussell, its position seems unassailable. Already the company has received invitations to tour Japan, India and the U.S.A. during 1973.

Under the direction of Mr. Bussell, a series of teach-ins will be held in all states. Current trends in overseas puppetry and all aspects of the presentation of puppet productions with all types of puppets will be discussed. Participants will be encouraged to bring along their puppets and air their particular problems. Furthermore, the MTA plans to introduce a bi-monthly newsletter with articles of international and local

puppets bounce into 1972

interest and a puppetry lending library will also be established.

Currently, with its rehearsals of two Black Theatre productions of Prokofiev's PETER AND THE WOLF, and Britten's THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA, the company is exploring a fresh field of puppetry in this country. The Black Theatre technique was originated by the famous Black Theatre of Prague and the Australian production is being directed by Charles Dask, one of the company's puppeteers who was formerly a member of the Prague Theatre. Black Theatre relies heavily on fantasy and its startling visual effect—so much so that the company refuses to divulge exactly how it is staged because knowing the technique would spoil the intrinsic magic of the presentation and thus its impact on the audience! The puppets, magnificently designed by Allen Lees (who designed FIDELIO (1970) and RIGOLETTO (1972) for The Australian Opera), are of brilliantly luminous colours and their effect against the black velvet backdrop is absolutely stunning. In THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA the puppets are immediately recognisable musical instruments and Allen Lees is again responsible for the delightful design. This exciting new production will have its Australian premiere at the S.G.I.O. Theatre in Brisbane during the forthcoming May school holidays.

The company's most ambitious venture to date is Mr. Bussell's production of Charles Kingsley's classic THE WATER BABIES which will be presented later this year and will include a cast of puppets especially created by Mr. Bussell and his wife.

*The visit to Australia by Mr. Jan Bussell has been assisted by the Special Projects Fund of The Australian Council for The Arts.

showguide

A Diary of Important Events

NEW SOUTH WALES
THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE—Newtown
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET**
 "Cinderella"
 "La Fille Mal Gardee"
 "Mam'zelle Angot"
 "Threshold"
 "The Firebird"
 "One in Five"
 March 17-May 13
 ** **WEST AUSTRALIAN BALLET COMPANY**
 June 19-24
THE STATE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC—City
 * **ELEO POMARE DANCE COMPANY**
 April 1-8
INDEPENDENT THEATRE
SNOW WHITE—Saturdays
 ** **UNDER MILK WOOD** (Thomas)
 Until March 25
 * **HERE ARE LADIES**—Siobhan McKenna
 March 27-April 5
SCIENCE THEATRE—UNIVERSITY OF N.S.W.—Kensington
 * **BUNRAKU PUPPET THEATRE OF JAPAN**
 March 21 and 22
COMMUNITY THEATRE—Killara
 ** **AFTER THE RAIN** (Bowen)
 March 8-April 1
 ** **ROPE** (Hamilton)
 April 5-May 6
 ** **THE STAR SPANGLED GIRL** (Simon)
 May 10-June 10
PARADE THEATRE—UNIVERSITY OF N.S.W.—Kensington
 The Old Tote Theatre Company presents:
 ** **THE TAMING OF THE SHREW**
 March 10-April 8
 ** **THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN** (Brecht)
 April 14-May 13
RICHBROOKE THEATRE—City
 ** **GODSPELL**
 Opens April 10
THEATRE ROYAL—City
 ** **Royal Winnipeg Ballet**—March
 * **PROSPECT THEATRE COMPANY**
 "King Lear"
 "Love's Labour's Lost"
 April 5-29
ORPHEUM THEATRE—Cremorne
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 June 6-10
 ** **N.S.W. COUNTRY TOUR**
QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY
 March 13-April 22
 * **CHAMBER MUSIC RECITAL**—The Elizabethan Trust Sydney Orchestra at the Private Theatre of Mr. V. J. Chalwin—Mosman.
 Sunday, April 30 (Details to be announced)
 ** **CLASSIC CINEMA**—Mosman

VICTORIA
PRINCESS THEATRE—City
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA**
 "Der Rosenkavalier"
 "The Rape of Lucretia"
 "Rigoletto"
 "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci"
 "The Marriage of Figaro"
 March 4-April 29
 * **PROSPECT THEATRE COMPANY**
 "King Lear"
 "Love's Labour's Lost"
 May 2-13
ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE—City
 ** **TALK TO THE MOON** (Kenna)
 Until March 11
 * **HERE ARE LADIES**—Siobhan McKenna
 March 12-25
 ** **CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA** (Shaw)
 March 29-April 22
 ** **THE PATRICK PEARSE MOTEL** (Leonard)
 April 26-May 20
 ** **WEST AUSTRALIAN BALLET**
 May 23-27
PLAYBOX THEATRE—City
 ** **GODSPELL**
PALAIS THEATRE—City
 ** **CARNIVAL IN RIO**
 March 4-25
 ** **RUSSIAN FESTIVAL**
 March 27-April 8
 (Concessions available only at Williamson-Edgley Book-
 ing Centre)
 ** **TRAK CINEMA**
QUEENSLAND
HER MAJESTY'S—City
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 April 25-May 6
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET**
 May 17-27
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA**
 "Rigoletto"
 "The Marriage of Figaro"
 "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci"
 June 13-July 1
TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE—Bowen Hills
 ** **DRACULA**
 March 22-April 8
 ** **TRUMPETS & DRUMS** (Brecht)
 March 8, 10, 15, 17
 ** **THE RECRUITING OFFICER** (Farquhar)
 March 9, 11, 16, 18
 ** **THE BROKEN STAFF** (Sherman)
 April 10-22
 ** **THE WIZARD OF OZ**
 April 26-May 12
 ** **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING** (Shakespeare)
 From May 13
FESTIVAL THEATRE
 ** **RUSSIAN FESTIVAL**
 May 8-12
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 Queensland Country Tour
 June 12-August 12
 * **THE MARIONETTE**

THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA
DOUBLE BILL—AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE
BLACK THEATRE—S.G.I.O. THEATRE
 "Peter & The Wolf" (Prokofiev)
 "The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra" (Britten)
 May 1-12
QUEENSLAND COUNTRY TOUR
THE MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA
 "The Magic Pudding"
 April 4-28
 May 15-26
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS
UNION THEATRE—Adelaide University
 ** **South Australian Theatre Company**
THE ALCHEMIST (Jonson)
 March 4-25
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE
 ** **Prospect Theatre Company**
 "King Lear" (Shakespeare)
 "Love's Labour's Lost" (Shakespeare)
 March 20-April 1
SCOTT THEATRE
 ** **AUSTRALIAN OPERA**
 "Rape of Lucretia"
 March 18
SCOTCH AMPHITHEATRE—Mitcham
 The South Australian Theatre Company presents:
 ** **MR. SIGGIE MORRISON WITH HIS COMB AND PAPER** (Reed)
 Until March 18
UNION THEATRE—Adelaide University
 The South Australian Theatre Company presents:
 ** **SEAGULLS OVER TAPE-ROO** (Late night show)
 March 4-25
 ** **FORGET-ME-NOT LANE** (Nicholls)
 May 9-27
 ** **THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD** (Synge)
 May 30-June 17
THEATRE 62—Hilton
 ** **THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM** (Farquhar)
 March 4-25
 ** **THE TWO OF US** (Frayn)
 April
 ** **THE EFFECTS OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARI-GOLDS**
 May
OZONE CINEMAS—Marryatville and Glenelg
 ** Concessions Monday to Friday only
A.C.T.
CANBERRA THEATRE—Civic Square
 ** **ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET**
 March 3-8
 ** **BUNRAKU PUPPET THEATRE**
 March 26

* **ELEO POMARE DANCE COMPANY**
 April 1 and 2
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 May 17
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA**
 "Der Rosenkavalier"
 "Rigoletto"
 "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci"
 "The Rape of Lucretia"
 May 23-June 3
 ** **WEST AUSTRALIAN BALLET COMPANY**
TASMANIA
THEATRE ROYAL—Hobart
 ** **MAJOR BARBARA** (Shaw)
 —Tasmanian Theatre Company
 March 8-25
 ** **BARENGGAY DANCE TROUPE**
 April 4-5
 ** **THE GIRL IN THE FREUDIAN SLIP** (Brown)—Tasmanian Theatre Company
 April 12-29
 ** **UNIVERSITY REVUE**
 May 5-20
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 May 23-27
 ** **RICHARD II** (Shakespeare)
 —Tasmanian Theatre Company
 June 8-24
LAUNCESTON PLAYERS—Launceston
LAUNCESTON HOTEL
 ** **THEATRE RESTAURANT MELODRAMA**
 March 16-18
LITTLE THEATRE—Launceston
 ** **ARMS AND THE MAN** (Shaw)
 April 12-15
PRINCESS THEATRE—Launceston
 ** **AUNTIE MAME** (Lawrence & Lee)
 May 19-27
 ** **RUSSIAN FESTIVAL**
 March 16-18
 ** **QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY**
 May 30-June 3
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
THE NATIONAL THEATRE AT THE PLAYHOUSE
 ** **SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE CROWN** (Greenwood)
 Until March 11
 ** **SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH** (Williams)
 March 15-April 8
 ** **THE PATRICK PEARSE MOTEL** (Leonard)
 April 12-May 6
 ** **THE STAR SPANGLED GIRL** (Simon)
 May 10-June 3
 ** **FORGET-ME-NOT LANE** (Nichols)
 June 7-July 1
HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE
 ** **THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA**
 "The Marriage of Figaro"
 May 18-27
 ** **WEST AUSTRALIAN BALLET COMPANY**
 Details to be announced

Please Check Local Press For Further Details

- * A.E.T.T. Presentations.
 Members will receive preferential bookings at concession prices. Further details to be sent by mail as usual.
- ** Concession prices available at Theatre on the presentation of Trust Membership card.

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