

World Class Comedians For Comedy Festival

Just when the realisation sinks in that the holidays are over and the year stretches interminably ahead, Melbourne's Comedy Festival comes around to give us a respite and some much needed laughs.

This year's Festival sees the return of Rita Rudner, the Miami born dancer who discovered some years ago that when she stopped moving her feet and started talking, people laughed . . . a lot.

The anti-thesis of the brassy, tough comedienne, Rudner has been laying them in the aisles from America to the Athenaeum with her clever observations of daily life delivered with the gentle touch, but at a ripping pace. This unusual combination had the critics raving the last time Rudner was in Australia. The Sydney Sun-Herald said 'When the shrinking violet from Broadway, Rita Rudner hit the stage she was so funny people cried. Definitely one of the stop stand-up comics of the decade'. Rudner performed at Kinselas to capacity houses and her two appearances at the Athenaeum in Melbourne were complete sell-outs. Definitely an act to catch.



Rita Rudner - The shrinking violet from Broadway

In Richard Jeni's biography he tells us he was born in April, 1957. 'This was the last time I had my mother's complete attention.' His address is New York city, ' . . . the King of Cities. The place where you can have anything you want at 4am, but you are too afraid to leave your house to get it.' Jeni's performance is less like an act and more like a high energy talk which happens to be hilarious. Mixing highly visual language with movement and an array of sounds and dialects he paints comic images which make the mundane unique and the commonplace uproarious.

But even the best comedian can have a bad night. Jeni tells the story . . .

"One of my first road gigs was a small club in Alabama. I was dumb enough to try material about the Jewish High Holidays. When it went nowhere I asked if there were any Jews in the audience. Silence. I said, 'OK, I'll settle for anybody that's ever had a frozen bagel'. Crickets. I said, 'Does anybody know what a bagel is?' God is my witness, a guy in the back raised his hand and said, "It's a huntin' dawg, isn't it?"

After failing dismally in the workforce Jeni has found his niche on the stage, and he doesn't do it the easy way. The majority of his act is suitable for all the family. About his audiences he says, 'My part is to make them laugh and sputter and grab their sides as often as I can. If that isn't my first concern I've betrayed them'. And just so you don't think he's too good to be true, his motto is said to be - "Virtue is its own reward but sleazy manoeuvring can put you behind the wheel of a Ferrari".

Help! Volunteers Wanted.

If you have some spare time during the week and would like to be involved in the day-to-day activities of the Trust, we could certainly use your abilities and enthusiasm. Duties would include assisting with the enrolment of new members, theatre bookings, picking up tickets, lodging orders with various theatres for tickets and assisting with the writing of Trust News. Also it is important to make sure that as many people as possible hear about the Trust, so that distribution of brochures to theatres and cinemas is an important part of our activities. This means that with the assistance of volunteers, there will always be a human being to answer Member's phone calls, rather than a machine. If you would like to lend your assistance in any of these areas please give Christy Vena a call on 690 8384.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Universal Theatre
Rita Rudner - Opens Wed March 9
Mon to Sun, 8.00pm
AETT - \$17.99
GP - \$19.99
Richard Jeni - Opens Mon March 14
Mon-Sun at 9.30pm
AETT - \$14.99
GP - \$16.99
Two AETT tickets per Member

Australian Opera's New Season

CARMEN

By Georges Bizet

Conducted by Vlado Kamirski

Directed by John Copley

Costumes by Vikki Feitscher

Set Design by Robin Don

Starring Elizabeth Campbell/Jolanta Nagajek, Richard Greager/Sergei Baigildin, David Lemke, John Wegner and Helen Adams.

The Australian Opera begins its Bicentennial season with John Copley's exciting and bold new production of CARMEN, which was highly praised by the critics when it opened the A.O.'s current Sydney season. Maria Prerauer, the Arts Editor of The Australian said, "Director John Copley's whole concept is brilliantly different. It is the Carmen you have always wanted to see."



Jolanta Nagajek as Carmen

THE MAGIC FLUTE

By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Conducted by Myer Fredman

Directed by Göran Järvefelt

Designed by Carl Friedrich Oberle

Starring Amanda Thane, Gregory Tomlinson, Donald Shanks, John Fulford and Peta Blyth

Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE is perhaps his best loved opera, and this award-winning production, directed and designed by the team of Jarvefelt and Oberle which enjoyed sell-out seasons in both Sydney and Melbourne has returned by overwhelming public demand.

Opera Australia has this to say about this production. "Goran Jarvefelt's production of THE MAGIC FLUTE . . . is simply the best realisation of that work that I have seen on stage." This is undoubtedly one of The Australian Opera's most popular productions and will feature Amanda Thane singing Pamina, Gregory Tomlinson as Tamino with John Fulford as Papageno. Conducted by Myer Fredman.

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA

By Claudio Monteverdi

Conducted by David Agler

Directed by Goran Jarvefelt

Sets and costumes by Carl Friedrich Oberle

Lighting by Nigel Levings

Starring Suzanne Johnston, Bernadette Cullen, Heather Begg, Donald Shanks and Christopher Doig.

Last year Goran Jarvefelt and Carl Friedrich Oberle delighted Australian audiences with their hugely successful production of THE MAGIC FLUTE. This same team returns to direct and design the work written by Monteverdi at the height of his powers. A landmark work which helped establish the form of opera which we know today, THE CORONATION OF POPPEA will be presented in the brilliant musical realisation of Raymond Leppard, first performed at Glyndebourne in 1962. Set in ancient Rome it tells of Poppea, Nero's mistress who engineers the banishment of the Empress Ottavia and assumes the throne herself.

Suzanne Johnston will sing the role of Poppea opposite the New Zealand tenor, Christopher Doig who makes his Australian Opera debut as Nero. THE CORONATION OF POPPEA will be conducted by David Agler.

BOOKING INFORMATION

State Theatre - Season opens

Tues March 15

Evening perf. - 8pm, Mats. at 1pm

A Reserve - Evening

AETT - \$41

GP - \$53

A Reserve - Matinee

AETT - \$26

GP - \$36

Two tickets per Member. Ring Trust

Office for available dates.

(N/A Sat nights)

World Theatre Season

The Victorian Arts Centre has combined a number of totally different productions from around the world to make up its World Theatre Season.

Noh Theatre Company

The Victorian Arts Centre and Playbox Theatre in association with the Adelaide Festival present the first Australian tour of the Kanze Noh Theatre. Noh is the most refined of the Japanese dramatic arts - it is the essence of all theatre seeks to convey. Ritualistic and stylized it is visually spectacular. There are breathtaking costumes and masks within the intriguing structure of the traditional Noh stage. The plays themselves present a fascinating range of characters and situations: warriors, lovers, ghosts, deities in disguise, love affairs, exile and possession.



Kanze Noh - Noh Theatre Company

Kanze will present three varying evening programs as well as a special Saturday matinee performance which will include an explanatory demonstration for those interested in gaining further insight into the unique music and movement of Noh.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Playhouse Theatre

Wed March 9-19

Eve - 8pm. Mat. - Sat March 12, 2pm

A reserve

AETT - \$43

GP - \$45

Fascinating Aida

This fabulous and funny trio were the highlight of the 1986 Festival of Sydney. Made up of two English girls, Dillie Keane and Adele Anderson and Australian newcomer, Denise Wharmby, FASCINATING AIDA have little to do with opera and lots to do with lambasting everything from Yuppies (yawningly uninteresting people payed incredibly excessive salaries) to jogging and food fads

with a fresh, breezy and self-deprecating humour and intelligence. They are probably best described as a sort of X-Rated Andrews Sisters whose musical ability and wit make for fascinating entertainment.



Fascinating Alda

BOOKING INFORMATION

Playhouse Theatre
Tues March 1-5, 8.15pm
AETT - \$24.90
GP - \$22.90

Twyla Tharp Dance

One of the most exciting and significant performance companies to visit Australia in years, Twyla Tharp Dance has been hailed as the most admired, envied, maligned and sought-after product in today's competitive dance market. Since her first performance in 1965, Twyla Tharp has captivated audiences world wide. Twyla Tharp has choreographed for such dancers as Mikhail Baryshnikov, the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet. She has worked in film, theatre and television, and her choreography credits include such films as *AMADEUS* and *HAIR*. Fresh from her sell-out triumph in New York, this will be Twyla Tharp Dance's first appearance in Australia.



Twyla Tharp Dance

BOOKING INFORMATION

Playhouse Theatre.
Opens Tues Feb 2-13
Eve. 8.30pm. Mats. Sat Feb 6 & 13,
2.30pm
AETT - \$27.90
GP - \$29.90

Playbox Double Bill

STEAL AWAY HOME

By Phillip Motherwell

Directed by Geoff Hooke

Music composed by Joe Dolce

Starring Ross Thompson and Joe Dolce

THE SERPENTS FALL

By Sarah Cathcart and Andrea Lemon

Directed by Andrea Lemon

Starring Sarah Cathcart

It is interesting to see Playbox take productions which were successful in Fringe Theatre to a more commercial audience. This double-bill is comprised of two productions which deserve a wider viewing. Sarah Cathcart's *THE SERPENTS FALL* was originally produced with funding by the Theatre Board and the support of La Mama in 1987 when it had sell-out seasons and rave reviews in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart. In this witty and fascinating piece, the myth of the Goddess and the serpent as her symbol (once the emblem of feminine power), is woven through the lives of four contemporary Australian women in an attempt to unearth the long buried power of the feminine.



Sarah Cathcart

STEAL AWAY HOME is an Australian Premiere by Phil Motherwell who has also had his work produced by La Mama. In *STEAL AWAY HOME* Jack Stewart is a petty thief, hungry to find himself, whose world is thrown into turmoil when a chance meeting leads him to question his parentage. While growing up in middle-class Kew his past was kept from him, and he never dreamt that he was related to the black kids playing on the other side of the Yarra.

BOOKING INFORMATION

The Studio, Vic. Arts Centre
Opens Mon Feb 8 - Sat Feb 26
Mon-Fri, 8pm. Sat - 5 & 8.15pm
AETT - \$11
GP - \$16.50
Conc. - \$10
Two AETT tickets per Member

A Novel Rort

TRISTRAM SHANDY - GENT

Adapted by Tim Robertson from the novel by Laurence Sterne.

Directed by Simon Phillips

Designed by Richard Roberts

This year the MTC enters into the spirit of the Comedy Festival with Tim Robertson's stage adaptation of Laurence Sterne's *'THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENTLEMAN.'* An unconventional novel made up of a mosaic of autobiographical musings, comic reflections on life, wicked anecdotes and much more, this stage version premiered at Sydney's Nimrod Theatre where it delighted audiences whether they knew the novel or not.

Simon Phillips directs a marvellous cast who present the crazy and eccentric group of characters who people the reminiscences of this affable gent.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Russell St Theatre
Opens Wed Mar 9 - Sat April 16
Eve - 8.15pm. Sat - 5 & 8.30pm
AETT - \$16.40
GP - \$20.40
Two AETT tickets per Member

Doonican's Back!

Val Doonican is celebrating 41 years in the entertainment industry. In that time he has notched up 11 million record sales, has been voted the BBC Personality of the Year, Show Business Personality of the Year, has appeared in three Royal Variety Shows and much more. And he's coming back to Australia for his tenth tour in this country. This is answering the demand of his growing legion of fans who continue to come back to see his mixture of great musicianship, Irish charm, warmth, humour and impeccable presentation.

Val Doonican has continued to grow in popularity over the years. See why at his only Melbourne performance at the Concert Hall.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Melbourne Concert Hall
Sat. March 12 at 8pm
AETT - \$17
GP - \$22
Two AETT tickets per Member

Focus on Films

CRY FREEDOM produced and directed by Richard Attenborough
Screenplay by John Briley
Starring Kevin Kline, Penelope Wilton, Denzel Washington and John Hargreaves
Opening February 18 at Russell Cinemas

When a mild, bespectacled newspaperman disguised as a priest secretly escaped from South Africa to the U.K. in the late 1970s he took with him the manuscript of "Biko" the story of the life and death of the charismatic, compassionate and nonviolent black leader whom the South African police had pronounced a Banned Person and finally beaten to death under interrogation.

The newspaperman was Donald Woods, an affluent fifth generation white South African, and a crusader against apartheid in the paper he edited. When he was coerced into meeting Biko it was the first time in his forty-odd years that he had met a black on an equal footing. Biko's friendship changed his life and took him into the black townships and meetings with other black leaders.

Woods was finally declared a Banned Person himself. He was not allowed to leave his home and even there had little freedom. When even the two youngest of his five children received a form of letter bomb the Woods planned their escape, which with its subterfuges and split second timing resembled a fictional thriller.



CRY FREEDOM was a natural follow-on for Attenborough after his experiences with apartheid during the making of *GANDHI*. It is a film that both shocks and enchants – shocking in its scenes of the black townships and violence of police raids, the chasm between the lives of black and white South Africans; enchanting in the beauty of the scenery and the filming of it, and the finely understated direction and acting.

ORPHANS directed and produced by Alan J. Pakula
Screenplay by Lyle Kessler from his play of the same name
Starring Albert Finney, Matthew Modine and Kevin Anderson
Opening February 25 at Rivoli Twin



ORPHANS is probably the most unusual film yet made on father/son relationships and bonding. Starring in the stage play in London, Albert Finney was so impressed with it that he arranged a performance solely for fellow actors to introduce them to its "dynamic American naturalism". Two orphaned brothers hide like wild animals in a decaying old house in New Jersey. The elder, Treat, makes hunting forays into the outside world, mugging and stealing. Phillip the younger never ventures out. He has been convinced by Treat that he will have violent allergic reactions to the outside world and die. Their world changes when Treat kidnaps a drunken gangster, Harold (Albert Finney). Basically a violent man, Harold also has great tenderness and tames the boys with his offer of paternal love.

Matthew Modine (Treat) starred in Stanley Kubrick's latest film *FULL METAL JACKET*, and Kevin Anderson played Phillip in the play's premiere season by the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, in New York when it transferred there and in the London production with Finney.

ARIA directed by Robert Altman, Bruce Beresford, Bill Bryden, Jean-Luc Godard, Derek Jarman, Franc Roddam, Nicolas Roeg, Ken Russell, Charles Sturridge and Julien Temple
Produced by Don Boyd
Starring Buck Henry, Anita Morris, Beverley D'Angelo, Genevieve Page, Julie Hagerty and John Hurt
Opening early February at the Capitol



It is a rarity to find ten directors listed for one film; even more rare when they are ten of the world's best. Producer Don Boyd had the novel idea of inviting them to each film an aria with his own interpretation and in his own style – a feast of musical variations. The various segments of opera were filmed in various places; England, France, Belgium, Italy and America. The list of opera singers involved includes such contemporary "greats" as Price, Domingo, Caballe, Flagello, Bjoerling and Yakar. Also involved in the making of *ARIA* were a group of some of the world's best stills photographers. Their work will illustrate a book of the film by Stephen Spender.

Film Discounts

In most editions of *Trust News* we have a Focus on Films column which covers highlights of the new film releases that month. We cover films which we believe will be of interest to Members. It is important to realise, however, that film discounts are available for *all* Hoyts, Greater Union and Village cinemas as well as films being screened at the Longford Cinema in South Yarra and the Capitol Cinema in the City. Concessional

vouchers can be purchased from the Trust and exchanged at any Hoyts, Village or Greater Union cinema for tickets (some Saturday and Public Holiday restrictions apply). Hoyts and Village vouchers can be purchased for \$6.00, while Greater Union are \$6.00 and Longford and Capitol vouchers are \$6.50 each. This effectively means a \$1.50 to \$2.00 saving on the average general public admission price of \$8.00.

The vouchers are open dated and are valid for periods of between three and

twelve months. They can be used for any film presented by the particular chain. They are not therefore a guarantee of admission to any particular screening. You can purchase as many vouchers as you wish so regular film goers can keep supplies of vouchers on hand. Vouchers can be obtained on the Trust Member Booking Coupon (no handling fee applies), by phone, or in person from the Trust during normal office hours. Please specify which cinema chain you require when ordering.

THE DEPARTMENT

By David Williamson

Directed by Rodney Fisher

Designed by Shaun Gurton

Lighting by Nick Schlieper

Starring Max Gillies, Tracy Mann, Helmut Bakaitis, Ben Gabriel, Ron Graham, Jeff Morrell, Matthew O'Sullivan, Kris Ralph, John Sheerin and Paul Williams.

THE DEPARTMENT is often hailed as David Williamson's best play, mirroring his own experience as a teacher and as topical now as it was when first written. It is a cutting exposition of the departmental meeting, revealing the workings of the Public Service in Australia and focusing on the interdepartmental power plays within the engineering department of a technical college. The cast is headed by the consummate Max Gillies as Robby, the head of the department and features an excellent supporting cast who portray the various characters within THE DEPARTMENT. Don't miss it!



Cast of 'The Department'

BOOKING INFORMATION

Athenaeum Theatre

Mon-Sat at 8pm, Sat Mats at 2pm

AETT - Mon to Thur. \$23.90,

Fri/Sat - \$24.90

GP - Mon to Thur. \$26.90.

Fri/Sat - \$27.90

Two AETT tickets per Member

DOUBLE ACT

By Barry Creyton

Directed by Sandra Bates

Designed by Tom Bannerman

Starring Barry Creyton and Noeline Brown.

Described as a 'Tour de-vorce', Barry Creyton's DOUBLE ACT has come from a sell-out season in Sydney and has wowed audiences in Melbourne since its opening. In a wonderful pairing of talent, Creyton and Brown come together as a

divorced couple who meet accidentally in a restaurant after being divorced for five years, and have another go at their relationship, hence the title, DOUBLE ACT. Funny and extremely witty, this production is definitely recommended viewing.



Noeline Brown and Barry Creyton

BOOKING INFORMATION

Universal Theatre

Tues-Sun at 8.15. Sat Mats. at 2pm,

Sun at 5pm and 8.15pm

AETT - \$20.50

GP - \$23.50

Two AETT tickets per Member

MANNING CLARK'S HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA

Written by Manning Clark, Don Watson, Tim Robertson and John Romeril.

Directed by John Bell

Music composed by George Dreyfus and Martin Armiger

Starring Tina Bursill, Ivor Kants, Terry Bader, Michelle Fawdon and John McTernan.

Manning Clark's definitive history of this country has been metamorphosed into a highly entertaining musical production featuring some of our best known performers. In this our Bicentennial year, the lifetime's work by Professor Manning Clark is a production not to be missed. Covering the



A scene from History of Australia

years from 1788 to 1915, the HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA features many of the characters and events which shaped this country, and the years from 1915 to the present are dealt with by following the life and times of Manning Clark himself.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Princess Theatre

Tues, Wed, Thur, Sat at 8pm

Fri - 5.30 and 8pm

Sun - 6pm & Wed Mats. at 2pm

AETT - \$31

GP - \$35

Two AETT tickets per Member

STARLIGHT EXPRESS

Composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber

Lyrics by Richard Stilgoe

Directed by Dion McHugh

Set and Costume Design by John Napier



Starlight Express - Traralgon Theatre Co.

STARLIGHT EXPRESS is the sort of musical extravaganza we've come to expect from Andrew Lloyd Webber. It is the story of a train race across America between a steam train, a diesel and an electric train. The score which rages between rock, country and blues is sung by roller skating singer-actors in a display of skill which is remarkable. STARLIGHT EXPRESS will be presented in Melbourne's new National Tennis Centre, where all seating is good and the sound quality is spectacular. The Trust still has good seats available, but book now!

BOOKING INFORMATION

National Tennis Centre - Opens Sun

March 27

AETT - Adults \$33, Children \$23

GP - \$36 & \$26 conc.

On Stage in London...

by Margaret Leask

The 1987 theatre year concluded with women in the ascendent in London — what with Judi Dench winning major awards for her Cleopatra at the National, Dame Peggy Ashcroft's 80th birthday celebrations at the Old Vic, and Maggie Smith lighting up the West End with a superb comic performance in Peter Shaffer's new play written specially for her, *LETTICE AND LOVAGE*, at the Globe.

For me, the highlight of the year was a special "party" at the old Vic (where she first appeared on stage in 1932) to celebrate the 80th birthday (on December 20) of "The Jewel in the British Theatre's Crown", Dame Peggy Ashcroft with extracts from the plays (mostly Shakespeare) and words and music programmes Dame Peggy has presented over the years. Much loved and long applauded, Dame Peggy appeared at the end of this memorable evening; leaving with the audience a great sense of her strength and imagination and her important place in the British Theatre. Three days before this event, I saw *LETTICE AND LOVAGE* with Maggie Smith and Margaret Tyzack, directed by Michael Blakemore — a warm, eccentric comedy "which defies tradition by having a hard core but soft edges" (*SUNDAY TIMES*). It is the painful but entertain-

ing account of the relationship of two women at odds with the world about them, manifested in their approach to history and architecture — Maggie Smith is a tour guide, sacked for her embellishment of historical fact in a dull stately home by Margaret Tyzack's ferocious employer at the Conservation Trust. Miss Tyzack is the perfect foil for Miss Smith, making for a fascinating piece of theatre.



Dame Peggy Ashcroft

At the Playhouse, Ian McKellen's one-man show, *ACTING SHAKESPEARE*, goes some way to re-dressing the balance — in a programme he has toured throughout America, he explores with almost missionary zeal and boundless enthusi-

asm Shakespeare as a living source of inspiration and observation. He is a fiercely intelligent actor with an endlessly pliable voice and body, which accounts for the success of such a programme not usually to be found in the West End. At the National, another British actor, Alec McCowen, is giving a series of watchable performances in repertoire this season, including Vladimir, in Michael Rudman's new production of Beckett's *WAITING FOR GODOT*, which has been generally praised but as always, despite an awareness of something great in its metaphor for the human condition, it sits uneasily in the repertoire for the general theatre-going public.

Looking ahead to 1988 sees a revival of *SOUTH PACIFIC* at the Prince of Wales, Shaw's *YOU NEVER CAN TELL* with Michael Horden and Irene Worth at the Haymarket, and John Gielgud in a new play by Hugh Whitmore, *THE BEST OF FRIENDS* at the Apollo, as well as continuation of such delights as Aphra Behn's *THE ROVER* with Jeremy Irons at the Mermaid and Charlton Heston in *A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS* at the Savoy.

Margaret Leask is a former editor of *Trust News* now living in London where she is an artists' agent.

Trust Update

Since publication of our December issue, a number of important developments have taken place at the Trust.

Most of you will be aware that our former Chief Executive, Kathleen Norris, has decided to pursue new theatrical avenues and that a new chief executive will be appointed in due course. Mr. Stan Coonan, a senior management consultant with Duesburys, has been appointed Acting Chief Executive and will help the Trust consolidate its management restructuring and implement new growth programmes.

During the latter part of 1987, members of the Board of Directors met to consider and define the strategic direction of the Trust and its immediate and medium-term objectives. Since then, the Board has been strengthened by the appointment of Mr. K. Brian Stonier, AO, and Dr. R. Seaborn, OBE.

Mr. Stonier's strengths as a publisher and accountant will be of great value to the Trust. He is also Vice-Chairman of the National Art Gallery on whose Board he sits until May 1988. Dr. Seaborn is the founding director of the Seaborn, Broughton & Walford Foundation, whose charter is to foster the performing arts in Australia. The Foundation's first contribution was to assist the Griffin Theatre financially thereby allowing it to continue operating in its Stables home. Dr. Seaborn is a retired psychiatrist, a former president of the Alcohol and Drug Foundation of N.S.W., and the founding president of the Drug and Alcohol Foundation of Australia.

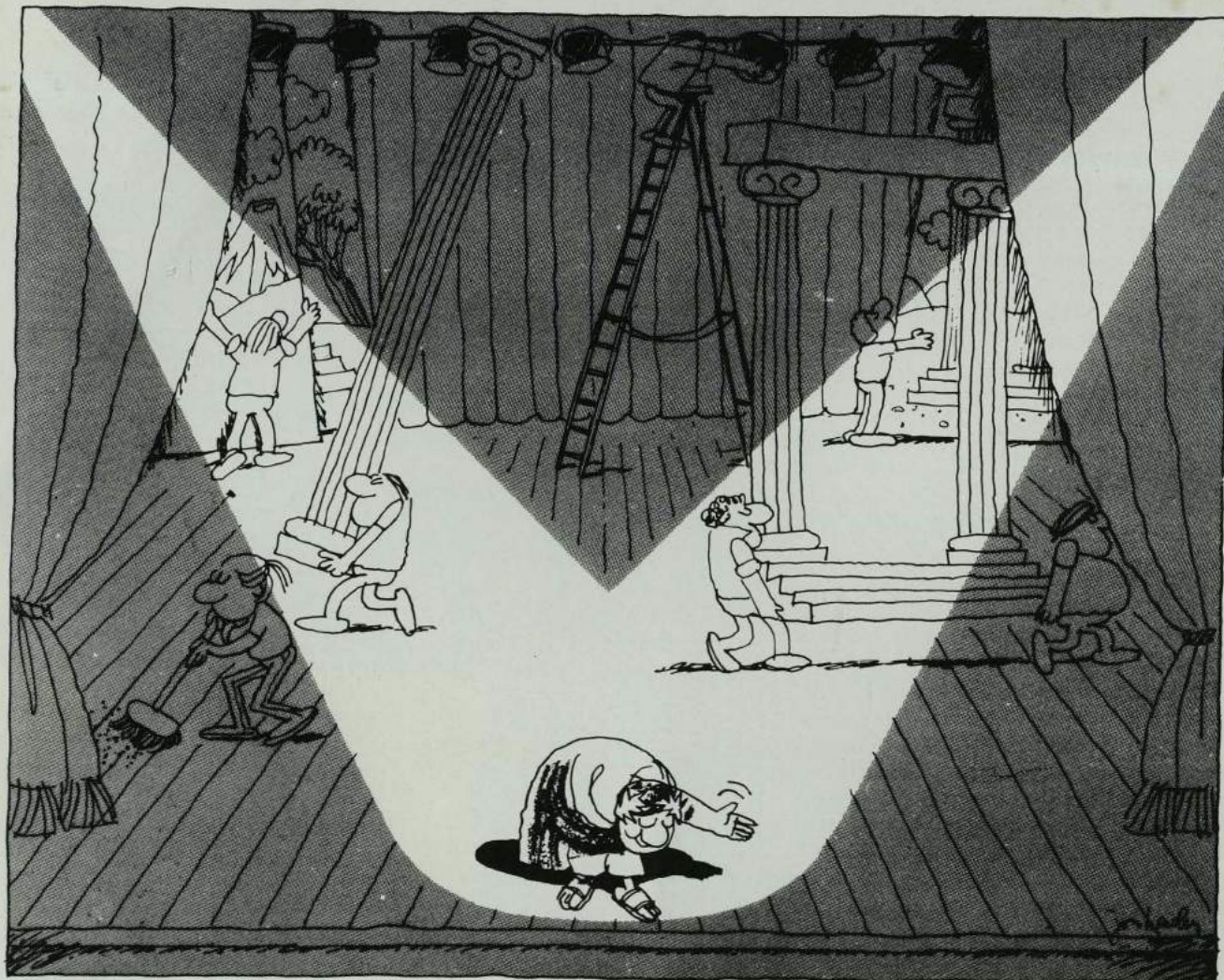
The Trust's management structure has been strengthened with the appointment of Mr. Bill Cottam as Finance Director and Mr. Trevor Brooks as Marketing Director, both from the private sector.

One of the main thrusts of 1988 will be a significant review of membership benefits and services across all States.

With membership at an all-time high (rapidly approaching 11,000), the Trust recognises and thanks all members for their continuing loyalty and contribution to the Trust, and thereby to the entire Australian arts scene.

No other organisation has the broad charter and unique capability to deliver significant benefits to all performing arts. We aim to improve communication and progressively establish a stronger national presence. In this Bicentennial year, we also aim to look to the future by developing programmes to educate and inspire the young people of Australia as the performers and audiences of tomorrow.

The Trust and its members have shared goals and can only achieve them by concerted, co-operative efforts. Over the next few months, the Trust will outline its new programmes to all members. Together we can make great strides forward during 1988. Welcome to a challenging and exciting year.



Great Performances.

Any friend, relative or business associate will appreciate your unique gift of Trust membership. It's a gift which keeps on giving throughout the year. The Trust will send the new member a distinctive card with your name and gift message or if you prefer, we will send you the card for personal presentation.

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Membership enquiries should be directed to the A.E.T.T. on 690 8384, 117 Sturt Street, South Melbourne, Postal address: G.P.O. Box 438C, Melbourne, Vic. 3001.

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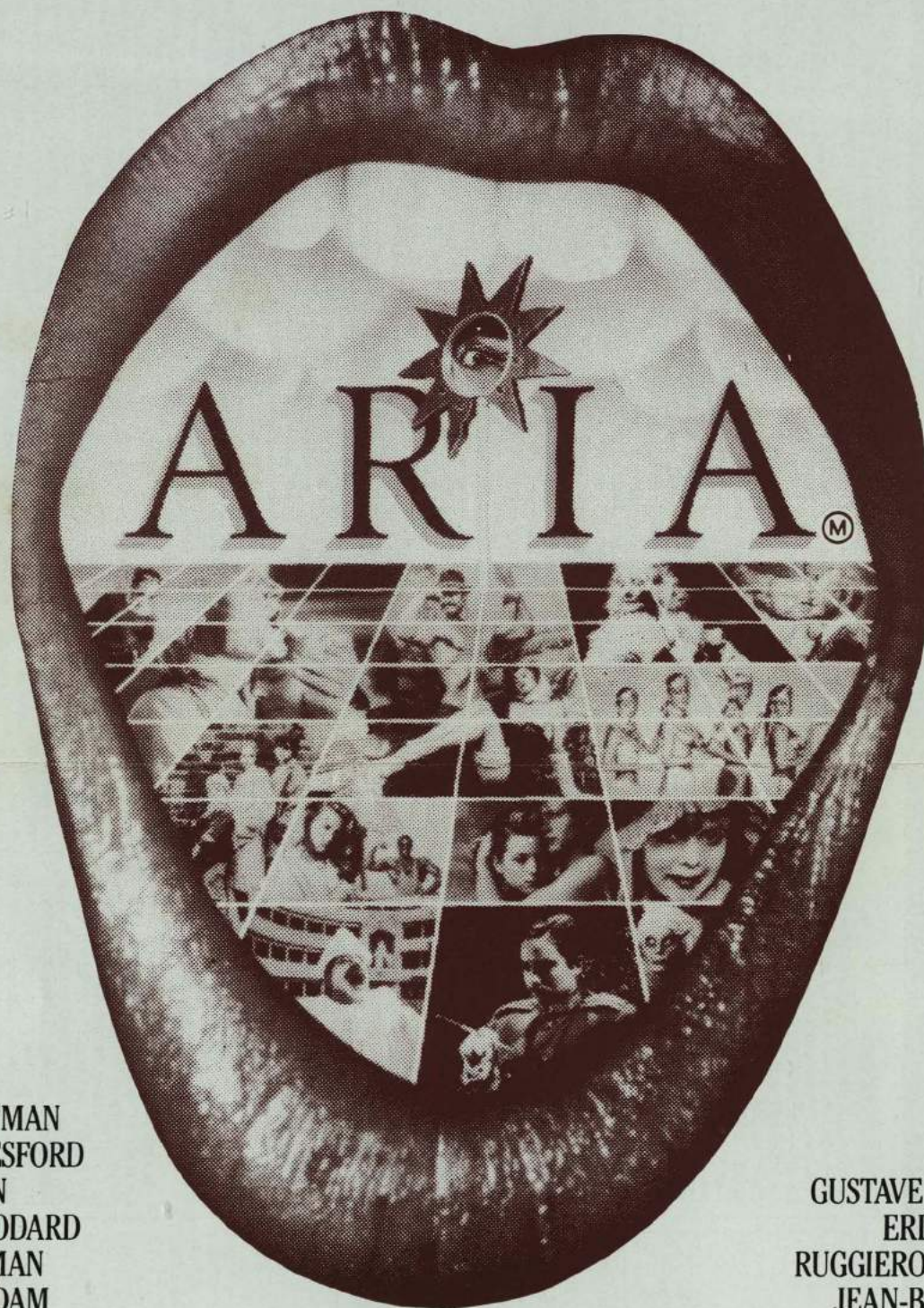
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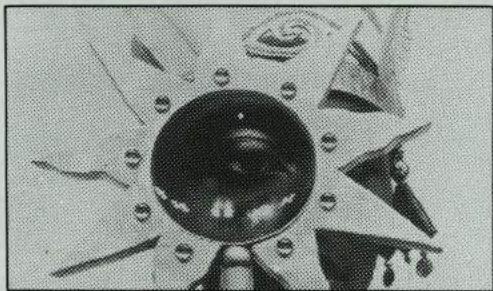
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ACADEMY TWIN

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"A FILM UNPRECEDENTED IN CINEMA HISTORY!"

Ten world famous film directors have chosen works by some of music's finest composers and brought together some of the greatest opera singers of the 20th century in a stunning cinematic cocktail. With a cast of more than 300, including John Hurt, Anita Morris, Beverly D'Angelo, Theresa Russell, Tilda Swinton and Genevieve Page, "ARIA" was a spectacular success at the Cannes Film Festival in 1987.



Since Malcolm McLaren charted with 'Madame Butterfly', opera has been shedding its stuffy image. Now 'Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle' producer Don Boyd has given free rein to ten top directors, including Ken Russell, who once did a punk Stravinsky, to film 'Aria' — opera more often in the buff than for the buff.



BANG! BANG! BANG! Three bullets ripped into my groin, but first let me tell you a little about opera. The obsession with getting the pill of art down the patient's throat has led many into the subterfuge of jam. Producer Don Boyd, an opera buff, settled upon the lure of ten directors for the price of one, and a manifesto which allowed each to give free rein to his cinematic imagination in the interpretation of his chosen aria. Whatever its commercial fate, 'Aria' should dispel the popular image of opera as being as boring as bowls.

Boyd, a posh, nerry, spurring chap who could have been written by Ben Travers, has the boundless optimism of a pup. This is just as well. At 29 a rising power at Paramount, his career nosedived abruptly following John Schlesinger's 'Honky Tonk Freeway' which he produced. 'I need your office,' explained a Hollywood hatchman, and Boyd was off the lot for keeps within a day of the opening. His 1982 project, 'Gossip', folded after three weeks leaving him answerable for everyone's wages. Even, now, he still has to pay the unions half of every fee he earns — some alimony. In between disasters, he has produced 'Scum', 'The Tempest', 'The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle', 'Scrubbers', 'An Unsuitable Job For A Woman' and 'Captive', not a portfolio that immediately triggers the phrase 'the Midas touch'. 'Aria', of course, is an omnibus movie, a form which the industry regards as death.

Optimism, Don? It is impossible not to like the victim of so much broken elastic.

'I most believe, ummm, never give up kicking the pricks!' he cries, arresting the slide of specs down his nose with a finger. 'The fact is I'm shortsighted so I was, ummm, very good at rugger — centre three-quarter — fearless at tackling because I couldn't really see how big the chap was. An optimism born of myopia, I suppose.'

Initial Recruitment

Setting about the initial recruitment of directors, Boyd first approached Fellini — and drew a yes. 'I was really frightened of meeting him, but I took him the latest *Beano* and the latest *Dandy* — he loves comics — and that warmed him up. I remember him saying that he loved James Bond movies because they had a detached irony, and I sort of saw what he meant. I told him what I hoped to do with "Aria" and he said, "Don — it is probably the only time in your life you're going to play God." Then he said he'd like to intercut Mozart, Puccini and Verdi for his episode, but when it came to it he had to back out.' Boyd tousled his inventor's hair and caught his specs again. 'David Byrne wanted to contribute but he made the awful mistake of by-passing me, the producer, and sending a script to RCA who turned it down. He was the only director who submitted a script.'

Robert Altman approached the project with Rameau's 'Les Boréades', and immovable principles. He would not film opera; he would not mess with the music. Instead, he offered the extraordinary suggestion of filming an eighteenth-century audience. The idea came about thus: Altman had just staged a production of 'The Rake's Progress' in Lille, and during rehearsals had been arrested by the sight of the Hogarthian cast sitting in the auditorium. It was not uncommon in the Age of Reason to find parties of lunatics from the bedlams attending theatres as guests of a jaded aristocracy. With Boyd's concurrence, Altman rehearsed his audience for a week, then shot for three hours having choreographed something like 400 set-ups.

'Brilliant!' enthused the producer. 'What Bob told me was that he wanted to film a Hogarth — but a Hogarth painting that moved! I so admire his ability to marshal enormous numbers of people. And the other director who, as it were, regarded the actual music as, ummm, well, sacred, was Bruce Beresford. He's an enormous opera buff — goes to the Met in New York, the Sydney Opera House, Covent Garden. He can tell you all about Nellie Melba! Actually, when I was at Film School and he was in charge of the BFI, I sent him a script which he rejected, so for years I'd thought that he was a real pretentious sod. Well, working with him, I've revised my opinion.'

Beresford's aria, Korngold's 'Gluck Das Mir', was to remain the most conventional way of filming opera. A love duet for voices and bare bodies, doves, medieval Bruges and reflections on water. 'I tried to encourage him to move away from that,' said Boyd. 'I phoned him up from a conbox at Orly Airport when he was in North Carolina about to shoot "Crimes of the Heart". He was saying, "I don't understand what you want, Don," as I was pushing my five-franc pieces in the box. "Perhaps mine can be the one that doesn't conform?" But the day before he was due to shoot he confessed he was absolutely terrified. He thought he'd made a terrible error and that he now saw why the others had chosen to do it differently. Well, I told him to go for it, so if there's any blame, it's me.'

Body-Building

Jean-Luc Godard, the man, had captivated the bounding producer. 'I met him in Paris and he told me he had two ideas for his "Armide" by Lully. He knew of a fairly undiscovered atelier studio full of Rodin statues, and he wanted to tell a story about

two cleaning ladies in the studio. The half-alive and the half-dead. I didn't like the idea of statues because architecture and statues are what everybody expects of filmed opera.'

And after Larry's Rodin cartoons, there are all these comic associations, I suggested. Rodin's 'Roofing Contractor'. Rodin's 'Bust Zip'. Rodin's 'Net Judge'...

'Mmm. Well, Godard's second idea was two cleaners in a body-building gym — living statuary — and I preferred that. He filmed it, then phoned me up to say it wasn't any good, but that he was going to re-shoot *at his own expense*! Later, he invited me out to his house at Lake Geneva to see the rough cut. He had all the reels of film and all the music soundtracks arranged on shelves so that he could dub it for me in his cutting room. There are a lot of cuts and changes of soundtrack in his section, and he had to overlap things to the second, to the frame. Watching him was pure theatre! He can do everything himself. It was like the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" with me as the apprentice. I have never been so conscious of genius, and at the end I was so moved by his display of technical virtuosity that I had tears in my eyes. He was so pleased that I liked it, and we went out and ate and he was very humorous. How? Oh, amused that the RCA executives might think they were getting a promo for their classical catalogue.'

As the evening wore on, Don Boyd's mood swings became erratic. The French critics at Cannes had taken against 'Aria'. Ontario had loved it. Some of Edinburgh had booed Ken Russell's 'Nessus Dornia' by Puccini. 'Oh, I know they're going to say it's an opera video,' he groaned, 'but in Verdi's time opera was whistled in the street.'

I tried to cheer him up. I told him how Mario Lanza, reportedly, had hired whores, knelt behind them and sung, manipulating their vaginal labia. 'See how the Voice of God speaks through the body of a woman,' he said. I told him about the opera director in Milan Kundera's 'The Book of Laughter and Forgetting'. This guy had it worse. Kundera wrote: 'Hertz required his women singers to perform their entire roles for him in private during special nude blocking sessions. To ensure that they held their bodies just so, he had them insert pencils in their rectums. Since the direction in which the pencil pointed indicated the position of the spinal column, the meticulous director was able to control every step, every motion of the singer's body, with scientific precision.' Opera is an open book to me.

Popularising Opera

Boyd intuited a distraction and crossed the restaurant to say hullo to Phoebe Cates. I went to Elstree to talk to Ken Russell, the father of popularising opera. Russell was busy, in the middle of a three-week shooting schedule for 'Salome's Last Night', starring Glenda Jackson and Stratford Johns, but he kindly fitted me in between veils.

'Have some champagne,' he said, lying like a white-haired Roman senator on his side on a couch in a break. A props man came in with a choice of prop goblets. The chalice from the palace, the vessel with the pestle, but no flagon with a dragon. The Great Man nominated one.

'I think most people think opera is an intellectual sport that's above them,' he said. 'Provincial operas are doing their best to allay this suspicion. Covent Garden puts on these East German, obscure, elitist, pseudo-intellectual, Symbolist productions which nobody understands. Actually, opera is just like musicals only the music is better, and if they're produced

properly, they're much more exciting. I've always tried to make opera a human story so that people feel emotionally involved. It mustn't be unbelievable because people need to relate to the characters.'

His section of 'Aria' had been exactly what Don Boyd had in mind. Marrying the high hieratic of some kind of Inca/Egyptian/African ceremony with the rituals of the operating theatre — hands at the high port, rubies and blood, masks — he had also paid poetic tribute to an assistant who had died in a car crash.

'I don't know what the audience thinks of my bit. Some like it, some don't, which is true of all my films. Those who dislike it should take the trouble to see what the words say, instead of saying, "Well, it's a load of crap." I don't speak Italian, but if I'm listening to Italian opera I have a translation. It's no big deal to get a libretto. If they found out what the songs are about and went back and saw the film again, they'd get 50 times the pleasure from it! People are too lazy these days. Do people ever wonder why something is in a film five minutes after it's finished?'

To be fair, I couldn't really reassure him that people did.

Mind-Blowing Achievement

'Pictures. Music,' he said. 'That's how cinema started off. Cinema's got lost a bit so far as it has become radio with pictures along. The writers have taken over more than their fair share. I think it'd be good to go back to the composer and the director. The golden era for me was the so-called Silent Era which is a misnomer because the best films had an orchestra of 80 accompanying the images with a specially written score. One of my favourite films of all time is "Metropolis" which had a score by the great Honneger, mostly lost now. The idea of that film with that score must've been a mind-blowing achievement equal to the Diaghilev ballet. Imagine the sound coming from all over the theatre, ambient, not funnelled through a speaker!'

He swung his sandals down and sat up a bit. He'd done a long day in the studio. 'I liked "Aria". I liked Franc Roddam's "Tristan". I felt the French director went on a bit. I got the picture with the weightlifters, and there was no development. Altman's was as long as a piece of string.' He sipped his champagne. 'I've been producing operas for six years on stage. The first opera I was offered was "The Rake's Progress". I'd seen it as Sadler's Wells 25 years before and dropped off to sleep. I thought, oh, my God — of all the operas! Then I played the records and realised Stravinsky had written a masterpiece. It had been such a terrible production, you see. Stravinsky said it didn't matter when it was set, so I set it in punk London and worked in the Falklands War. You have no control over the first night once you've rehearsed it. You pray the lights don't go wrong and everybody knows their moves — but at the same time there's a frisson of excitement. You just don't know from second to second what's going to happen! And sometimes it's the most amazing bonus that you never planned.'

Or, to quote Susan Alexander Kane: 'There is the ghastly sound of 3,000 people applauding as little as possible.'

'Oh, yes. But in film you work towards your final print, and then it is shadows reflected on a screen. You know by the fourth night that — unless the projectionist is drunk, and they often are — it should go straight forward.'

He looked both belligerent and tired at once.

'No surprises,' he said. □

TIME OUT