

E FORUM

THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL

questioning through history for fertility, and its eventual encounter with the age of medical technological intervention. In an optimistic outcome the egg produces an equine mutant and embraces it. The show is of a high technical standard yet produces the illusion of a wealth of imagery created from little resources. The audience is made to work hard in order to be co-creators and explorers. Certainly, a different world.

Toughness, anger, pain and discomforting material, as well as female solidarity, reappear as elements of Eva Johnson's writing and performance of her solo show *What Do They Call Me*: my pick of the Festival. A simply mounted piece, with props a blanket, chair, glass and book, it is eminently transportable and should be widely seen. It consists of three monologues to implied audiences (us) by three women who are related to each other and who show differing facets of a communal Aboriginal fate and of resilient female Aboriginality negotiating a fractured history. The first character is a drunken wom-



Hope and courage are the keynotes of Doug Anthony Allstars: Tim Ferguson, Johnson's playlet, and the tacit indictment of white Australia's crimes against black families is there for the audience to wear. Or not, if they so choose.

It seems that the Living Arts Centre is to be bulldozed, renovated and generally cleaned up. Without the grime, the crush, the overpriced booze and the firetrap ambiance, it wouldn't be the same. Patrons, showing patiently in queues or pettishly sneaking forward as the overdue crush doors open, form a kind of camaraderie. Police were there, grimly lecturing Aboriginal drinkers. Yuppies were there, squealing about the uncouthness of the awful yobbos of Port Adelaide and savouring their little taste of *la boue*. The Festival big names were there, hailing each other conspicuously and making deals. And the performers were there, sparking off wild moments of unrehearsed anarchy. Let's hope this cleaning up doesn't go too far — who wants a Fringe without some element of dirt and danger?

Veronica Kelly



an flung into the cells. She has survived a lifetime of victimisation through a code unknown to her captors, and her plight is sufficient indictment of white racism even without the all too common tragedy — expounded at Writers' Week by Sally Morgan — of having had her child taken from her. The second character is this child, comfortably raised by a prosperous white family in ignorance of her identity, who is now questioning her adoptive mother about her origins, and tentatively setting forth on the journey towards her Aboriginality. The final monologue is by another daughter, a lesbian activist who strives to love and to understand the global achievements of her white lover (an "expert on Aboriginal affairs") who is a determined educator of her partner in the global achievements of black women. She tries to make sense of the tangled web of class, gender and racial currents of which she is the focus. The author, movingly exposed and courageous as the performer of a painful history, has gone past raw rage and incorporated her anger in a celebration of black women's strength. Aggression is reclaimed — there is too much to do, to set right, so she's moving forward and taking us with her.



Handspan Anne Wylie

Tristan Und Isolde In Venice Written and performed by Paul Sherman Centre For The Performing Arts (Adelaide) 25th February — 15th March

Stranger than fiction! Queensland writer and actor Paul Sherman delves into history only to bring to light a story that is at once authentic and idiosyncratic. Although largely centred on the character of the German composer Richard Wagner, it is no less the story of the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, an unlikely combination of actor, Franciscan monk and World War I flying ace, complete with eye-patch, who became acquainted with Wagner as a young man and later wrote a book about Wagner in Venice called *The Fire*. More than a century later, Sherman makes his own pilgrimage to Venice in search of two ghosts, those of Wagner and D'Annunzio. This performance is the result of his research as well as his powers of empathetic understanding and in it the audience are treated to a brief yet intense encounter with these two characters. The result is a double reincarnation — a glimpse of the musician intensified, magnified through the eyes of the reverent poet and further refined in an engaging and intelligent performance by the actor.

The obvious relish in recursive structures gives the piece an immediate density. *Tristan Und Isolde In Venice* is a multiple creation. In it Sherman presents the tale of a poet who has written a book about Wagner who is writing an opera based on a poem about Tristan and Isolde. (And to complicate matters even further the review-

er is now forced to add yet another dimension to this already intricate network!) This makes it plain that Sherman's primary matter is not simply historical revelation. More important, perhaps, is his exploration of creativity and the way in which aspects of experience combine with elements drawn from an artistic tradition in order to bring about a new work of art. In one very evocative moment, Sherman portrays Wagner in a moment of musical inspiration listening to a melancholy song sung by the boatmen on the canals below his window. For the composer, it becomes the melody played by the shepherds in *Tristan Und Isolde*. The artist seizes on life and transforms it into something of power. And this is precisely what Sherman seeks to do again — to seize on Wagner's moment of discovery as insight into the nature of Art's mechanism.

This is not to say that Sherman neglects the historical Wagner. No, he depicts Wagner as the great artist, involved to the point of complete obsession with his grand work and burning with a glorious sense of mission (in this case the resurrection of Western culture, no less). At the same time, he must confront serious emotional conflicts concerning his sick wife, his beloved Mathilde and Mathilde's boorish husband Otto von Wesendonk. Needless to say, the great artist is largely misunderstood by those around him and inevitably lives in poverty due to a dire lack of recognition. Nevertheless, despite the wrangling and the distractions, his voracious creativity continues to feed off every aspect of his ordinary life. Sherman successfully captures this internal dialogue that the maestro maintains with his opera in the making, a dialogue that requires total devotion and

dominates all other relationships.

At times this portrait comes close to the romantic stereotype of the genius. Nevertheless, to add some shading to his depiction Sherman presents Wagner's rampant anti-semitism (Wagner even wrote pamphlets on the subject). This is unambiguously exposed for what it was — a paranoid reaction born of his intense devotion to his life's work. His rather predatory attitude towards women is also noted, although this aspect receives little dissection.

Sherman gives a controlled performance, now speaking, now singing a bar or two from some famous aria, now pausing again in quiet thought. All the while he juggles his small band of characters with assurance. With so much to communicate within the space of sixty minutes my only real criticism of the piece concerns its overall ambitiousness. There is clearly too much to tell and the difficulty has been to know what to leave out. Some judicious streamlining in places would contribute to the strength of the piece, although much of it is very tightly constructed. However, I am not about to complain about an overload of ideas when so many contemporary works struggle desperately to present even a minimum of substance.

Let me add too that the performance took place in a church hall with only the most rudimentary facilities. I can imagine *Tristan Und Isolde In Venice* having even greater impact in a better equipped space and I hope that Sherman gets the chance to do this in the near future.

Simon J. Patton

Theatre Forum continued
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BEAUTIFUL BEASTIES: A LETTER FROM LONDON

After the cinema, live theatre may be the safest form of sex these days. A London theatregoer of shameless promiscuity in my youth, I just couldn't get enough in whatever form: the straightest of 'legit' in the West End, genteel experimentation at the National or the R.S.C., or the raunchy deviancy of the fringe. Rather jaded by those glorified spruikers and pimps of the business, London's theatre critics, had seduced me just too often with their hype — I'd made a firm decision to remain a radical celibate on this visit. No theatre, not even any films (one could always catch up on these back home in Melbourne), I didn't count on the lure of "the Snarling Beastes".

The very name of this new theatre company is a turn-on, and such a striking contrast in this sense to the newly-aggrandised "Royal National Theatre". It has some backing from one of the big, old companies (Birmingham Rep.) but in style and programming and personnel it's a ferociously independent, beguilingly youthful menage a trois. Apart from its first production — Steven Berkoff's *East* — its material has been completely self-devised, and in its latest show, *Valentino*, it heedlessly crosses the boundaries between theatre and cinema to present an irresistible stage portrayal of one of Hollywood's enduring cult figures. This is not just — not at all — the play of the film, *Valentino*, made back in the 1970s, but a play within and around a film within and around a play. My views of celibacy melted before the prospect of these multiple excitements.

Devil's Advocate Manton Rooms Monash University

Here we go again. More sex, politics, sexual politics and political sex from the Drunk and Disorderly Company. This tale of power play, corruption and ethical compromise is set in the arts section of a major Melbourne newspaper. The main character being — lo and behold — a theatre critic. But what can a theatre critic possibly have to do with all this? Well nothing is sacred according to Director Remy Davison. Russell, the critic in question, is bored and frustrated with his trivial tasks at the office. Preferring to plagiarise other reviews rather than see the play himself, and selling tickets to the photographic sessions of the page three girl!

His degree in mechanical engineering, he feels, justifies his position as David Williamson has a similar background. Although Williamson is often mocked by the characters, *The Devil's Advocate* is ironically very much in the Williamson genre. Russell is reminiscent of *Dora's Party's* Coolie: a neanderthal ocker with latent intelligence. Russell's dormant principles

A screen is positioned above the stage area to flash on opening credits, the odd photograph or piece of footage, some expository narrative or dialogue in the silent movies, and the end-title. The main "beasties" in Hollywood's jungle — the ruthless producer, Jesse Lasky (Andrew McIlwce) and Valentino's equally ruthless lesbian wife and muse, Naracha Rambora (Debbie Isitt) — are given some spoken dialogue to enact out below. Here the two media are split, or rather too awkwardly juxtaposed, as I shall elaborate below. They achieve a much more impressive integration in the mimed rituals of the two beauties, Valentino himself (puckishly svelt Mark Kilnurry) and his hopelessly infatuated fan (Debbie Isitt again, turned elegantly pert). The film star's struggles to achieve his mythological status on screen as the "Great Lover", and his real-life failure to be any such thing, are movingly evoked through a series of brisk, jerky vignettes that brilliantly parody a range of cinematic genres — the pre-talky days, from slapstick to melodrama. The wordlessly emphatic physicality of action and reaction (even in suggesting Valentino's recoil from physical love when it is genuinely, tenderly offered him) are sufficient to conjure up all the farcical and pathetic effects of the silent film; the black and white costumes are simply enhancements of this period atmosphere.

The "black and white" banalities of the spoken dialogue may also serve to parody these crude, declaratory intrusions of written text that punctuate the action in silent films — or, alternatively, the clichés of the general run of Hollywood biographies. Certainly, their awkwardness by comparison with the brio of the mimed sequences lies not so much in the script itself as in the quality of its delivery here. My sole, but lingering, irritation with the Snarling Beastes' little beast of a show is that so emerge when he sniffs somebody else's corruption.

This is a highly topical play — there is even a character called Friedrich. It is also set in an election year — and it could only be this one. The main gist is that complaints were made in parliament that certain media mogul, suggestively named Rupert, owned more than his fair share of the printed word. The faceless Rupert then plans to throw some dirt on the government via his editor — the bumbling, ineffectual Eric. Eric, who is not fond of sticky fingers, breaks the word to Russell, who foams at the bit for a good piece of investigative journalism. Russell does a Fitzgerald and exposes the sins of an arts minister with a criminal history and twenty-nine million dollars' worth of unaccounted for grants. Russell's motives for playing an undercover hero are unclear.

Corruption is exposed but the media magnate maintains his dictatorship on public opinion. And Russell has performed a few dubious tricks of confidence in the process.

Meanwhile, the microcosm of the newspaper office is as riddled with double dealings and oncupmanship as it ever was. With the embarrassed resignation of

much attention has been lavished on the physical side of the performance, hardly any on the vocal. The result was embarrassingly unsustainable attempts at foreign or American accents (as Professor Higgins might have complained "Why can't the English actor learn to speak his non-native tongue?"), and, more serious, a completely unmodulated stridency of tone.

Even to talk of physical and vocal "sides" of a performance is symptomatic of a disjunction that's become too deep in the twentieth century. One doesn't lament the decline of "elocutionary theatre" where perfect enunciation was a sufficient, if not exclusive, token of dramatic effectiveness ("I could hear every word"); but in reacting against this tradition, non-establishment companies in particular (and I can't exempt many of Anthill's productions here) seem to have gone to the other extreme, where vocal exactitude and nuance are almost at a deliberate discount. "Accents don't matter," I've heard drama students proclaim; they may not, but then they shouldn't or needn't be attempted. Accents speak louder than words; maybe, but in the language of the theatre as much as in the language of love, unrelieved loudness is likely to be a turn-off in the end. There was more than relief — there was vivid excitement — in the silences of *Valentino*. But the breaks in the silence, as handled on the night I went, came close to distracting or even detracting from the whole enchantment of the mood. I was effectively seduced; but my initial hesitations about re-exposing myself to London theatre have continued to grow in the form of vague but disturbing post-coital regrets.

Ian Britain

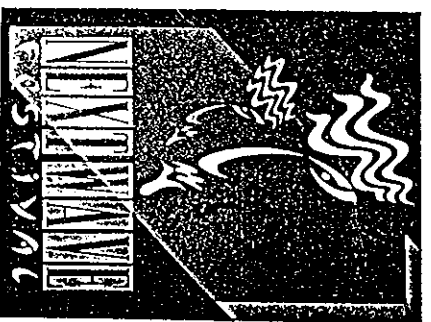
P.S. Australian audiences should get the chance to see the Snarling Beastes when they visit Sydney in 1991.

the cowardly puppet editor, Eric, the Napoleonic newcomer Friedrich assumes his role. And this does not augur well for the ethical future of the newspaper. The people may change but the system does not.

As far as the dialogue goes: Davison's concerns are overwhelmingly scatological, littered with references to the most fundamental aspects of the human condition — defecation and fornication. Although this may seem a little adolescent at first, it does serve to locate the place of society today firmly in the sewer. Or in Davison's mind anyway.

Remy Davison himself is admirable as Friedrich in the large blue suit and clipped German accent. And it is perhaps revealing that he lets himself on stage with an ostensibly mocking swaztika. The other characters, although clichés, are convincingly played by a promising bunch of young actors. The members of the Drunk and Disorderly Company have many credits under their belt and doubtless many more to come in the future.

Michelle Ryan



PLAYREADINGS

Anthill, in association with the Next Wave Festival, is presenting four workshopped playreadings, work by new writers between the ages of twelve and twenty-five.

The Next Wave Festival is Victoria's festival of young people and the arts. It presents the best work being created by professionals with young audiences in mind, and the work of young and emerging artists.

Four short plays (one hour or less) by four different young writers will be selected for workshoping with a team of four professional actors and a professional director. Each writer will work with the

team for five days after which the play will be performed as a moved reading at Anthill Theatre during the Festival.

Two plays will be presented on Sunday May 20th and two on Sunday May 27th at 2.00 pm.

Admission prices: \$5.00 full price
\$2.00 concession
Antitrends FREE!

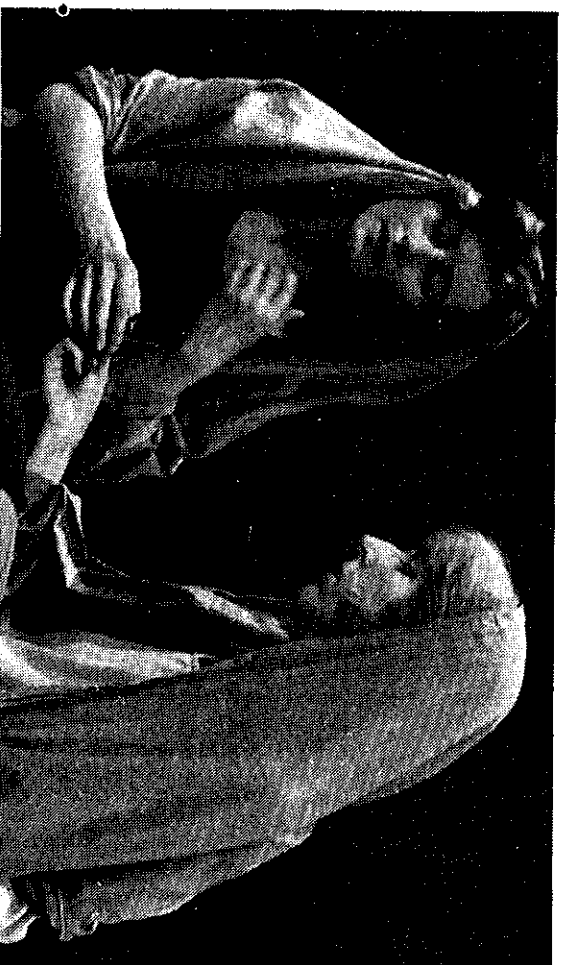
BOOKINGS: PH: 699-3253

There will also be special school presentations on 23rd and 30th May at 10.30am at Anthill.

Artists involved in this project include: Ian Scott, Jillian Murray, Nathalie Bate, Wendy Joseph, Suzanne Chandry, Chris Corbett, Ian Watson, Roderick Poole, Melanie Beddie and Julie-Anne O'Brien.

SHOESTRING

In this article, an Australian academic turned theatre director in Oxford talks about his company "Shoestring" and his productions of Euripides's "Ekave" and "Hippolytus".



When I went to the Lecocq School, and then to Philippe Gautier in Paris, and then to Athens to watch Giorgos Sevastikoglou work on the *Orestes* for the 1982 festivals, I picked up a way of looking at productions that takes issue with academic ambitions of scholarship and says instead: "The past is dead". We are not archaeologists. Our concern is with the living world that creates itself spontaneously second by second. It is death to sacrifice living spontaneity for the concerns of scholarly research."

There is a lot of debate amongst theatre people about what constitutes a good production, because there are so many different kinds of theatre in England alone, and there are developments in Eastern Europe as well as the West that change the nature of the enterprise radically decade by decade for people who are in touch with them.

My predominant concern owes something to Lecocq's having inherited the assumptions of the "sober" popular tradition from Copelan, and something to my readings in Marxist aesthetics. Lecocq and his staff were always coming down heavily on the "Anglo-saxon" students for *durere*. They defined *durere* as absence of warmth, tenderness, respect, generosity.

For me humane awareness of the character being played (and of the audience) constitutes spirituality as Lukacs or Fischer might have defined it — without, that is to say, conceding anything to religious dogma or elitism, connecting together things like the capacity to suffer and to survive suffering, the capacity to dare and to explore, compassion, vulnerability, all sorts of human needs and awarenesses, and saying that these are the common inheritance of all mankind.

I am probably over-simplifying in the crassest way but the plays I work on treat issues that are just as central today as they were when those plays were first staged 2,400 years ago, and are peopled by characters with the same fallibility and fragility and endurance and resourcefulness as the audience of 1990. The audience recognises that and sympathises with it.

It took us some time when we were working on *Ekave*, Euripides's *Hecuba* (we gave her the Modern Greek pronunciation), to home in on what was most real about it.

We decided that without a sense of imprisonment the play made no sense. So we explored the situation of the Trojan women prisoners of war in exhaustingly painful workshop sessions, which almost ended the project then and there because of the tension that they generated between a male director and a cast of four women.

Euripides's text is quite explicit about the implications of their imprisonment. The women, we are given to understand, have been permitted to survive the massacre of the inhabitants of Troy because of their sexual attractiveness. In other words, having looked on while their husbands and sweethearts and children and parents were put to the sword, they are now being carried back to the slave markets of the Greek cities. And in the meantime, as booty of war, most of them have masters among the Greek officers who are beguiling the tedious of the journey home by asserting their rights of sexual access.

So we had to deal with some very disturbing images.

The interesting discoveries we made tailored nearly with evidence we had from prison sources and from Holocaust survivors. First, the pain: the conflict between ethical impulses and survival instincts, the guilt that attaches to survival, the self-accusation, the sense of shame and degradation generated by loss of status and loss of moral autonomy, the maddening boredom. Second, the positives: the fact that every forbidden or covert signal of support or acceptance or comfort or affection took on a force much more affirmative than it would have had in a context where such things can be taken for granted.

To make the state of imprisonment the focus of the action we imprisoned the four actresses on the stage.

To place the emphasis on women we reversed the convention Euripides was accustomed to and had the women play every role, and be the chorus, using masks to help distinguish characters from each other.

But we wanted masks to have a function, and we thought that we would reserve masks for sinister purposes — for men, since they were the rulers in a situation of coercion, manipulation and exploitation — and for *Ekave* when she abandons submission and decides to seek revenge, at the

Shoestring began operation in mid-1984, as a small-scale professional theatre company, based in East Oxford.

It has survived for six years in an austere economic climate by limiting the remuneration offered to actors to an equal share of company income, setting aside one equal share to cover overheads.

Actors who audition for Shoestring are advised that they need another source of income to survive, and the company's working week is usually limited to six three-hour daytime calls. Touring hours are longer, but every effort is made to ensure that the actor's "survival jobs," as typists, waiters, hairdressers or whatever, are not put too much at risk.

The company's work divides into performances for primary schools, latterly more and more on third world themes, performances for adult audiences of Greek plays in adaptation, which are much in demand for secondary and tertiary schools and colleges, and workshops covering a wide range of educational fields.

The company also has a community commitment, which has involved it for example in mounting disabled performance projects.

Division of labour within the company is not 'job-specific'. Every member of the company is expected to share in the making of props, the construction of sets, and in devising productions, working up scripts from improvisation sessions, planning and leading workshop activities.

Most actors with Shoestring manage to stay eighteen months, some longer, attracted by the incentives to creativity the company offers.

moment, that is to say, when the women become in their turn the oppressors, torturing and mutilating an ex-ally who has betrayed them and falls into their hands.

Ekave's mask signalled the appearance of the motif of revenge. We wanted the mask to say loud and clear that the vengeful *Ekave* was a centre of frightening energies, a potent, demonic character, and she put the mask on at the end of an ambiguous feminine ritual which consists of a series of reminiscences about the women's memories of the night of the fall of the city. After it they lure their unsuspecting victim into their tents where they force him to look on while they slaughter his sons, and then they put out his eyes. It is as though they are steeling themselves for taking revenge by reminding themselves of precisely what the Greeks have done to them.

The implication of seduction and betrayal is quite explicit in the original, mirroring the implication of sexual exploitation and moral degradation in the women's situation.

And afterwards their victim comments on how attractively the women had prepared themselves and their tents for his visit. So we let them all put on make-up as they reminisced. A woman's make-up, too, can be a mask, and the joke about a woman's make-up being warpaint is universal. But all this was done with the quiet deliberation of a ritual.

The thing people valued about what we did with the play was not the horror and savagery but our evocation of the solidarity that enabled the women to resist the pressures of their situation.

Where did the audience see that? As the audience entered the theatre there were four actresses in the acting area. For the fifteen minutes between the opening of the doors and the beginning of the play the women did very little but everything they did was designed to say, "We have no freedom. It is not by our own choice that we are here. We cannot leave this place, and in it we are constantly reminded of the shame and degradation of our plight."

And in that situation of minimal action and zero self-respect the tiny signals I spoke of before of sympathy and support that passed between individuals very occasionally took on the impact of flashes of lightning.

It was the impression of the women's solidarity that the audience retained, so

that when the women sang, as they do in the original, of the wind carrying them over the sea, and of their hope that in their new homes their slavery will be made enduring by the sympathy of other women, a very meaningful assertion was made, we know that it was picked up because of the spontaneous comments from people who came up to us after the performance.

But there was also for me an element of surprise. The warmth with which the production was greeted called into question an assumption which I had found was being challenged more and more by my stage experience, an assumption that moral condemnation is a kind of end-stopped process dictating the reader or spectator's overall response to a work. I had assumed that the audience would loathe *Ekave* and that the other women for being sucked down into the moral abyss of the men's world and for treating Polynestor with such malevolence. Instead they paid more attention to the minimal affirmations than to the presiding sense of brutal anarchy.

I don't mean to say that they were blind to the ethical implications of the text. They did not exonerate *Ekave*. But they respected her even when she had behaved like a fiend from hell.

The discovery that the audience kept their sense of sympathy with *Ekave* and their admiration for the courage with which the women prisoners confronted their situation, even though the action of the play involved the women in actions of a horrifying kind, crystallised for me some of the misgivings I had experienced when preparing an *Antigone* two years before, and suggested a completely new set of strategies for the *Hippolytus* that we are putting into rehearsal in July.

Hippolytus is another revenge play, in which all of the characters, even the goddesses, behave with consummate malevolence. The play's chain of events involves one character after another plotting the downfall of a dearly loved friend who has overnight become an enemy. Each of the plots concocted is ingeniously nasty. It is in other words a play about how love turns to hate and how hate breeds hate.

How do we persuade the audience to recognise in this mania of deception and self-deception, of conspiracies of silence and conspiracies of revenge, their own suffering, their own vulnerability, their own courage and resourcefulness, their own despair?

We don't know for sure what we are going to do with this production, but I can tell you about one of the experiments we are pursuing in areas of mime and movement, music and design.

Hippolytus is a skilled horseman. Skill with horses was something the Athenians identified with Thracians and Amazons, people from the ends of the earth. His horses stampede and destroy him. In a heavy-handed way we have a temptation to symbolism, which Peter Schaffer for one could not resist when he updated Euripides by writing *Equus*. The horses could represent the forces in *Hippolytus* that he thinks he has under control.

Similarly, in *Phaedra* there is a force of primal savagery identified for the Athenians with the bull, the badge of Cretan domination over the Eastern Mediterranean in long-forgotten centuries, remembered through legends about Athenian youths and maidens being sacrificed to the bull in the labyrinth of Minos, legends about *Phaedra's* mother lusting for intercourse with a bull.

The legend of Theseus's marriage to *Phaedra*, like that of his defeating the Minotaur and being guided out of the labyrinth by Ariadne, imply that Athens under Theseus gained the upper hand over their former rulers, the Minoan empire.

This was almost certainly wishful thinking, but it points to something in the play very typical of Euripides. In his version of the story the bull wins. The un-Greek, barbarous world reclaims its own and asserts its sovereignty over areas of life that cannot be freed from their primal inheritance; the blind immense power of the sea, the cataclysmic force of earthquakes and tidal waves, and above all the mysterious ability of denied forces in the human soul to take their revenge for being denied.

We need the bull and we need the horses, or the richness of the play's underlying imagery will be missing. So it is there that we are looking at mime and movement, music and design to create those presences.

One of our notions for example has been to begin the play with a mimed hunt, in which a party of hunters, *Hippolytus* among them, trap a deer. As they carry it home they sing a simple hunting song about the brave, free hunters high on the mountainside in the bright and glorious morning.

We think that we might repeat the song twice. *Phaedra* might sing it in her mad scene when she is hallucinating about joining *Hippolytus* in the mountains and setting the hounds on the track of the deer. Then, when the dying *Hippolytus* is carried in to be nursed by his guilt-stricken father, who has been told by Artemis that the accusations which led him to curse his son and drive him away were all lies, we think the hunters who carry him in might sing the song again, in a slower tempo, and perhaps quite softly, as background music to the touching final scene between father and son, much of which was almost certainly sung in the original.

Because it would be nice if the audience genuinely shared Theseus's grief, and genuinely mourned *Hippolytus's* death.

It is true that both men have behaved quite badly in the course of the play, but if the audience comes to respect their suffering in the end we might be in touch with that principle of spirituality I spoke of earlier as being connected with the capacity to suffer and to survive, with a sense of fallibility and vulnerability, and perhaps even with the ability to forgive.

And if we really move the audience there, it might make more sense of the lines the chorus sings immediately afterwards, lines that end the play and over which editors have been shaking their learned heads for centuries:

An unexpected grief has come amongst us.

Countless the tears the city sheds.

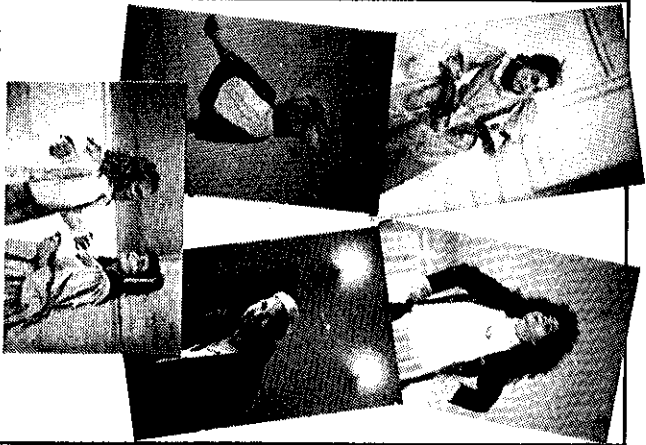
The sorrows of the great

Are sorrows common to us all.

Although overall directorial responsibility is kept in the hands of the company's Director (Dennis Douglas) a good deal of detailed stage direction is done by the actors themselves, working as a co-operative, specialist design work is often let out on commission.

Dennis Douglas

RETROSPECTIVE 1989



THE IMAGINARY INVALID

Festival of Perth
February 22 — March 5, 1989
Anhill Theatre
March 8 — April 22, 1989

by Moliere; translated by Katharine Sturak; directed by Jean-Pierre Mignon; costume, wig and make-up design Lloyd James; lighting design and production manager Liz Pain; dramaturg Suzanne Chaundy; assistant director Thea Brejzek; costumer Rose Chong; stage manager Della O'Hara; graphic design Ryszard Konikowski; performed by Julie Forsyth, Alice Garnet, Jack Komar, Catherine McClements, Alex Menglet, Jillian Murray, Malcolm Robertson, Ian Scott, Ross Williams.

The stated philosophy of this company is to "stimulate and encourage audiences through the presentation of theatre of excellence," and this they certainly did with a highly accessible production that delighted its audience and would, I am sure, have delighted Moliere.

Mardy Amos
The Australian

You'll find little better entertainment than "The Imaginary Invalid"... It is outrageously funny and scarily satirical... ANT brings together the strengths of Moliere's great classic with an accessibility and direct humour which makes this 17th century work, live and laugh in 1989.

David Britton
The West Australian

With "The Imaginary Invalid"... Jean-Pierre Mignon and his tirelessly inventive ANT return to their most familiar and... most confident ground... In the end this is a vigorous but unsubtle, entertaining but patchy interpretation. It is, nevertheless, one well worth seeing for its many comic high points.

Geoffrey Milne
The Herald

With "The Imaginary Invalid"... Mignon and his company are back in top form. This is a delightful production, imaginatively directed and splendidly acted... warm, accessible and thoroughly enjoyable.

Leonard Radic
The Age

... a masterly performance by Julie Forsyth. The register of voices is the most brilliant achievement of this actress... graphic, lively, thoroughly expressive... one gesture is sufficient to sketch out a character...

Saarbrücken Zeitung
"Perspectives" Festival

The Australian actress was one of the discoveries... Anhill Theatre, Melbourne took the audience by storm... no need for translation, Julie Forsyth communicates across language barriers: feelings!

Stuttgarten Nachrichten
Theatre der Welt Festival

...no frills, no stage bombast, no gags, KIDS' STUFF does without all of it. An excellent actress, simple lighting, a little music, that's it and it's plenty... Julie Forsyth got the most frenetic applause for an extraordinary, heart-warming performance. Bravo!

Hamburger Abendblatt
Theatre der Welt Festival

NIGGER VS. DOGS

Anhill Theatre
July 26 — August 20, 1989

by Bernard-Marie Koltès; directed by Marc Adam; designed by Anna Borgheisi; lighting design by Liz Pain; dramaturg Suzanne Chaundy; assistant director Susan Bamford; stage manager Shona Johnson; graphics Ryszard Konikowski; performed by Natalie Bate, John Heywood, Valanga Khoza, Tim Sullivan.



JEFF BUSBY

A provocative and complex play, it is worth seeing for its bold and imaginative sweep despite the flawed production. Marc Adam's direction seems to obscure rather than clarify. The ending... is puzzling and anti-climactic.

Alison Croggon
The Bulletin

Although "Nigger vs. Dogs" has interesting resonances for us (as an exploration of the results of European invasion of a "primitive culture") I nevertheless found it rather obvious, a bit didactic, and in the end — a trifle clumsy.

Geoffrey Milne
The Herald

The production... is pathetic and unconvincing. I left the theatre feeling anger and bitter disappointment. This is yet another production of an "issues" play which fails to make any significant contribution on valid statement.

Chris Boyd
The Melbourne Times

While appreciating what it has to say, I found the play for the most part disengaging. Part of the problem lies with the representational nature of the four characters; they are symbols rather than flesh-and-blood creatures... Intense though the acting is, I found the overall experience remote and mostly uninviting.

Leonard Radic
The Age



THE MAIDS

Anhill Theatre
October 11 — November 5, 1989

by Jean Genet, translated by Anne Murch and Evi Geiger; directed by Suzanne Chaundy; costumes by Rose Chong; make-up and hair by Lloyd James; lighting design by David Cohen; properties Tomek Komar; assistant director Susan Bamford; production manager Grant Davis; stage manager Greg Diamantis; graphics Ryszard Konikowski; performed by Jack Komar, Ian Scott, Ross Williams.

Suzanne Chaundy's direction is fresh and alive, full of shock, horror and uncomfortable laughter... In short, Anhill have beautifully realised Genet's play.

Margaret Simons
The Age

Although this production is absorbing, skilfully acted and follows Genet's intention in having men play the three female roles, it somehow lacks a breathless sexual urgency and a sense of jagged foreboding. As such, Suzanne Chaundy's production tends to singe rather than scorch our complacency, and to prick rather than puncture our consciousness. Nevertheless, her interpretation has many merits...

Rosemary Neill
The Australian

HAPPY DAYS

Anhill Theatre
November 15 — December 17, 1989

by Samuel Beckett; directed by Jean-Pierre Mignon; dramaturg Suzanne Chaundy; costumes by Rose Chong; make-up by Lloyd James; stage manager Greg Diamantis; production manager Grant Davis; graphics Ryszard Konikowski; performed by Julie Forsyth and Ross Williams.

Jean-Pierre Mignon's production is appropriately definitive for what may mark the last in a distinguished 10 years for Anhill. Staged in the theatre's small proscenium, it emphasises its theatrical artificiality, throwing the focus on Forsyth's performance. And what a performance it is — this sort of role is her forte and she acts with an almost spooky authority.

Alison Croggon
The Bulletin

Julie Forsyth is simply magnificent as Winnie. She manages to convey the absurdity of stoicism in the face of increasing fury and pain. Our own "abounding mercies", at the dawn of the 1890s, are hardly more attractive.

Mignon's reading of "Happy Days" is impeccable, perhaps definitive. It balances tragedy and comedy, pathos and irony with the elegance and delicate symmetry of a four-leaf clover. It is outstanding theatre by any measure.

Chris Boyd
The Melbourne Times

In a play which is wide open to different interpretations, it is easy to see Anhill in particular, and the performing arts in general, as the Winnie who refuses to be silenced whatever the odds.

And in the literally central role, Julie Forsyth gives her finest performance since the brilliant solo tour de force of "Kid's Stuff". My suspicion is that it will be as hard to silence Anhill as it is to silence the indomitable Winnie.

Geoffrey Milne
The Herald



JEFF BUSBY