

THE PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE

**MARY LONGFORD INC.-
AVANT-GARDE, KITCHEN SINK DRAMA**

**ONWARD INTO THE '80s-
FOUR SURVIVORS OF
THE '70s**

**PLUS LOTS OF REVIEWS
PROFILES, PERFORMANCE
NOTES & SCRIBBLES**



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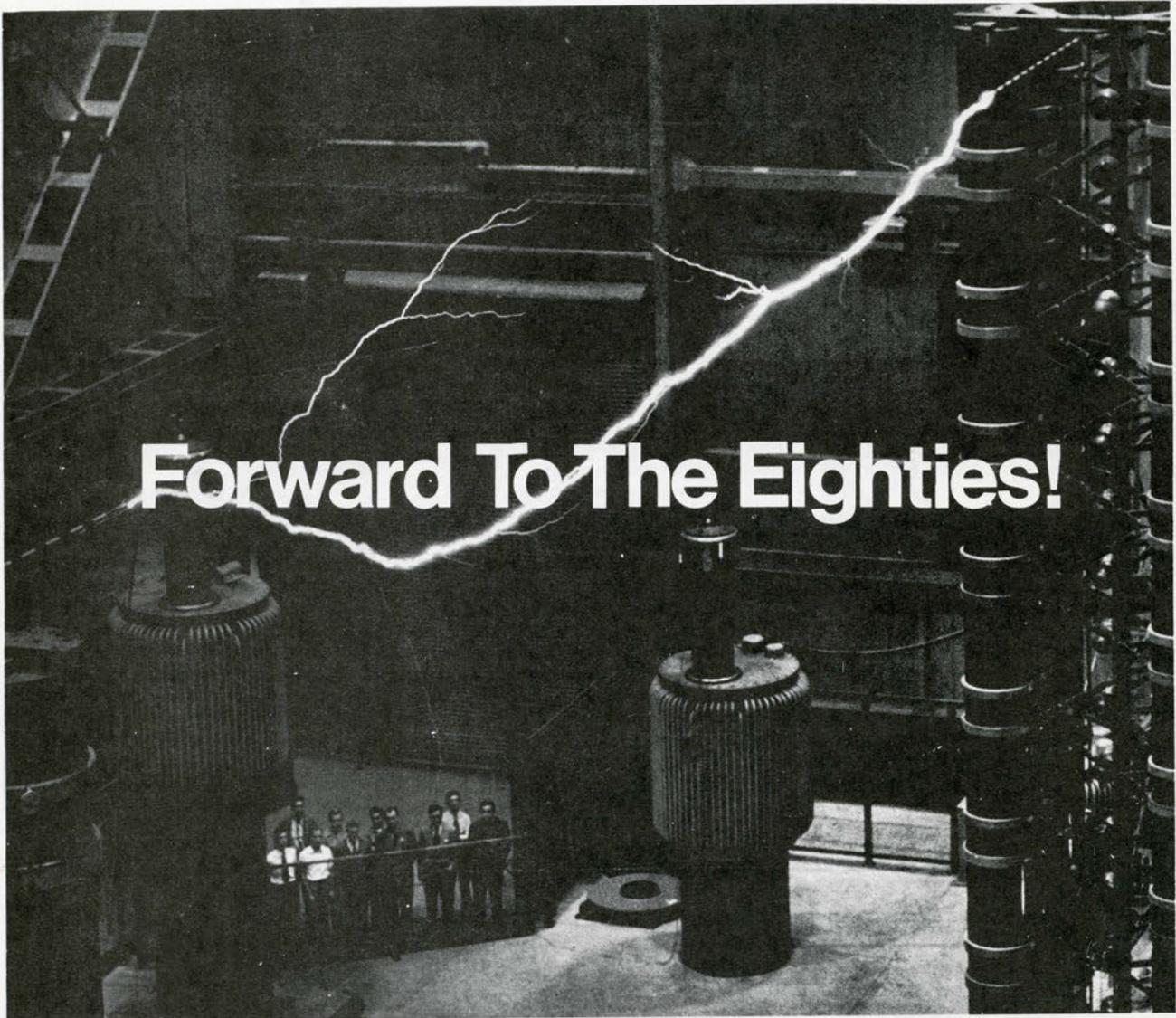
CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR 1979/80

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Forward To The Eighties!

In Science fiction terms we have finally arrived in the future. The Eighties are the most densely populated area in mid-century SF, even disregarding the effects of that well known little land-mark, 1984. Yet five years before Orwell the graffiti appears: '1979 makes 1984 look like 1969' implying that the future is now and that it is not very nice.

Previously performers have found 'the future' delightfully open season for bacofoil and lurex high camp visions of space and time travel, alien invasions, and smatterings of intergalactic clowns. Pneumatic spacecraft etc. have been liberally erected on the lawns of art galleries, tended by white boiler-suited performer-proles undergoing exacting technological rituals.

But now we have arrived. Space travel was too expensive but we are surrounded by its mundane research and development spin-offs. Digital Hi-fi, micro-processors, video tricks and biofeedback games all reflected in the shabby brilliance of a Tottenham Court Road showroom. Courtaulds call their new range of shiny courtelle twin-sets 'Technological chic'

but there isn't anything chic about technology any more.

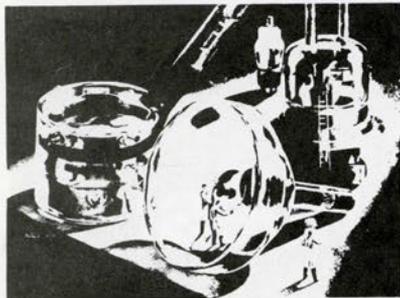
More widely, there is a conspicuous absence of the sort of enthusiasm usually accompanying the onset of a new decade. Where are the cries of 'Forward into the eighties!' or 'Gentlemen, we foresee a rapid expansion into the late half of the next decade'. Instead the western world has been shaken by the biggest ever orgy of nostalgia. Styles and tastes, media attention and performances have careered wildly from the austere forties to the gay Bloomsbury tens, then to the repressed fifties, and back to the nervously elegant thirties. The pop industry has also undergone a temporal contraction in nostalgia of style, only here the knot is tighter because of its short history. Rockers, hippies, mods and guitar heroes all falling over in a slow race not to be first to go out of fashion. The punks crying 'no future', nearly showing the way out but ending up in the historical tangle as safety valves for the fin-de-siecle tension.

If it is the end of an era, then it is the end of thinking we know what is going to happen next. Sure, it is possible to make

some predictions. But to take a preview of the world in the eighties requires an acute sense of humour about the advances that have crept up on us and those that have run away screaming at their own folly. It would not, for example, be sensationalist to say that public execution is back and will enjoy popularity in the eighties. That is to say, with the return of capital punishment in the US with TV coverage, novelisation, rock music and 'the event as art' heightening the spectacle, the result can only be public execution. In Britain, of course, we don't have the technology to do it. At the last moment, when capital punishment was debated in the House of Commons, it was realised that there was no one left who remembered how to carry out our own highly skilled death-perversion—hanging.

Against all predictions we have seen a clear triumph of capitalism and opportunism in the developed world. Britain, until recently thought to be heading towards an 'enlightened' Scandinavian sort of boring socialism, has been taken over by the worst set of Tories seen for

centuries and will be the new banana republic of the eighties. On the other hand, the 'grey monolithic eastern bloc', stalinist source for Orwell's dystopia, is now riddled with the absurdist doctrine that consumerism is conformist, therefore consumerism must be healthy. To be a good citizen you must 'want' blue jeans, foreign currency and Elton John. The assembled trappings of westernism provided for communist youth are quite extraordinary. Where else but East Ger-



many could you see, as I have, giant US style bowling alleys peopled with heavily denimed youths busily quaffing pepsi cola and listening to home grown versions of Bee Gees numbers.

Those who say that the worst aspects of Nineteen Eighty Four are well ahead of schedule and even now arriving on platform four have though, been to some extent taken in by the theatrical posturing of the police and military, who have just been given new toys in the form of advanced communications and surveillance of the population, and want everyone who might 'make trouble' to be frightened of them. The continuing ability of the IRA to make utter asses of the Army in Ireland can be compared with the way the police flaunt vast resources of riot control equipment, undercover agents, and thousands of radio-linked officers and seal off an entire square mile of London in order to evict a few squatters from a building.

Yet with all the evidence of eleven murderers, a tape recording and a shower of publicity, they can't find the Yorkshire Ripper. This vast panoply of resources is just for show; not because they don't want to use it (they certainly do) but because of the low intelligence of the personnel deploying it. This is not to say that a lot of people do not get wrongly arrested, mistreated, persecuted etc. in a mockery of efficiency. It is just that the apparatus for a police state in the eighties exists, but no one has learnt how to use it yet. And with the education cuts planned, it's likely that no one ever will. In the meantime, the police resort to Performance on a grand scale.

And what of performance on a small scale?

Well, if the sixties were a period of discovery, the seventies were a time for enactment of these discoveries, then it is clear that the eighties will see a period of entrenchment. Fringe artists, performers, activists, all living in their purpose-built

arts emporia, waiting . . . waiting for what? In the arts, along with everything else subject to historicism, the revolution does not continue forever. It is subject to epochs, renaissances, decay, overthrow. Those who survive the depression at the end of an epoch form the new Establishment. Whoever survives the arts cuts will no doubt be sitting there, as jealous of their position as that fifties art-cognoscenti were when they were faced with an upsurge of new forms and the challenging of the gallery/repertory theatre system.

But as I have said earlier, history is contracting, and Establishments *should* be getting more and more used to being overthrown. Epochs are recycling themselves faster and faster. The role of these fringe arts emporia, the right of the performers to inflict their visions on the public will be challenged.

Certainly the whole concept of culture, which has been adopted rather than rejected by the fringe and performance artists, will be knocked for six. Reflecting cultures, alternative cultures, counter-cultures, subcultures . . . already rejected by people like the Situationists who regard any attempt to foist spectacle on the people as suspect. Will the eighties see an end to culture? An end to art? An end to any significance of an action made by one human being before another?

Probably not. I foresee instead an age where even more myths are created; where the loneliness of the human soul sears agonisingly across the surface of late 20th century iconography. Where the increased access to technology creates not a worship of it but an aesthetic indifference. A ready the radio set, the vacuum cleaner, the gas stove are considered substantial, long-lasting, monuments to our lifestyle. How long before the planet itself becomes a permanent exhibit of 'Art in Life'? in which case, who would be the public? The answer—the same as before—us. One of the main reasons for the public fascination for 'Close Encounters' style 'visitors' or invaders as they used to be called, is the fact that we are all aliens. This is not another way of saying that we are alienated. It means that we are slowly discovering that we do not live on this planet. This is why we are indifferent spectators of our own achievements, of our myths, of our 'Art in Life'. Why else would we exploit the planet so ruthlessly? Being so messy with nuclear power and so on. We are acting as if we did not live here. Which we don't. We are all 'visitors'. Our lifestyles are a museum for which we have a season ticket. How else could we view everything that happens to us and others around us in such a periscope manner? None of us lives here. People are in the process of discovering that they are the invaders; that they don't belong. Are the animals and plants indigenous beings, or did we bring them with us?

This may be monstrous claptrap, but it illustrates the uncertainty of the

future, now that the knot of history has tightened to the point of choking time and space. The fact is that the over-civilised end of the world is afraid of taking any more jumps. There is no more point in prediction. Our imaginations have been outstripped by facts. We, performers, artists, visionaries and anyone else you care to mention are afraid of the decade. Be glad when it's over, what? Roll on the Gay Nineties! Rob la Frenais

Four Survivors of the Seventies



Paddy Fletcher
of *Incubus*

A decade is a nice round comprehensible concept for mag. eds. But us writers get hung-up on precision when faced with geometry. For instance, bias is a ubiquitous and as any selection of detail from the 5260320 (pocket calculators, a phenomenon of the '70s that we have no time to investigate, only exploit) minutes that have made up this good/bad ten years must of necessity be selective, let me swear on all the life-enhancing changes that have shaped my susceptibilities over the last BIG TEN that what follows is as relevant, precise, impersonal (detached), liberal (socialist), socialist (relevant), personal (conservative), revealing, controversial, humane (cynical), piercing (bitchy), brief (underpants) and rivetting (industry) as I find possible to make it at eleven pm with five rehearsals left before a first night, half a bottle of Jameson's leering at me from my elbow and an incipient Hemingway complex fast losing credibility.

One of the trix we columnists (I wasn't a columnist in 1970) use is a device called 'chumminess'. We try, by adapting an ingratiatingly conversational approach to our scribbles, to win you over by sheer personality. I thank the wonderful for giving me the kind of personality that has enabled me to summon up the naked 'chutzpah' (I learned the meaning of 'chutzpah' in '72) that one needs to attempt a definitive analysis of the most complex decade since the '60s, in the kind of Everyman unpretentious evocative hindsight-provoking drivel that teases and informs.

Suez? Free milk? The Beatles? Germ warfare? What did I know of these etceteras as I faced the dawn of a new era with a mugful of spinal fluid, the strains of the Fabulous Etceteras ringing in my ears and the merry etceteras of all you etceteras etcetering etcetera etcetera etcetera. . . (to be cont. in 1990, God willing).



Mary Turner
of Action
Space

We spent the '70s, along with many other performers and groups of artists, exploring ways of 'making the arts relevant to a wider section of the community'. Looking back now it is easy to be nostalgic for the heroic days when events took place for the first time. The first agricultural show with an art performance, the first seaside beach to be animated, the first neighbourhood festival, playscheme or visit to a handicapped hospital. The first time audiences of hundreds.

But continuity and consistency mattered, next came quality and security, backed up by financial support and analysis. Things have changed but not nearly as much as expected. The balance between creative spontaneity and practical achievement has been played out in the '70s and what will follow. . . ?

The like of it now happened

Performers and artists cry with Living Theatre 'To the streets'. Abandoning buildings and products; creating a new poor patronage of participation, play and processes. Poor we are but with new ways of survival, brown rice and squatting, communes and encampments. The romance of the late '60s becomes practical and the response from the 'real world' is quite stunning. Artists and performers have more places and people to work with, everybody's doing it, wanting it, having it. Workers co-ops, community art, personal revelation.

Support comes from every quarter, the bizarre and extreme are accepted. The initiative is made, a step is taken. . .

The Arts Council of GB asks "How can we best make further progress in the next quarter of a century? . . . as grant in aid grows . . . One field which seems to offer real scope for the involvement of a wide range of people, some of whom have known little of the arts in the past, lies in what is loosely called community arts. . ." Patrick Gibson, 1974.

A chapter that can be skipped by anyone who has no very high opinion of thinking as an occupation

Then in 1975 we reached halfway mark and everything stopped dead. The phenomenon had been studied, codified, financed in spite of the difficult economic climate, contained and absorbed. From top to bottom. From face painting stalls on every neighbour-

hood festival and balloons every 400 yards to committees and study parties in Europe and the jolly old ACGB. Prof Baldry had spoken for the community arts and we were all in hard times. Europe said we were 'democratising the arts', the Arts Council rejected this demagogic doctrine which it said 'insulted the very people it is supposed to help'. Were artists to be replaced by the community itself or were we to enjoy our cultural heritage? While the debate raged, everyone got bored. Both public and performers found they were just running an egg and spoon race and the eggs were stuck to the spoons.

A shift in perspective

Back inside we crept, pusillanimously maybe, and it all continued just the same. Old values re-established themselves. The concern for quality became all important to artists and public. What's wrong with theatre, exhibitions and concerts anyway? Why swap a private view for a kick in the arse in the park. 'Let us entertain you, it's all we can hope to do'.

Everyone got better, a bit richer and still more popular. Both outside and inside there was no end to the work. A certain excitement was no longer available but the certainties of success supported us. A precise assessment of the various jobs can now be made and a specialisation of programme, method and audience developed. A conservative culture tolerates radical outposts up to a point but the scrutiny increases. The stakes are regularly raised on both sides.

Into the millenium

In the next five years we are going to need either far more or far less. It doesn't matter if you are coming or going as long as you want to do it enough. No one can legislate you in or out of existence. With less we will make many fresh starts but will not continue. No one can run far without fuel and certainly not a regular service in any direction. With more we will provide a platform for the radical, experimental and minprity voices.

It will be a sign of the confidence of governments here and in Europe if they allow this critical element to animate the solidarity of their cultures.

We have been excited by our own ignorance, we have learnt lessons the hard way. The Muse passed 'Falcons and crockery, An angry spur. Justified? Diligent . . . Intoxicated' D. Higgins. There is no need to modestly pretend that we are sensitive, alternative, underground and poor. We have been hardened, we deal with numbers, we will sell ourselves into the establishment through our own methods and products. In the present situation we have nothing to lose.

Mary Turner
paragraph headings by Robert Musil



Jill Bruce of
Bruce Lacey
and Jill Bruce

It's difficult to see a decade in perspective until one is several years into the next one, but I think already we can see that for us it has probably been the most significant decade of our lives—the decade of most evolution and change—of personal searching and self-discovery and arrival at a point where we can see the clear way ahead for many years. It has been a decade of enormous personal breakthroughs. I wonder how much this is a reflection of a general atmosphere of the '70s and how much a purely personal experience.

In the '60s Bruce worked with the Alberts in 'An Evening of British Rubbish'. They were alternative theatre when there was no alternative theatre touring a whole show around the country in an old van. But still there were only conventional theatres to work in. Bruce expressed his hopes, dreams, fears, fantasies, loves, in his assemblage sculptures and environments which mainly appeared in galleries. I appeared in other people's things and did little that was creative. I couldn't find a way of expressing all I wanted to. We were part of the '60s Happenings but it didn't immediately lead anywhere for us.

So at the beginning of the '70s we stood waiting, almost, for something to happen. Moving to a SPACE studio, we physically expanded. Becoming aware of all the art centres and non-theatre venues which had become available, opened up a whole new world of possibilities.

A final theatre production with the Alberts: 'The Electric Element' at Stratford East, made us realise what we had to do—work on our own, just the two of us; not creating things to please an audience, but to please ourselves, to explore ourselves, to express our dreams and fantasies, our hopes, our fears, through performance: to work it all out in front of an audience. We produced 'Stella Superstar', 'obsessions and fantasies' and 'Exiliad', which were amazingly complex technological presentations, which we operated as we performed. After years of wanting to be a musician, Bruce at last produced wonderful music on synthesiser.

By the time we were preparing 'Exiliad' we felt we had discovered our own identities and started to search for mankind's. By the end of 'Exiliad' we wanted to be free of the technology of working in a theatre situation with a

paying audience. We had been performing increasingly in outdoor situations to non-captive audiences and at Bansham Faire in 1976 it all came together. We gave up technology and found what we had been searching for since the mid-'60s, when we first discovered neolithic sites and an instinctive feeling of our ancient ancestors.

We now work outdoors at fairs and festivals performing ceremonies and rituals in celebration of the forces and energies of the earth. It's real now. No longer a fantasy. We're still instinctively doing it for ourselves, but also for the earth, the sun, the trees, the animals, the people around us. . .

Now we stand on the brink of the '80s. We've found ourselves, we've found a new home in the country, we're embarking on the acquisition of a whole new lot of skills—new forms of creativity and expression—all to be blended into our performance. Thanks to the '70s, the prospect of the '80s is very exciting.

Jill Bruce



The Phantom Captain

The next ten years? We hesitate to plan even a year ahead, let alone a decade. Our purest impulse is to mount a moment-by-moment instant replay of our first decade. In Esperanto, to lift the tone and reinforce our universal appeal. We'd still like to be the first group to play Skylab. Meanwhile we're keeping our heads in the crowds. That should keep us for a while, but don't hold us to it.

Neil Hornick and Joel Cutrara
The Phantom Captain

CAMERAWORK

A magazine designed to provide a forum for the free exchange of ideas, views and information on photography.

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**Ginsberg and Orlovsky
University of Warwick Arts Centre**

November 6th—Location: cold rack-tiered studio, Arts Centre; unsympathetic concrete box in the heart of England. A simple twist of 'They need another five minutes before they come on because they did an hour-long set earlier for the people who couldn't get in tonight' and audience knows the positive, the empathy of waiting. Quartet enters: diminutive beardless Ginsberg; shiny suited Peter Orlovsky, ass-long pony tail-shook free; Pickard, modesty prevailing, edging the triad; Stephen Taylor radiating youthful intensity from back of guitar. Less a poetry reading than a celebration; opening number 'a non-theistic C & W "Gospel Noble Truths" '.

Orlovsky launched the readings, a wild man unleashed in the groves of academe, booming voice, long, rolling chameleon tongue articulating unashamed sexual celebration songs, rising in stature to deliver '1961 Busride from Damascus to East Jerusalem', a compassionate heart-cry poem demanding return of arab coffee-shop taken at gunpoint by Israeli military; universal architext concerning origins of all enduring hatreds burdening world's dispossessed.

Pickard slightly effacing—following Orlovsky's yodelling hillbilly hymn to hallucinogenic jam, 'Feedin' Them Raspberries to Grow'—reminiscing upon music-hall sand-dance act, Wilson, Kettle & Betty, 'I feel like the bloke who used to throw the sand down for them'. Ginsberg's gentle encouragements helped him through a subdued first set which gained confidence for a masterly delivery of 'Hero Dust' and moving new lyric recounting Eastern bloc secret police techniques, 'I met a man with a human face, taken off a train and replaced'.

Harmonium, guitar and rough vocal fanfares, 'Campion's measure of vowels' song, 'The Rune', opening Ginsberg's first set, began the transformation of the 'reading' into spirited Charles Ives camp meeting event. Retrospective including earliest imitations of Carlos Williams was cut with precise non-academic explanations of the principles and techniques of the poetics; 'writing close to the nose, grounded, no ideas but in things, mind clamped down on objects, paying attention to common speech'. From the heart of the performance a joyful sense of reunion emanated; witnessing the deep bonds of affection and affiliation between contemporary masters of the living tradition of poetics descended from William and Bunting. It was a reunion of trans-Atlantic cousins sharing a common speech.

Ginsberg's quietly extrovert performances of 'The Green Automobile' and 'America' in the first half were balanced by the essentially elegaic mood of the second; sections from 'Kaddish' followed by elegies for Cassady, Kerouac and Louis

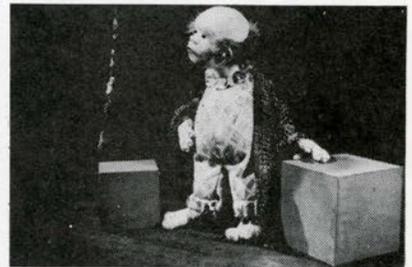
Ginsberg. Confounding recent critical academic press, concerning unhealthy inability to surmount subjective fascination with desire to be mastered by power-death figures, the stress was on Zen empty-heartedness, acceptance and exultation. In broad sweep, through beginnings of the generation, through deaths of loved fellow travellers, Ginsberg recreated and furthered the life of the movement. Fusing, in style and spirit, chordal progressions of Blues and 19th century revivalist hymns, their songs celebrated Antimonian-like traditions of resistance through into present time. Last loose jam on Blake's 'Nurses Song', throaty whispers and yodellings of Orlovsky, Taylor's high harmonies:

And Samsara echoed.
And London echoed.
And Great Britain echoed.
And Blake's skull echoed.

Still echoing here.

Tony Pol

**Barry Smith's Theatre of Puppets
Hoxton Hall**



Barry Smith's Theatre of Puppets presented 'A Variety of People' at Hoxton Hall on Friday 30th November.

'Pierrot in Five Masks' announced in a voice that would precede Ligeti's String Quartet No. 1 on Radio Three. Electronic Bach begins and an all-white adolescent figure with no face comes alive with five different masks. 'Courtier' takes our attention as he learns to walk, 'Zany' flings himself about, the 'Guru' does what perhaps, only puppets can do—he floats very smugly around the stage, 'Disco Dancer' with his graceful appeal to dance actually made me cry. The Dancer's piece ends with the mask of an old man. He is now old and past it, an unfortunately superior stance. The final piece of this section is the 'Conjurer', less magic than the dancer with an excellent though predictable final disappearing act. 'Anonymous'—a vagrant old woman rummages about for things to put in her sack. This beautiful and sensitive image is brought to life by Gillian Robic's manipulation. The piece finishes as the woman covers herself with newspapers and sleeps.

Puppetry of this type can achieve great heights of control and sensitivity. Barry Smith's Theatre of Puppets does all this. He adopts the Japanese Bunraku

methods and conventions, with hooded manipulators in full view but not 'seen'. This gives precision of gesture not often possible with other forms of puppetry. The figures themselves are beautifully made with a leaning towards a highly romantic aestheticism found in most 'serious' modern puppetry for the last ten years or so. Mrs Jones in 'Mrs Jones Eats It All Up. wasn't like this. She was a funky, grotesque yet refined fat lady in a teashop treading the line between gluttony and politeness.

In all the stories told (mostly without words) I was left wanting something more. Everything had obviously foreseeable twists and no real surprises: Mrs Jones eats her cup and plate and she goes home. Puppets have a great potential for change and surprise and performing feats that are not possible in human theatre. I liked this show and would recommend it to anybody but I can't help wondering why ideas in puppetry in general always seem to stop short of exciting experimentation.

Tom Castle

Juliet and Juliet – a Duet Romeo and Romeo – a Duet Action Space

With a narrative incommunicable in a context open to multi-dimensional interpretation 'Juliet and Juliet—a Duet, Romeo and Romeo—a Duet' was performed at Action Space during the last week of November by Rose English and Jackie Lansley. Both performers have affiliations with the X6 dance company and movement was used as the major form of presentation in their slightly obscure production.

Images of T'ai Chi, of yoga, of living sculpture emerged, formed and reformed as complementary elements of unspoken harmony and symbolic agreement of two women before an attentive gathering. The performance grew out of a casual 'warm-up' leaving the audience to be drawn into involvement at each individual's own pace rather than at a set starting point demanding the formation of an audience for a formal beginning.

The progression of spectator into audience corresponded to the interaction between the performers, an unfolding as individuals and a merging into a unit, fluid but with a focus.

Sudden side lighting abruptly changes the mood towards a more conscious performance by actors who speak to one another about the mechanics of movement, breaking all symmetry and causing comparison and competition between the two watched by the many. We are all defined and the theatrical process acknowledged. Rough shapes replace rhythmic patterns, asymmetric forms replace organically evolved ones.

Two moods alternate, the one more contemplative but the original more spontaneous. Transitions grow more subtle between them and the celebration of co-operative shapes formed by the women begin to integrate sounds,

objects, dialogue and music.

Walls appear and are hidden behind and are used as territory by each actor. The backdrop makes activities more defined and less open to abstract interpretations. Work in tandem is replaced by scenes quite random and individually defined by separate spotlights.

Defined space constricts the movement, actions grow dependent upon gadgets both resulting in conflict then confusion causing the performance to come to an end.

Marguerite McLaughlin



British Events Oval House

Midway is a piece of theatre conceived and performed by Mick Banks and Corrine D'Cruz under the guise of British Events, a company formed earlier this year. Although Midway is decidedly an event it is not particularly British save perhaps in its insistence that the spectator accepts a pair of plastic binoculars before sitting down.

The performance is based around an important sea-battle that took place between the Japanese and the USA in the Atlantic Ocean not far from Midway Island in June 1942. To actualise the climax of the battle airfix models are used, statically placed on a table at the back of the performance area. Miniature roman candles were effectively used to create the impression of the ships being bombed. However a glance through the toy binoculars revealed how it was done and spoil the spectacle a little.

The performance begins with records of 1930s songs and black and white slides of sea-battles projected onto the stage back wall. Mick Banks introduces Pearl Harbour by loud hailer from behind the scenes and Corrine strolls on stage, dressed as a street girl, through her multi-coloured doorway. Languidly and lethargically she crosses the stage to stand for a moment or two in a red light. The noises of bombing start and she becomes increasingly agitated until finally running back across stage. Before reaching her doorway a very very loud bang kills her. Shrapnel confetti falls over her dead body and through the doorway a draught blows and a strong white light shines.

This creates rows of light and shadow streaming and wavering across her body and the stage. (Visual Treat no. 1.) We are left to ponder the sight of the dead prostitute a touch too long and unfortunately this trait only becomes more pronounced through the show as events become slower (more British?). Mick

Banks comes on next as the all American soldier to give us more background to the battle. An airfix aircraft carrier is lowered from the ceiling and comes to rest between his nose and the audience (Visual Treat no. 2). Corrine and Mick both come on in the next scene dressed as aircraft signallers. They do an amusing and well-executed tap-dancing routine as we imagine aircraft taking off and landing while another unexpected model, of an airplane this time, flies over the audience's heads. From the dance we are carried through a tap-dancing lesson given by 'Ginger' to an imaginary class of crewmen that includes 'Fred' in preparation for the aircraft carrier to go to Japan and set up a Broadway-type musical and make stacks of money.

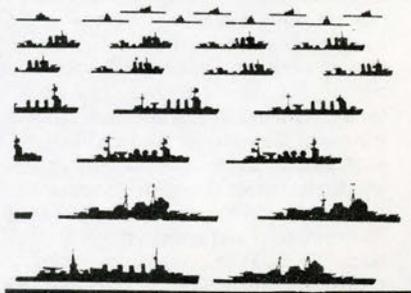
After this jovial diversion comes the climactic battle. One effect in particular that impressed me was the use of lights to green the smoke rising from the smouldering miniature fireworks behind which were projected slides of bombed battleships with the smokey parts yellowed (Visual Treat no. 3).

Corrine returns as narrator this time and tells us that among the debris of the bombed aircraft carrier (the very one we are sitting in) floating in the ocean has been found the script of a new musical and it is a performance of this which makes up the rest of the show. The musical transpires to be a boxing match between the two great nations compered by Mick Banks. The teams are represented by suitcases which are slowly lowered from the ceiling, one case painted on the side with the rising sun and the other case painted with a starless American flag. After a duel of song and the Japanese defeat the Japanese suitcase is raised to the ceiling and, at the signal of another very, very loud bang, blood drips startlingly from the bottom of it on to a small lighted patch on the floor (Visual Treat no. 4).

The finale is a further tap-dance routine but this time lit by a strobe; the sombre victory dance of the Americans. Symbolic of a hollow victory after the bomb?

The event was technically very polished and an impressive debut from British Events, whose performances at the Oval House culminated in a special Cambodian benefit. British Events have now flown to Australia to perform in the Sydney and Adelaide festivals and will return to touring in Britain in the summer.

Paul Lyons



Academia Ruchu

"What is *this*?" enquires a voice, in all the deadpan solemnity of a Berlitz foreign language record. "This is a *man*" concludes the same drone, solipsistically answering its own query. But look again — the 'man' is clearly a woman, spotlight and centre stage. What is happening?

So begins *Lesson 1 and Lesson 2*, the first of three works performed by Akademia Ruchu at the Drill Hall on November 29 and 30. Luckily, the *Lesson* does not follow its alarming opener with (as one might anticipate) an elaboration on the theme of the Relation between Word and Object. Too witty, too perverse for epistemologic pedantry, this Polish dance/performance group do use notions of description, appellation and translation, but with great slyness. In their work, a 'vocabulary' is not only a set of words both Polish and English, but also a considerable range of activity. Modes of conduct are 'translated' first into words, then into motions. But unlike, say, Jasper Johns, they are not letting us know that the same concept can materialise in several different forms, or that a paradox can result from a thing's being given the wrong name; they are taking it for granted that we know this and going on to manipulate the consequences.

A spectator who spoke neither Polish nor English would not be disappointed however; the inventiveness with which the performers used their bodies by itself ensured theatrical success. Stylisation, danciness were absent—would in fact have been inappropriate; but, again confounding any possible misgivings, Akademia Ruchu did not confuse floppiness with lack of energy, or 'naturalness' with loss of presence. Most of the group had considerable self-awareness as performers, and used themselves—their bodies and personalities—with frankness and quite an amazing control, considering the chaos of possibilities with which they were working.

A disregard for common sense seemed a good way to approach a lot of this work. *Collage*, in particular, seemed bent on creating an entire other world where behaviour melts into arbitrary gesture; Akademia Ruchu would have us believe that the universe resembles a large unkindly grin. There is no satisfactory way of indicating how this piece functions except by describing a bit of it. Out of a continuum of things happening, the group suddenly form a close knot, as if held by a magnet, and clump around the room; at intervals an individual is expelled, performs questionable antics and little dances about the place until the group, ever ravenous, clumps round its orbit again and whisks the individual back. The next thing we know, through some fluke of gesture, what looked like a

confrontation between individuality and collectivity becomes a row of men pissing and a cluster of women leaping. The men, since they are just standing there, start to stamp (what else?); two of the women join the line, which turns into a bunch, which turns into a vacuum cleaner again and inhales the remaining two women before continuing its ludicrous rounds. Vocal sounds abound through the piece, in the form of single, repeated, sung syllables. Miniature events, both meaningful and absurd, set themselves up; the performers attempt to outdo each other trying to flatter and impress the audience; they pantomime a ritual of allowing each other to be first to cross the floor; they stand stock still and tilt from side to side; a leader hugs and pats his smiling, sheep-like followers. And so it goes. Metamorphosis of behaviour is hot on the heels of mercurial gesticulation.

Whether rightly or wrongly, one has certain expectations of a work coming from Poland, the main one being that the work will be in some way politically charged. I have never been to Poland, and would like to avoid making misguided, shallow or otherwise wrongheaded remarks about the 'polishness' of the Akademia Ruchu, but it's certainly true to say that there was a distinctly East European consciousness informing the work, even in those patches where nothing in particular was being said. The language itself, in the *Lessons*, used words of great familiarity, but they had about them an aura of another, less glamorous culture, a different bureaucracy, a different arrangement of day-to-day humdrum. "Are those 'workers', 'leaders',



Is This Your District Centre of Culture?

'voters', 'citizens?'" asks that voice in terrible and comic earnestness, like an American. "Is this your university office, your District Centre of Culture?" as the dancers jig up and down, run across the floor, speak eloquently in hand language. Even the most mundane object or event—a pencil, telephone, waiting room—takes on a surreal banality, a menacing edge. And in *Collage*, the recurring stamping around of the group in close formation begs to be read, on one level anyway, in the context of relentless marching, military drill, disciplined manoeuvre. Akademia Ruchu's funal work, *Autobus*, was a metaphor for waiting and suffering such

as could only have come from a country conscious of its own tradition of oppression. This work, very short, demanded immobility of most of the performers, all of whom were seated in varying degrees of isolation or mutual support, on a raised podium—like a monumental sculpture, a monument to enforced patience, one might say. An accompanying tape of train noises enforced the feeling of exile, the more so as the sound of marching feet gradually filled out the train whistle. The only movements were of one of the women slowly, almost without us noticing, raising both legs and contorting her face into a silent grimace; at the pitch

of the convulsion she snaps into relaxation . . . then resumes.

It hardly needs to be said at this point that theatrical devices throughout all three works were minimised—absent in fact, to the point of seediness. Clothing was practical, loose, and well-worn, faces were utterly pale, hair unfussed with. All the details of production conspired to let the inner worth of the work and the performers shine though and, since both work and performers had something substantial to offer, this austerity was not in vain.

Andrea Hill

Flaming Bodies

Snoo Wilson's 'Flaming Bodies' (ICA until December 22nd) is his play on the 'American Dream'. That fact in itself should be enough to fill the theatre until the end of the run with Wilson followers. For those who haven't been fortunate enough to see one of his plays before a little more explanation is required. But beware: if all the words written about Snoo Wilson were laid end to end, the paper wouldn't be worth the value of one ticket to see one of his plays in performance.

From the start we are built into the artificial world of Los Angeles, and one of its artificial condominiums. The people who inhabit this world have had to become as unreal as the city itself; and for those who are daft enough to take the whole charade of LA high-life too seriously, insanity is lurking just around the corner. The whole thing has the smell of authenticity. We are placed in a world where anything can happen, and not only has everybody seen it all before, but nobody really believes in the outrageous events surrounding them. As for turning a hair about the odd death or catastrophe, that would be extremely un-cool. Roger Ungless (Hugh Thomas) begins this performance with a series of (bad) self-deprecatory, anti-Californian and anti-gay jokes. They cause him rather less of a threat than a bead of sweat. Only there's one person, Mercedes Mordecai (Miriam Margolyes), who can't let the world roll over herself so easily. A self-diagnosed schizophrenic, her life is populated with the characters of the hack Hollywood anti-epic of her imagination. As she can't cope she is replaced by someone (Julie Walters) who can. Her ideas are fairly and squarely ripped-off, and at the end of the play she goes. But that's not the half of it.

It would be folly to attempt to analyse the play too closely—worse to attempt to psycho-analyse it. LA (especially with its

Hollywood connotations) is the ideal place for Mr Wilson's imagination to run riot. And a right old hum-dinger of a riot it proves to be.

Starting us off in a solid looking set, with solid looking characters and the gentle purr of office suite knick-knacks turning over, Wilson has conned us into a belief that the proceedings will take place within the safe naturalism we see in front of us. Within ten minutes he has gently slid us into second gear, and being Snoo Wilson he never turns back. The play builds from climax to even more outrageous climax as his surrealist exposition of 'America' unfolds. Unlike lesser talents who could only take us from there to an apocalyptic disintegration of set, characters and plot, Wilson is capable of turning the whole schemozzell inside-out in reverting to an *apparent*, uneasy naturalism by the end. We can't help wondering if we just blinked and imagined the whole thing. Except that Snoo Wilson's imagination is a good few tones more vivid than ours.

The sheer mechanics of the play-writing are astounding. Red (and green) herrings are laid across our path the moment we try to trace motives and themes: we know we are looking at something that was written because he wanted to write it, not because he thought he should. In the final analysis all we have left to cling onto is a mound of images and phrases that range from being brilliant to crass. And yet, somehow, our reactions to each moment and episode in the play have been pre-judged and pre-determined. The whole experience of this 'trip' is as effortlessly economic as if we had been told to 'just take the tablet and sit back. Fear and Loathing in Los Angeles will reveal itself before your very eyes'. Once we have entered this world we can only hope that we will be allowed to come out of it the other side. It proves (as Snoo Wilson has done many times before) that no amount of environmental staging or pyrotechnic wizardry can transform the vision of the audience so effectively as the written word in the



Roger Morton

hands of the right writer.

Not that the production shies away from the use of effects, and very good ones at that. But to say too much about these would take away one of the fascinations of seeing the piece. A I praise, though, to designer Gemma Jackson and her many technicians and helpers, who have so successfully brought this part of the production into being with a deftness and ingenuity that is rarely seen outside the province of big-budget West End musicals.

There is much fine work, too, from the cast of three. Miriam Margolyes takes the central role in her stride, managing not only to show the apprehension and fear of her character, but also an impish desire, like us, for the next disaster to hit. Hugh Thomas and Julie Walters cope admirably with the successive mutations of their characters. Mr Thomas particularly is capable of tapping each apparently new part on the head with the right brand of irony.

If the production has one slight fault, it must be that the pace has been held back to suit Miriam Margolyes' style of performing, rather than Snoo Wilson's adrenaline-filled speed of writing. Nonetheless, it is a very hopeful sign that the piece is directed by the Theatre Director of the ICA, John Ashford, giving us a clear indication of the standards that we should expect from performances by other companies at that theatre.

Pete Shelton

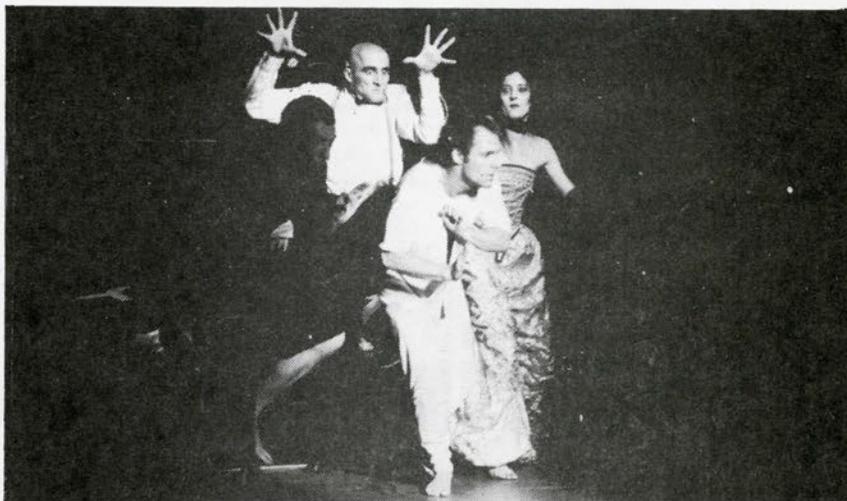
CV1 Coventry

The majority of actors, must in order to survive, find themselves repeatedly forced to accept roles they don't care for, to work for directors they don't respect, and to appear in productions (particularly on TV where the money is better) that they wouldn't be seen dead watching. Caroline Hunt was one of that majority until about two years ago, when she decided to do something about a situation which frustrated her: she formed her own company.

continued on page 24



Kaboodle



Bernd Bohner

From Handstands to Horror.

One of the surprises of the last year has been how the somewhat unremarkable clown troupe Kaboodle, led by John Melville, has developed into one of the genuinely innovative and experimental companies working in Britain today.

Mr Roland's Medicine, a 'modern gothic treatment of an idea suggested by Browning's 'Childe Roland to the dark tower came', was premiered at the Oval House earlier this year and is now touring. Mr Roland, a wealthy Victorian purveyor of quack medicines, finds himself trapped in a gothic nightmare only slowly realising, along with the audience, that he is being revenged by the parents of a boy made imbecilic by taking one of his potions.

A comparison with the thalidomide tragedy is easily made and, though perhaps unavoidable, reduces the resonances of a piece that is much influenced by Kaboodle's continuing commitment to performing for the mentally handicapped.

Using the simplest of means the show was ideally suited to the labyrinthine bowels of Jackson's Lane Community Centre in North London where I caught it on tour. A few props, costumes, make-up and a large, metal cage suspended from the ceiling and providing a home initially for the imbecile and eventually for Mr Roland, are, with the lighting, the production's only technical resources. Yet the visual impact is very strong due to some precise, balanced and striking choreography from the writer and director Lee Beagley.

The sounds of the show are also rich. Music, composed and played by David Giles, is important but so too are the sounds of the actors which combine an ornate baroque language with

evocative non-verbal vocal collages.

Though this show is clearly related to the Victorian British gothic imaginings of Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins and Dickens — also possibly Henry James — the company's style owes more to a European tradition than it does to anything else happening on the English stage today. Literary, physically robust, acrobatic, visually and verbally decorative and with elements of clowning, the production reminded me of things I have seen on the contemporary Italian stage.

Whether these disparate elements have yet been synthesised into a fully coherent style I am not sure. The constant throwing of audience expectation with, for example, the intrusion of schoolboy jokes or the dislocation of the time setting, seemed a little gratuitous.

The strong performances were macabre without being grotesque. Melville himself was the confused and humiliated Roland transformed from frock-coated respectability to naked abasement, while director Lee Beagley gave a touching portrait of the boy David. I did not care so much for Suzanne Surrey's Lady Eaden, the boy's mother, possibly because Ms Surrey seemed too young for the role, but Ross Foley's butler cum father amazed from the moment he greeted us as we entered the auditorium.

It is a tough show, concerned and compassionate, yet curiously bleak. Compared with a warm and incident-filled *People Show* it is a sparse and somewhat dismal affair but one that catches the imagination and impresses with the skill with which it is executed.

Luke Dixon

Gay Sweatshop

New Workshop Production is
Directly Aimed at Teenage Audience

"I first realised I was gay when I was Twelve. I am Fourteen now. My parents don't know I'm gay—I have to tell them I'm going to a friend's house, when I go to the Gay Centre. None of my school-mates know(I think they'd die if they did. Sometimes they call me pouf, but I don't think they mean homosexual when they say that—I think they mean like a girl."

(Paul—14)

"I don't know if many parents actually think lesbianism is a disease, but mine certainly do. To quote:

'You're going with a what? A girl?
But that's a disease, isn't it? Do you feel alright?'

My mother and I did not speak for a month. Well it was peaceful anyway! Every cloud has a silver lining, or so I'm told."

(Mandy—18)

The above extracts are taken from GLIB magazine.

* * * * *

When I first read the 'blurb' for this show my immediate reaction was 'Ah, no, not another play about "coming out". Isn't there anything else Gay Theatre can deal with?' When I saw the production at the Royal Court my mind was quickly changed. Written by Philip Timmins, Sara Hardy and Bruce Bayley, all long-standing members of Sweatshop, 'Who Knows' reminded me that however sophisticated gay theatre has become, there will, unfortunately, always be a need for a show about 'coming out'.

Directly aimed at a teenage audience and performed by a predominantly teenage cast, the show very neatly moves us through the problems faced by two teenagers, Robin and Claire, when they come out to their friends. To say more than this about the story line would be stating the obvious—or would it? We see the inside of a mixed gay club, lovers just being with each other, the group of friends trying to understand what it's like to be queer, (sorry I mean gay). The threat of being beaten up, a parent being understanding ("it's only a passing phase dear, you'll meet the right man"), having

to meet in secret because you're under age and you can be 'put away' for it even if it is the most natural thing in the world. Oh yes we've seen it all before. But . . .

This really is one of the best shows that Gay Sweatshop have produced for a long time. It's well written, beautifully directed by P. Timmins, performed by a company who are without exception excellent. The sad fact is that the very audience it is aimed at will probably get little chance to see it. Why? Gay Sweatshop have never been allowed to perform in schools. Infrequently they have been allowed to take part in Youth projects like at the Royal Court. But someone might think that they're queer. They just might be and you never know you could lose your job. Am I being obvious again? Whether you're 14 or 44 or 104, you really must see this show even if it's only to remind yourself of what it's like to come out and like me kick yourself and stop being so bloody blasé.

Better still if you're connected with youth clubs or theatre venues, book it.

Julie Parker

Bob Workman



Ionescopade

Neil Hornick is Eluded by The Legendary Scion of the Absurd.

I celebrated my 21st birthday by taking three friends out to dinner and then to Orson Welles' Royal Court production of Ionesco's 'Rhinoceros' (first published as a short story in 1957, one year after the movie of the same plot, Don Siegel's 'Invasion of the Bodysnatchers'). One of my friends, full of food and drink, disgraced himself by falling asleep during the performance and I remember being distracted by the ill-fitting wig worn by Laurence Olivier in the lead role. That was in 1960 and Ionesco's reputation was at its height. So far as I know the last major production of a Ionesco play in London was in 1963, when Alec Guinness appeared in 'Exit the King', also at the Royal Court. Since then there have been other plays and honours galore, including election to the hallowed membership of the French Academy. But what's he been up to during the seventies? Ionesco is out of fashion. He belongs, it seems, to the past.

When this magazine invited me to conduct a recorded conversation with this legendary scion of the Absurd during an expected visit to London, I was easily lured to the Theatre at New End to see 'Ionescopade', a vaudeville entertainment based on his work. No new work this, it was first presented in New York in 1973. A sequence of mostly complete shorter pieces, woven together with original songs based on Ionesco's writings plus linking interludes by two scene-shifting clowns, it's an effective format, though the clowns sometimes overstay their welcome. The music and lyrics by Mildred Kayden are pretty good, if you don't mind occasional reminders of Kurt Weill and, especially, Jacques Brel. There's even a song in Brel style called 'Madeleine! The show at times might just as well have been called 'Eugene Ionesco is Alive and Well and Living in Paris'. On the other hand, one outstanding number, 'Knocks', is in the best Broadway tradition. And days later I can't get the scatty music-hall number, 'Hang on my Arms, You might Fall Over', out of my head.

The programme demonstrates most of Ionesco's characteristic features: the delighted dismay at empty forms of language, the melancholy, the hatred of authoritarianism, the fascination with theatricality and the sheer ability to entertain, as in 'The Cooking Lesson', a step-by-step comic exposition of how to cook an egg (Ionesco's personal ikon), which stands up as a pure one-man vaudeville routine. 'The Peace Conference', an escalating triangular quarrel, offers a good example of how skilfully Ionesco

distils a human social relationship into its elemental formal components to strike at its universal core. It could be diagrammatic—or even Laingian—were it not also so funny, so . . . absurd. Admittedly, the playful probing into the platitudes of language already seems to belong to an earlier period, the experimental theatre of the fifties and early sixties. Though it's a measure of their vitality that these short pieces still work so well. Indeed their snappy disjointed linguistic style still crops up frequently in avant-garde shows of today.

That Ionesco was also a representative dramatist working within a particular tradition is also demonstrated by the many associations thrown up by 'Ionescopade'. There are cross-temporal echoes of Lewis Carroll (a dialogue about saying what you mean), Dada and Surrealism, the paintings of Magritte, contemporaries Jean Tardieu and Max Frisch, the Goons (the sprightly conjunctions of human beings and machines in 'The Motor Show', originally written for radio), not to mention a speculation about a dead bird that should make Monty Python fans imagine they're back home watching TV. It's one of the likeable things about Ionesco that he was perfectly aware he was creating within a tradition. As he admits in one of his beautifully lucid and candid personal essays, he felt himself to be a discoverer or rediscoverer rather than an inventor.

There are those who believe the best of Ionesco is to be found in his shorter pieces. If so, let's be grateful for this chance to re-experience him in a production that, on the whole, does right by him. Paul Marcus' direction is vivid and incisive, Chahine Yavreyan's lighting is inventive, and Liz da Costa's costumes and masks impeccable—except for the surely unintentionally silly outfit worn by Richard Gale for his rendering of 'Madeleine'. The burlesque acting style, complete with bowler hats and false noses, is well in keeping with Ionesco's early demand for extreme exaggeration, and helps impose unity on a cast which, despite their professional dexterity, lacks a single natural grotesque. Still, each of them has his moment, notably David Scholfield who is very funny as a chef with a perpetually quivering false nose and moustache in 'The Cooking Lesson'.

Ionesco dramatises man at the point of bewildered uncertainty and yearning, but the Ionescian man never transcends himself through the joyful acceptance of contradiction. For Ionesco, it seems, the only transcendence is embodied in

the work of art itself, something somehow separate from the state of being of the creating artist and the experiencing public. In this crucial respect he definitely pre-dates or differs from those artists who see their lives and their art as being seamlessly interwoven in a unified state of supra-reality. Committed performance artists may be inclined to join hands with the politically committed in dismissing Ionesco as a proscenium-bound playwright. But in his playful and sometimes sombre exploration of that realm where fantasy, dream, art, reality and incantation blur into an astonishing new order, I think there's enough affinity for us to doff our rhine horns in respect.

As for the recorded conversation, M. Ionesco, naturally, has yet to show up in London. If he ever makes it, more in the next issue. And if not, I'm still glad to have made his re-acquaintance.

Neil Hornick



Peter Davies

The Empire Builders

More French Absurdity at The Gate.

This tight little three-acter, somewhat in the style of Ionesco, is about one big displacement activity. The action takes place in an apartment block with drab brown walls, where a family moves upwards from floor to floor in retreat from a mysterious and deadly noise: 'frightening to hear but hard to describe', according to the text, and realised here as an insectoidal throbbing electronic croak. Everyone but the daughter denies hearing the noise, though they clearly do, and go on moving upwards, each apartment sparser and more cramped than the last: or so the daughter says. At the beginning of the play she wistfully recalls the six-room flat they once lived in where she had her own bedroom and a record-player. The father denies they ever lived in such a place, and declares that the three rooms they now have are more than ample. The mother agrees. The maid gets on with the housework.

Wherever they move to they are accompanied by a silent scapegoat: the Schmurz: a longsuffering figure swathed from head to foot in bandages soiled with dried blood, a living mummy with one arm in a sling, who stands in a corner to be kicked and punched from time to time, by the parents when feelings run high or the conversation flags, and by the maid when the parents order her to—generally in an oblique fashion, as she leaves the room—"Haven't you forgotten something?" Only the daughter acknowledges the thing's existence—and the maid implicitly, by declining to punch it after she's given her notice.

Though the play is farcical, it doesn't, apart from the Schmurz, contain a great deal of physical business: the farce is largely semantic. The father and mother are carried away by words—the mot juste, the witty conceit, the pleasing cadence; the daughter is concerned with truth; the maid is a brusque walking Roget's Thesaurus. For my taste, a lot of the word-play in the first two acts was arid: clever, but not always supported by any flow of mood. The audience—granted, it was a wet Monday night—didn't laugh a lot. I felt that possibly a more relaxed and natural style of delivery might have helped the comedy: there's tension enough later in the play, no need from the outset for the characters to be so alertly and self-consciously absurd. But then, this play is a piece of Absurd Drama, so I am not inclined to lay much blame on the actors.

The French have always been fond of artistic categories, treating them literally and maintaining them with purist zeal.

Hence Absurd comes to mean the dead opposite of rational. This play for example contains a number of references to Descartes and Voltaire: allusions to thinking reeds, and being for the best, and cultivating, in default of a garden, our window-box. The source of Absurdity is a passionate belief in Reason.

There are works in English which one might call absurd: by Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Flann O'Brien, Spike Milligan and John Cleese, among others: which are no less pointed but less mechanical and funnier because they are not based on a tyrannical concept of Reason. What they reveal isn't that Reason is the mask of Chaos, but that nonsense not only successfully masquerades as sense, but often *is* sense, as far as one can see from day to day. Writers of Absurd drama in the French sense spend a lot of time pointing out with dry despair that things are absurd, rather than experiencing them as such and managing to find them bearable and at least partially funny.

These reflections are prompted by my

reservations about the first two acts of the play. In the third, the piece came to life. The husband and wife, the only characters left—apart from the Schmurz—are about to move into their final retreat, a one-room attic flat, but the Noise gets the wife before she can climb the stairs: so the husband makes his last stand against the unknown. Alone and at bay, freed from the need to keep up a front, and thus from the routine mechanism of denial, he addresses the audience man to man in a long confessional soliloquy. Ultimately he is still helpless, but in his ridiculous military preparations to confront death he becomes heroic and genuinely absurd.

Dudly Sutton as the husband plays this scene splendidly. That it works so well is also due to the other actors' sharp characterisations earlier on; it is simply in the nature of the play that the first two acts, when one has seen the third, seem like a necessary preparation. If life is to be portrayed in terms of man versus the void, there is only room for one hero.

Steve Thorne

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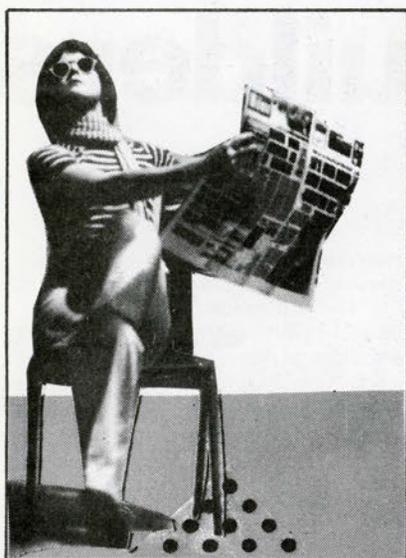
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Avant-garde, Kitchen-sink Drama

Pete Shelton talks to Mary Longford of Mary Longford Inc.

Back in early 1978, the Evening Standard ran a short piece about a David Hockney performance; the details of the piece were notoriously unspecific. The public obliged by jamming the telephones at Action Space (the venue for the event) for a solid four hours in their race to snap up tickets. They arrived to find Hockney conspicuous only by his absence, and that the apparent perpetrator of this foul deed was an unknown by the name of Mary Longford. Or rather a somewhat dubious multi-national called Mary Longford Inc. . . .

True to form, the Hockney fanatics failed to start a riot when they discovered the truth. Indeed the performance ('Cocktails', complete with cardboard cut-out Hockneyesque swimming pool and palm trees, and no less cardboard cut-out bubbly drinking types) was a rave success.

'Cocktails' was part of Mary Longford Inc.'s second production, and as the Arts Council project grants have slowly crawled in, two new performances have been presented since then: 'Swans, Swans, Swans' and 'Miniatures'. In a comparatively short time the company has built up a large following in London for its unique blend of dance and performance art. Before their second major tour outside London I spoke to Mary Longford about her work as director of the company.

PS: Firstly, why 'Mary Longford Inc.'?
ML: After sitting down for several hours I came up with a series of names that sounded like '60s pop groups. I decided it was better to call the company by my name rather than invent another image to cope with. I don't think the name implies that I'm a one-man band . . . well, I am: in Edinburgh someone wanted to know who is, what is Mary Longford Inc. . . . I smiled, "It's me". They burst into

laughter and pointed in my direction and said, "Meet the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool" (*Laughter*).

PS: Somebody said that going to watch a Mary Longford performance was rather like watching suburbia falling to bits. . .

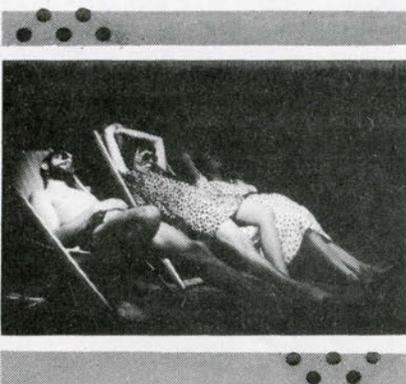
ML: That's quite interesting.

PS: A lot of the images seem to come from everyday life and show the ingrained faults of society.

ML: I think 'falling to bits' is a nice way of putting it. I do aim to set up quite strong situations and images, and then destroy them.

PS: Does this process mean that you've got an axe to grind?

ML: No. I could be developing one. The first pieces I did were very naive: I was injecting into these pieces things that were lacking in theatre that I saw. I didn't



really think about what I did—I just got up and did it.

PS: So your starting point was as a member of the audience, looking at your work through the audience's eyes?

ML: Yes.

PS: Is that how you tie together a lot of images?

ML: Yes, tying together images to me represents stills. Stills of a film fading in and fading out. I'm shifting the emphasis from, say, outside in a garden, to a small bathroom, which a camera can do, and an editor can do. That's what I want to do in my performances.

PS: Is the media a stronger influence than other performances?

ML: Yes, definitely. I can go and see a film and see everything I want. With a very good performance I can see 95% of what I want, but it is always missing the extra 5% that film manages to incorporate. Film can take you backwards, take you forwards, slow you down, quicken things up. It's that shift that I'm trying to



Peter Simpkin

get in performance. One minute you can be in Africa, the next in Brighton.

PS: Is that why you are using traditional theatres less and working more environmentally?

ML: To start with I had a very narrow idea of space.

PS: A choreographic idea?

ML: Yes, or a sculptor's. And then we took 'Miniatures' from a tiny space to a vast old cinema, with many performance areas including the old seating rake. . .

PS: Sounds like the wrong title.

ML: (*Laughter*) . . . and suddenly it clicked. After that we did the Oval: we decided, right, all the seating out, use the lighting box, paint the lighting box. Then, the next day we went into the changing room with showers: there was Hitchcock's 'Psycho' scene all ready. To use an environment properly I would need a residency.

PS: Other groups, such as IOU or the People Show, use residencies for their work, but your role in directing a piece seems to be more choreographer.

ML: Yes.

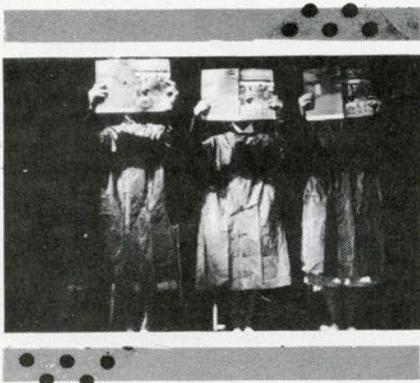
PS: Do you consider the company to be a dance or performance art company?



ML: Neither. Those are other people's labels. Maybe I should think of another name for what I do. (*Laughter*).

PS: The idea of you creating pieces because you were a frustrated member of the audience sounds quite revolutionary.

ML: From the age of fifteen I went to the theatre non-stop. I was on the doorstep of the Belgrade, Coventry, and there was also the Birmingham Rep. and Stratford. It was not just Shakespeare, because it was the time of Osborne, Wesker, Pinter and the kitchen sink drama. I spent hours watching how plays were produced. How they were lit and directed. When I went to drama school I spent the first year wondering what the hell I was doing there. Being told to walk in arcs and doing Noel Coward. Fortunately, they had a lot of people come down from the Place and give lecture demonstrations.



Even though I wasn't a dancer I could sit and watch. When it came to directing I was really choreographing. Everyone said "You can't choreograph—you're not a dancer". But I wanted to do something that would excite people. Someone asked me to choreograph a piece for a college choreography competition; it wasn't really dance, but movement, with a lot of sound effects. We did it in a week, and won. But then I was only three months away from my final show, and I was told to stop it because "you've got an acting career before you". And so it got left for several years. And then I came back to it, because I still wanted to do it, I still wanted to create that excitement.

PS: Back to the Weskers and Osbornes. There's a sense in which what you're doing is avant-garde kitchen sink drama.

ML: (Laughter) Oh god. . . I use images that people see every day, and can identify with. I've tried, with the last two shows, to bring in more humour—to reach out to the audience, so they can relax more. A lot of comments I hear are that I alienate people with my strange images. I still want to frighten people, but I also want to feel that I can make them laugh. Every show that I do teaches me things about an audience and their reactions.

PS: Is there a prize project you are

working towards?

ML: About three (laughter), but to do them I would need technical back-up. . . I would need five hundred pounds for lighting, two designers. . . it would be a very big project.

PS: The epic is something you are interested in?

ML: It's always been a dream of mine that you have four people in the cast, four people in the programme, and then, suddenly, out of nowhere, a hundred people just materialise.

PS: The press have been very praising towards your work. Do you think they really have an inkling of what the shows are about?

ML: No. I was approached by a reporter from the 'Scotsman', and I wasn't quick enough to realise that the reason was that she hadn't understood the show at all.

PS: Does it matter?

ML: No, I don't think it does. The way I like people to see the work I do is similar to walking round an art gallery. There are some things you could sit and get lost in for an hour. There are other things you just walk past. You don't have to understand it. You take what you want. . .

PS: In the picnic sequence of 'Miniatures' were you having a swat at the social habits of the middle class?

ML: No. I gave the performers the image of being people on an assembly line, producing exactly the same goods. But if you opened up the top of their heads they were, in fact, thinking completely different thoughts. So I took identical tasks, which was the laying out of tins.



When you go into a supermarket and start looking at those goods they're really quite interesting, they're amazing images.

PS: You've never thought of doing it the other way. Taking the performance to the supermarket?

ML: Mmm. Mmm. That would be marvelous. You'd have plenty of time. At least twenty minutes in the queue (laughter). I'd certainly like to work in those extraordinary places.

PS: Why is there always laughter in the shows?

ML: Oh god (laughter). Is there?

Mary Longford Inc. start their British tour at the Crucible Studio, Sheffield (29th January-2nd February).



Geoff White

Mayakovsky

The Social Operating Table of Stalinism



Keith Cavanagh

The world premiere of a new play by a distinguished East German playwright who is also performed in West Germany is something of an event; and it says much for the enterprise and perspicacity of the Half Moon Theatre that they should have been responsible for this production of Stefan Schutz's 'Mayakovsky'. A converted synagogue in London's East End, the Half Moon has been dedicated, since it opened in 1972 with a production of Brecht's 'In the Jungle of Cities', to the presentation of socialist plays to a popular audience. The theatre's present regime under the directorship of Robert Walker is currently enjoying continuing critical and box office success of a kind that poses the question of how a theatre in a working class area can cope with the taxi loads of middle class punters who travel in to see the latest cause of approving reviews in *The Guardian* or *Time Out*.

That problem worried Guy Sprung and his colleagues when they founded the Half Moon seven years ago and attention is focused on it again by this latest production which is attracting national, indeed international, interest in the theatre and boosting the Half Moon's appeal for funds for their new premises on the Mile End Road. Yet those premises are intended not as a prestigious cosmopolitan culture house but a new 'People's Palace' for the East End.

Schutz was born in East Germany in 1944, studied at the State School of Drama and has gone on to work in a number of the country's leading theatres where his plays have been performed and published. In the past year two of his works have been seen in West Germany and it was the West German Goethe Institute which helped fund this London production, the first time they have supported a contemporary East German work.

Schutz's play explores the life and psychology of Vladimir Mayakovsky the Russian Futurist poet, from the revolution of 1917 to his suicide in 1930. Mayakovsky looked on the revolution as

a personal liberation yet became increasingly unable to reconcile his ideas about art and individual expression with the party dogma that developed under Stalin, and Schutz dramatises the resulting struggles with brilliant effect. Before the revolution we see the poet bound and suspended in a net. The revolution sets him free but the ensuing compromises required of a Soviet artist become impossible for Mayakovsky to make, Schutz dramatising the difficulties by having two Mayakovskies on the stage simultaneously, one a party hack the other the 'poet of the revolution'. It is a dynamic way of showing the poet's internal dialectic and confirms Mayakovsky's suicide as not a personal tragedy but a defiant political act.

The politics of the play are by no means simple. Though it firmly equates Stalinism with the fascism of Hitler's Germany, it is more than a straightforward Trotskyist critique of Stalin's Russia for it also deals with, though does not resolve many of the issues central to the relationship between any artist and the society in which he works. The new Soviet state, struggling to better the lives of the peasants, had little reason to support bourgeois art and Schutz's depiction of the artist in the Bolshevik revolution has horrible parallels with today's artist caught up in the monetarist revolution of contemporary Britain. "Patients are dying because of you", someone shouts at Mayakovsky on hearing that the State is to publish some of his poems and that same cry might be made with equal vehemence at the Half Moon which is receiving money from the state while essential social services are being destroyed nearby for lack of funds.

Robert Walker's production, with designs by three students of the Central School of Art and Design, Hildegaard Bechtler, Fotini Dimou and Ann Hubbard, is one of the most impressive seen in London in a long while. Heavily stylised, using music, vocal distortions, artificial movement and snatches of dance, the whole refreshed with

occasional humour, the production acknowledges Mayakovsky's involvement in the Futurist movement yet extends its references and allusions beyond that. This is particularly so in its visual aspects, the thrusting angular set making good use of the vertical spaces in the theatre like a piece of three dimensional soviet poster art while the influence of the German expressionist cinema of the twenties and the Hollywood Gothic which developed from it are also strongly felt giving the production a visual style which encompasses the entire period depicted in the play.

Schutz himself provides a series of striking visual images in his text all of which are brilliantly executed by the Half Moonies. Mayakovsky enters a boxing ring to fight with a mummified Lenin; party hacks literally hack at and eat each other up on a giant table; Mayakovsky's two selves rise like twin Frankenstein monsters from the social operating table of Stalinism. All the costumes are designed and made so as to distort the bodies of the performers. Only Mayakovsky, with unblemished 'normality', wears a straight suit. Despite his mistress's belief that 'there is nothing here but your own madness stuck to you like a shadow', it is not Mayakovsky who is seen to be distorted but all those around him.

Tom Kempinski's translation is wondrously good. Colloquial without ever resorting to obtrusive slang it even included a limerick at one point, and the cast of familiar Half Moon faces took to it with relish. Peter Attard was Mayakovsky 1 with Robin Soans as his apologist doppelganger. Sam Cox, Robin Hooper, Matthew Robertson and Andrew de la Tour between them played the host of other parts with Lizza Aiken as the play's various women.

'Mayakovsky' may not be cheery Christmas fare for the Alie Street locals but it is quite the most important new play in London this winter.

Luke Dixon

At Birmingham Arts Lab.

One-in-Ten



Ian Sanderton

Someone said that *One-in-ten* was the estimated number of homosexual women and men in Britain. I thought it was one in twenty, but, hopefully, I have been supposing wrongly and this is indeed heartening news. The invisible minority is larger than I believed. 'One-in-ten' is also the name adopted by a company from Birmingham who after Gay Sweatshop, Brixton Fairies and (dare I mention it?) Bloodlips are the newest company of gay men to put their life-styles and the issues that come out of them into dramatic form.

It is terribly easy for gay people to be blase these days about what our theatre groups are or 'should' be saying. It is also terribly easy for us to be madly supportive of things that come out of our movement and accept them as attempts, gestures, statements and a hundred and one other things that justify building up our culture. Suffice it to say that 'One-in-ten' is not just another of these attempts but an exceedingly good company. Their work is not 'rah! rah!' neither is it 'aren't we a depressing lot' neither is it self-conscious in its statements. Neither is it self-oppressive, full of academic research, camp, vamp and all the trimmings.

Four plays were four original one-act plays dealing sensitively as well as highly critically with situations, traps and processes in which gay men continuously find ourselves. While not wishing to this a 'review' of work that may not be seen again in its present form, I feel I would like to comment on two exceptionally good pieces in *Fourplay*. The first was a very well written and sensitively performed piece called 'J', written by Jeremy Adams and Peter Kirby and performed by Jeremy Adams. It is a monologue that lasts only a few minutes taking us through J's thoughts and reactions to his father, (a most intrusive voice), and his attempts to find

himself in a gay lifestyle based in gay bars etc. Also his relationship with his parents which he attempts to solve is extremely touching. The piece could well do with some depth elaboration and some lengthening. Certainly, Jeremy Adams could hold an audience for a greater period of time and the piece would mature into a very worthwhile piece of theatre in its own right.

The second piece I would like to praise is *See-saw* written by Eric Presland, an ex-member of 'One-in-ten'. Here we had a very cleverly written play, extremely funny, full of things everyone can identify with in any relationship. Again, we saw two very good performances by Jeremy Adams and Paul Marks in this play that wittily examined the 'ups and downs', traps, exploitation, self-oppression, etc. that goes with Dependency. The game of 'when I'm up you're down and we can't both be up together' and the nigh impossible task (at first sight) of breaking this up. The writing is clear, simple and at times, touched an almost Beckett-like precision. I wax lyrical about this at the risk of it sounding like 'high culture' because I was very taken with this piece and I sincerely hope we get another chance to see it somewhere. Anywhere.

Of course One-in-ten aren't 'brilliant'. The other two pieces left much to be desired in terms of theatre.

So, who are they? Where do they spring from? Why haven't we seen them in London before? I was full of such thoughts and went to speak to Eric Presland.

One-in-ten are not as new as maybe thought at first sight. They have previously worked under the name of 'Meteor Theatre' which produced a revue 'We know You're In There' and 'Late-comer' also by Eric Presland. The group began in the heart of the gay movement in Birmingham with people also involved in the Birmingham Gay Centre, until it closed down. They are now based in The Birmingham Peace Centre which, I am told, is virtually run by Peter Kirby.

At the use of the word 'political', however, Presland immediately countered with: "How do you mean political?" Well, I didn't mean Agit-Prop (a much-maligned term in gay theatre circles these days) that a lot of us today so wish to avoid. He seemed visibly relieved. In fact, 'See-saw' was originally written and performed for a man and a woman. The piece Eric assured me was not written for One-in-ten. But it works very well because it does what other gay theatre pieces do not necessarily do. It speaks about conditions that heterosexual

people as well as gay people find themselves in.

One-in-ten are committed to their politics but are also interested in theatre and bringing these two together in a way that politics does not dominate. Here, in their work, we do not find dialectics or ideology taking a prominent part. And this is refreshing.

One-in-ten consist of both professional and amateur actors. There doesn't seem to be any signs of the underlying doubt of either of these types for the other as does occur in gay theatre, whatever some people may think or say. They don't seem to be in the least bit hung up on that aspect of performance. And this is hopeful.

What are their plans? They are not sure. They don't have a proper home and they don't have any money. They would obviously like both. And they deserve both. They also should tour more often.

I couldn't resist asking Presland why he was always referred to as an ex-member. Apparently it's only because he's moved to London and is out of touch with the main company.

If anyone is interested in contacting One-in-ten here is the address: Birmingham Peace Centre, 18 Moor St., Queensway, Birmingham B4 7UB (Tel: 021-643 0996).

Bruce Bayley

Trees In The Wind

7.84 Theatre Company
Crescent Theatre, Birmingham

7.84 began life in 1971 as a touring company with 'Trees in the Wind' and see the '70s out with a revival of the same play. Beautifully directed by Penny Cherno, this new production contains some fine performances, in particular that of Annie Hayes as Carlyle, and is set and lit with impeccable precision. Set at the time of Nixon's visit to China the play draws its title from a saying of Chairman Mao's: 'wind will not cease even though trees want rest', and centres around three women sharing a flat in London. One is a radical feminist holding men responsible for the crimes of history, one has just had her dreams of romance shattered and the third is a socialist, politically active and yet disillusioned with promises of a better future. Joe (Phillip Donaghy), the only man in the play, has renounced socialism for capitalism and forms the focus around which the action and argument develops as he confronts the three women together and individually.

'Trees in the Wind' offers a condemnation of capitalism and also indicts the Left for its inability to provide any real form of alternative that has vision and compassion. Emptiness and hopelessness permeate the play and despite the bitter

Pathological Optimists

Welfare State — 'Systematically implanting images and ideas'



- 1. The Vigil at the body of the dying deadman**—symbol of a dying age and a decaying culture, witnessed by the zombies, the decaying grey men, and noted for ever by the calcified gnomes of law and order.
- 2. The funeral of the deadman**—Passing the embedded skeleton where, playing above ground, is the spirit of innocence. Old tree stumps grow from the bones. Broken clichés glint anew on the mosaic of the concrete terrace.
- 3. The theatre of shadows**—the beginning of a new dance—an Aboriginal creation myth transplanted to Liverpool:
Two dockers working on a quay see a pig's carcass fall off a ship. They both want it so they fight. Neither wins; they agree to share it. They disguise it as an old woman and take it back to their flat at the top of a high rise block. They cut it up and put it in the oven. They drink the pig's blood and get very drunk. They dream they are in a rocket heading towards the sun. They have a big net in which to trap it. They catch the sun and take it back to their flat. The sun escapes and sets the flat on fire. The dockers awake from their dream. The pig is burning in the oven. They have a wild party.
- 4. The regeneration of the elements**—water springs from the Fountain of Life; the wind in the field of windmills.
- 5. Procession of the clockwork peacock**—the peacock, symbol of regeneration, lumbers graciously to confront the Keeper of the Dead. The Skellyman is vanquished with souvenir kung-fu swords.
- 6. The new fairy godmother**—cutting the belly of the deadman. Seeds and silks fly to the moon, and two weeping cherry trees are planted with hopeful wishes. The garden is open and the deadman is dead:

Where is the deadman?
Where is the baby-eater?
Where is the deadman now?

Where is the deadman?
Where is the baby-eater?
Where is the deadman now?

Inside the big house,

Behind the courthouse,
Under the fat dead cow.

Where is the deadman?
Where is the deadman?
Up our nose no more.

- 7. Barn dance**—we eat the barbecued ribs of the deadman and the romantics dance.

We cannibals
Transform dead flesh.
Fresh energy arrives.
Begin again
In Liverpool 15

The garden of earthly delights was created over 2 weeks by 7 members of Welfare State International with 7 Crawford Centre staff and 50-60 kids of ages from 8-15.

With certain skills learned or begun to be learned in the daily Art Factory, kids made lanterns, steel drums, masks, whirligigs, carnival effigies, mosaics, costumes, songs, stories, shadow puppets and garden sculptures.

These were brought together to form an 'urban village festival', an event to celebrate their making and their placing in the 'garden' of the Crawford Centre.

The garden gave us the reason for the event. Around the Centre was an open field, soon to be transformed into a landscape garden. We created a fantasy garden to plant the seeds (both literal and imaginative) of this future transformation, and animated it with a simple creation myth to establish a root for further dreaming.

We traced the pattern of a sculpture garden, a terrace, a theatre arena, a fountain, a display of windmills, a circle for dancing. Some artifacts were transient—others will form concrete cornerstones of the future garden architecture.

This work, the seventh we have created for Liverpool, illustrates our position at the end of 1979. In this event 250 people came, saw, danced, ate, and celebrated. The audience was wide-based in age and class. It was one kind of popular theatre and a continuing diary of our preoccupations, began twelve years ago. We don't normally work directly with kids; we prefer not to exacerbate existing divisions. Welfare State has always fused categories and roles in terms of art and people. However, even if we are romantic idealists, we are also pragmatic realists. We were asked by old friends in Liverpool to work at the Crawford Centre—so we did. We intend in the Eighties to continue to survive, making necessary popular art in relevant contexts.

The next gig after Liverpool is in contrast the reworking of Christmas

Celebrations in a Cleveland village. During the two weeks before Christmas we will make processions, lanterns, new carols and a crib etc. This follows on from work in that same village over the last three years. At intervals over this period we have systematically planted images and ideas and demonstrated a process encouraging local people to re-convert their own celebrations at Harvest and Christmas time. Now, after this Christmas we do not intend to return. It's up to the locals. If there isn't the energy to follow our initiative—then we're wasting our time. And the same goes for the Liverpool gig as well. Energy is precious and in short supply. It must be conserved to break through the scab of the old cultural attitudes. Wherever breakthrough is necessary and possible.

Twelve years ago we didn't see it quite like that. We believed an alternative society would grow easily and naturally. Now we know it won't. It will take a hundred years in Britain.

Now old values continue to be reinforced. Creativity is repressed. Gross National Product rules.

It is harder to get public funds for new work than it was five years ago. Fees are lower, expenses are much higher. Meanwhile defence, law and order, nuclear stations etc flourish. But we are little more than a pea bouncing on an immense military drum. We are a pea under the Queen's mattress.

We can remain a stubborn irritant.

We prefer not to reminisce but to focus ahead.

In the eighties our band will play for dancing. Our trade will be carried out in the street. We will train cultural guerrillas (workshops, Lake District, September 1980). Our images will be made of cement (they are harder to destroy). We will extend our scope of Third World connections. We will continue to move into communities to suss out their latent images and reveal their energy with power and celebration. If for a period we have to bury the tablets, at least they will be there to be dug up later.

By 1984 our ship of Fools carrying the holy relics of imagination will voyage joyously. We pathological optimists have no intention of stopping for at least another few decades. Sing and dance with us, we and the culture we find need all the help we can get.

John Fox



The Artist Who Has No Ego And No Name

Feminist Improvisation Group – Ritzy, Brixton.

I enjoyed myself. I thought that the music was good. It was a long show and it cannot be easy to sustain three hours of improvised music but much of the music the Feminist Improvising Group played at Brixton was constantly interesting. Even when the inspiration was flagging, and even if Lindsay Cooper did walk off in boredom, there were still the odd sparks flying. By which time it was nearly closing time, so I left.

Lindsay Cooper's bassoon and oboe playing gave the music a very lyrical, melodic feel. Taken as a whole sound textures were built up with an ear for their clarity, even when at their most hectic. Lines, phrases and tunes were all there. Something for everyone to recognise, interspersed with a generally good sense of comic timing. Everybody played nearly all of the instruments and everybody didn't play all of the time.

But while to write a review of this particular concert in terms of the music that was played might serve to make a case for saying that women can play their instruments as well as men; or that the feel to women's improvised music is very different to the feel of men's improvised music; it doesn't really explain what happened given that most of the justification for whether the music made sense or not was patently non-musical.

The Feminist Improvising Group is making a statement, and however painless it was to listen to the music, you were listening to sounds—themselves not inherently political—being used as a political tool. And that means a shift of focus away from the sounds themselves to the act of making those sounds.

Were the music heard at the London Musician's Collective, played by men, you would hear it within the context of the politics of improvised music. That set of assumptions contained in the improvising area of the FIG is put into a different perspective by the stated feminist element. The assumptions of improvised music—non hierarchical spontaneous music-making where performers are simultaneously creators and not interpreters—are reflected in the act of making music. They touch on the structure of such an event—its informality, its constant state of performance (if you are improvising everything is potential stimulus and in your reactions so are you to others). But to assimilate that state of affairs into a feminist standpoint would become a matter of content and context.

Before the music began there was a film. You entered the cinema to discreet sounds of Tamla and Country muzak (the singers were women), while Norman

Mailer took the chair at a conference of the American National Organisation of Women. Predominantly middle-aged and middle class women got up to proclaim how they had 'opted out to fight for the equality of women', how it was a woman's right and duty to fight for the right to govern the society that governs them'.

Then the music discreetly faded away as Norman Mailer invited Germaine Greer to speak. Her impassioned invective against 'the masculine artist—the pinnacle of the masculine elite', her fine sense of rhetoric in dealing with art and cultural values set the mood of impatient expectancy. 'Women's revolutionary art is not evaluated by its rarity but by its return to anonymity'. This provoked applause in her audience. Then, ushered in by the Slogan heralding a return to 'the artist who has no Ego and no name' the band came on to play. An unfair trick perhaps.

Nevertheless whatever happened you could not afford to ignore what this was all about. You were forced to take up a critical standpoint in evaluating your responses. The jolts and jars in the music would certainly not allow you to forget it.

Most of the sets tended to revolve around songs, and there was generally a far greater use of voices than I've noticed in male improvisors. There were parodies

—'I could have danced all night'. Sally Potter sang a song called 'Soft Soap Sally' and another one about French bread and roses. Maggie Nicols and Sally Potter sang a Brecht-Eisler song 'Abortion is Illegal'. During this Georgie Born asked 'am I allowed to play modern piano in all this? Sally Potter replied 'it might be permissible in the bounds of juxtaposition of genre'. Georgie Born then started to tape down the piano keys. Maggie Nicols did not play any instruments, she sang talked and moved. Her sense of the juxtaposition of genre was probably the most highly developed of the whole group. She reminded me of Betty Boop when crooning like Donna Summer as much as when wailing like Cathy Berberian.

And it is this notion of the juxtaposition of genre which the FIG handle with an irreverent awareness that points the way to a new kind of music making. Sounds may not be political but musical styles are cultural artefacts. They are tools in the definition of an historical consciousness. It is good to see feminism embracing a notion that few members of the musical hierarchy are willing to touch.

Simon Thorne

THE MASTERWORK/AWARD WINNING FISHKNIFE A PERFORMANCE SCULPTURE FOR THE THEATRE IN FOUR PARTS CREATED BY PAUL RICHARDS AND BRUCE McLEAN

It is interesting how Minimalism, once the ultimate reduction of an artwork to structure in its purest form, has surreptitiously become the apotheosis of high style—purely decorative, even Kitsch. The object stripped of all external connotations becomes Image itself. To the cynical eye the emperor's new clothes may have been sent to the cleaners a long time ago—the art scene in-crowd wallowing in the Punk vacuity of the imageless. Look how the austere early grey paintings of Frank Stella became subtly subverted into the Day-Glo swerves of his later canvasses. The harsh rarified sound world of Steve Reich's Farfisa organs becomes lushly symphonic in his 'Music for 18 Instruments'. Robert Wilson's Five-hour Gesamtkunstwerk Einstein on the Beach was a spectacular example of Greenwich Village gone up-town. The Masterwork is a similar example of up-market art packaging. Conceived as a multi-media pageant for lights industrial machinery, dancers, acrobats and musicians it celebrates the achievement of the Architect who has completed 'the Masterwork of the century'. Celebration of 'the hard-edge principle' among the ennui of the coffee table art-world . . . I can tell you there will be no revival for concept art.' It lasts two hours. The Evening Standard of November 1, 1979 quoted production costs in the region of £14,000. For all that, its presentation seemed to have a low-budget gloss to it. Wilson's opera was true Manhattan high style. Bruce McLean and Paul Richards looked more like a pair of cheapjacks. Everything seemed to have fallen off the back of a lorry. The glossy programme brochure registered grateful thanks on paper cut to the format of a record sleeve 'to Billy Smart's Circus for the donation of rocks from the Old Waterloo Bridge'. What Billy Smart's are doing with them I would dearly like to know, but there they were, lying on stage, 'epitomising permanence' alongside the Lansing Bagnall forklift truck and the SGB power lift.

The cheapjack hits hardest though in what McLean/Richards give us to consider. To return again, perhaps un-

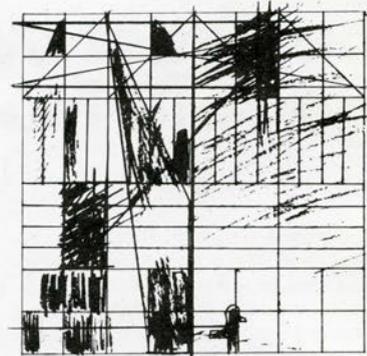


from the programme

fairly, to 'Einstein On The Beach', Robert Wilson gives his audience enough conceptual meat to chew on to justify the protracted scale of his processes. The *Masterwork*, a touching homily on the horrors of architectural Brutism, involves one process. Starting at the beginning it arrives at the end. The checkerboard floor lighting was a tour de force by the Riverside lighting crew, but all you could do was watch it. Two video monitors were there to assist one in the appreciation of its sculptural form and the different patterns you could make with it, but after five minutes there was nothing more to think about. Any genuine relationship it might have to the music or the movement, let us say, was a mere formality. The dancers, clad in boiler suits colourfully smeared with emulsion, performed angular movements. They performed an obsessive process of measurement against a backdrop of enormous blow-ups taken from the guttering of the Hayward Gallery (again a tour de force of photographic development to get to that size). Genuine choreography was keeping its head well down. Apart from some basic decisions as to who walked on where, most of the movement seemed to be at the discretion of the performer. 'One of three friends' was an acrobat and 'the fat man' a juggler. She and he were clearly intended to represent the human reaction to the imposed technological moulding that the masterbuilder had conspired to create, their movements to

counteract the general angularity with fluidity. Sadly the style of movement imposed upon the dancers meant that the attempted hard edges were leaving angular blotches all over the skirting board. With nobody around to adjust the focus the significance was lost and the effect was myopic.

Likewise the music for which 'the hard-edge principle' was equally notional. The Michael Nyman band was a motley bunch of session musicians playing an equally motley bunch of instruments, from the medieval rebec to the bass tuba. To talk in layers of historical representation—an orchestra spanning the epochs of Western culture—would seem to me capricious. Sitting between Philip Glass who composed the music for 'Einstein on the Beach' and Mike Oldfield, Michael Nyman's music was almost consistently loud, high pitched and physically uncomfortable to listen to. Philip Glass may use this uncomfortableness as a wall of sound to investigate the musical properties of acoustic effect. His diatonic simplicity is likewise a means of guiding the listener through the mathematical formulae which form the basis of his musical construction. Mike Oldfield is the occasional writer of pleasing melodies. Attempting both at the same time Michael Nyman produced something which was neither one nor the other. It was at its most interesting when it lapsed into the Disco beat, but for the most part British New Simplicity proved itself to



from the programme

be painfully simpleminded.

I have always felt that Mondrian's paintings are far more significant in printed reproductions. The cracks in the paintwork on the surface of the originals distract from his conceptual preoccupations. Technology has since found the means to make 'hard-edge' viable as a principle. But as a technique its standards are rigorous, even when the concept is under attack. The *Masterwork's* desperate attempt to articulate a disgust with the situation that had called it into being fought vainly to create 'the definitive work in mediocrity' and succeeded. Throughout the piece voices issued from loudspeakers. Their cliched complaints at their inability to be anything other than cliches, was this nascent social conscience? I fear not. People with coffee tables should not spill coffee.

Simon Thorne

P R O F I L E

Lotte and Ada

The formula for the fine chemistry required between performers to give them the spark of spontaneous humour to add to a framework of practical material has been sought for as long as anyone became aware of its value. At its best it cannot even be explained between the people who possess this elusive charm, which is precisely the problem that 'Lottie and Ada' have as a feminist cabaret act. They do not know how or why it has happened, even their slick timing on stage seems to just exist beyond their own control.

Shauna McDonald-Brown and Dinah Jeffery sat looking vaguely embarrassed with their inability to elucidate the key to their ambidextrous wit. The classic 'it just happened' was all they could say and yet although they describe themselves as a lesbian/feminist satire cabaret act their range in both music and repartee can amuse anyone with observations about alternative lifestyles, urban blight and the search for romance. One of their most effective devices is the use of eternally familiar tunes and a remaining close to the feeling of the original lyrics bending them just enough to give the audience a shock of recognition about some contradictory facet of their own lives. It is just this contradiction that keeps 'Lottie and Ada' apart from clever-

but-limited imitation and leads them towards quite perceptive satire.

The names Lottie and Ada were dragged up from memories of a skit by a well known comedy duo (if you don't know who I promised not to tell). Dinah and Shauna were asked to write three songs for the Women's Theatre Group last year and remained together initially to perform for their own pleasure. Enough friends convinced them of their appeal that they ventured first to the Women's Arts Alliance, other women's events and recently to Action Space. As a lesbian/feminist act they were unsure of how possible it was to bring their material to a 'mixed' audience, but they also wanted to challenge the limitation of women-only venues and become viable or 'lesbians up there onstage as well as being funny women'. Topics for their own songs included the Wages for Housework campaign, violence towards women and a song written for the Hormone Imbalance theatre group expressing other people's attitudes towards visible lesbians ('you don't know what it's like to be revolting; to be a chromosome in debt. . .'). Lottie and Ada were surprised at how well their material can relate to a non-gay audience. "We were so nervous to play such a mixed audience and then see this really

straight-looking guy just killing himself over our Carol King take-off . . ." have made Lottie and Ada sure that they can develop their material for a wide audience and are intrigued at the possibility of working with New York's Spiderwoman company in the future. They feel it will be a way of providing an objectifying experience for their own quite British atmosphere.

continued on page 24



An Essential Cog In A Barbarous Machine

The arguments stating the case in support of greater State subsidy for the Arts are being ping-ponged around with a frenzy which, while highlighting the Crisis for the practitioners, administrators, and assorted cognoscenti, are almost totally bypassing the general public. This really is as important as the political reality at the base of the Crisis—a climate strongly reminiscent of Weimar Germany—against which even the strongest arguments are scratches on the tip of the iceberg as we tank towards 'a return to common-sense' (to quote the Prime Minister, referring to her goal in trying to reduce the excess which Britain pays to the EEC, but a statement which also sums up the rudiment of Tory political philosophy). There seems little practical advantage in debating the Crisis (debates which all too frequently are more to do with crossing swords on time-weary—although admittedly important—issues like Elitism vs Populism or ACGB accountability) when it is actually with us. Debates will no longer prevent the closure of theatres or the disbanding of companies. The only way to combat the Thatcher vacuum-cleaner is to convince the general public (who after all did vote in this government on a platform which stressed reduction in public expenditure) why the Arts are essential and why they need massive subsidy. This must be the first task of any Arts Lobby. Internal debates will not bring about necessary changes in political, social and educational attitudes. Since the medicine to cure the Crisis will not be chemically available until attitudes are changed, the second task of any Arts Lobby must be a concerted effort to wrest promises that further cuts will not happen (and we must—if we are to avoid total cynicism, a response which is understandable in the light of pre-election promises—believe that we can do this!). The Arts can no longer be seen as a privilege for a few, but rather, a need as important as food or sleep.

Yet, no matter how efficient the Arts Lobby is, it is already too late for certain artistic groupings. As far as small-scale theatre is concerned, there is no medicine to be had, essentially because it is easier to trim the edges (particularly if the company is not building-based) and encourage theatrical 'centres of excellence' (favoured by The Arts Quango). The work of small-scale theatre companies is more often than not the antithesis of the product on display in 'centres of excellence'—and it is also the former which are committed to making theatre more accessible—but these points will not prevent decimation. When the Arts Council comes to carve up the next subsidy cake, it should be remembered that it is easier for those 'centres of

excellence' to find compensatory sources of funding than it is for small-scale ventures. Since this Government (like previous governments, it must be said) does not give tax relief to industrial companies who offer sponsorship, industrial benefactors are going to look to those bodies with large publicity machines who are in a position to guarantee as widespread as possible publicity mileage for the assistance given. Since there seems little likelihood (other than by violent revolution) of deflecting the Government from its current economic course, industry will continue to suffer, as will the Arts. It is humbug therefore to place the solution to the funding Crisis in the lap of business sponsorship. Although business sponsorship will provide some help, small-scale companies will only benefit in exceptional circumstances (for example, as the anti-smoking lobby has greater influence, the opportunities for tobacco companies to advertise are being severely restricted; small companies might, if they felt desperate, tap some of the available revenue). Trusts and Charities are at present inundated with requests for grant-aid to cover the deficit between expenditure and income (or, in many cases, for funds to prevent total liquidation). There is a limit to assistance and the lucky recipients will be those whose policy falls in certain 'soft' areas, like youth and education work; at the same time, those companies working to expand understanding of taboo subjects (nuclear power or homosexuality, to name but two) will

find themselves even more in the cold. The answer is not to be found in hiring the services of one of the several Arts Marketing bodies which now exist, simply because the theory cannot answer the very specific needs of each individual small-scale theatre group. However, the marketing experts are raising questions concerning the effectiveness of established channels of selling product and each company should assess the efficiency of its own particular system. If the objective is to expand audiences and thereby change attitudes, plans of action, rather than hit-or-miss attempts, must be adopted. Every person reached, provided he or she likes the product, is a potential ally in the case for better funding. Entrepreneurial initiative is as vital as commitment to and involvement with an effective Arts Lobby; to stand in isolation is to encourage defeat. So far, attempted campaigns for a better deal for the Arts have proved to be little more than damp squibs. Someone said at the recent 'Crisis in the Arts' debate at the City University, 'art is an essential cog in a very barbarous machine'—we must now, if we are to ever hope to change the nature of the machine, dispel myths of exclusivity and insularity and stand together to convince our audiences exactly how essential art is. If we fail to unite to do this, we risk a future more pessimistic than the present could ever foretell.

The Crisis *is* serious and the future looks bleak; laugh but don't ignore!

David E. Thompson

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FUTUREPERFORM

PROBABLY NOT TO BE MISSED



INCUBUS. The Golden Ass.

Incubus have spent eighteen months preparing for this one and it should be interesting to see what they have come up with. It is one of their cod adaptations of a great classic which this ill-educated writer cannot tell you anything about except that it is rather naughty. The Golden Ass, drastically adapted from Lucius Apulius is not recommended for children. Whether or not it is recommended for those with sensibilities towards the sort of randy sexism with which Mr Fletcher is sometimes accredited we cannot tell, for as we go to press it was embarking on a ludicrously mammoth tour of the country. Catch them before they drop with fatigue.

Dec 13-Jan 15 Touring Holland and Germany.

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 Jan 24 Exmouth Rolle College
 Jan 27 Tavistock Kingdom Hall
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THE LONDON MIME FESTIVAL takes place between Jan 9 and Feb 2 at the Cockpit, Battersea Arts Centre, Jackson's Lane, TH Jackson's Lane, The French Institute, and the ICA. It will all stretch out to the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, and Warwick Arts Centre, and many other venues. All details 01 402 5081



One of the many events in the London Mime Festival is **LA CAGE** by Theatre De L'Abre. Inspired by Rene Magritte, it explores the theme of the death of creativity in the modern world of rigid convention.

Jan 15-20 ICA. Details 01 930 6393.

On behalf of Demolition Decorators, 'Swami' Max Coles would like to wish everyone a spiritual Christmas and an apocalyptic New Year, and hopes to see you to celebrate at the Whittington Park Community Centre, Yerbury Rd. N19 on Saturday 12th January 1980 at 8. 30.



THE WART. By Twentieth Century Coyote.

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17-20 dec Abbey Centre
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 14-19 jan Covent Garden (outdoors we presume.)

DANCE UMBRELLA 1980.

A whole range of performances, notably at Riverside Studios, London, and The Arnolfini, Bristol. In particular, the Umbrella brings the Danny Grossman Company plus a selection too numerous to mention of avant-garde to classical dancers.

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Arnolfini Enquiries Bristol 299194
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FUTUREPERFORM

A SENSE OF IRELAND.

A sense of Ireland is a major festival of Irish Arts taking place in London in the spring. It's stated purposes are to present 'the best of the Irish Arts, North and South, in a major international context; to demonstrate the strength of Ireland's heritage and contemporary culture; to make an important contribution to improving understanding and relations between the people of these islands.'

The idea started when the ICA approached some people to run an Irish festival. This grew into a much larger concept and a significant amount of money was obtained from the Irish Government and other established bodies in Ireland. It is heavily backed by commercial interests, and it's business is handled by a PR firm, Cromwell Associates. Along with this growth came a feeling in some quarters that the whole affair would be likely to over the basic problems of Ireland as the whole affair would be likely to paper over the basic problems of Ireland as a whole country, especially as it now enjoys the support of the N.Ireland Office in the form of Hugh Rossi MP, who is not widely known for his sympathy with any dissenting views on the role of the Army etc. in the North. This feeling was reflected recently in a letter from Margarita D'Arcy to the Irish Post which suggested that, given the current ststate of affairs, there was no much to



celebrate about, over Ireland as a whole. especially in London.. The Festivals response to this could come in the form of a section called THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, which is a mixed programme of events all relating to aspects of Northern Irish Problems. All these events are held at Action Space, who were going to mount an Irish Festival themselves before being approached by 'A Sense Of Ireland', and who certainly have no intention of ducking the issues

Here are the dates:
Feb 23 3pm Echoes From the North Performance Art by Sonia Knox.
Feb 28-Mar. 1 O'Wilde and his Mother. By Women of Ireland Written by Siobhan Lennon.
Feb 12-23 . Theatre groups to-be announced.

All enquiries 01 637 7664

Also at the ICA,
Feb 6-23 The Risen People By James Plunkett.

Feb 26- March 15 The Liberty Suit by Peter Sheridan.

All Festival enquiries 01 493 3201.

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Feb. 5- 9. Enquiries 637 7664.



PERFORMANCE Scribbles

WITH LOVE FROM LEEDS.

A new magazine published by the Studio Trust under the auspices of the now defunct Studio International has some harsh words for performance as practised in art schools, in particular Leeds. The Politics of Art Education tells us: 'After the mergers the Leeds Fine Art Department maintained it's prestige in virtue of it's bent towards performance/zany antics such as the department buying twenty pounds of baked beans for one moronic attempt at spectacle. The dog-end of this silly-bugger soft-option petered out just over a year ago as the last gaggle of petty-bourgeois starlets left the stage with their B.A.s to pick up their arts council grants and offer rag-week capers on the streets of any city seeking self-aggrandisement and a re-inforcement of their (cultural)

hegemony in the guise of an 'Arts Festival'. (Alan Robinson, Green Strohmeyer-Garthside & Tom Soviet.) Wonder who you're talking about, chaps?

MOBILE MASS SQUAT

What has happened to the Bloomsbury Co-operative, AKA Anarchia Mystica United ? After successfully occupying the delightful Nash-designed HQ of the British Pharmaceutical Society in Bloomsbury Square, (temporarily housing this organ, by the way) they recieved notice to quit from the Department of the Environment and after a court battle, decided to beat a quick retreat to.... the building next door to the Arts Council. Your correspondent rushed along to congratulate the new occupiers only

to find the usual guard dogs security firms etc. Where have they gone? Apart from being the vanguard in a new movement of mass squatting, they provided an admirable venue for the burgeoning but elusive 'new wave' in performance. Along with Theatre Space in King William St. (also a squat) they were hosts to such companies as Theatre of all Possibilities, Demolition decorators, and were even going to get a transfer of The Warp when it finished at the Roundhouse. More on TheatreSpace in the next issue.

BELOW DECKS.

The Phantom Captain has split-official. Peter Godfery has left with

continued over page

RAMPANT COMICISM ON THE FRINGE

Luke Dixon's review of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe has provided the English language with a new word, and me with a new addition to my critical vocabulary. The word is 'comicism' and it ain't in my Webster's. I'm aware of its context in the review ('rampant comicism'), but I have a sneaky sus that it's a put-down and this makes me feel uneasy. To refresh your memories, Luke contrasts the performance of Richard III by the Rastavelli (sounds like a Jamaican circus act) company from Georgia in the Soviet Union, with the rest of his week on the Fringe, and it is here that we discover our new word. To quote: 'That performance alone justified the journey north and swept away the rampant comicism generated by a week on the "fringe".'

Does Luke mean that his rampant comicism was swept away? If so, good luck to the lad, and I'm sure he must be feeling ever so much better for this purgative experience. It must have been a ghastly moment when he realised that he'd come all the way north only to contract rampant comicism, and the relief when it was swept away must have been blessed indeed.

Or is Luke using his new word more objectively? Personally, I believe that he is trying to tell us that he came, he saw, he resisted, he survived and he remains uncorrupted. If I am right, then his tale is a moving, inspiring and deeply moral one, all the more so for its self-effacing reticence.

But I'm still not happy about the Word itself. There seems to be an implicit sneer in it. Now hopefully I've outsnegged Luke already, but this sort of thing is almost

as catching as the dreaded comicismus rampantus. Earlier in his review Luke tells us that deciding what *not* to see at the Fringe presented fewer problems than deciding what *was* worth his time and trouble, and gives us a few titillating examples. As one who has in the past played the Fringe and suffered audiences of two old men, the Scotsman reviewer and a three-legged dog, while the Dalkeith College of Cookery packs 'em in next door with 'Lady Windermere's Fan', I'm inclined to share his contempt for the undergraduate contribution. But surely we can allow our future masters at least *one* tiny bite of the Showbiz apple, forgive them their ghastly revues, appalling revivals and boisterous behaviour, and realise that the Fringe is more about them and their efforts than it is about small 'Professional' companies. I accepted this fact after two attempts at Edinburgh and wild horses wouldn't drag me back for a third.

What about that Word though? Would 'triviality' have done just as well? How about 'superficiality'? 'Nugacity'? No, we must understand that Luke is going for immortality, and accept his invention. But what the fuck does it mean?

Rather like Luke's reaction to the Edinburgh meatmarket, it's probably easier to discover what it *doesn't* mean; i.e. a bunch of Commies mucking about with the Bard of Avon. I bet that was a great show, but if there wasn't any rampant comicism in it, then I have a nasty feeling that I wouldn't have enjoyed it a bit.

Paddy Fletcher

Sorry Paddy, 'Comicism' was a typesetting error. It should have read 'cynicism' (Ed.)

role in the Captain's multi-decked vessel. Below decks in the Fleet Rd. HQ there is also opening a new costume hire shop called Parrot Fashion. No connection with the nauticalists, but there is an alarming number of naval uniforms for hire. What can we make of this?

PERFORMANCES
scribbles

one of their many pseudonyms, the Rational Theatre Company, and will carry on with the last Phantom Captain Project, Marbles. Meanwhile Neil Hornick has come out of hiding and is re-assuming a commanding

Lotte and Ada from page 20



Although they have been together for so short a time both women are sure that they want to explore the possibilities of full-time shizophrenia as themselves and as two talented and musical personae in a type of entertainment historically devoid of women. They are aware of the pitfalls and have high standards set for themselves in wanting to change their material often and continue to broaden it. They conscientiously worry about comedy-fatigue and the ability to constantly generate new songs and shows. They question it themselves, but they already are what they want to be—funny women. Who says the Women's Movement doesn't have a sense of humour? It does now.

Marguerite McLaughlin

CV1 from page 10

The emergence of CV1 had two distinct phases, and it is relevant to bear this in mind when assessing the achievements of the group over the past eighteen months. There can be little doubt that CV1 have brought to Coventry a standard of performance which consistently betters that seen at other venues in the Midlands. The group's choice of plays has been idiosyncratic: not all have been new plays, and at least one wasn't a good play, but this has not mitigated the success of the experiment when viewed from an artistic standpoint, for without exception all have been presented with a rare conviction and understanding which is clearly the fruit both of collaboration with authors and, more significantly, of an unwavering belief in, and dedication to the work in hand.

In the company's most recent production, however, there are welcome signs of a change in this attitude. 'Christmas of a Nobody', suggested by, rather than adapted from Oliver and Weedon Grossmith's classic 'Diary of a Nobody', is, indeed, CV1's most accessible production to date. Ron Hutchinson, the one Coventry writer the group has worked with (they previously performed his stylish but enigmatic 'Anchorman') deftly presents the two overriding characteristics of the Grossmith hero Charles Pooter: the desire to achieve some measure of individuality matched against an unshakable faith in social conformity. He provides comedy by gently exploiting their apparent incompatibility and then marries them superbly together in a touching final act. This is excellent writing, with an irresistible charm, rather than (as was the case with 'Anchorman') a forbidding aloofness. Coincidentally the production is arguably also the least polished of CV1's offerings. Despite some fine moments from Niall Buggy as Pooter, Caroline Hunt as his wife and Cotchie d'Arcy in a variety of cameo roles, Ron Pember's direction seems at times to veer uneasily between realism and caricature, with only Stephen Petcher (as Pooter's son Lupin) consistently capturing the distinctive style the text cries out for.

Nevertheless the whole is a more satisfying theatrical experience than most of CV1's work, and was significantly acclaimed in the local press as a 'turning point'. Significantly, because this is the first production in which CV1 seem fully to acknowledge the fact that an audience (whether in a specific or in a general sense) is as important a part of the theatrical experience as the performers.

The next step is to tailor that excellence to its context. Without abandoning the beliefs that motivate them, they must be prepared to make the concessions necessary to court an audience. 'Christmas of a Nobody' suggests that they are now beginning to do just that, and that CV1 is set to become a very good Midlands company, rather than a very good company that happens to perform in the Midlands.

Mick Martin

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HINCHLIFFE LASHES OUT

"There must be a way through"

The autobiography sat in an easy chair (laid back and startled) from an overdose of having his back up and amnesia (Ref. 'Jones' Ely)—sorry! Doubled actions hurtled his crossed legs into side by side non-decision.

Fat man leaped to his feet and adjusted his belt too tight for his waist. His pants were chest high and they should have belonged to the Mayor—perhaps they did.

"Let's play coherency next please, Mummy".

"Don't be so bloody daft, eat your dinner like a good boy".

Cleansed like the reading of issue three and belonging to the race that sleep on with the oblivious, the last West Ruislip bound reached its destination. Stumbling and jibbering, the befuddled and bewildered occupants spluttered from the snake's doorways. All were blinking like bulbless lighthouses or silent foghorns on a clear night.

"No more back that way tonight mate"

Holl call time—nearly two quid left. "Sorry mate £2. 8s and eleven to Norff'olt" gabbled a fascist taxi monkey. The weed overgrown pavement that runs beside Northolt airport is amazing. Walking is restricted to a sort of clack, rustle, trip "damn it" pace. Search lights, stuffed Spitfires, scrambled Rogers tone the scenery. Man with large Alsatious animal plods the perimeter behind fence, him on one side, me on't tother. Which side are you on?—"Evening"—"mm

Nippy". "Woo, Woo Woo"—"Come 'ere 'oy, Bloody Rabbits"—"Chortle, Chortle stupid prat"—"Night"—"Night"—Clomp, Clomp, trip. "Bollocks". With inward lack of tit and thigh, I purged the runaway self bed pan and cold tea contorted growth distance, jism rusted chastity belt. Anonymous fish and San Francisco at the other end of the runway. Potting the number eight ball perfectly into my minds eye and muttering "Booger loo" with a giggle, I spotted the home straight. An Indian restaurant lay in its cold odour and awaited its warming up tomorrow. I noticed the pool of puke the next day and secretly recalled its purpose of departure from my now fur stained chops. "Thank god I'm healthy", I thought, "That lot could have stayed inside me".

"Here's the colour charts, what shade shall we do the bedroom?" Imagination wildly dogged, next day disorientation, something to do with blood poisoned tubes. "Think!"—"I am, I'm trying to decide which the stencils or maybe the painting by numbers. Saved, oh god saved. We're going to trace it."

Clockwatching for witching hour I hurried along watching my back, paranoid as some demented Lobby Lud. Bolt slid back deafeningly, the Empire opened in blinding vintage gleam. Liquids rushed forth and I could tell by my timetable that I would catch the last West Ruislip. You know the one, the one that for some strange inexplicable reason never goes through Northolt without giving you an anaesthetic.



from page 7

Hinchliffe

anger and humour with which they are presented the final impression that 'Trees in the Wind' leaves is one of empty boredom. Inevitably, the revival of a play centred around the politics of some eight years ago raises questions of a political nature, and in this instance gives rise to some thought about political theatre. The political issues contained in McGrath's play are still vital and more relevant than ever as we face the prospects offered by our present right-wing reactionary government but are effectively negated by their presentation. Didactic speeches from cardboard characters become laughable as do the characters themselves, whilst the skill with which the characters are portrayed only emphasises their lack of credibility.

Maybe eight years ago this form of political theatre was exiting and broke new ground, but it is now dangerously sterile, lacking in imagination and subtlety. The emptiness of 'Trees in the Wind' has become only too typical of much of socialist theatre of the last few years: it is not only the organised Left as indicated in this play, that has failed to provide any real form of alternative. The same is true of much so-called alternative theatre, which has now become fixed in a rut—the same old format, the same content. Speeches, bursts of song in cabaret style interspersed with action, characters each with a single point of view. It becomes self-congratulatory and raises no problems. Such theatre begins to inhabit a vacuum with no points of con-

tact: it may entertain but does no more.

'Trees in the Wind' is a highly polished, professional piece of theatre that could have been presented by any repertory theatre in the country, and certainly, in Birmingham attracted precisely the audience that any such theatre would have drawn. 7.84 state that they 'aim to provide good entertainment, music and theatre for working people in clubs, community centres, theatres and halls—anywhere people want to go, and can afford to go, for a night out. . . 'Trees in the Wind' tours to various universities and Jackson's Lane Community Centre, London. A tired play for the same tired audience of converts?

Gillian Clark

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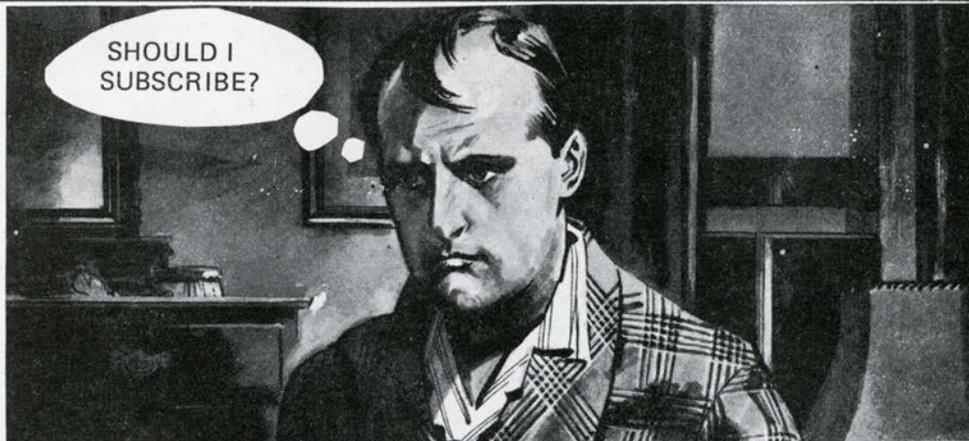
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