

Lowdown and the turbulent 1980s

Part I – 1980-1986

A history and commentary by Tony Mack

Australia has a long history of taking on cultural influences from outside the country and synthesising them into something uniquely Australian. This was the case in the 1980s, when Australian youth performing arts practitioners embarked on a long and at times bitter series of debates about the function, form and content of their work. During this time they synthesised a range of overseas and homegrown influences in Australian theatre for young audiences and youth arts practice, including Theatre in Education, developmental drama, political theatre, alternative theatre and community arts.

At the beginning of the decade the most dominant influence was Theatre in Education. Now almost completely extinct in Australian youth arts practice, in 1980 it attracted 84% of youth performing arts funding from the Australia Council and performed to hundreds of thousands of young people each yearⁱ. In order to understand some of the debates that took place in the pages of *Lowdown*, we need first to take a brief look at the history of Theatre in Education, how it was imported from England and how it came to dominate the youth arts landscape in the 1970s and 1980s. We also need to acknowledge that youth performing arts practitioners of the time had a number of different approaches to their work. An outline of these approaches will help to navigate through the various discourses of the 1980s.

Three approaches – didactic, developmental and artistic

Three main approaches to youth performing arts tended to dominate in the late 1970s and 1980s – the didactic (or instructional), the developmental and the artistic.

In a 'didactic' approach the arts practitioner positioned themselves as the 'expert' and the young person was regarded as deficient in either skills or knowledge. The function of the arts practitioner was to instruct the young person until they attained a level of proficiency. This could be seen particularly in 'fame' schools and traditional acting or dance training – for instance, in Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*ⁱⁱ, the acting teacher Tortsov is seemingly infallible, patiently listing the mistakes of Kostya (the student), who submits completely to the wisdom of his teacher.

From the early 1920s to the 1980s there was also a strong tradition of didactic theatre impacting on Australian practitioners. These influences stretched from German playwright Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstucke*, or 'teaching plays', of the 1920s to Joan Littlewood's 1960s Theatre Workshop productions and the alternative/political theatre movements of Australia and the UK in the 1970s and 1980s (in particular the work of Albert Hunt, a senior lecturer in Community Arts at Bradford College and later a Theatre Fellow at University of Queensland). Didactic issue-based theatre would feature strongly in the Australian TIE productions of the 1970s and 1980s, attracting more and more criticism as the 1980s progressed.

In a 'developmental' approach to youth arts, the arts practitioner acted as guide to the young person at a particular stage of their social development. The function of

the arts practitioner here was to facilitate an arts experience that could allow the young person to develop further. UK drama in education practitioners such as Peter Slade, Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote had been strong advocates for developmental drama and their work, disseminated through publications, in person and (in the 1970s) videos, influenced the teaching of drama and the development of youth theatres in Australia. One Australian practitioner, Joan Pope from WA, encountered Slade's drama while studying drama speech and mime in the UK in the 1950s, and developmental drama was well established by the late 1960s in Australia, through the work of groups such as Pope's CATS (Children's Activity Time Society)ⁱⁱⁱ.

The Australian community arts movement can also be linked to the developmental approach, creating a diversity of opportunity for communities, and individuals within those communities, to grow and develop. Indeed, the distinctions between youth theatre and community theatre would blur in a number of companies in the 1980s.

The 'artistic' approach is used in this context to describe a particular approach whereby the value of the art itself has primacy. Rather than use the performing arts as a tool to instruct or develop (though these may be by-products), the responsibility of the arts practitioner in this approach is to be the best artist they can be, and to facilitate an arts experience of the highest possible standards for/by/with young people.

This 'art for art's sake' approach was not as popular amongst youth arts practitioners in the late 1970s and early 1980s as it is in the 2010s. Some practitioners were distrustful of art without a socio-political agenda, as well as 'High Art' institutions that clamoured for taxpayers' funds without ensuring equal access to quality arts experiences for the very taxpayers that were funding them. At the start of the 1980s, as in the beginning of Theatre in Education, it was the didactic and developmental approaches that tended to dominate Australian youth performing arts.

Theatre in Education

In 1965 Gordon Vallins piloted a program in the UK called 'Theatre in Education'. It would go on to change youth performing arts in many countries around the world. The name 'Theatre in Education' intentionally emphasised that, in this type of theatre, 'professionals would work within the educational system'^{iv}. The Belgrade Theatre, working with the Coventry Education Authority, established what would become the Coventry Theatre in Education (TIE) team, the first of many teams to tour TIE work into schools and classrooms.

Vallins, the Coventry TIE team leader, was influenced by both the didactic approach of Joan Littlewood and Brian Way's use of developmental drama as an educational tool^v. These influences were reflected in the three shows of the first Coventry TIE program. *The Balloonman and the Runaway Balloons*, for infants, and *The Secret of the Stone*, for juniors, both encouraged full and active participation from the students, whereas the secondary program was 'a deliberately didactic piece of theatre based on the 1879 Tay Bridge disaster'^{vi}.

The program was a phenomenal success and by the mid-1970s there were approximately twenty teams touring TIE work to schools around the UK. As one

AYPAA member visiting the UK, Max Wearing, noted in the AYPAA newsletter in 1974, 'Theatre-in-education in England has the public image of something new, avant garde, radical and exciting'^{vii}. By this time the preference in TIE was for an issue-based piece of didactic theatre, and some of the early developmental drama aspects – the actor-teacher, teaching in role, active participation and small audiences – had been discarded^{viii}.

TIE's migration to Australia was, at times, literal – a number of prominent UK practitioners moved to Australia to work. Roger Chapman, from the Leeds Playhouse TIE team, became the first director of the South Australian Theatre Company's TIE team, Magpie, and later Director of Carclew Youth Arts. Another Belgrade TIE actor-teacher, David Young, became Director of Salamanca Theatre Company in Tasmania. John O'Toole, who had written the key text on participatory TIE in 1976, *Theatre in Education*^{ix}, migrated to Brisbane. Don Mamouny and Mary Fairbrother also both returned from sojourns in the UK to found, respectively, New South Wales' Sidetrack Theatre and South Australia's Troika.

Derek Nicholson, who had been touring productions to school aged audiences since 1964, had returned from a stint in England in 1968, well before the 'British Invasion'. During his time as a postgraduate student at Sadlers Wells, he was able to sit in on rehearsals of the controversial production 'US', directed by Peter Brook and using the collaborative rehearsal processes of Albert Hunt that became to be known as group devised theatre. At Pageant Theatre in Sydney he was able to implement Australia's first Theatre in Education program, a five year research and performance project developed in conjunction with child psychologists, incorporating both developmental drama and group devised theatre^x. Nicholson later became Director of Theatre Workshop at the Seymour Theatre Centre, *Lowdown*'s temporary home in the late 1970s. Theatre Workshop would become part of an influential culture of group devised theatre and theories of youth culture and participation in Sydney, hosting City Road Theatre and Toe Truck TIE company, and featuring practitioners such as Mark Radvan, and Michael and Ludmila Doneman. Errol Bray, in his work at Sydney's Shopfront Theatre, would also continue to extend and formalise this theory and practice.

While Australia can trace its history of educational theatre back at least to the 1920s, when Joan and Betty Rayner set up their Theatre of Youth in Sydney^{xi}, and its homegrown children's theatre back to at least 1850, when the pantomime *Goblins of the Gold Coast or Melbournites in California* premiered at the Queen's Theatre in Melbourne^{xii}, Australian youth performing arts had never had to absorb so many new influences (such as TIE or developmental drama) in such a brief span of time as in this period. It is in this context, of a melting pot of imported and indigenous youth arts ideas and approaches, that we return to the pages of *Lowdown* at the beginning of 1980.

1980-1981: *Westward Ho!*

On page 37 of the first *Lowdown* for 1980 the Acting Director of Carclew^{xiii}, Sue Averay, summarised a report that would throw a lifeline to a struggling AYPAA (Australian Youth Performing Arts Association) and *Lowdown* in Sydney. A Working Party had been formed to investigate and make plans to rationalise ‘the undirected proliferation of youth performing activities in South Australia’^{xiv}. This was one time, however, where the word ‘rationalise’ was not code for ‘make wholesale cuts to funding’.

Partly initiated by practitioners, as well as administrators and officers at both the Arts and Education Departments, the idea was to maximise the value of financial support by eliminating waste and duplication, ensuring quality standards in youth performing arts activities and making sure that youth performing arts companies were held accountable for public funding. The Working Party decided that Carclew and its facilities were to be the base for youth performing arts in SA. It was to provide administrative support to the sector, and also be the administrative base for the Youth Performing Arts Committee (later the South Australian Youth Arts Board and now the Carclew Youth Arts Board). Carclew was also to act as a resource and information centre for the sector, connecting practitioners with local, national and international information^{xv}.

It was a typically practical South Australian solution to the reality of finite funding and issues of standards and governance. The Youth Performing Arts Committee would report to the Minister, and Carclew would be the project and policy generation arm of that Committee responsible for converting strategy into tactics, and policy into action. Resources would be shared through Carclew, and standards in the sector would be raised by exposure to local, national and international best practice models.

The question remained though, as to how to connect South Australian practitioners with national and international information. Enter AYPAA, the Australian Centre for the international organisation ASSITEJ^{xvi}, and its national journal *Lowdown*. According to *Lowdown* Editor Geoffrey Brown, ‘National AYPAA accepted an offer it couldn’t refuse from the SA Government to be based within the glamour of Carclew’^{xvii}, and opened the door of its Carclew-based office in North Adelaide on May 12 1980.

This was not the end, however, for Theatre Workshop’s contributions to AYPAA and *Lowdown*. As mentioned in *Lowdown Begins*, the Theatre Workshop, Seymour Theatre Centre, at the University of Sydney had been providing a temporary home for AYPAA and continued to organise the printing of the first two copies of *Lowdown* for 1980. Later in the year Theatre Workshop would make a major contribution not only to AYPAA, but also to Australian youth performing arts.

Mark Radvan’s *Youth Theatre: An Essay* had been commissioned and prepared by Theatre Workshop, and was sent out as the *Lowdown* supplement with the fourth issue for the year. The essay was highly influential – for the first time a rigorous attempt had been made to articulate Australian youth theatre as a concept, outline its characteristics and value, differentiate it from other youth-oriented drama and list the resources needed for it to occur.

In placing developmental drama practice within the context of Australian youth culture, Radvan rejected the idea of young people as being incomplete human beings needing constant direction by ‘expert’ adults. ‘I’m sure that as a society we

completely underestimate the capacity of young people for intelligent, creative, self-directed activity. We seem to almost perversely deny them an opportunity to contribute their gifts to society, but wait until boredom and idleness have atrophied them, before attempting to put them to use^{xviii}.

Radvan's essay, along with appendices by Radvan, Derek Nicholson and Michael Doneman, anticipated a youth arts practice with significant ownership by the young people themselves. The theory that would underpin this practice would continue to develop over the coming decades, particularly in Queensland.

Throughout 1980 and 1981 there was a broad national and international coverage in *Lowdown*. Countries such as Japan, New Zealand, New Guinea, USSR, USA, UK, Yugoslavia and Hong Kong featured, and a letter from the Danish Children's Theatre Union was published^{xix} announcing its intention to form an alternative ASSITEJ centre in their country and oust the current ASSITEJ centre. This event marked the beginning of the stunning ascendancy of Danish children's theatre around the world for the next 30 years. Nationally, *Lowdown* profiled NADIE, the 1980 Community Arts Conference, the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation and Director's Seminar, as well as topics such as arts in remote areas, community theatre practice, youth orchestras, opera and musical theatre, superannuation for artists and much more.

The December 1980 *Lowdown* was accompanied by the AYPAA National Theatre-in-Education Study Issue No. 3, looking at scripts. Produced by Catherine Beall and Anne Godfrey-Smith and published by the Queanbeyan Age in the ACT, it featured contributions from practitioners such as Elizabeth Mansutti, John Lonie, Joe Woodward, Richard Taylor and John Preston. The editorial, by Beall and Godfrey-Smith, is critical of the quality of TIE scripts and quotes Salamanca Theatre Company's Barbara Manning: 'I believe that too many groups are disguising their lack of solid acting skills by using stereotype characters in noisy revue-type presentation, often with very weak scripts. There is a sameness throughout much of the TIE/DIE work, which can be traced back to the use of socially-relevant documentaries, the need to travel light, and to keep within a very meagre budget. Somehow we need to take a step forward from here...'^{xx} In the middle pages, actual TIE feedback from students was quoted, with statements such as 'TIE always presents the same issues and we know about them' and 'TIE come to our school and do plays about what they think we are and we're not always like this'.

Lowdown was steadfastly continuing with its reviews of shows – and publishing long letters of protest and indignation in practically every issue about even the mildest criticism. An unexpected outcome was occurring for companies in that they were getting more searching evaluations from *Lowdown* about their work than from the local mainstream media. Rather than take criticisms on board, like Richard Bradshaw from Marionette Theatre with Christine Westwood's review of his *Top End Tales* in Vol. 2.3, others tried to shoot the messenger. The Executive of AYPAA was clearly worried – a meeting in Adelaide in late 1980 discussed the situation at length – but affirmed 'its belief that reviews are an essential part of the development of critical evaluation in this area'^{xxi}. John Lonie, a writer at Magpie TIE Company, was clearly sick of the whinging, writing in *Lowdown* Vol.3.1, 'Our arm of the profession desperately needs critical attention...We need to encourage reviewers of our work...Otherwise, we may as well shut up shop'^{xxii}.

Very soon though, the AYPAA Executive had more important problems than reviews. In the second issue of 1981 it was announced that Geoffrey Brown would be leaving

AYPAA on 22 May, and that the operations of AYPAA were 'to be scaled down owing to financial restrictions'^{xxiii}. The future success of AYPAA was dependent on joint funding by the Community Arts Board and the SA Department of the Arts.

Brown's last editorial was in the next issue, and he pointed to key structural problems that AYPAA had to address if it were to continue. The breadth of the organisation's responsibilities was so daunting – all performing artforms, for and by young people from 0-30 over a whole continent – that AYPAA could not advocate for one group without criticism from other groups who felt they were in greater need. Brown also warned of the possibility of the sector never being taken seriously until it matured in its attitude to self-criticism. In signing off he affirmed, 'It is truly an exciting and wonderful area, and I wish everyone who works in it all the best for the future'^{xxiv}.

Later in the issue the President of AYPAA, Andrew Bleby, paid tribute to Brown, stating that he had 'at all times acted beyond the basic expectations of the job', and lauded his 'versatility as policymaker, lobbyist, travelling consultant, accountant, magazine editor, layout artist, secretary, typist, information officer, report and application writer, project officer and public relations officer'.^{xxv}

With severe financial worries, an unwieldy structure of national representation and the departure of an energetic and committed employee with indispensable skills, AYPAA's future was looking very bleak indeed.

1981-1983: AYPAA disappears and Lowdown gets feisty

The next three *Lowdowns* – from Vol.3.4 to Vol.4.1 – were produced by volunteers. While contributions were received from around the country and Leask (now based in the UK) reported on the 1981 ASSITEJ World Congress in Lyons, France, where Australia was voted on to the ASSITEJ Executive Committee for the first time, it was largely SA AYPAA members and Carclew staff keeping the magazine afloat under the direction of AYPAA President Andrew Bleby. With some savage cuts to theatre in 1981, it was becoming increasingly clear that AYPAA and *Lowdown* could not survive in their present form. Finally, the death of AYPAA was announced in the first *Lowdown* of 1982^{xxvi}.

Carclew was in a quandary. It had begun to rely on *Lowdown* and ASSITEJ membership as a key part of its service delivery to South Australian practitioners. Now it was faced with a situation where these would both disappear, as neither State (apart from SA) nor Federal Governments would pay for them. After much negotiation, AYPAA made an offer that was practical, effective – and quite unorthodox.

AYPAA would dissolve as an organisation at its AGM on 7 March 1982. Its assets would be passed to Carclew, and Carclew would become the National Centre for Australian Youth Performing Arts and the national centre for ASSITEJ. Subscriptions for *Lowdown* would become membership fees for the Australian ASSITEJ Centre (as they had become membership fees for AYPAA^{xxvii}), thus satisfying the national membership conditions of the ASSITEJ International constitution. State and Territory editors would be added to *Lowdown*, along with a national editorial committee, to ensure its coverage reflected a national focus. A National Office would be set up within Carclew to generate national projects, with the *Lowdown* national editorial committee acting as Steering or Advisory Committees for each project.

Now there are many examples worldwide of organisations joining an ASSITEJ centre and receiving a subscription to its publication. Never in all the countries of the world, however, had it been the other way around – in Australia, individuals or organisations subscribed to *Lowdown* and automatically became members of the Australian ASSITEJ centre!

The decision for Carclew to manage Australian youth performing arts networking and its international representation as Carclew ‘projects’ made sense within the new Carclew structure and event-based culture of Adelaide^{xxviii}. Organisations like Carclew, the Adelaide Festival Centre and, later, Arts Projects Australia ran festivals, concerts, productions and conferences as projects. That is, a group of project managers, often in the same administrative area (such as the Carclew Project Office), would be assigned different events to deliver, sharing common administrative resources and even staff members. Already Carclew was working on projects such as a national Theatre-in-Education Directors’ Conference (the forerunner of the YPAA conferences of the 1990s and 2000s), a Winter Concert Series and Australian International Puppet Festival^{xxix}. With a national committee and other stakeholders providing input, Carclew would designate both the publication of *Lowdown* and the functions of AYPAA as national projects, and assign staff to deliver them.

It was at this point, with *Lowdown* and the National Office being regarded as separate federal projects within Carclew, that the publication began a different journey to the organisation that started it, AYPAA, and its descendant, YPAA. This was reflected in May 1982, when the *Lowdown* banner on its front cover was changed – rather than *AYPAA Lowdown*, it simply became *Lowdown*.

The next eight issues were edited by part-time editors, an alternating team of Helen Rickards and Andrew Bleby, as Carclew and the youth performing arts sector lobbied the Theatre Board of Australia for funding for the publication. The achievements of the two editors during this difficult time were substantial, with developments to the *Lowdown* format, increased subscription numbers and a greater national presence and reputation.

Rickards, the Director of Handspan Theatre Company, edited the magazine throughout 1982 with a format of a focus on a particular State each issue. May 1982 (Vol. 4.2) featured Victorian organisations such as St Martin's Youth Arts Centre, the Victorian Arts Centre, the Australian Children's Television Foundation and Drama Resource Centre. In July (Vol. 4.3) it was New South Wales' turn, with profiles on Freewheels TIE, the Marionette Theatre of Australia, Sidetrack Theatre, Musica Viva Australia and the Australian Theatre for Young People. These issues were followed by focus issues on Tasmania (Vol. 4.4), Queensland (Vol. 4.5) and WA (Vol 5.1).

Rickards proved to be a superb lobbyist for youth arts, initiating feisty *Lowdown* interviews with arts leaders in the various States. Interview subjects included: Race Matthews, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Arts (Vic); Evan Williams, Director of the Division of Cultural Activities (NSW); Max Bingham, Deputy Premier and Minister for Recreation and The Arts (Tas); Tom McVeigh, Minister for Home Affairs and Environment (Qld); and Ron Davies, Minister for the Arts (WA).

The sharp *Lowdown* criticism of NSW art policies, or the lack thereof, at the beginning of Evan Williams' interview^{xxx} prompted an equally sharp response from Williams in the next issue. Williams later proved to be a strong advocate for youth performing arts both in NSW and federally, leading *Lowdown* to publish 1983 grant increases for NSW companies under the title 'Keep It Up Evan!' and a letter of praise of Williams from Ben Strout, Artistic Director of Theatre of the Deaf. Some of the increases to NSW companies were quite extraordinary, with Sidetrack Theatre, Theatre of the Deaf, Toe Truck Theatre and Theatre South at least doubling their State funding.

Considering the scrutiny that *Lowdown* brought to bear on the NSW Division of Cultural Activities throughout 1982, arguing that it needed to align its current arts funding with the stated policy objectives of the Premier and Minister for the Arts, Neville Wran, it seems reasonable to deduce that *Lowdown* may have played a part in these increases.

Whether it did or not, subscribers loved Rickards' feisty approach and the improved look of the publication^{xxxi}. She had increased subscriptions by 45% by the end of the year.

Andrew Bleby began 1983 in the editor's chair with an articulation of the three major functions of *Lowdown*. At this time he was the Assistant Director of Carclew and represented Australia on the ASSITEJ Executive Committee. While Bleby's first *Lowdown* function – the provision of information and critical examination – corresponded with Margaret Leask's original mission and Geoffrey Brown's

developments, the second and third function took the publication into new areas. Rickards had indeed been exemplifying the third function, for *Lowdown* to act as a tool of direct action, throughout the previous year. Bleby's second function though, was quite different – that '*Lowdown* can act as a permanent record of ideas as well as events. Ideological articles and philosophical debates are given a readership and a permanence. Indeed, *Lowdown*'s very existence can help to create such writing.'^{xxxii}

The two functions balanced each other nicely. *Lowdown* now had an immediate, short-term function of direct action, and a long-term, more reflective function as a document of record, which increased its intellectual capital and the sustainability of the youth performing arts sector. Examples of the more reflective articles included how Australia's arts centres catered for children, Jon Hawkes (then Director of the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council) on the third stage of Community Arts in Australia, The Rotherwood Plan and major new policies from the Theatre Board of the Australia Council and Professor Neil Postman's argument that the social concept of childhood would disappear by the end of the century^{xxxiii}.

The debate of TIE practice continued too, throughout this time. In Vol. 4.2 an article from David Johnston of the London Theatre Centre rejected the 'art for art's sake' approach to theatre and emphasised the need to provide alternative political information to the 'British Establishment'^{xxxiv}. The Empire seemed to strike back at Johnston and his ilk though, as *Lowdown* reported in Vol. 5.2 that Britain's Employment Secretary, Mr. Norman Tebbit, 'recently urged parents to keep their children home from school rather than to see "propaganda" plays by the Theatre-in-Education companies'^{xxxv}. Other articles questioned whether the message was swamping the medium in TIE (David Woolger), and whether a lack of funding and critical evaluation was compromising its practice (Malcolm Moore)^{xxxvi}.

By July 1983 the national Theatre-in-Education Directors' Conference had become the Standing Conference of Theatre-in-Education Directors. *Lowdown* reported on a 'new maturity' when they met during the 1983 Come Out festival. Come Out Co-ordinator Rob Brookman organised a 'mini-festival' of Australian TIE performances during this 'five-day marathon' full of 'meetings and reunions, exchanges and arguments, criticisms and comparisons'^{xxxvii}.

In mid-1983, when still campaigning to have the Theatre Board of the Australia Council reconsider its rejection of Carclew's application for funding for the publication, *Lowdown* received a most significant donation. Joan Rayner, from the Australian Children's Theatre, showed her practical support with a cheque for \$250. Though little known now, Joan and her sister Betty had performed to hundreds of thousands of children around Australia over decades from the 1920s onwards. It was both a practical and public endorsement of *Lowdown* from an elder of Australian youth performing arts that boosted the morale of all involved.

Then again, perhaps it did more than that – soon afterwards, the Theatre Board did agree to funding for the magazine and *Lowdown* commenced with a full-time Editor for the first time in its short history.

1983-1986: Stability and Growth

By 1983 *Lowdown* was being sent to ASSITEJ Centres in 40 countries, as well as to US universities and other international subscribers^{xxxviii}. It was now the world's leading youth performing arts magazine, and isolated practitioners in some countries knew more about Australian youth performing arts companies than their own. Through the pages of *Lowdown*, Australia was able to document a vibrant theatre practice far different from that occurring in the ASSITEJ Centres of Europe. In a report from an ASSITEJ Executive Committee meeting in Lisbon, Portugal, Andrew Bleby commented, '...it is apparent that not only does Australia have a lot to learn and understand about other countries, but they have something to learn from Australia as well...Australia is now starting to take its place in a real international community of theatre for young people.'^{xxxix}

Ian Chance was employed as the first full-time Editor of *Lowdown* in late 1983. His background was varied, and included fringe theatre, community arts and community radio. He had hosted an arts program on the radio station 5MMM and just finished as publicity co-ordinator for Come Out '83.

In his first editorial Chance promised to build on the solid groundwork of past editors Helen Rickards and Andrew Bleby, and this was evident in subsequent issues. But Chance had a broader community arts interest that was to permanently influence *Lowdown's* coverage, particularly in regional and remote areas. In his first issue he travelled to the Northern Territory to survey youth arts, comparing the Darwin Performing Arts Complex unfavourably with the community arts based model of the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs, and profiling Darwin's Brown's Mart Community Arts Project, the only organisation then initiating youth arts programs in the NT. In his second editorial he argued for a breaking down of the barriers between youth and community theatre, as well as linking both fields to the presentation of socio-political theatre^{xl}.

Under Chance the magazine settled into a format of regular columns, features and reviews, with a centre insert of Clues, a publication and arts information section from Carclew Information and Lending (at that time, Carclew had a youth performing arts library). In October 1985 the Clues focus was on arts training, and the listing of the courses of relevant performing arts training institutions around the country became an annual event, eventually transforming into the annual publication *Directions*. Advertising began to grow within the pages of *Lowdown* and, after a long period of instability, there is a feeling that the magazine and sector were preparing for a period of growth.

Certainly things had improved at the Theatre Board. Chance's first issue also features an interview with Michael FitzGerald from the Australia Council, who had assisted Margaret Leask during the early days of AYPAA in the 1970s. Now FitzGerald was the Director of the Theatre Board, and his view on youth arts was crystal clear:

'This field is critical...I would argue emphatically that if there is to be a new development in the drama area or a new development in the youth performance area, then it has to be the youth area that is supported...There have been a lot of very nice statements, and a lots of very nice recommendations, but there has not been much putting of money where the mouth is!'^{xli}

For the first time there were three people on the Board with a knowledge of the youth arts area, Malcolm Moore (Magpie TIE, SA), Andrew Ross (La Boite Theatre, Qld) and Gary Simpson (Senior Lecturer in Education, Macquarie University, NSW). The position of Youth and Puppetry Officer, which Fitzgerald had originally filled in the 1970s, had been reinstated as part of the full-time staff on the Theatre Board. Mary Travers, who was employed in that role, became a regular contributor to *Lowdown*. With the results of funding rounds published in *Lowdown*, as well as Australia Council staff involving themselves in debate within its pages, there was a new transparency to arts funding and policy development in youth performing arts.

Letters to the Editor continued to be published, but the tone had changed – most companies now accepted the role of critical review in the pages of *Lowdown*. When a company did try to defend its production by attacking the reviewer, Chance now allowed the reviewer a right of reply. In Vol. 8.1 a letter attacked Jan Blackman's review of *Rage*, which was performed by graduates of the Newcastle University Drama Department^{xlii}. Demanding, somewhat pompously, that the reviewer be 'castigated' for his sins, the eight signatories also requested the reviewer be educated in an appropriately intelligent mode of discourse suited to the evaluation of community theatre. Unfortunately for the letter writers Jan Blackman's reply, immediately following, showed a much more detailed knowledge of community theatre than they did. He used their own language and arguments against them to great effect and, possibly, to the even greater amusement of readers around the country.

Debates within the TIE community also reflected a more thoughtful, and less angry, mood in the sector. Geoffrey Rush, the new Artistic Director of Magpie TIE at SA's State Theatre Company, made it clear that 'Theatre' came first in 'Theatre in Education'. 'What I want to avoid is our theatre being an excuse for something else that is happening. The potency of the theatre experience – as intangible as it sometimes can be – is highly valid nonetheless. I don't like the idea of a history lesson with a bit of tap-dancing thrown in to make it look like theatre'^{xliii}.

In Vol. 5.5, Resident Writer with the London Theatre Centre, David Holman, reflected on a move away from didacticism to imbedding political ideas in the emotional relationships of a play's characters, as he developed a framework for a play for Magpie TIE to be performed in the 1984 Adelaide Festival^{xliiv}. In this play a child's world is turned upside down by a family being forced to move from the country to the city during an economic downturn. The audience would see the world through the eyes of that child and feel her anguish at the human consequences of economic change. The play was *No Worries*, and would later become one of the most acclaimed plays in Australian youth performing arts history. In the 1990s it would be made into a feature film, and go on to win first prize at the 1994 Berlin Children's Film Festival.

There was an intriguing piece of news in Helen Rickard's report from New Orleans, USA at the World Theatre Symposium 'Theatre and Children in Tomorrow's World', running from 16-19 June 1984^{xlv}. Rickards was in the USA with Handspan's Theatre's international tour of *Secrets*, and was designated as the official ASSITEJ Australia delegate at this event. Rickards and Mary Travers, the Theatre Board's Youth and Puppetry Officer, attended a one-day Pacific Basin Exchange meeting as part of the Symposium, with Australia, Japan, Korea, USA and Malaysia represented. A motion was put to the meeting that read:

'This Pacific Basin Exchange Meeting led by the United States and Japan congratulates Australia on its initiative in producing the biennial Come Out festival. We express interest in and support for the proposal to hold the 1987 ASSITEJ Congress in Adelaide, South Australia at the time of that year's Come Out Festival'^{xlvi}.

A key part of the triennial global gathering of youth performing arts practitioners, the ASSITEJ World Congress, was the voting of each country in the General Assembly for the next host of the Congress. Rickards had not only signposted that Australia was the first country from the Southern Hemisphere to bid for the prestigious Congress, she had also confirmed that it had secured a swag of votes for the bid in the organisation's General Assembly, later to be held in Moscow at the 1984 Congress^{xlvii}.

In late 1984 the Premier of South Australia, John Bannon, called a media conference on the grounds of Carclew. In front of the assembled local and national media he announced that Adelaide would be the host for the Ninth ASSITEJ World Congress^{xlviii}. For the Carclew Director, Roger Chapman, the Congress was a superb opportunity to deliver to SA and Australian practitioners the kinds of outcomes envisaged by the 1980 Working Party:

'It is very exciting news and presents us with a whole new range of possibilities. This event will provide an unprecedented opportunity for Australian companies to see their work in a world context. Such massive exposure of our art-forms can do nothing but help the country's artistic development and status'^{xlix}.

Ian Chance, as Margaret Leask had done 9 years before from Berlin in the AYPAA newsletter, reported from on the ground at the 1984 Moscow Congress, leading the *Lowdown* article with the greeting to ASSITEJ Centres from the Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Like sport at the Olympics, art was a weapon of the Cold War and ASSITEJ had been formed in its shadow. The massive Soviet State-funded children's theatres were meant to impress Western visitors such as Chance and they did, with 'enthraling' standards of acting and production, and such facilities as a futuristic two-thousand seat auditorium, indoor aviary and outdoor sculpture garden.

However, in putting themselves forward as a society that had achieved its social change in 1917 and was now a Utopian alternative to the capitalist West, the Soviet hosts encountered some healthy Australian scepticism. After accustoming himself to the dizzying standards of technical excellence, Chance noted the complete absence of theatre for social change. (Indeed, why would there be a need in a perfect society?) Moreover, in bringing 'culture to the masses' and 'inculcating good taste', Chance queried the choice of productions that 'had the vague air of museum pieces' and the Soviets entrenching 'an oddly bourgeois art-form as the people's theatre'¹.

Opposite the announcement of the Adelaide Congress in the November 1984 *Lowdown* was another important piece of news. Andrew Bleby had presented the Adelaide proposal to the Moscow Congress and argued that Australia was a logical choice for a Congress if ASSITEJ wanted to reach beyond Europe and North America to Africa, Asia and the Pacific. At the height of his success though, *Lowdown* announced that he was to move away from Carclew and Adelaide to Melbourne, to take on the role of Director of the Next Wave Festival for Young People. In his absence, the *Lowdown* Editor Ian Chance was to run the day-today

business of ASSITEJ Australia – as Chance reassured readers, ‘*Lowdown* magazine is the official communication of ASSITEJ Australia, and all contributors are de facto members’ⁱⁱ.

The first issue for 1985 further reassured anyone concerned about Australia’s ASSITEJ representation. In a stunning coup, the Youth Performing Arts Council of South Australia announced that the Director of the Adelaide Congress would be none other than the current Director of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, Michael FitzGerald. If one of Australia’s most respected stage actors, Geoffrey Rush, had legitimised work in TIE for a generation of Australian actors when he became Artistic Director of Magpie TIE, FitzGerald’s appointment was to cause even more of a buzz. The question, for arts bodies in governments, major cultural institutions and the top theatres around Australia was – what was this Congress, to lure one of the top performing arts bureaucrats in Australia away from the Australia Council?

Meanwhile, there were national and international developments in Australian youth theatre. In the NT, the Browns Mart Youth program had evolved into the Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre. La Boite Theatre’s youth program in Brisbane evolved to the next level when a small amount of funding from the Australian Council enabled it to bring Ludmilla and Michael Doneman to Brisbane. The project they devised with a group of young people, *The Great Circle*, ‘was to be a groundbreaking success for youth theatre in Brisbane’ⁱⁱⁱ. In the NSW/Victoria border town of Albury the young people’s circus The Flying Fruit Flies were working with seven members of the peerless acrobatic Nanjing Troupe in a project called *The Great Leap Forward*. Canberra Youth Theatre continued to produce critically acclaimed productions such as *Shrew* and *Dags*. In SA, the Port Adelaide Youth Theatre was launched and the founder of the Unley Youth Theatre, Brigid Kitchin was handing over the reins to another Canberra Youth Theatre veteran who had moved to Adelaide, Jo Fleming.

The NSW Association of Youth Theatres was formed to act as a voice for diverse groups in that State, such as Shopfront Theatre, PACT, Australian Theatre for Young People and Newcastle’s 2-til-5 Youth Theatre. These companies pushed into areas of community theatre, political theatre and high quality contemporary performance. One of the most prominent at the time was Shopfront Theatre. Its founder, Errol Bray, had a rocky relationship with *Lowdown*, at one stage requesting the magazine never to mention him or Shopfront againⁱⁱⁱⁱ and labelling it a ‘waste of time’. Within a couple of issues either he relented or the Editor ignored his request, and normal coverage resumed. Which was just as well, as the Playbuilding program at the core of Shopfront’s work resulted in a string of successful productions and international tours.

Bray’s yearly festival for young playwrights turned international in 1985, with Interplay ’85 at the Seymour Centre in Sydney being the first International Festival for Young Playwrights. Soon to be known as World Interplay, the first festival featured, along with the homegrown talent, young playwrights from New Zealand, Ireland, UK, USA, Canada, Yugoslavia, Mexico, Samoa and West Germany.

By the beginning of 1986 Michael FitzGerald had the ASSITEJ situation well in hand. Firstly, he was using *Lowdown* to broadcast the latest news about Congress to Australia and the 43 national centres of ASSITEJ. The March 1986 issue included a 17-page report detailing the theme of the Congress, his travels, accounts of meetings and impressions of festivals^{liv}. Secondly, he had clarified any confusion about the Australian ASSITEJ centre. In the past, Bleby had referred to ‘Australia’

being voted on to the Executive Committee rather than a person, and the responsibilities for ASSITEJ shifted around Carclew depending on who was available (or on the ground in a particular country) and had the skill set to represent Australia's interests. With a Congress approaching it was vital that one person be responsible and accountable for the international organisation's key networking event. From this time, FitzGerald was referred to as the Director of ASSITEJ Australia, as well as the Director of the 9th ASSITEJ World Congress and General Assembly. There was once again a National Office in Carclew again but, as ASSITEJ Australia, largely concerned with external relations.

It was the beginning of AYPAA/YPAA's reappearance as an entity separate from Carclew.

Two issues later Ian Chance departed after three years as *Lowdown* Editor. His skills in production, and editorial flair in completing the transformation of a journal into a lively and readable magazine, had made *Lowdown* an integral part of the youth arts landscape. His passion for Community Arts, for youth arts activities in disadvantaged and marginalised communities and his interest in arts in regional areas left their mark indelibly on the magazine.

As he departed, the countdown was ticking. Australian youth performing arts was getting ready for when the world popped in to visit.

ⁱ Australia Council Occasional Papers, *Theatre Board: Support for Young People's Theatre*, p10. North Sydney: Australia Council, 1982.

ⁱⁱ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 1936.

ⁱⁱⁱ Joan Pope, 'Influences and outcomes: the ins and outs', *Theatre, Childhood and Youth*, p75-79. Orne: ATEJ, 1987.

^{iv} Gordon Vallins, 'The beginnings of TIE', *Learning through theatre: Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education*, p9, ed. Tony Jackson. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980.

^v 'Joan Littlewood's productions had been a revelation...Beneath the theatricality the work was singularly alert to social change with its emphasis on the immediate and on seeing social problems in human terms. Brian Way's influence was of a different order...The important thing I learnt from Brian was that drama, used as an educational tool, could be central to the development of the individual.' Gordon Vallins, 'The beginnings of TIE', *Learning through theatre: Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education*, p4-5, ed. Tony Jackson. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980.

^{vi} Gordon Vallins, 'The beginnings of TIE', *Learning through theatre: Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education*, p13, ed. Tony Jackson. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980.

^{vii} Max Wearing in 'Australian Youth Performing Arts Association Newsletter 1974, Number 2', p22. Margaret Leask (ed.). AYPAA: Sydney, 1977

^{viii} Christine Redington, *Can Theatre Teach: An Historical and Evaluative Analysis of Theatre in Education*, p115. Oxford: Pergamon, 1983.

^{ix} John O'Toole, *Theatre in Education*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976.

^x Dorothy Darlington, 'Pageant Takes Theatre to the Children', *Sydney Morning Herald*, p13, 24 November 1971.

^{xi} Dianne Mackenzie, 'Theatre-in-Education', P43. *NADIE* 17.1, 1992.

^{xii} Mimi Colligan and Frank van Straten, *Melbourne – Past and Present*, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01486b.htm>

^{xiii} At that time, its full title was Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre.

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- ^{xiv} Sue Averay, 'Youth Performing Arts in SA', *AYPAA Lowdown*, Vol. 2.1, 1980, p37. Sydney: AYPAA, 1980.
- ^{xv} Sue Averay, 'Youth Performing Arts in SA', *AYPAA Lowdown*, Vol. 2.1, 1980, p37-38. Sydney: AYPAA, 1980.
- ^{xvi} ASSITEJ is the French acronym for the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People. see 'Lowdown Begins' for more information.
- ^{xvii} Geoffrey Brown, 'Lowdown – The Early Years', *Lowdown V.22.3*, p4. Adelaide: Carclew, 2000.
- ^{xviii} Mark Radvan, *Youth Theatre: An Essay*, *AYPAA Lowdown Supplement no. 4 1980*, p7. Sydney: Theatre Workshop, 1980.
- ^{xix} Jorgen Melskens, 'ASSITEJ Denmark', *Lowdown V.3.1*, p13. Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xx} Catherine Beall & Anne Godfrey-Smith, *AYPAA National Theatre-in-Education Study Issue No. 3*, p2. Canberra: AYPAA, 1980.
- ^{xxi} Geoffrey Brown, 'General', *Lowdown V.2.3*, p3. Adelaide: Carclew, 1980.
- ^{xxii} John Lonie, 'Criticism', *Lowdown V.3.1*, p3. Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xxiii} 'Future of AYPAA', *Lowdown V.3.2*, p3. Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xxiv} Geoffrey Brown, 'Observations', *Lowdown V.3.3*, p3-4. Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xxv} Andrew Bleby, 'AYPAA 1980', *Lowdown V.3.3*, p22 . Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xxvi} Andrew Bleby, 'The Death of AYPAA', *Lowdown V.4.1*, p19-20 . Adelaide: Carclew, 1982.
- ^{xxvii} As evidenced by statements such as 'All members of AYPAA(that is, subscribers to *Lowdown*), Andrew Bleby and Sue Averay, 'From the Editors', *Lowdown V.3.5*, p2 . Adelaide: Carclew, 1981.
- ^{xxviii} This new structure was easy to comprehend outside SA, and remains unique within Australia. Is Carclew a youth arts centre? A funding body? A policy development body? An events management organisation? A government department? The answer is simple – Carclew is whatever it needs to be to serve the artistic needs of SA young people and be accountable to the people of SA and its government.
- ^{xxix} It also housed, in 1981, a Resource Centre and the School Performance Arts Review Committee, and was landlord to both the Association of Community Theatres and National Music Camp Association.
- ^{xxx} Helen Rickards, 'Arts Policies in NSW', *Lowdown V.4.3*, p4 . Adelaide: Carclew, 1982.
- ^{xxxi} Vol. 4.4 introduced gloss card covers, and it began to have a better balance of text, image and white space by the end of 1982.
- ^{xxxii} Andrew Bleby, 'From the Editor', *Lowdown V.5.1*, p2. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xxxiii} *Lowdown V.5.2*. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983
- ^{xxxiv} David Johnston, 'School, A Place for Performance?', *Lowdown V.4.2*, p22-23. Adelaide: Carclew, 1982.
- ^{xxxv} 'Glimpsing TIE in Britain', *Lowdown V.5.2*, p7. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xxxvi} *Lowdown V.4.4*, p19-20. Adelaide: Carclew, 1982.
- ^{xxxvii} 'An Air of Maturity', *Lowdown V.5.3*, p20. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xxxviii} 'Australia's New Role on the International Stage', *Lowdown V.5.4*, p14. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xxxix} Andrew Bleby, 'Australia's New Role on the International Stage', *Lowdown V.5.4*, p14. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xl} 'Editorial', *Lowdown V.5.5*, p3. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xli} Ian Chance, 'Strategy or Starvation?', *Lowdown V.5.4*, p5. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.

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- ^{xlii} Jan Blackman, 'Youth impact on 25th community festival', *Lowdown* V.7.4, 27. Adelaide: Carclew, 1985.
- ^{xliii} Ian Chance, 'Theatre comes first in TIE', *Lowdown* V.6.4, p22. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{xliv} Andrew Bleby, 'Why I Write For Kids', *Lowdown* V.5.5, p7. Adelaide: Carclew, 1983.
- ^{xlv} Helen Rickards, 'World's Youth theatre casts new light on Australia', *Lowdown* V.6.4, p17-21. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{xlvi} Helen Rickards, 'World's Youth theatre casts new light on Australia', *Lowdown* V.6.4, p19. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{xlvii} See *Lowdown Begins* for more details on the Congress, General Assembly and ASSITEJ constitution.
- ^{xlviii} Ian Chance, 'World spotlight swings this way', *Lowdown* V.6.5 & 6.6, p19. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{xlix} Ian Chance, 'World spotlight swings this way', *Lowdown* V.6.5 & 6.6, p19. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^l Ian Chance, 'West meets East at Moscow world forum', *Lowdown* V.6.5 & 6.6, p20-23. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{li} Ian Chance, 'ASSITEJ', *Lowdown* V.6.5 & 6.6, p20. Adelaide: Carclew, 1984.
- ^{lii} Sonja Elliott, 'The Backbone's Connected to the...', *Lowdown* V.22.3, p14. Adelaide: Carclew, 2000.
- ^{liii} Errol Bray, 'The Last Word', *Lowdown* V.2.5 p3. Adelaide: Carclew, 1980..
- ^{liv} Michael FitzGerald, 'ASSITEJ', *Lowdown* V.8.1, p35-52. Adelaide: Carclew, 1986.