

LOWDOWN

YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

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assitej

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SPECIAL 'CLUES' SUPPLEMENT
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It's important, it's particular and it will be here in April 1987

ASSITEJ is the acronym for the Association Internationale du Theatre pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (or the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People).

It was founded in 1965. It is a Category C of UNESCO (= acknowledged but no financial support). Its attempts to become a Category B (= acknowledged and financial support) are in abeyance due to the withdrawal of the U.S.A. from UNESCO and the subsequent uncertainty

at the future of that organisation.

Its main objective is for the world-wide promotion and development of professional theatre for young people.

It currently numbers 43 member countries and is actively seeking to extend this membership. Two countries of particular interest to Australia which may become members in the next year or so are China and India.

How does it operate?

* There is a 17 country/member Executive Committee including Australia, since 1981 (Attachment B). The Executive meets in different countries every year to deal with general business, receive and discuss reports from member countries and to pursue through commissions (working parties) themes and issues relevant to the moment. Currently and up to the 1987 Congress the main theme under discussion is "Towards the New Theatre" i.e. why and how theatre for young people should deal with the current problems and needs of young people, the competition and interest of other-than theatre activities, cultural developments, and life and living, including technology, in the late 20th century and beyond.

Other issues under discussion include: Liaison with countries in Asia (responsibility of Japan), Africa (responsibility of Portugal) and Latin America (responsibility of Spain); refinement of Theatres of the

World; planning and finance including single projects that ASSITEJ may undertake.

* There is a secretariat currently based in Paris which directs the organisation.

* Initially every two years and latterly every three years there is a World Congress and General Assembly. Any country may bid for the Congress which is decided by vote of the General Assembly. All member countries attend the Congress to elect the Executive Committee for the next three years, deal with particular business and discuss through plenary and group sessions, themes of importance and significance. All dealings are conducted in the three official languages of English, French and Russian. The 1984 Congress was in Moscow. The 1987 Congress will be in Adelaide and will discuss particulars of the "Towards the New Theatre" theme. These particulars will be decided by

the Executive Committee in 1986 based on recommendations from Australia.

* It is practice, but not obligatory, to coincide the Congress with a performance festival. It may be national, international, a combination of both, or not at all. Such a decision is entirely up to the host country. The 1984 Congress in Moscow was with an all-Russia Festival, the 1981 Congress in Lyon was a combination of national and international companies. The intention for 1987 is to have a limited number of perhaps five international companies from our near neighbours whose work is relevant and contemporary and will enhance and reinforce the distinctive, different and seldom-seen by the world work in Australia.

* In this connection any country in any year may apply to ASSITEJ for the designation ASSITEJ Theatres of the World. The Executive

Committee decides on this designation on the basis of the intended festival offering at least 10 professional productions representing at least 3 continents and five different countries, seminars and debates, national and international criticism, and with the necessary financial, administrative and managerial ability to organise such a festival. The 1987 ASSITEJ Theatres of the World Festival will be in Lyon in June.

Why Australia and ASSITEJ?

- * It allows the opportunity for Australia to be involved in a world-wide organisation dealing with the development of young people's theatre.
- * It provides an outlet for Australia to promote itself, its product and its ideas.
- * It enables Australia to have an influence and to be influenced by world trends and developments.
- * It facilitates the breaking-down of some of the disadvantages of cultural isolation.

Why Australia and the 1987 Congress?

- * It is a significant distinction for Australia to gain by vote the first-ever Congress in the Southern Hemisphere.
- * It will allow the opportunity for the world to see our work firsthand and engage in the Australian situation and experience.
- * It will allow Australians the opportunity to meet and discuss with world colleagues.
- * It will re-inforce the opinion held by many that our work is of a world standard and has much to offer to other countries.
- * It will be both a focus and an impetus of future importance to the young people's theatre movement in Australia.

ASSITEJ Theatres of the World Lyon, June 1987

ASSITEJ has awarded the title 'Theatres of the World' to Lyon. This is on the basis of the Festival program offering at least ten professional productions representing at least three continents and five different countries.

At the Executive Committee meeting in Sibenik in June, 1985, Michel Dieuaide of the Lyon Festival drew attention to their following proposals for 1987:

- to increase the proportion of original and premiered productions. In 1985 three French companies presented new work. In 1987 three French companies and three other companies are proposed.
- to invite foreign directors (and

perhaps playwrights), especially from countries where it is difficult to work e.g. Africa, and for them to work with French companies in the presentation of a piece.

- to support new playwrights (three French, three other) in staged readings of new work with the possibility of publishing them.
- to extend the number of national and especially international critics and journalists at the Festival.

For further information contact:

Theatre des Jeunes Annees
23 Rue de Bourgogne
69009
Lyon
France
Tel: (7) 864.14.24

ASSITEJ National Information and Resource

In the Youth Performing Arts Library at Carclew, as well as the ASSITEJ offices, there is a volume of material from many ASSITEJ member countries.

These include magazines and periodicals, reports, notification of festivals, special events and so on. There are also publicity folios from a number of individual companies in different countries.

All this material is in the process of being catalogued. Once this is done, up-dated lists will be circulated through Lowdown, occasional mail-outs and other appropriate sources. It will also be available on request.

Any individual or group intending to travel overseas is advised to contact Michael FitzGerald well in advance of a proposed trip. Michael has already made contact with a large number of ASSITEJ representatives, as well as a host of directors, writers, artists, dramaturgs, company representatives and so on from many countries.

In most countries ASSITEJ is the best initial and official contact. National representatives are very helpful and supportive. They can often open doors and make contact more speedily than most other official lines of communication.

Anyone in doubt as to the standing and/or credibility of any international festival, company or organisation should contact Michael.

ASSITEJ is concerned at the growing number of groups which present themselves as of national/international standing, importance and standard when this is not so. A quick check can easily be made.

It is Michael's intention to visit each major centre in Australia during the first part of 1986 to meet with young people's theatre groups, to discuss the 1987 Congress and exchange information. These meetings will be set up well in advance to allow for early notice and maximum participation.

Speakers tell of Pacific conditions

As a component of the first all Japan Performing Arts Festival for Young Audiences, held on Sado Island in August 1985, international delegates were invited to address a Symposium.

The guidelines for these brief papers required speakers to inform participants of

the present social conditions and problems facing children in their countries of origin, and the current state of development and role of theatre for young people as it can contribute to children's growth.

The following pages are edited from some of the papers presented:

China

An outline of the Chinese Children's Theatre, by Madam Luo Ying

Madam Luo Ying, Head of Children's Art and Culture of the Ministry of Culture in China headed the three-person delegation to Japan. She began her career as an actor and director. China has begun to make contact with other countries and it is hoped will become a member of ASSITEJ in the near future. A Chinese delegation will probably come to the 1987 Congress.

• In the thirties of this century, there were only a small number of ensembles performing specifically for children.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Party and the People's Government attached great importance to the work for children.

As a result, professional children's theatre ensembles, song and dance ensembles, puppet and show-play ensembles have established and developed rapidly with State support.

There are now seventeen children's ensembles in China. The salaries, medical care and housing of the theatre workers, as well as the rehearsal places, expenses and properties and all other expenditure are provided for by the central and local governments.

The children's shows play to a vast young audience, whom, backed by school teachers and parents, are organised into the theatre.

Through enjoying plays, children are ideally and aesthetically moulded and educated. Some

heroes and heroines of the theatre have become models and examples for them to follow.

Three hundred million youngsters and children comprise one third of Chinese population.

We, the workers of youngsters' and children's culture and arts, are now doing our best to help foster a wholly new young generation with ideals, morals, culture and discipline.

Korea

A better future for Korean Theatres for Young Audiences, by Woo Ok Kim

Woo Ok Kim is a head teacher at the Seoul Institute of Arts and founding artistic director of the Dong-Rang Theatre for Young People. He worked for a number of years in the U.S.A. (based in New York) as an actor and director with a number of renowned contemporary theatre groups. He is an executive member of ASSITEJ Korea and headed its large delegation to Japan. His production of "Wandering Stars", has been enthusiastically acclaimed throughout South Korea. This play deals with problems facing modern Korean youth.

• The current educational system of Korea has caused several problems in that society.

Most critical problem amongst these is that all the energy of students and their parents is directed toward the entrance to colleges and universities.

The purpose of education is focussed solely on how to get into college. Therefore all the other activities of the students are to be discarded intentionally, though reluctantly. Against this back-

ground you cannot expect any cultural activities to be shared by the students.

If you go to any school with the good intentions of showing a free performance to students, the principal of the school would probably say; "No thanks. No time for students to view the show. They are busy studying".

Theatrical diversion is literally a diversion from scholastic efforts.

In Korea most theatrical companies do not have any chance for getting grants either from the Government or from private business.

Besides the tight financial situations, there are other problems facing the youth theatre companies of Korea.

We need more professional companies, more professional actors, more theatres and original plays exclusively for the young and, above all, a better educational system in which students feel free to be exposed to cultural activities.

However, amidst these problems, I am optimistic that improvement is being made gradually for better theatre activities for young audiences in Korea.

Canada

The history and development of young people's theatre, by Pierra Rousseau.

Pierre Rousseau represented ASSITEJ Canada. He is a freelance director in Quebec and in May/June 1985 was Artistic Director of the prestigious 16th Quebec Festival of Youth Theatre, held in Montreal at the same time as the Theatre Festival of the Americas.

• Over the last fifteen years a

theatre of research and creation, destined for audiences of children and adolescents, has developed in Canada and particularly in Quebec.

New theatre companies have been formed and are distinguished from their predecessors in that they are principally or exclusively devoted to children's theatre.

Often these companies will play directly to school audiences, both to allow the largest possible number of children access to theatre, and also to compensate for the lack of halls available for children's theatre programming.

The new children's theatre is a far cry from that which existed prior to 1970.

The majority of companies create new plays which are usually progressive and liberating in nature. They are presented in innovative forms which allow a great deal of room for the imagination of their young audiences. Indeed, several plays are the result of a direct collaboration with children themselves, having been created in drama workshops.

The beginning of the 1970's was marked by the development of touring networks within the scholastic environment.

As teachers tended to favour performances whose themes could be integrated within the children's studies, several companies created plays based on school subjects. The result was that their works were often rather didactic and could not really be considered outside the scholastic context.

It was perhaps inevitable that this new theatre should have to go through such a primary stage, since children's theatre had to become known and recognised in order to gain access to government funding.

Several companies sprang up in the early 1970's, but many of them did not survive beyond mid-decade.

Those that did survive, however, are a significant group that, from year to year, help create a national theatre for children composed of works whose character is universal.

United States of America

Theatre for young audiences in the U.S.A. today: Setting, Status, Challenges — Dr Harold Oaks.

Dr Harold Oaks is Chairman of the Department of Theatre and Cinematic Arts at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, U.S.A. He is also on the executive committee of ASSITEJ U.S.A. Together with Jane Campbell, Managing Director of the Honolulu Theatre for Youth, he represented U.S.A. at the Sado Festival.

• Theatre for children and young people can make a positive contribution to the world by choosing to maintain its artistic focus and dedication to international goodwill. More so, as it speaks with a clear voice to the needs and hopes of today's young audience.

Three paths to the development of the theatre for young audiences were laid out and cleared in the first quarter of the twentieth century. These paths can still be seen and continue to influence the field.

The first children's theatre path was cleared by the settlement houses of our large cities in order to provide wholesome entertainment and learning experiences for immigrant children and their families who would become citizens.

The second direction which developed was that of the educational theatre sponsored by college and university theatre training programs.

The third route in our children's theatre movement is the one ASSITEJ/USA is currently paving: the professional theatre which defines itself in artistic terms.

On November 6, 1905, the great Maude Adams made Peter Pan's first flight on the Broadway stage of the Empire Theatre in New York City. From that moment, many American theatre leaders have known professional theatre of the highest quality could and should inspire the lives of our young people.

The professional theatre for young audiences has been slow to develop in the USA for two primary reasons; it lacks money and prestige.

The theatre for young audiences in the United States has developed in both quantity and quality in the past ten years. Nevertheless, we are not content.

We know that many children and adolescents have no opportunity to see live theatre, and many of the millions who do attend see theatre of poor quality.

New dramatic literature and theatrical forms are required for today's young audience. We recognise the key role the theatre can play in acquainting young people with their cultural heritage.

We know we must seek and find ways in which the theatre can honour the cultural heritage of our immigrant children and also give these new citizens access to their new culture. It is essential that excellent plays be written and produced in ways which grasp and extend the minds and spirits of children of the media age.

Japan

What should we discuss now as playwrights for young audiences? — Shin Shikata

Shin Shikata is the Vice President of ASSITEJ Japan, as well as a director and writer of Theatre Urinko in Nagoya. He was the key speaker at the International Meeting of Playwrights for Young Audiences on behalf of the Japan Council of Playwrights for Young Audiences. This Council consists of professional dramatists both theatre based and freelance.

• Almost ten years ago we had so many stage versions of novels in children's theatre in Japan. Some were good, but among them were not a few productions which only followed the plot without any dramatic excitement. It seemed that they simply dramatised famous novels to please school masters and teachers and so find a market.

Through these years we have been trying to find how we can give dramatic excitement to our children, and now think of independence of drama from literature as our common theme.

One of the features of children's theatre in Japan is a long run of a repertory, usually for one year or two.

In such cases there will be two conditions that keep performers always active; one is to select so attractive a drama as to make performers refreshed and encouraged at all times. The other is a good relationship between a writer and performers.

In Japan we have our plays performed mainly at school gymnasiums. Considering our audiences are children who are almost free from established customs or rules, we think it important to try to build an improvisational climate

between performers and audiences, just as seen in our traditional plays and medieval European theatre.

For another instance we may call it also a type of indirect control to impose a miniature of adult drama on children's fresh and unrigid minds.

Some people insist that there should be no distinction between adult theatre and children's theatre. Of course we know these two have common rules as theatre, but I dare say it necessary for us to pay

special attention to theatre for young audiences with a specific point of view on each stage of children's growth.

We Japanese playwrights for young audiences have had a common big experience, directly or indirectly, that is World War II and its aftermath.

Our common desire is, therefore, to wage peace against war for children's future. From this point of view we have our task to deal with the urgent threat of nuclear weapons in the world.

MORE ASSITEJ LOWDOWN: The Pacific Exchange

The Pacific Exchange of children's theatres was initiated by the United States during the Louisiana World Theatre Festival and Symposium at the New Orleans World Fair in 1984 (see Lowdown Vol. 6 No. 4).

The exchange was further developed in Japan during the Sado Island Festival in August last year.

There Pacific country representatives from Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and the U.S.A., plus observers, met to exchange information on upcoming events and developments.

Some interesting future events include:

South Korea • an arts festival component of the 1988 Olympic Games celebrations. It is hoped that young people's theatre will be a significant feature of this festival.

Canada • the 1988 Winter Olympics will include a program of young people's theatre • the Vancouver Children's Festival will be from 21st-27th April in 1986 and mid-May in 1987. The 1987 Festival will feature workshops conducted by national and international directors • Canada would be pleased to feature Australia in 1988, our Bicentenary year, both in Vancouver and across the

country. Michael FitzGerald has taken this up with the Bicentenary Authority.

Hong Kong • there is a Children's Festival at Christmas/New Year every year • there will be a Festival for the Handicapped, including children and young people in April 1986.

United States • Hawaii will be presenting a new production "Song for the Navigator" a tale of Micronesia in 1986 and wishes to promote this production not only on "the mainland" (i.e. the United States) but throughout the region • ASSITEJ U.S.A. is in the process of compiling a directory of "best plays" which will be published in due course.

Japan • Stephen Long, an American, is working on a 3 year exchange with and at the invitation of the renowned Himawai company.

Australia • the 9th ASSITEJ World Congress and General Assembly, 8th-16th April, 1987. This will coincide with the Come Out Festival and, although there will be a small international component drawn from Pacific countries in the Festival, it will be predominantly Australian.

As well, the meeting discussed ways and means of closer collaboration between Pacific countries. Everyone agreed there needed to be much closer

exchange of information and especially ideas. Exchange would follow as a result of this.

It was felt there could be greater exchange of reports and especially publications. In this respect Lowdown received many accolades for its quality (including discussion of issues), the range and extent of articles and its Australian profile.

It was also felt that, beyond exchange or visits, countries in the region knew little or nothing of such projects and often only after they were over.

The meeting agreed that much greater value could be made by visiting companies including other countries in overseas tours. In summary, it was agreed:

- to concentrate on publication and report exchange to get information and ideas flowing.
- to inform each other of overseas tours within the region.

The Pacific Exchange will take place during the 1987 ASSITEJ World Congress in Adelaide. As well as further information exchange, issues to be discussed will include the extent and effectiveness of publication exchange and ways and means of facilitating extended overseas tours in the Pacific. •

9th ASSITEJ World Congress and General Assembly Adelaide, 8th-16th April, 1987

This will coincide with the Come Out Festival in that year. By 1987 South Australian schools will be working to a 4-term year. N.B. Friday 17th April, 1987 will be Good Friday.

Theme: Towards the New Theatre

This is the overall theme adopted by the Executive Committee at its meeting in Sibenik, Yugoslavia in June 1985. It is in the context of ASSITEJ's recognition that, if theatre for young people is to have any significance, relevance or value it must examine its style and themes in the light of past achievements and failures, current needs, problems and developments of young people and young people's theatre and the prevailing social and cultural influences, including technology.

Under this theme the Executive will discuss new ways of theatrical creation, which is to include dramaturgy, at its meeting in Scandinavia in May 1986. This will be followed by discussion on the role of the director in East Berlin in January 1987.

It is up to Australia to present to the Executive Meeting in Scandinavia specifics for discussion at the 1987 Congress in keeping with the overall theme, Towards the New Theatre. These specifics could include extension of the Executive's discussions on theatrical creation and the director. From discussion and observation during his overseas trips, as well as acknowledgement of developments within Australia, Michael FitzGerald recommends **three topics** under the theme:

- the role of the playwright and especially the young playwright.
- youth theatre, including young people's representation both in theatre activity and organisations affecting their future. It touches on youth culture and the role of young people in a nation's culture.

N.B. Michael reports that youth theatre in the Australian sense (i.e. young people from primary school age to under 25 working under the guidance of experienced adult tutors, directors and writers in performances and workshops) is either unknown, misunderstood or rejected in a large number of instances. Certainly the Australian movement is distinctive in style, standard and "flavour" and Michael has urged

antagonists to come and see for themselves.

- the place of young people's theatre in a multi-cultural society.

Other topics for consideration include: dance-in-education and dance/drama, aboriginal theatre for young people, the changing role and status of theatre-in-education, the role of community theatre (again in the Australian sense) in relation to young people.

N.B. Anyone who has any ideas or suggestions for discussion topics at the Congress is asked to send them in writing to Michael FitzGerald at Carclew. These should be in keeping with the overall theme and related issues as set out above. Michael would like these by the end of March.

Venue

The venue will be the Adelaide Convention Centre currently under construction. This will be the most up-to-date in Australia and will include modern interpretation facilities (English, French and Russian are the official languages), congress and delegate facilities and a casino. It is understood the Centre will be completed by November/December 1986.

Official Carriers

- The official Australian airline will be ANSETT.
- The official international airline will be the Malaysian Airline System (MAS).

Registration

It is not anticipated that registration will be called for until towards the end of 1986. This enables full time to detail plans of the Congress, accommodation, official and social ceremonies and the many other aspects of such an event. As the Congress will coincide with Come Out, details of that Festival have to be set up including the proposed international component.

In due course Congress registration will be advertised nationally through the press and other relevant outlets.

Funding

The Congress has the full support of the South Australian government which in 1985/86 has given a grant of \$79,000 towards salaries and other costs. ASSITEJ is furthermore based at Carclew and has access to all the resources this centre offers. The Congress, through Carclew, has also received a grant of \$25,000 from the Theatre Board of the Australia Council towards the salary of a program assistant. This position will soon be advertised nationally.

ASSITEJ Australia to the world

As director of ASSITEJ Australia and the 9th ASSITEJ World Congress and General Assembly it is both necessary and essential that I should become acquainted with as many national centres, international members and companies and relevant government and official departments as possible.

In this way I can get an understanding of the range and extent of work being undertaken; get to know what is going on, the "flavour" of ASSITEJ itself and the shape of things to come; promote the Australian theatre for young people and, as the country's representative, give Australia a place in discussion and debate; and stimulate interest in the 1987 Congress.

The meetings, festivals and seminars I attended in Europe, the Far East and South America during 1985 allowed me to achieve all of these to a marked degree.

In all cases, the host countries provided hotel accommodation, meals and internal costs. My own budget (\$79,000) generously provided by the South Australian government allowed for international air fares, which were facilitated by the Malaysian Airlines System (MAS), the official international air carrier for the Congress.

Overall, I can report I am making considerable headway in developing an Australian presence overseas as well as arousing much interest in the 1987 event.

Edited versions of my reports to the South Australian Youth Performing Arts Council follow.

**Michael FitzGerald,
Director, ASSITEJ Australia,
9th ASSITEJ World Congress
and General Assembly.**

LYON, June 7-14

In June, 1985, Michael travelled to Lyon, France, to see the renowned RITEJ Festival which is organised by the Theatre des Jeunes Annees, and to observe and discuss the administration and management of the Festival.

The 1985 Festival was designated the first-ever 'ASSITEJ Theatres of the World'. It consisted of fourteen companies from eight countries across three continents; seventeen productions (five French, twelve from other countries); street theatre; an international videotheque; exhibitions, discussions and seminars.

The administration and Festival Centre for RITEJ was housed in La Condition des Soies (an old, modernised building, originally the Silk Trading Centre) which was provided at no cost by the City of Lyon.

The theme of this Festival was "One Country, Two Images", reflecting the exchange programs that France is undertaking, particularly with Italy and Portugal. Plans for 1987 include the extension of this exchange.

The overall standard of performance at the Festival was fair with some particularly

interesting work from Portugal.

Teatro o Bando of Lisbon presented two very fine theatre-in-education pieces, hard-hitting, with some excellent playing and strong, imaginative design.

One of the highlights at RITEJ was the production of "Pleurur pour Rire" (Cry to Laugh) by Teatro Experimental of Casalus. This was a production for primary schools reflecting the 'Me' and 'Myself' syndrome i.e. the conditioned and the real me.

Particularly impressive was "Robinson O Crusoe" by Teatro dell'Angolo of Turin — very well

designed, funny and well-acted. With great rapport from the actors, two "enemies" meet on the roof of a submerged house after some kind of war or devastation.

Also notable was "Les Albatros", a piece of street theatre by Teatro Tascabile from Bergamo in Italy.

Other productions ranged from a few good to mostly bad and indifferent. The standards confirmed to me again that the quality of our work in Australia is at least on a par with what is considered best overseas. In some aspects of design, themes and scripts, energy and vigour, the Australian "flavour" is generally better.

Impressive organisation

The administration and management of the RITEJ Festival was most impressive, including:

- day to day running of the Festival — involving notice boards; a daily bulletin; a computer and programmer; an information officer and publications, posters and pamphlets booth.
- the break-down of the

management into artistic supervision / general management / seminars, debates and workshops / special activities, exhibitions and videotapes / and public relations — each carefully defined under the direction of efficient and effective personnel.

- the friendliness and courtesy of day staff (RITEJ Director, Maurice Yendt's daughter, Valery, and fellow University students).

- the generosity of the Festival in facilitating attendance by some 79 out of 85 invited participants (picking up the tab for accommodation, meals and tickets)

and in providing full typing, photocopying and other services to all participants.

- the regional and especially national attention of the media, up to Le Monde level.

Not impressive:

- poor Chairing of seminars and discussions which did not encourage full debate and which allowed the domination of a few individuals.

- the quality of translators. During the two sessions which I attended, the English interpreter's stock phrase was "just a moment . . . it's gone".(!)

Some interesting facts and figures:

- the two-week Festival as detailed above cost four million French Francs (approx. \$A.658,979), provided by:

Direct Grant, City of Lyon	\$A.247,117
Direct Grant, National Govt.	82,373
Box Office	164,745
City of Lyon support (cost of eight venues plus salaries of all front-of-house, back-stage staff and theatre manager)	164,745
	\$A.658,979

SIBENIK, YUGOSLAVIA, June 21-29

The purpose of this visit was to attend the ASSITEJ Executive Committee meeting (Australia is an ASSITEJ Executive member) and to attend the Twenty-fifth Yugoslav Festival of the Child, held in Sibenik.

Sibenik Festival venues were a beautiful, classical out-door square and an indoor theatre of quite lovely proportions and tiered boxes.

The Festival was popular, heavily supported by the national television (which insisted on wide-appeal presentations) and was generally of poor standard.

To be fair, I was there in the first

week of a two-week Festival and it may have improved in the second. However, ASSITEJ Yugoslavia was itself embarrassed by the selection in which they had tried, without success, to have some say.

To its credit the ASSITEJ Executive took up the question of poor standards with the Festival Committee and some telling remarks were passed.

The Executive Committee meeting enabled me to put faces and personalities to members with whom I shall be working over the next two years; to become involved in the personal dynamics of the organisation; and to contribute to some surprisingly new and relevant developments.

Based on the comments and opinions of others, my views of ASSITEJ were that it was Eurocentric, conservative and ineffectual.

While some of these views still pertain, this meeting was impressive for the energetic and forceful direction of some progressive members.

The Executive was quite honest and open about its need to become relevant to the 'here and now' — to the needs, problems and developments of young people and young people's theatre in the late 20th century and beyond.

Assitej Executive Committee, Sibenik, Yugoslavia, June, 1985.



Of particular note:

- the recommendation of the commission (working party) dealing with Themes. This states there should be one theme from Congress to Congress which should be discussed at each annual Executive Meeting and at the final Congress.

The current theme is "Toward the New Theatre". The topic for discussion at the Executive meeting in Scandinavia (May '86) will be "New ways of theatrical

creation regarding the cultural evolution of young audiences”.

At this meeting, Australia will present recommendations for the 1987 Congress.

“The artistic approach of the director as the basis of high quality theatre will be discussed in East Berlin in '87.

- the report of ASSITEJ Japan on non-member countries in Asia.
- the endorsement of the American recommendation that artistic matters, both in principle and relating to any Festival coincidental to a meeting, should be discussed either through a commission or a full executive meeting or both.

• the enthusiastic reception to the Australian progress report on the 1987 Congress which underlines the wish of all members, both executive and otherwise, to come to Australia despite the obstacles of time, money and distance.

Scepticism allayed

I had gone to this meeting with a fair degree of scepticism about ASSITEJ, its future and the need for Australia to be involved.

While there are still problems, including personalities and power blocks within the organisation, I am convinced of the future of the organisation and the need for Australia to be involved in that direction.

Certainly, the 1987 Congress in Australia will be critical to this future development in its being held outside Europe and in an area of great determination and new forces; in assisting the organisation to look outwards and forward; and in allowing Australia to show the world what we can do.

Furthermore (beyond the plethora of thoughts and ideas I have in my head, my copious and detailed notes and questions) I am convinced that the 1987 Congress will be unique — an outstanding theatrical event of the decade and of critical focus and future importance to the young people's theatre movement in Australia and the world.

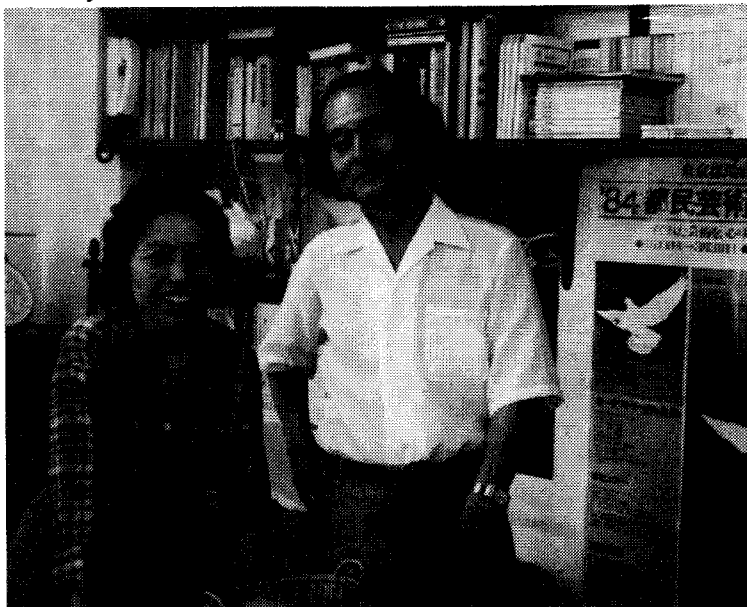
JAPAN, August 18-30

The primary purpose of this visit was to attend the 'First All Japan Performing Arts Festival for Young Audiences' on Sado Island in the Sea of Japan.

Equally important was to meet in Tokyo with ASSITEJ Japan and other organisations dealing with young people's theatre and companies; to investigate the level of work there and to 'drum up' interest in the 1987 Congress.

The trip was also an opportunity to look at particular companies that might be invited to the Festival accompanying the Ninth Congress in Adelaide.

The President of Assitej Japan, Kazuto Kurihara with Conference Secretary Fusako Kurahara.



Sado Island Festival

The first-ever Sado Festival for Young Audiences consisted of some fifty-six puppet and young people's theatre companies from all over Japan.

The Festival program ran simultaneous programs in the three major towns of the island. There were also major opening and closing ceremonies; an international symposium (open to the public); a Pacific Basin information exchange; a playwrights' meeting; and two official receptions to attend.

The Festival attracted thirty-five international delegates from twelve countries. More than thirty thousand of the island's total population of eighty thousand attended performances. Three hundred locals came to the International Symposium in Ryotsu.

The administration was handled by ASSITEJ Japan in conjunction with a special committee set up for the purpose and the town-councils of those town involved.

It must be pointed out that neither ASSITEJ Japan nor its members (nor any other company for that matter) receive any government subsidies. They all rely on their own foundations, private corporations or public support for their endeavours.

ASSITEJ Japan provided all accommodation, meals, internal costs and tickets to all delegates.

An official program for international delegates was also organised by ASSITEJ. Nevertheless, the number of companies and the range of venues was quite bewildering.

It was certainly not easy, if not impossible, to 'do one's own thing'. Moreover, the Japanese characteristic of not wishing to offend by expressing a forthright opinion made it doubly difficult to find out exactly what one should see.

However, by dint of a fair amount of both insistence and persistence, as well as follow-on in Tokyo, I am confident that I saw or know about the best companies.

As a first-ever event, ASSITEJ Japan is to be congratulated on the organisation (which was co-ordinated, communicated and impressive) and the considerable artistic achievements.

Above all, the fact that the Festival was for the community at large, and not for delegates and participants only, and that the public responded as it did is exemplary.

The very healthy mixture of adults and children in the audience was a highlight. The plan of having the Festival at this distant-from-Tokyo location (rural, friendly and very Japanese; i.e. Japanese hotels, food, customs) is a definite plus.

The overall standard of the work I saw was very good. This ranged from adaptations for and by children of classical Noh & Kabuki (including a Living Treasure), through Kodo, the sensual/sexual and amazingly compelling Sado Island Drummers, to some very fine young people's theatre companies. All shows I saw were for primary and lower secondary.

Japanese companies consist of large ensembles (average eighty) broken into small playing groups. These groups work together for a long time and perform only one or two pieces for a number of years.

The ensembles have all the obvious strengths of such groups — fine team work, rapport, tightness of playing, greater focus and clarity of text etc. — but with a certain detrimental predictability.

They have, however, far greater physical skills than their Australian counterparts; including acrobatics, movement and mime, sense of space and dramatic effects.

Most impressive companies:

I saw two productions from Himawari, "Long, Long Time Ago" and later, in Tokyo, "Three Bewitched Princes" (three Brothers' Grimm stories).

The former is a sort of Aesop's-fable, Japanese style. It consisted of short, simple, humorous and effective morality tales (some 12 or so in all), from which several are selected for a particular performance.

Himawari use few or no props, have a wonderful sense of space and stage, and use their bodies in amazing ways to create scenes, theatre pictures, shapes and so on.

The Company has toured extensively in Europe and North America. Although their productions are not new and, the two I saw, I felt were thematically questionable (especially "Bewitched Princes"), the work of Himawari is still very good theatre in the making.

The Kazenoko theatre company's production of "The Treasure Pick" was sheer theatrical magic. No heavy theme, no immediate relevance to modern youth and a Korean folk story to boot!

But the zest, exuberance, theatrical skill, design, colour and above all, joy of playing were overwhelming. It was good, old-fashioned theatre — music, mystery and drama for the young — and I loved it.

Again the production has been around for some time. It has toured extensively internationally and is unashamed escapist. But . . . !!

It should be noted that one of Japan's foremost directors, Yukio Sekiya works with these companies.

Yukio Sekiya is a man of distinct ability, theatrical skill, experience and expertise. We were fortunate to meet him in Tokyo where we saw his workshop production for a group of young, amateur and 'just beginning' theatre artists.

Such is Mr. Sekiya's dedication to the young people's theatre movement that he works with groups such as we saw at little or no charge.

Tokyo

I met with representatives of ASSITEJ Japan, the National Child Welfare Association, the Japan Children's Theatre Association, the Japan Foundation, Sou-Zebro Oti-Ai (one of the most eminent Japanese critics and journalists specialising in young people's theatre), Alison Broinowski (Cultural Counsellor of the Australian Embassy) and various directors, producers and entrepreneurs. All discussed developments in Japan as well as young people's theatre in Australia.

It would seem the general consensus of opinion that the most deservedly prominent companies in Japan are (in no particular order) Kazenoko, Himawari, Zenshu-Za (I saw them earlier in the Lyon Festival), Musabiza (a drama/puppetry company) and Nakama (whose production of "The Prince and the Pauper" I saw on Sado).

Japan: some comments and conclusions:

I also saw videos of two youth theatres (in the sense that they were companies performing to older students and young people) which seemed to be of outstanding works.

Seinen Gejiko (literally Youth Theatre) presented contemporary, relevant themes (anti-war, the problems of living in a heavy industrial society, the Jewish/Arab issue), strongly performed and produced.

The other video was of Nakama. Called "Mimo and the Thieves of Time", it was a surreal/Brechtian piece dealing with modern society's obsession not to waste time. This work was based on a novel by German writer, Michael Ende.

I regret not seeing live performances of these two groups. To all appearances they were companies of much significance and worth.

Again, ASSITEJ Japan is to be congratulated on the work it is

doing, on its first Festival and the example it is setting for other Pacific countries.

It seems that a large delegation may come to Australia from Japan for the 1987 Congress. We must be prepared to facilitate this to our best ability.

• At the Japan meeting, playwrights requested their own sessions at the 1987 Congress to continue discussion of particular issues. I think that Australian

writers would agree and that the Adelaide Congress should meet this request.

• The Pacific Exchange, first introduced in New Orleans in 1984, continued in Japan should be repeated in Adelaide in 1987.

N.B. I have detailed notes and/or papers for:

• The International symposium, Ryotsu, Sado Island, 21st August, 1985.

Written papers were delivered by: Australia, Canada, China, East Germany, France, South Korea, Romania and the United States. (Addresses were also given by: Belgium, Ghana, Hong Kong and Italy.)

• The Pacific Exchange, Ryotu, Sado Island, 23rd August, 1985.

• The Playwrights' Meeting, Niigata, Japan, 24th August, 1985.

SEOUL, KOREA, August 31-September 3



A scene from The Wandering Stars, performed by the Dong-Rang Theatre for Young People — Seoul, Korea.

ASSITEJ Korea had a delegation of seven at the Sado Island Festival in Japan. This group included a director, playwright, critic, leading actor, two choreographers and the Vice-President of the Association. They also sent the seven member Korean Puppet Theatre Sonang-dang to perform.

The Korean delegation was keen for me to go to their country to meet with ASSITEJ there; to get some idea of theatre at large; and especially to see a performance of the much-acclaimed production, "Wandering Stars".

Apart from classical theatre and dance companies, there are only two professional theatre companies in Korea, the rest being

amateur or pro/am.

The National Theatre of Korea is mainly concerned with old-fashioned musicals and pot-boilers. The repertoire of most others veers from (potted) classics, to Neil Simon and Pinocchio.

However, "Wandering Stars", by the Dong-Rang Theatre for Young People, was exceptional. The director, Woo Ok Kim has received extensive training as an actor and director with the best of alternative/contemporary companies in New York.

Mr Woo lectures at the Seoul Institute of the Arts (a drama training institution) and persuaded a highly successful T.V. writer, Yoon Dae-Sang, to write a

play for young people.

The result is "Wandering Stars", a play dealing with seven young people locked-up overnight in a Seoul prison.

About ninety minutes long, "Wandering Stars" was simply and effectively directed. It combined good dance/movement sequences and a five-piece pop band.

Each character presents some of the problems facing Korean youth today — the pressure to pass college exams (which in Korea is paramount and untenable); T.V. addiction; parental neglect; leaving school early to work in support of the family; early sexual experience and so on.

The eighteen actors included two of Korea's most respected senior artists and some fine character actors, through to recent graduates from the Institute.

I was given an English synopsis of the text and, while I don't speak Korean, I sensed from the rhythms of performance and response that the play was well written — with sensitivity, good dramatic peaks and lows and above all with humour and hope.

Certainly the audience laughed a lot — and cried — and there are one or two scenes of astonishing effect!

Korea — some comments and observations

Generally, Korea now realises that in cultural exchange it is being squeezed out by Japan and China. Trade has been the main concern. Strenuous efforts are now being made to redress this both by government and private corporations. The Australian Embassy in Seoul confirms this and wishes to support the change.

CHINA, September 4 -12



Members of the Liaoning Children's Theatre, after a performance of The Ginseng Babies.

China had a three-person delegation in Japan, including Madame Luo Ying, Head of Children's Art and Culture in the Ministry of Culture.

With much assistance from Madame Luo and Carrillo Gantner (Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy, Beijing) an exhilarating, provocative, stimulating and exhausting eight days in China was enabled.

My program included performances in Beijing, then in Harbin, Changchun and Shenyang in the North-East (the old province of Manchuria) and then to Tsingdao in Shandong province, the sister province of South Australia.

Most travel was by rail journeys of amazing distance and experiences (my final journey from Tsingdao to Beijing was fourteen hours).

My one plane journey from Shenyang to Tsingdao, should have taken two and a half hours but took seven 'due to bad weather' — the one and only reason given for what I gather is the usual such delay on any internal plane journey.

I saw ten productions (some of them for me alone), had endless official meetings (both government and company) and attended never-ending pre-theatre banquets with officials and post-theatre supper parties with officials and cast

members (even when I had to catch the night train for the next round!).

A rich feast of companies, casts, cadres, communiques, conversations, communication, ceremonies — and all Chinese!

China is in an incredible state of flux. Consumerism seems rampant with toys, cosmetics, clothing material, clothes, and foods and drinks of all kind heavily in demand. Savings go towards the tantalisingly expensive washing machine, refrigerator, colour TV and video.

While the authorities are trying to control foreign influences, they cannot stop the flood of film and video (including porn), magazines, records fashion and style (including punk) that is sweeping the country.

In a country of one billion people, two thirds (660,000,000) are under thirty-five and one third of those are under twenty-one years old.

Modernisation is the name of the game. It would also seem that China is running harder to meet the modern world than the modern world is fighting to get in. Certainly McDonalds, Coca Cola and take-away Chinese are there, but so are modern technology and modern influences.

The Chinese are avid both to consume all this and to assume their place in the late 20th Century

as one of the best. Interest, energy and vitality are palpable everywhere.

Chinese young people's theatre is in a curious state of flux. It is like a Sleeping Beauty, who has woken after the Cultural Revolution but in the style of time she went to sleep.

It seems to be in some time warp of the fifties — a cross between stylised, melodramatic classicism and something vaguely Russian/Stanislavski.

To my Western eyes, plays are over-long, over-written and predictable. They are didactic and out of kilter with young audiences — and, often in the same production, at odds with themselves both in theme and especially in style.

Theatre companies are large, averaging 120, broken into smaller groups. They are top-heavy with older members.

While graduates from the country's training institutions may request placement in a particular company they are more often than not placed in one company — and there they stay, institutionalised.

As in Japan, the companies are more versatile than Australians in physical skills, dexterity and company "corps". However there is a sameness in practically all I saw that is boring and dull.

A recent directive from the Ministry has asked all companies to rationalise their operations with a view to reducing members and allowing young and especially creative artists to have their place.

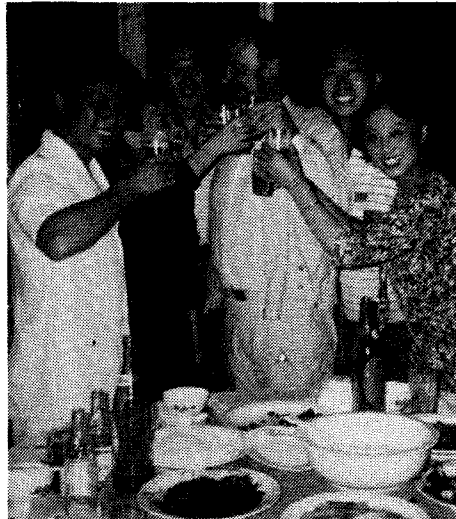
Again as in Japan, company members can perform the same piece for a number of years, although there is now a practice of moving company members within the ensemble — especially younger members.

I sensed a restlessness and frustration in young company members — and most certainly an avid interest in the Australian system of open auditions and free choice; of director and actor; of offer and acceptance or rejection; of an actor's possibility to develop and play different roles etc.

The plays I saw included some creditable attempts to make



Discussing the developments in children's theatre in China, Michael FitzGerald and the director Lianoning Children's Theatre.



Michael with the Qingdao Drama Troup, Shandung Province.

Peking Opera more accessible to young people.

This was achieved by concentrating on the visual and physical, by substantially reducing the running time to forty to fifty minutes and by providing slide projections in modern Chinese of the classically sung arias.

In my opinion these were more successful than stylised versions of morality stories based on folk and fairy tales. The latter were mainly one-dimensional, unreal and always in the same vein.

I also saw plays presenting contemporary issues, all (with one exception) in common style and theme. They were of two hours duration, melodramatic and naive (good is good, bad is bad and there are no shades of grey) predictable, uniformly and unexcitingly presented.

An extraordinary feature of all but the classical plays was the playing of young boys by middle-aged female actors — which always suggested pantomime to me and was wildly at odds with attempts at naturalism in other characters.

However in Qingdao I saw one play, "Take Your Wing, Petrel" ("Fly Away, Petrel"), which indicated a trend that could well be the way forward.

The play was written for upper secondary school students by a

younger playwright after much research with students and teachers on the problems and pressures of today's students.

While still two hours long, over-written, with unnecessary characters and predictable themes, it was well directed (another 'younger' member) and with a stillness of playing that was the closest to naturalism that I encountered in China.

"Petrel" had a static set and some very fine characterisation by the young actors playing the leads. However, while senior male students were played by young male actors this was contradicted still by a young middle-school boy being played by a female actor!

The themes of the play — competition, success and failure, diligence, parental "back door" influence — were pertinent and relevant. It certainly caught the attention and interest of the young audience.

I was most impressed with the supper discussion of the predominantly young company after the play. We had a most constructive conversation and they agreed with a number of criticisms.

The playwright is working on another theme of teachers' problems and attitudes in conjunction with teachers themselves and hopes to have a

new play by early next year. This company had more 'get and go' than most others I experienced.

China: some comments and observations

- The keen interest in modern trends and developments, a desire to know and learn, the overwhelming interest in Australian theatre for young people and especially our plays and playwrights — all underline China's wish to update her theatre both in style and theme.

- From what I saw, it would be untimely to invite Chinese companies to perform in Australia (unless with classical theatre or workshop/demonstrations for specialist theatre groups).

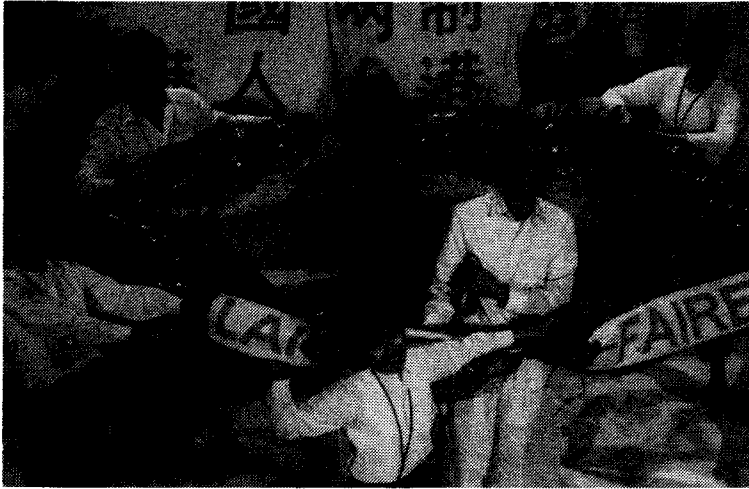
At the moment they would most likely arouse boredom or laughter, or both, in our mass media oriented young audiences.

A more helpful and useful way would be individual or group exchange (e.g. director, writer, designer, actors) both to China and from China.

In the case of visits from China it would be best to nominate actual artists or kind of artists to suit needs and conditions here, e.g. the younger creators.

In this respect South Australia could lead the way by exchange with the Qingdao Theatre Company of Shandung Province.

HONG KONG, September 13-16



Hong Kong's Chung Ying Theatre production for the season of contemporary Chinese theatre to be held at the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

This was mainly a stop-over on my return. I renewed contact with the Chung Ying Company and watched a movement rehearsal of "City of Cats", a modern classic by Lao She.

"City of Cats" is Chung Ying's production for the season of contemporary Chinese theatre to be held at the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

I also met with Nicholas James (General Manager) and Bernadette Tsui (Project Officer, also at Sado) of the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

Hong Kong would like to join ASSITEJ but before they apply would like some indication of how this might be received, given China's intention to join also.

We discussed the issue (raised also in Japan, Korea and China) of

the need for closer communication and exchange within the Pacific countries — as well as getting more mileage out of touring companies by building up a circuit.

I had hoped to visit Vietnam but, despite heavy representation on all sides (including the Vietnamese themselves, our Ambassador there, our own Embassies in Tokyo and Beijing and my well-received visit to the Vietnamese Embassy in Canberra) the authorities only gave permission two days after I returned to Australia. Now they are almost insisting I go!

Overall comments and conclusions

The creative energy, vitality, and potential of the countries I visited is electrifying. Undoubtedly

the Pacific and especially Asia will be a major force of world influence by the end of this century.

It is appropriate that Australia should take its place in this area and I feel we can offer a great deal. To this end the Pacific Exchange should continue to be encouraged.

While I saw a lot of good theatre, nothing was startlingly new or different. Again in many areas (youth theatre, young playwrights, standard and quality of scripts) we more than hold our own.

One of the greater areas of interest is in plays, playwrighting and playwrights. Exchange should be encouraged in this. Whenever companies or groups travel overseas, playwrights should be included as part of the production.

From the Australian side, I have ascertained keen interest in our work and I was able to heighten the image of young people's theatre in Australia, and of Australia itself.

It is important to share the knowledge that I have obtained and that ASSITEJ Australia becomes the link between Australia and international activity and development.

To this end, I propose:

- to utilise "Lowdown".
- to issue frequent up-dated reports and communiques through the network I have already established with the first mail-out.
- to continue to use media outlets.
- to make regular but informal contact, including occasional visits, with companies and individuals in each state and territory so as to let them know what is happening and to allow their input.
- to continue to consult with individuals of specialist and relevant interests.

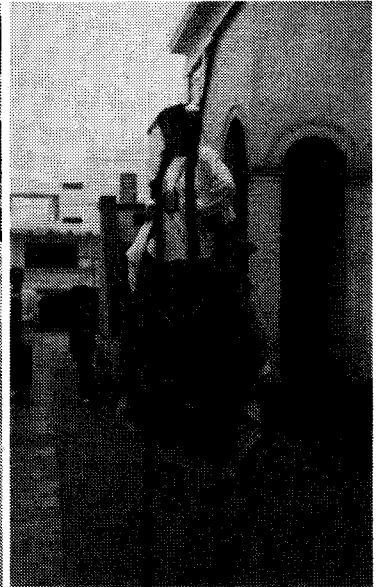
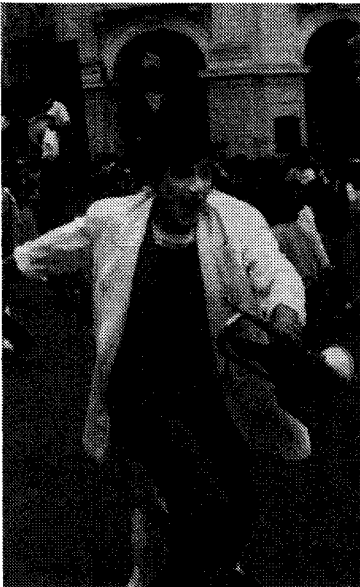
LIMA, 25th October-6th November

In October, Michael visited Lima, Peru, to attend the First International Festival of Theatre for Children and Young People. It was the first such gathering ever, not just in Peru, but in all Latin America. Michael was the guest of ASSITEJ Peru which provided hotel accommodation, meals, and internal transport costs for the eight days of the Festival.

The Lima Festival included visiting international theatre companies from ten countries: Spain, Sweden, France, Argentina, Switzerland, Dominica, Columbia, Cuba, Canada and the United States.

Italy and the Soviet Union cancelled their groups at a late hour.

There were also ten performing



The opening procession of the First International Festival of theatre for children and young people — Lima, Peru.

groups from Peru and a variety of observers from countries including Australia, Russia, Poland, the United States and Canada.

From rehearsals, it became evident that El Teatro Popular Latino Americano (a group of expatriots living in Sweden) would be the highlight of the Festival.

Unfortunately, during the dress rehearsal, a couple of them fell into the orchestra pit while dancing and the show was cancelled. (*You see Foolsbarn! It doesn't only happen in Rockhampton. Ed.*)

An apologia

I cannot, in all honesty, say that I found my time in Peru to be "satisfying" or "rewarding" in the Western European/Australian sense.

This is in all probability my limitation not that of the people of Latin America (and particularly Peru) whom I met and spent time in discussion with. I simply have too much of the boring Anglo-Saxon conditioning of time, precision and efficiency not to find a great deal irksome.

I would, however, emphatically agree with George Pendle in his book "A History of Latin America" (Pelican Original, 1971):

"The world will hardly look to the Latin Americas for leadership

in democracy, in organisation, in business, in science, in rigid moral values. On the other hand, Latin America has something to contribute to an industrialised and mechanistic world concerning the value of the individual, the place of friendship, the use of leisure, the art of conversation, the attractions of the intellectual life, the equality of races, the juridicial basis of international life, the place of suffering and contemplation, the value of the impractical, the importance of people over things and rules".

In organisation the Festival left much to be desired. There was little or no official communication, no clear program set out and what program there was got constantly changed, without notice. There seemed little or no focus of theme.

Never-ending delays in transport, performing and other schedules resulted in many people, especially the non-Spanish speakers, organising their own time-tables.

Festival performances took place in the afternoons and evenings in three different theatres.

The mornings were given over to workshop discussions of interminable tedium; mostly due to

poor translation, lack of care in presentation of papers, and an inability of most speakers to do other than ego-trips of "me and mine" in theatre.

Exceptions were from Russia and Dominica — because of careful, objective and honest presentations — and one group from Argentina (Galera Encantada) who provided practical demonstrations and workshops. This was just what was needed in the local situation.

With some notable exceptions, the Festival program ranged from amateur singing and dancing (on simple folklore, animals and birds themes etc.), to some second-rate companies and individuals from abroad who somehow seem to "con" people into accepting them in international festivals. As far as I could gather, a few of these were totally unknown to representative ASSITEJ Centres.

It is imperative that all national centres of ASSITEJ take a stand on this matter, not only for the sake of their own credibility but to stop the spate of sub-standard work that should never be allowed as professional theatre let alone performed for young people!

The exceptions to a generally poor standard of performance were rare but worthy.

From Spain, La Pajarita de Papel presented "Parsifal" which was professional and highly theatrical in its production. Strong visuals including some excellent puppetry.

In a fine example of theatre-in-education, the California Theatre Centre performed "The Most Valuable Player".

Dealing with the first black baseball player to break the colour barrier in U.S.A. it was competently professional, included good use of back-projection and sound, nice ensemble playing and some lovely theatrical moments of both tension and stillness (the latter a quality not preferred by most Latin-American companies).

From Argentina, La Galera Encantada's one-man show "I Won't Play Like That Any More" dealt with various conflicts and facing young people. It was delightful, fanciful, with strong issues and very well performed and presented.

A Cuban group, Teatro Nacional de Guinol also presented work which was simple, ingenious, appealing and reasonably presented — albeit in a large

theatre instead of a small intimate space.

Observations and comments

The overall standard of work in Latin America seems to have a long way to go. This was confirmed in discussions with Natalia Kovaleva, Consultant and Spanish-speaking expert of ASSITEJ, U.S.S.R.

Natalia has fifteen years experience and close contact with most Latin-American countries, excepting Brazil.

However, the Lima Festival was a beginning and Australia had a presence in this. Future plans include a national seminar in Peru in 1986 and a 2nd International Festival in 1987.

Undoubtedly the presence of international participants and delegates did much to enhance the young people's theatre movement both in Peru and throughout the continent.

It is through such "indirect" support that much can be done to advance a principle aim of ASSITEJ's — the professional development of young people's theatre.

Despite my reservations, the trip was most valuable for several reasons:

- the promotion of Australia, our theatre for young people and the 1987 Adelaide Congress etc. Apparently my interview on Radio Super FM was a highlight of the media coverage of the Lima Festival, soliciting widespread interest and inquiry.

- the continuation and development of contacts with companies and individuals. I have established some excellent world-wide relationships on behalf of Australia.

- I now "know" from personal experience the state of play (literally) in Peru and to some extent other Latin American countries regarding developments in young people's theatre.

I took the opportunity whilst in Lima to meet with Mario Vargas Llosa, one of Peru's most distinguished writers. Of international renown; urbane, passionate and informed, he will be a guest of the 1986 Adelaide Festival Writer's Week which will include visits to schools.

Honolulu, 8th-13th November

Returning from Peru, it was too good an opportunity not to stop-over in Honolulu to renew contacts made first in Japan.

I met with Jane Campbell, managing director of the Honolulu Theatre for Youth, artistic director John Kauffman, playwright Michael Cowell, consultant Charlotte Rath and members of the company.

I was also fortunate to meet Gayle Cornelison, general director of the Californian Theatre Centre (seen in Peru). He was in Hawaii as his script of "Cinderella" was in dress rehearsal as Honolulu Theatre for Youth's final production for 1985.

This Hawaiian group is classified as a community theatre (in American terms). They receive some \$20,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (which

makes it one of the largest U.S. grant recipients).

The company has considerable support from the State of Hawaii (over \$100,000) and also received a \$40,000 special artistic project grant from the N.E.A. in 1984 (one of the seven only awarded).

This grant is to research and develop a show dealing with the amazing ancient navigators of Micronesia — who criss-crossed the Pacific using only the stars to guide them to pinpricks in the ocean . . . and returned!

The first draft had been written (I have a copy) and the play went into rehearsal in early December for a 9th January opening.

Honolulu Theatre for Youth has a 25-member trustee board, a number of whom remain as founding trustees. It includes eminent people from business,

commercial and professional sectors.

The company has fifteen full-time staff members, including three technicians, theatre craftspersons, office staff and one artist — the artistic director. All other artists, including actors and designers, are contracted for a show at a time.

Honolulu Theatre for Youth was founded in 1955. Each year it presents approximately three hundred performances of between five to nine productions for up to 140,000 people. Virtually every public school in the State has students attending at least one H.T.Y. play each year.

The overall management of the company is undertaken by Jane Campbell. She has held this position for many years and is knowledgeable, expert and experienced, and of considerable influence in company matters.

John Kauffman is now in his

fourth year as artistic director. A graduate of the Professional Actor's Training Program at the University of Washington, he has worked nationwide as both actor and director.

John has been an associate director for the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and the Empty Space Theatre in Seattle. A veteran of film and television, he won an Emmy Award in 1972 for his one-man show, *The Indian Experience*.

Honolulu Theatre for Youth certainly reaches its community and has wide-spread community support. I was concerned at the lack of an ensemble, even a small core group, but I was told that this could change by next year.

Gayle Cornelison and I spoke of this, as well as the rich untapped source of material in Hawaii and the Pacific; the possibility of

exchange with the "mainland"; and the fantastic potential to have a well-supported, indigenous, as well as truly multi-cultural theatre company.

I saw two performances of "Cinderella", a preview opening for a selected audience and a school's performance.

Cornelison's one hour adaptation is witty, in restoration style and with relevant and contemporary themes of appeal to both young and adult audiences.

Unfortunately, the mainly inexperienced cast could find neither the style nor the wit. What should have been a sharp, well-controlled and amusing performance became broad pantomime.

The direction and production, including sets, lighting and effects, were crisp and defined — but overall we had the form without the substance.

Conclusion

This trip certainly extended my knowledge of and contact in the Pacific, an area of great importance to both ASSITEJ and Australia. It has strengthened my opinions:

- that the Pacific basin is a vital area of future development for ASSITEJ.

- that the Pacific countries should undertake more exchange with each other. Most, if not all, are avid to do so — it just needs to get the ball rolling.

- that Australia has a good reputation and international regard, particularly in our field.

- N.B. I cannot stress too heavily the importance of *Lowdown* in all my travels abroad. It is widely distributed, enthusiastically received and thoroughly read from cover to cover. I spend a deal of time discussing the various issues and their content.

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