

This year's Next Wave Festival had the usual array of events, but was heavily slanted towards the visual arts, with performing arts coming second both in number and variety of offerings. Assistant Director Linda Sproul said that she and Director Zane Trow were steering the festival in a new direction; attempting to meet the needs of emerging artists who are in the 'wasteland years' between 17 and 30. She stated that on graduating from art school, many young artists have no context to work within. Consequently, festival management sought to work against the prevailing view that the Next Wave services schools, and placed a heavy focus on creating an infrastructure for emerging artists.

The visual arts catalogue, (which covered the numerous exhibitions in far-flung venues) was notable for its sophistication, particularly the essay by Lyndal Jones which dealt concisely with interpretation and meaning. My hope is that teachers and students would

...new

wave

Getting away from theatre based arts activity; incorporating those sectors of youth arts rendered invisible by the arts and media; breaking with tradition...

JANE WOOLLARD gauges the success of this year's Next Wave Festival in Victoria.

have read this article, but I wonder how accessible this side of the festival was for secondary students.

The exhibitions I most enjoyed were Crash Course, The Transparent Gallery and Supermart. Crash Course at the National Gallery was a video installation, with thirty video monitors featuring the manifestos of artists and curators participating in the festival. Each artist was asked questions which dealt with the role of the National Gallery in the art world, the concept of 'bad' painting, and the artist's beliefs. It was exciting to hear the Gallery being challenged from within its walls, and to witness visual artists speaking about their work, especially as the visual arts are often given a low exposure in the wider arts industry.

LEFT: David Adamson in Arena Theatre's *Bring Down The House*.

The Transparent Gallery, situated in the Myer Bourke St. and Lonsdale St. windows was also notable for its high exposure and visibility. I found it both witty and sad to behold art works and mannequins vying for space and the viewer's attention. Martin Wischer's installation perhaps dealt with this dichotomy most successfully, with the inclusion in his work of a dreaming female figure encased in white fabric. At first I wasn't aware she was real, until the softness and solidity of her form proved remarkable next to the idealised boniness of the mannequin. Justine Siedle's *Symbols, Looking, Listening, Learning* was a delicate work which again contrasted nicely with the hurry and brashness of a department store lunch hour. Matthew Fawcett's work and its preoccupation with symbols - *Evading the Industrial Culture - Is there any magic left?* - also created an interesting opposition to the aggressive images and marketing ploys of the large corporation.

Supermart, in the Blaxland Gallery of Myer Melbourne, was a witty, digestible show. The artists all made pieces which played with the notion of duplicated, affordable and disposable art. Stacked on supermarket shelves complete with price tags, were jars containing

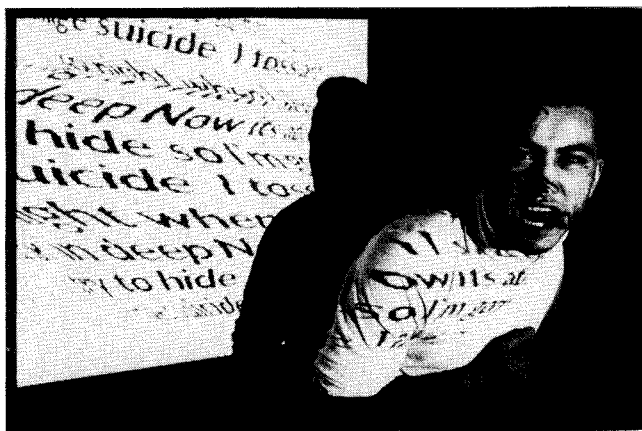
the urine of famous men ("collect the whole set - blood, faeces and semen samples also available").

There were tissue boxes labelled 'Last Painting', plaster-coated teddy bears and individually wrapped bleeding hearts. Most of the work wouldn't stand on its own, but collectively it worked as a subversion of ideas about art and consumerism.

The range and number of exhibitions was impressive and there was an air of discourse about the visual arts side of the festival. A question: Were the schools informed about these shows? It did seem that this part of the festival catered for an older audience who were already au fait with the ideas and concepts behind the work. However, for upper secondary students, exposure to this kind of art would open their eyes to the possibilities for work and discourse in the arts.

The theatre offerings were predominantly aimed at the upper secondary audiences, with varying degrees of success. Barnstorm's *Foreigners from Home* was remounted to at least one noisy and excited audience who seemed to enjoy the play. However, the occasion was more marked by the lesson in theatre etiquette dispensed by a persistent usher, seemingly determined to impress the value of silence upon the young people. The uncompromising nature of an institution such as the Arts Centre was much in evidence - no concessions were made to the spirit of a youth arts festival.

The play itself gave the audience a taste of theatre conventions and traditional practices, being a stylistically unadventurous piece. Nevertheless, it was the usual high quality and well-rounded production we have come to expect from Barnstorm.



ABOVE: Rapper MC Mike G, from *Notes and Messages*, held at The Lounge as part of the Literature Program.

The play revolves around the struggles of the Kidd family during the depression of the 1930s. The paucity of funding for Theatre in Education companies was nowhere more evident than in the spectacle of four actors attempting to play a family of eight. If there had been enough funds to employ an extra two actors, Chris Dickins could have written fuller characters. As it was, some of the characters are frustratingly thin. Nevertheless, *Foreigners* provides a traditional theatre experience for its audience. It's a pity that the Arts Centre didn't give these young people any reason to come back of their own volition.

Arena's *Bring Down the House* by John Romeril was notable for its 'hip' script and foray into the science fiction genre. The performance I saw at the Malthouse was poorly attended, with few young people in evidence. The story jumps between various eras, and relied heavily on Liz Pain's rather stylish lighting to represent time changes. I wonder how this play will succeed in schools without the lighting effects that are possible in a theatre. Indeed, I found it confusing at times, even with the benefit of the lights. Simply put, the play is set in 1997 when young people are inexplicably expendable, and are hunted down by 'sweepers' which patrol the streets exterminating the young and the homeless. Four of these homeless renegades seek refuge in an old house, where one character, Will, can hear the noise and sounds of times past.

Barbara Ciszewska's production is very noisy and frenetic, with her usual movement stamp. Irine Vela's music was particularly engaging and the vocal range and precision of the actors impressive. David Adamson's intense energy as the seer, Will, gave the piece a dangerous flavour, which is sorely lacking in theatre for schools. The script is very quirky with some lovely word play which unfortunately was lost due to the noisy effects and shouting that prevailed.

Overall, I was excited by this offering, even though it didn't work as a cohesive piece. I enjoyed its energy and modern quality, and the *Bring Down the House* dance will get them going in the schools. My argument



is that it sets out to tell too many stories in one hour, and suffers from a lack of clarity which no amount of snappy timing from the actors could rectify.

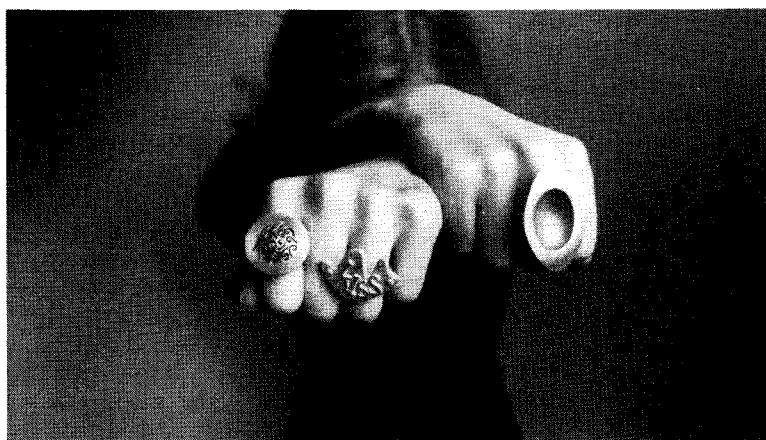
The show to catch at the Next Wave was *Idol* by Sydney's Sidetrack Theatre. This was a group devised, dangerous, exciting show made under the direction of Nigel Kellaway with dramaturge by John Baylis. In the space of an hour, the performers cajoled and titillated the audience with images and moments derived from the theme of 'stars'. With its heightened, physical, clear and sharp style, complemented by Peter Wells' layered soundtrack of operatic and electronic music, *Idol* was both an entertaining and witty piece of theatre.

The company brought avant-garde experimentation into the realm of (almost) mainstream theatre. The audience stood for the first half of the show and followed the actors around the space. The actors then began to move amongst the spectators, and it was delightful to behold the ebb and flow of the actor/spectator relationship physicalised, as we shifted and moved to make way for the performers. The play was less interesting once we were asked to sit down.

Sidetrack is a company boldly leading us away from the dreadful issue-based plays of the 70s and 80s. Their focus on theatre style and craft conveys a delight in human behaviour that is a healthy alternative to the high-minded quality of much Theatre for Schools.

Two plays in the festival which were devised by young performers under the guidance of professional directors were the similarly titled *Dancing in the Belly of the Beast* and *Of Beauties and Beasts*. *Dancing in the Belly of the Beast*, staged in the small but cavernous UniversalTwo, had good intentions. However, there was an overstating of story and intention that rendered some heartfelt material merely preachy and dull. A music/theatre piece based on themes of culture and identity, initiated by the City of

Melbourne Cultural Development Branch and the Flemington English Language Centre, *Dancing in the Belly of the Beast* was created by composer and director Dalmazio Babare and a group of English Language students from differing cultural backgrounds. Using a band made up of young musicians, actors and a rap dancer together with elegant slides projected on the floor and walls of the space, this was an example of work that was more about the director than the young performers who devised it. The most refreshing moments were when the drummer and the fiddler came forward, sat on a chair and told us their stories. It was unaffected and undirected, in contrast to the work of the two actors



**Top: Rodney Alif in *Dancing in the Belly of the Beast*
Middle: Jewellery from the *Worn to Be Wild* Exhibition.
Bottom: School students participating in musical extravaganza *The Big Drum*.**



whose stories were laboured and stressed in their delivery.

For a work about multiculturalism and diversity, the most resonant moment was when Nicola Hayes, of Greek extraction, played a very uplifting and dexterous Irish jig on her fiddle. This was a moment which had everything to do with being young and fresh and in possession of a rich heritage, that no amount of clever directorial ministrations could match.

Of Beauties and Beasts was a group devised project begun by Maude Davey and Jane Bayly last year, with a group of ten young women.

Their subject matter was fairytales, focusing particularly on the representation of females in these stories. This year, Kim Durbant took over as director and generated new material to go with the old. The lack of rehearsal time showed in the demeanour of the young performers who seemed self-conscious and pre-occupied with their costumes and hair. There was some lovely movement work which had a chorus flavour to it, but the

performers were inhibited by their long, pastel princess dresses. The subject matter and choice of clothing for the actors was bound by conventional fantasies of the feminine, and I wished it could have moved beyond this.

St. Martins hosted the Youth Theatre Minifest, which was an opportunity for youth theatre companies to get together and see each other's work. In two afternoons, more than 200 young people from youth theatre companies all over Victoria presented works in progress, short performances and glimpses of their process and philosophies.

The Big Drum, written by Natasha Moszenin and performed by 2000 school children, was the closing event of the festival. Considering this, it was a pity it was staged on the Friday before the festival officially ended. However, it was an adrenalin-filled event, as the Big Drum was wheeled up Bourke Street to the steps of Parliament House, where the kids waited in their school 'tribal' colours, with various drums and percussive instruments. I wondered why there was no banner in evidence to state what the event was for, as there were many puzzled workers and shoppers stopping to watch.

Each school had a rhythm which they had learnt beforehand. It was a logistic feat for the organisers and composer, as the entire group had never rehearsed together. Once the 'Drum' was underway, the rhythm was infectious. I wished that the few spectators had also been given a rhythm to clap out. The politicians and electronic media were in evidence, so it would have been a fantastic opening to the festival, with all the

coverage it generated.

In addition to the Visual Arts Exhibitions and Theatre events, the festival contained music and literature items. These included literature nights at The Lounge, the Young Playwrights' Readings at Anthill, the Book Gig at St. Martins and lunchtime music concerts. As director of *About Painting*, I am unable to say much about the only festival event to tour regional Victoria.

Having spent two weeks participating in and watching the Next Wave Festival, I find myself with a number of questions. The first concerns the geography of events.

If the festival celebrates work made for and by young people, surely the problem of low attendance could be addressed by situating all components in one area? Why not take over both St. Martins and the Victorian Arts Centre? Then we would have a true festival, a mini 'arts city', rather than a disparate collection of events attempting to cohere under the Next Wave banner.

I also question the situation of young theatre artists. Where were they?

Are there young people who are passionate about experimentation in theatre, as distinct from the many who regard it as a stepping stone to TV? The visual arts side of the festival showed a liveliness amongst emerging painters, but where were the avant-garde of the theatre craft? I realise that there is a burgeoning of this sort of work during the Fringe Festival of the Melbourne International Festival, but why isn't it happening in the Next Wave? Can theatre, like painting, pick up its heritage and move towards and beyond the end of the millennium?

On the whole, I found the festival successfully catered for differing tastes and needs, but I longed for it to have a kind of centre or cohesion. It would be wonderful to see young artists gathering to discuss and present their work; like the Mini-Fest, but on a larger scale. Why not a theatre and performance publication similar to this year's visual arts catalogue? Like the *Straight Outta High School* rock band concert at the Wall Street Bistro, in which parents and peers took over for a relaxed, alcohol-free afternoon of music, the Next Wave festival has the potential to create for young people a sense of taking-over the arts world, both as artists and audience.

At the next Next Wave I would like to see the festival live up to its name and present its audience with new performers in theatre, dance and music, who have new questions and thoughts about the performing arts. Let's have more theatre and performance by young people rather than for young people - let's dare them to defy TV culture and be truly, madly radical. ●

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An artist in the machine

As the youth arts industry seeks to re-define its parameters in the face of changing attitudes, the powerful presence of our high-tech and complex 'pop culture' cannot be ignored. This is the world our young people seek to inhabit. So where does the current youth arts agenda fit in to all this?

Zane Trow, Artistic Director of Melbourne's Next Wave Festival examines this potentially divisive issue and finds there is, increasingly, an artist in the machine.

The contemporary art practice of the late 20th century has been continually 'pirated' by commercial culture. The technological developments in performance art,

multi-media work, video and film, music and the visual arts have come about through the dedicated experiments of artists who seek to push forward and use new tools.

From the paint brush to the light pencil, commercial culture, advertising, TV and most recently the explosion of the music video culture have taken all of these developments

An image from the *FEM Series* by Andrew Nelson, one of the artists involved in the *Artech* project.



"In June *Lowdown* Jane Woollard asks of the Next Wave Festival, 'Where were the young theatre avant-garde?' A dead question using dead terminology. I think that very few of the 'young avant-garde' have any interest in theatre at all. Why should they? The majority of theatre for young people still has adults playing teenagers, singing bad rap songs, desperately trying to compete with the video camera by claiming some kind of 'pure experience'. Prince is better at it."

a n d incorporated them into the mainstream. This is nothing new; perhaps t h e mainstream only ever develops through appropriation of work at what is commonly referred to as

the cutting edge. The most avid audience for this work in popular technology is young people. How can youth arts (whatever that is) start to deal with these developments in a meaningful way? Is it not essential that all arts workers constantly examine the cultural context in which they work?

At the Next Wave Festival we do this by returning to the sources, the artists that are out on the edge of technology. As it happens, most of them are young, quite a few of them are young women, and all of them are diving headlong into a developing artform.

For the 1992 Next Wave Festival I introduced a new program area entitled *Art & Technology*. This title was eventually shortened to *Artech*, as in DIR:E\ ARTECH in the Next Wave computer network. The *Artech* program has now become as solid a part of the Festival as a theatre, literature, or visual art program.

The events that made up the first *Artech* program attracted the largest audiences of young people during the Festival's two week duration. The success of the program was reported in everything from the ABC TV's *Review* program, to The Australian newspaper's computer pages and Melbourne street magazines. No one from *Lowdown* (as far as I'm aware) went to any of it, nor did any of the

more established youth arts workers. This seems to me to be one indication of a lack of flow between youth culture and youth art.

Artech was by no means simply a display of commercial technologies. There were no video games or space invaders. The idea of *Artech* was to challenge and stimulate, ask questions about where these games came from (defence industry mostly); to tap into the clear overlap between youth culture and 'serious' contemporary art.

The combination of art and technology facilitates work that has intellectual depth and is also accessible and popular. The events also clearly place the artist in control, de-bunking the myth of the all-powerful machine, this myth being most prevalent amongst adults.

By citing commercial youth culture as one of the sources for art we begin to claim back and de-mystify the pirated ideas from the commercial sector.

A youth audience might be enlivened and challenged to discover the sources that U2's producer, Brian Eno, uses in the studio. His 'oblique strategies' - random choices of sound and mixing parameters - are a direct line to the recently deceased experimental composer John Cage. Even the sequenced notes in the dance beats of the Kylies and Jasons

are indirect references to composers such as Glass and Reich. A recent British award winning rock video completely pirated the work of German performance artist Joseph Beuys.

Heavy metal

videos are full of images from early 20th Century film. Madonna did a good hatchet job on *Metropolis*, and Dada and Surrealism can be found popping up all over the place. If Brecht and Artaud are useful tools, then so are Cage and Beuys.

Next Wave brought nine of Melbourne's emerging techno bands together for a performance in the National Gallery. The *Bytebeat* project allowed these musicians an artistic credibility, took their work out of the dance party world and brought a huge youth audience into the gallery. All of the bands use video projection, sampling and DAT (digital audiotape). They do this remarkably cheaply, and none of them have the backing of record labels or grants.

In the research and meetings leading up to the *Artech* events, a number of key issues relating to art and youth culture came up. I think, and Rachel Healy must think so too since she commissioned me to write this, that these issues could be of interest to the youth arts industry as a whole.

One issue is that of access. Most of the artists and organisations we spoke to jumped at the chance of devising installations, workshops and performances. No-one from within the youth arts or festivals field had asked them before. Information technology is completely changing the education

system. Access to a greater understanding of the capabilities of the school computer room are very important. How often does the art teacher or the drama teacher use this room? The music teacher probably does, but only if the school has a midi system.

All secondary schools and libraries in Victoria are modem linked and these modems are very often under the control of administration. Modems offer the very real possibility of mass creative communication across vast distances. It is as simple to download poetry as it is exam results.

More teachers and artists need to begin to grasp these possibilities, information technology courses need not only be about spreadsheets and word processing. Animation, graphics, music and text can all be utilised as part of an art/information/communication course that looks to the future.

Access is also an issue in relation to software design. Some of the most exciting work in terms of computer graphics and art has come about through artists learning to program, not simply working with off the shelf software. One artist talked at length about "the poetry of programming" - the more beautiful the programming, the more beautiful the image.

Programming is often seen as existing only in the domain of the computer wiz. A process of de-mystification needs to take place, otherwise we are simply painting by numbers, and not really engaging with an artform in any meaningful way.

That is not to say that it is impossible to be creative with basic off the shelf software. Next Wave and the National Gallery Education Department undertook to run teachers in-services with both Apple and Commodore hard and software and school group workshops in photocopier art. The results can be stunning.

In terms of a community arts and youth theatre practice, issues such as empowerment and access, disadvantage and participation need not be lost in this maze of circuitry. Social conditioning excludes many sections of the population from interaction with technology. As we

are pro-active arts workers, so should this exclusion be addressed.

Multi-national corporations continue to be the main controllers of our access to digital worlds. However, photography and video technologies have always been useful tools in community arts and art in working life projects. The new Director of the CCDU of the Australia Council has a film and media background. This seems to me to offer a promising future for the development of media technology based tools at a community level.

Another issue, perhaps the most interesting in relation to *Lowdown's* constituency, is crossover. By that I mean the links between art and youth culture. If we are to be at all relevant to young people, as participants, audience or young artists, then surely we have to address changes in youth interest and their ways of dealing with the world.

In June *Lowdown* Jane Woollard asks in her article on Next Wave: "Where were the young theatre avant-garde?" A dead question using dead terminology. I think that very few of the "young avant-garde" have any interest in theatre at all. Why should they? The majority of theatre for young people still has adults playing teenagers,



singing bad rap songs, desperately trying to compete with the video camera by claiming some kind of "pure experience". Prince is better at it.

Young people now have very high standards when it comes to production values, so how could they be impressed by the '70s theatre culture that is paraded in front of them at school? Sidetrack's *Idol* seems to me to be the only TYP theatre work I have seen recently that comes anywhere near what I mean.

Idol overlapped with genuine late 20th century theatre practice and youth culture; it did this unselfconsciously, and challenged young assumptions about commercial fame at the same time.

At the 1992 YAPA Conference in Sydney I was surprised to see how closed the TYP groups were to these cross artform influences. Multi-media work involves decent interaction between artists using a variety of disciplines.

Surely a theatre that is challenging and demanding has always done this. It would seem to me that changing the



conference name has isolated TYP even more, but I may be wrong.

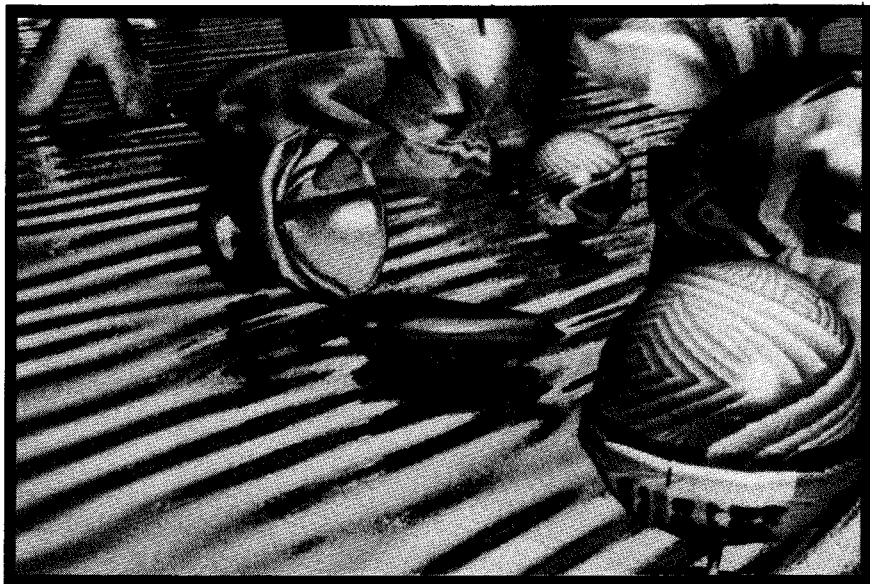
The fusion of multicultural ideas and information technology based tools offer a genuine creative leap forward for youth and young peoples theatre. If Not Drowning, Waving can do it then why not us? We must do this, because we say that we are informed by the need for socio-political change. We say that we educate and challenge young audiences, that we are relevant and vital to the growth of Australian culture.

Above and previous page: Stills from Lisa Robert's experimental film, *Sophie*. **Below left:** A second image from Andrew Nelson's *The FEM Series*. Both artists co-ordinate Melbourne's Animation Network.

Youth based computer art projects are happening all over Australia. The Melbourne based Animation Network co-ordinated by Lisa Roberts and Andrew Nelson (the artists whose work appears on these pages and on the cover) represents electronic artists and their work for exhibition. The Animation Year Book (on video) fosters networking between education, industry and the arts. This video magazine showcases work by these groups and is screened at conferences and festivals nationally. Resources for schools in computer animation are also produced and distributed by the Animation Network.

Other recent projects include:

Brisbane City Council Community Arts Units' *ANT 92*; artists and young people using Amiga computers in the school holidays at the



Electronic Learning Centre at Corinda High School.

The *Fabric of the Mind*, a project undertaken through the Victorian Computer Education Unit, using computers as design tools for quilt-making.

Melbourne City Council Cultural Development Units' *Belly of the Beast*, a multicultural, multi-media youth performance using slide projection and music.

This is not in any sense meant to be a definitive list. There have also been computer based artist-in-schools projects in South Australia and Western Australia, numerous youth and community video projects, and plenty of community music projects using midi and other computer music systems.

But a lot of projects go unseen except by their direct participants and community, and *Lowdown* contributing editors really need to start dealing with and reporting on these projects and the issues they reveal.

A consistent national overview would help in determining artistic directions and networking. The Modern Image Makers Experimental Festival in Melbourne and the Third International Symposium on Electronic Art in Sydney in November could be crawling with young people and youth arts workers.

I do not mean to say that theatre is dead. I do not claim a monopoly of knowledge about these issues. I know that a lot of youth arts, theatre and music workers are engaging with technology and multi-media work, but let's debate it and criticise it. *Lowdown* is still the only national forum for the youth arts industry - please, let's drag youth arts into the nineties.

The Next Wave Festival would be interested in hearing about any art and technology based youth projects. They can be contacted at 31 Victoria Street, Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065 ph: (03) 417 7544.

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