

LOWDOWN

YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

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THIS ISSUE:

- YOUTH ARTS IN S.A.
- U.K. PLAYWRIGHT, DAVID HOLMAN
- 83-84 THEATRE BOARD GRANTS
- CENSORSHIP IN N.S.W.?



ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The series of articles in the following pages looks at the development of South Australian theatre for young people. A glaring omission is that of the Youth Opera program of the State Opera which has provided an important introduction to the form for thousands of young people, both participants and audience.

Outside the field of this coverage are also the developing artists in schools programs, music programs and dance for young people.

I hope that we'll be able to cover these topics in later issues when we look at the national development of such programs.

Ian Chance

ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A southerly direction

Real support for young people's theatre development began in South Australia some ten years ago. At this time, shortly after the opening of the Adelaide Festival Centre, the state's Education Department created the position of **Education Officer** within the Festival Centre's activities. This position (currently occupied by Cate Fowler) then quickly provided the impetus for several youth arts programs that continue today — including the **Come Out Festival** — but, more importantly, it has proved typical of the active role that the Education Department has played in assisting the development of the field in S.A.

In 1974, the first Education Officer of the Festival Centre, Christine Westwood, successfully proposed the formation of a secondary schools T.I.E. Team. This team was supported by the Schools Commission and the Education Department and was based at the Department's **Theatre 62** in inner-suburban Hilton. At the same time that the **Theatre 62 T.I.E. Team** was being developed, drama educationalist Mary Fairbrother established an in-schools Education Department T.I.E./D.I.E. Project, called **Troika**.

These companies in some ways represented the dichotomies of early T.I.E. models. While **Troika** leaned heavily towards the drama participation aspects of youth theatre development, the **Theatre 62 T.I.E. Team** was more inclined toward a defined performance mode. The two companies were amalgamated in 1979 as **Troika T.I.E.** which, like its earlier namesake, is a teacher-based company, now working from the Wattle Park Teachers' Centre.

In view of the differences between the earlier companies' working models, it is ironic that a recent report on **Troika T.I.E.'s** activities remarks that the company seems to have reached an impasse in its attempts to bring together the educational and theatrical components of its program. This problem nexus — often an economic problem as much as an artistic dilemma — is one shared by many T.I.E./D.I.E. companies, while professional-theatre T.I.E. companies have generally opted for a solution in de-emphasising the drama curriculum and heavy participation elements of their work.

In South Australia this tendency has led to a streaming of youth arts programs into separate channels of Theatre for Young People (performance oriented), Youth Theatre (participation) and in-schools curriculum developments in drama, dance and music. The notable exceptions to this are the **Parks Drama Centre** with its combination of youth theatre and D.I.E., and **Troika T.I.E.** — which now seems stranded between two diverging streams.

Youth theatre participation programs first appeared in S.A. with the formation of the **State Theatre Company's Youth Team**, also known as the **Saturday Company**, which was based at the newly-constituted Carclew Arts Centre. Under the direction of Helmut Bakaitis (now of St Martins) and Peter Charlton (Arena Theatre) these exciting early days have left a considerable mark — in the form of a fresh crop of young arts participants — and represented the first real commitment to youth theatre by a large professional company. This early commit-

ment by the State Theatre Company has continued, though changed in form, through the creation in 1976 of **Maggie T.I.E.** — a professional theatre for young people.

South Australian youth theatre is today represented by the **Essai Youth Theatre** of Carclew, under the direction of Drummond Jewitt, and the **Unley Youth Theatre** directed by Brigid Kitchin. **Essai** is a one-year participation program which results in at least two public seasons, the most recent being a well-received production of **The Legend of King O'Malley**. **Essai** is seen by Drummond as an opportunity for young people to test themselves in conjunction with other people — a chance to set realistic goals for themselves, to explore options and to learn good theatre habits.

"I think there has to be some pressure for excellence, otherwise we're selling kids short. Without that demand there can be no real fathoming of the individual or group potential," he says. "However, we are ultimately feeding into the wider area of theatre and society — while the product should be good, the performance isn't the be all and end all of the project."

Brigid Kitchin agrees with Drummond's last point, and emphasises that the **Unley Youth Theatre** wants to work from the basis of the kids' own ideas and commitment. The Unley program allows for the on-going involvement of participants, with an emphasis on group development.

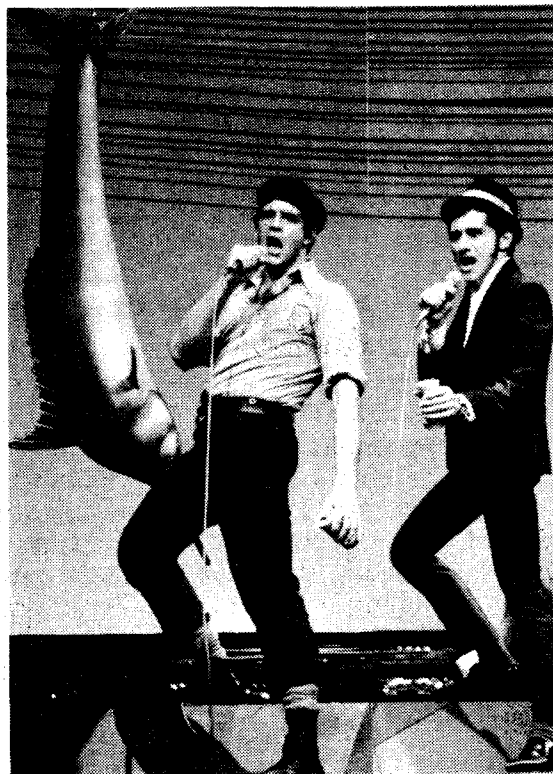


Photo David Wilson

Maggie T.I.E.'s 'Song of the Seals'
Phillip Quast and Igor Sas

ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Unley Youth Theatre is sponsored by its local council and grew out of the council's community development program. It is run by **S.A. Creative Workshops**, an Unley-based community arts and community theatre team who also ran a youth theatre offshoot, **Phoenix** — which is now a production-oriented aspect of the total program.

Both **Essai** and **Unley Youth Theatres** cater for people up to age 20, although **Phoenix** is an auditioned company and often has older actors in it. The largest proportion of the 160 odd participants in the two programs is in the 15-20 age group, proving the need and the service that youth theatre can provide as a transitional program.

It is early to judge the long term successes of these youth theatres, but one of their most important functions may turn out to be as models and established resource bases for the development of a statewide network of youth theatres, sharing people and resources. One of the future plans of the Carclew-based project is to investigate this potential and to provoke further youth theatre development in suburban and regional areas.

Of the professional young people's theatre companies in South Australia, the **New Patch Theatre** is both one of the oldest — and the newest. Founded in 1972 by Morna Jones as **Little Patch Theatre**, the company was assisted from 1977 by the Australia Council and, through a seconded teacher position, by the state Education Department. Patch Theatre has always enjoyed good support from its community in the western (beach) suburbs of Adelaide. This support has, to a large part, been due to the fact that the company has always had a small theatre venue and, as well as limited school-tours, has run regular weekday and school-holiday seasons of children's theatre.

Little Patch suffered a severe set-back in 1980-81 when, in rapid succession, it lost its founder, its artistic direction and, ultimately, its funding and Education Department support. After struggling for two years, the company again found its feet under the artistic guidance of director Des James — who was a founding member of **Troupe** and for four years an actor with **Magpie T.I.E.**, before doing a directors' course with NIDA. This new-found success is, in no small part, also due to the continued persistence of administrator Margaret Bennett.

In the last twelve months **New Patch** has produced a series of successively more interesting plays that have won back its credibility — and funding. The Theatre Board is said to regard the emergence of **New Patch** as one of the most exciting recent developments in theatre for young people and the company has been very well supported in the Board's '83-'84 grant allocations. The latest production from **New Patch**, **"Dizzy, Bizzy, Daffy and Arthur,"** is reviewed by Drummond Jewitt in this issue of **LOWDOWN**.

One South Australian company that has not had such success on the Australia Council funding front — despite perseverance and continued state support — is the **Acting Company**. Refused a Theatre Board grant for the third time since 1981, the company seems to have been involved in an on-going dispute with the Board about the validity of its approach to theatre-in-education.

In a recent newspaper article entitled *'Curtain may fall on company'*, director Sue Rider says: "The **Acting Company** concentrates on bringing literature alive for students, providing the literary balance to companies such as **Magpie T.I.E.** and **New Patch**,

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GRANTS TO YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS

South Australia's Premier and Minister for the Arts, John Bannon, has announced a substantial boost in Government funding to Youth Arts. Mr Bannon said that grants totalling \$234,000 would be made to numerous Arts organisations working in important fields of Youth Performing Arts and Arts-in-Education.

Mr Bannon said South Australia was leading the rest of the country in Arts-in-Education. He said the importance of access to the Arts for children and young people, both in and outside of the school context, should not be under-estimated. The Arts, skilfully introduced at an early age, would set a path for an extensive enrichment of a person's lifestyle, that would be carried into and throughout adult life.

The Premier said that 1985 was the **International Year of Youth** and it was his Government's wish that COME OUT '85 should be one of Australia's major contributions to the Year.

The increased funding announced by the Premier included grants of \$50,000 each to **THE ACTING COMPANY** and to the **NEW PATCH THEATRE** (formerly **Little Patch Theatre**). \$32,050 has been provided towards the **PAPER BAG THEATRE COMPANY**, \$7,000 to the **DANCE THEATRE COMPANY**, \$5,000 to **LA MAMA**, \$5,000 to the **NEWMET DANCE THEATRE**, \$5,000 for the **UNLEY YOUTH THEATRE** and \$5,000 to **CARCLEW** for a Youth Radio Project.

S.A. Government funding for youth arts is recommended by the Youth Performing Arts Council based at Carclew, which has been rationalising funding procedures by channelling funds to the field from both the Education Department and the Department for the Arts.

which focus on social issues". A statement of policy from the company says that in choosing to work this way the company is expressing its belief that the best of a society's philosophy and culture is preserved and handed down in the best of that society's literature.

In response to this thesis, the Theatre Board has agreed that; *"The Board does not support in principle the performance in schools of theatre which is based on literary texts"*. The Board's letter added that in consideration of funding for T.I.E., the parameters would include: *quality, preference for original Australian works, and a low priority for companies which restrict their activities to literal translations of school texts.* cont. . .

ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The **Acting Company** has been fairly single-minded in continuing the argument for the validity of presenting important works of literature as theatre-in-education, and that it should be supported in doing this. It is believed, however, that the Theatre Board may have scored the final point by lately stressing that ALL the above parameters have been applied in refusing funding to the company. Despite good response to the **Acting Company's** work from teachers and students, few people working in the field will commit themselves on the general quality of the company's work.

As South Australia's major T.I.E. company — tightly nestled in the commitment of the **State Theatre Company's** bosom — **Magpie T.I.E. Team** shares no such concerns about funding, nor having to justify its existence.

According to some, there have been times when such questions could have been raised; a company operating on the scale of **Magpie** is a very expensive exercise. The **Magpie T.I.E. Team** consists of an artistic director, a writer/researcher, stage-manager, secretary, six actors, guest directors, access to the state company's administration and publicity resources plus the best stage construction shop in the state — and two large trucks to carry it all away. It doesn't add up to peanuts!

Fortunately **Magpie's** high profile, the sheer volume of work that it generates (36 new shows in the last five years), its ability to attract the best writers to work for young people, and its capacity to present work of a standard that can really get kids excited about the medium — are generally considered to make it all worthwhile.

"Terrific! That's the standard we've got to work to. That's what T.I.E. is all about", says Keith Gallasch, S.T.C.'s new artistic director and acting director of **Magpie T.I.E.** Keith has just returned from a schools performance of the company's latest show, the David Holman play **'Drink the Mercury'**. This production has been directed by Barbara Peirson, an actor on exchange from **Theatre Foundry** in the U.K. and Keith is very happy both with the direction and with the level the company is working at, having had a total turnover of personnel this year.



Photo David Wilson

*New Patch Theatre, 'The Billabong Circus'.
Kathy Niesche, Janeen Brian, Jon Mill and Stephen Daughtry.*

Similar enthusiasms were raised by **Magpie** earlier this year with their production of another Holman play, **'The Disappeared'**, also directed by a U.K. exchange person, Roger Watkins. The vigor and intensity with which the company presented this production of stark political realities, belied a growing feeling among adult critics that **Magpie** had 'gone soft'.

It is more probable, however, that **Magpie** had itself simply disappeared below the horizons of adult perception. Certainly, deserved reservation and disappointment was expressed about the company's last public season, the clammy **'Song of the Seals'**, and people remembered earlier glorious moments such as **Magpie's** superb **'Come Out '81'** production of Dorothy Hewett's beautiful piece of Australian children's writing, **'Golden Valley'**, and the provocative and newsworthy **'Until ya say ya love me'**. Unseen and unknown were the continuous and booked-out schools programs and pioneering country tours.

What is significant here, however, is that a wider theatre audience should be looking at and judging a T.I.E. company.

Theatre-in-education is going through many changes in the context of developing new theatre and community theatre", says Keith Gallasch. "I think that the T.I.E. Team should be the guerilla arm of the main stage company, that it will meet this demand to be able to excite adult audiences as well as do the best possible thing by children.

"T.I.E. is a dialectic relationship of pedagogical interests and instilling a love of theatre. It has to be both. I think that there have been times when people have thought that it was one or the other, but it has to exist in some harmony of those considerations — that's why the David Holman play is a great model for Australian writers to look at, and why Tulloch's work is so good too".

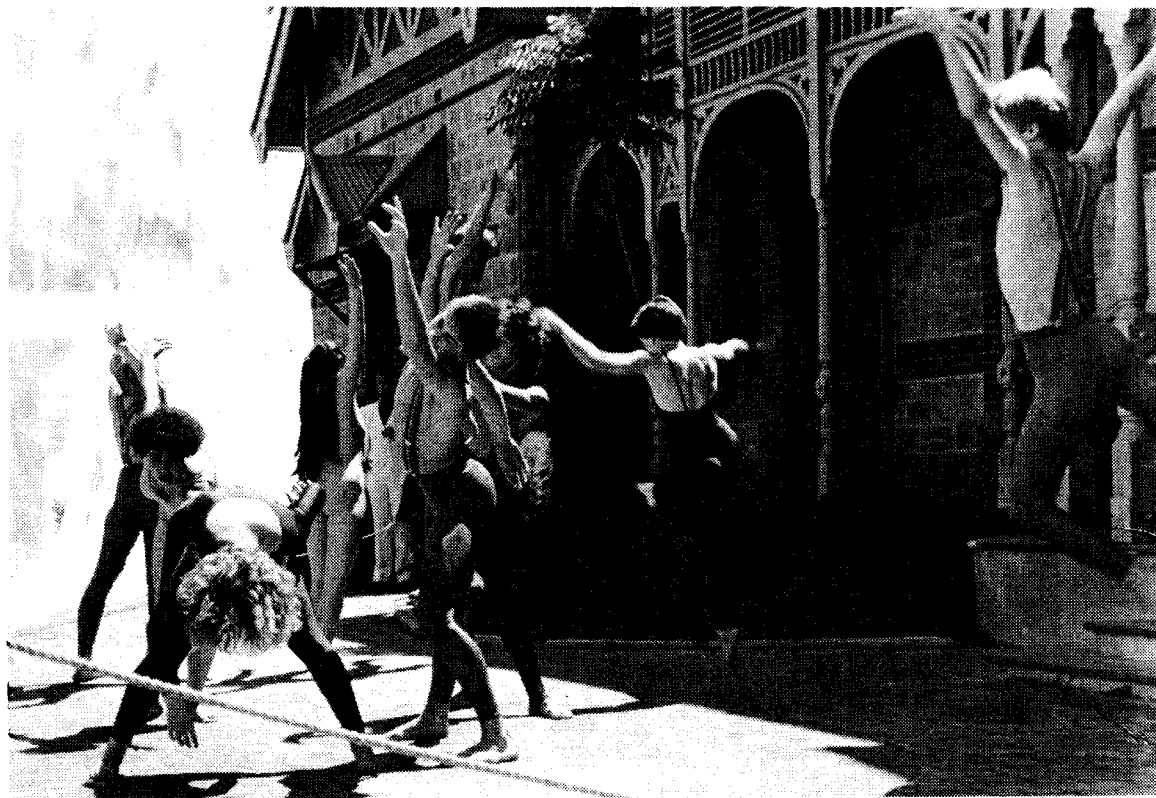
Much of **Magpie's** work in the past has been group devised, although in recent times there has been more use of scripted works. "My personal feeling", says Keith Gallasch, "is that while T.I.E. scripts may be quite excellent theatrically, they could well use a writer's hand in the process and final working — intensifying the role of language, clarifying and making it much more alive and engaging.

"It's not a nasty criticism, it's just that in the end the quality of work has to be that good. It's one of the directions to go and I think, increasingly, writers are going to be working for youth teams, youth theatres and community theatres.

"It is a matter of attracting writers from the main stage — which is incredibly competitive, but where they hope to break through, sooner or later. I think that one of the great training grounds, or indeed re-energising areas for any writer is to work for youth or T.I.E. or community. If you are involved in a group devising process you share ideas, you see your ideas workshopped — which only happens occasionally for most writers. It is very direct work, involving research, that has to fulfil a need — satisfying obligations rather than just having your fantasy roam — so it is terrific discipline.

"But my basic point is simply this ... if you are going for the very best then writers should be more seriously involved."

... says the artistic director of a State Theatre Company which is currently looking for a new director to head an autonomous but overlapping T.I.E. Team — perhaps looking at some new directions for young people's theatre in South Australia ●



The original Energy Connection directed by Gail Edwards at the opening of Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre

CARCLEW STRUCTURE

Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre in North Adelaide represents a model for the development of youth arts structures and support which is drawing interested glances from around the world.

The Centre was established in its present form (under the direction of Roger Chapman) following a high-level enquiry into youth performing arts in South Australia in 1979.

The report concluded that not only did there need to be a rationalisation of all the growing services and activities in this field, but that there was a need for a structure that linked the two departments of Arts and Education. Buck-passing and confrontation between these two areas has been a constant thorn in the side of youth arts around the world, retarding progress and clouding visions.

The Youth Performing Arts Council, which is Carclew's Board of Management, includes senior representatives of both Departments, and is responsible to

the Minister for the Arts for recommending all policy and funding in this area. The Centre therefore keeps a watching and developmental brief on all youth arts activity, recommends funding, and carries out its own projects (such as the Australian International Puppet Festival, T.I.E. Directors' Conferences, a Youth Theatre Project, a Youth Radio Project, and the publication of *Lowdown*) aimed at developing the field.

In the two years of its history, Carclew has also attempted a rationalisation of the funding for youth arts, organising cash transfers from the Education Department as well as the Department for the Arts in order to channel all the funds through one responsible body rather than have seconded teachers and arts bodies struggling through random development. The system seems to be working, while simultaneously raising the profile of the field to the extent that youth arts funding in South Australia has substantially increased while some other areas have suffered ●

ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Photo David Wilson

Roger Chapman, director of Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre.

On a clear day . . .

With almost twenty years experience of youth performing arts behind him, Roger Chapman now surveys the development of youth arts in South Australia from the patrician environment of the drawing room of Carclew House — sharing Colonel Light's vision over Adelaide from that impressive old-money mansion.

As Director of the Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre, Roger Chapman holds the State government's brief to ensure the support and development of youth arts in South Australia, and believes that social and political conditions in that state lend optimism to his task.

Roger feels that the strength of organisations such as the S.A. Department for the Arts, Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre and the Association of Community Theatres, along with the political credibility they have gained through experience and success, will ensure that the arts community of South Australia is quick to capitalise upon changes in direction and emphasis of policy that are the result of new State and Federal Governments.

"There has been talk in South Australia of another cultural renaissance", Roger says. "If that should come about within the next two years I would expect community arts and arts for young people to be the first to benefit from that renewal of effort."

"There was a heady period during the time of Dunstan when the Department for the Arts was developing very quickly. It was only a division of the Premier's Department then, now it is a full-blown department in its own right. All the structures are there and ready — and the will, particularly of key officers, is there and ready to take up the new challenge.

"Those structures were formed by the political will of one or two politicians, who said that 'the quality of life in South Australia is our first and foremost goal'

The cornerstone of that philosophy was that we should be looking at the *kind* of life that we lead, push away from the grasping world of material consumption as a criterion of life, and toward the expression and development of the potential of the individual. I think that the new regime is again interested in that philosophy."

Given that South Australia has experienced, a little in advance of the rest of Australia, a decline in the 'standard of living' (i.e. the ability to purchase), a return to an emphasis on quality of life starts to make sound political sense.

In a recent interview on A.B.C. Radio, Premier John Bannon was confronted by the proposition that South Australia had lost its role as the country's leading light in cultural affairs, that its cultural self-esteem and national high-profile had been overtaken by the rapid development of the arts in other states. The Premier's reply was interesting in that, as a defence, it was an implicit admission that a healthy cultural scene is indeed considered important to the social and political well-being of this state.

While the Premier admitted it was true there were some problems in the functioning of the Festival Centre and the Art Gallery, and that the Adelaide Festival had lost its unique position as *the* major event on the Australian cultural calendar, he pointed with particular pride to the development of youth arts in the state. Premier Bannon claimed that South Australia led the country in this field, nominating Carclew, the Come Out Festival and Theatre-in-Education programs as setting examples of excellence to be followed.

While this statement may be left to stand in regard of program infrastructure and administration, the current status of the end-product of these youth arts programs deserves closer scrutiny.

On a clear day . . . cont.

Like all wise Ministers for the Arts, Premier Bannon has a policy of State patronage 'at arms length'; that is, he doesn't get involved in discussing criteria of excellence with regard to funded groups. However, the length of the state's arm in these matters is usually about equal to the breadth of interests and opinions held by members of a government-appointed funding body.

As the director of such a body, responsible for the recommendations for all State youth arts funding, Roger Chapman's background and opinions on youth performance are of more than passing interest.

"I would certainly encourage much sterner stuff to go into schools than what we are getting," Roger Chapman says. "I'm concerned to facilitate good work, so I would encourage companies to take risks, to be bold — with the very strong proviso that they have done the research and know that their facts are correct and adequate. You're walking a tightrope all the time, that's one of the excitements. You're offering something that you have to balance very finely — and you can fall off if you don't get it right; it can blow up".

Here the lapse into descriptive analogy reveals something of Roger Chapman's personal experience. In 1965 he became an original member of the **Belgrade Theatre Company of Coventry** and it was here that social and artistic commitment were combined with what were considered to be the very best techniques of avant garde theatre, teaching, play and the major element of participation; and presented for the first time as theatre-in-education.

"We wanted to present kids in the classroom with shows that had content, something real to say, and shows that had commitment from the performers — so we thought we were breaking new ground after coming from the theatre where we felt we had been theatre fodder, just saying other people's words and being told by the management what we were going to do next week and the week after.

that we've gone through a very limp period; maybe society in the eighties has lost its angry people. It's a world-wide problem in theatre, there has been a shift in public consciousness and the plays are once again comedies of manners — rather than the work of the period of the Arthur Millers. Maybe things are so dark that people really don't want to look any more.

"When '**Drink the Mercury**' first came out (a play by David Holman currently being revived in S.A. by **Magpie T.I.E.**) it had tremendous shock value because nobody really knew about environmental poisoning. A few years later another company in the U.K. did a play along similar lines, about an asbestos factory, and their grant was withdrawn and the company disbanded. These days people would simply agree because the dangers of asbestos are well known — but T.I.E. does have that capacity to shock and it can be dangerous".

Today it seems we have been so inundated with stories of the dangers of our society and lifestyle that we are inured to shock or provocation, a jaded reaction of "oh no, not more". This sort of reaction has led many T.I.E. Teams to move into the area of 'soft-core morality plays'. Roger Chapman, however, sees this problem as a challenge to the commitment and skills of writers and companies.

"If you're looking at what companies will make it, and whether you should support them — and of course that is one of our roles here at Carclew — I think it is those people who care about the product, passionately care about it, who want to say something, want to communicate and there is no way that you are going to stop them; you can give them nothing and they're going to do it — they're going to win. **Sidetrack Theatre** is the burning example. They actually had a philosophy that mattered. It mattered that they said what they *had* to say through theatre. For me that is the essence. The other example is the much quieter work of Peter Charlton — who originally was here with the old youth team of the S.A.T.C. — he's developed an interesting philosophical style which is gentle but equally thought-provoking and

"I would certainly encourage much sterner stuff to go into schools than what we are getting."

"I'm concerned to facilitate good work, so I would encourage companies to take risks, to be bold."

"It was an opportunity for actors who really wanted to have a say in the direction of the companies. Out of those kind of companies, in the U.K. and Australia, have come actors who have really taken charge of their careers and their own lives, and they have made a very big contribution to the profession as a whole.

"However, one of the resultant weaknesses of that T.I.E. model was the literary standard. Group devised work started to show literary holes, and it has been companies who employed writers in residence or writer/researchers that suddenly lifted their game".

Roger Chapman is also concerned that some of the impetus of earlier youth performance work has been lost in the onset of the 'new depression'. "The work at its best is dangerous," he says. "I do think

challenging. Coupled with those two is the ongoing work of Richard Tulloch — and these have really been our flagships.

"Real issues make waves, and here the great models are Ibsen, Shakespeare and Brecht. But I think that society is often overprotective when you're working with young people. You usually find that the wowsers are up in arms, even before the nature of the work and content is fully known.

"Now I'm for everyone knowing what they're getting — and that's another thing we do here at Carclew, through the **Schools Arts Information Service** — but we're certainly not into censorship. Schools should be clearly told what work is all about, but if it is good work it more than likely will challenge the status quo. And, for myself, the best T.I.E. does just that.●

ACTING TOGETHER



The teachers.

Acting Together by Clare McCarty and Jac Rattley is the documentary and analysis of the classroom application of an experimental dramatic theory. It is a unique work in that it is written by classroom teachers, those working "at the coalface" of education, not by academic theorists.

The work done by Clare McCarty and Jac Rattley with drama students at the Parks Community Education Centre (Adelaide) represents a bold approach to education, as does their book.

In the Preface, Dr Jim Walker, himself a lecturer in Education at the University of Sydney, says that while most books on education are written by tertiary academics, there is great need for

"... a critical record of the experience of the classroom teacher." Clare McCarty and Jac Rattley have written such a book.

In it, they document the theories and experiences of **"one of the most exciting and productive experimental educational programmes in Australia today."** While working within the subject area of drama, they state that their ideas can be applied to any faculty, for they are concerned with the theory and practice of education itself.

Working in a disadvantaged area in Adelaide's western suburbs, where youth unemployment is close to 50% and approximately 75% of families rely on social security payments, Clare McCarty and Jac Rattley sought, through drama, to build a relevant curriculum which would help their students to be aware of their problems and their causes — to eventually become agents of social change. Traditional theories and practice of education had not worked at the Parks because they had no relevance in students' lives. Pre-determined content reinforced the basic problem — powerlessness over conditions affecting their own lives. Consequently these teachers, through drama, set about giving their students back some power.

Their drama curriculum is based on the principles of student participation in curriculum formation and control over the learning process, the content of which is geared to the practical problems of students' daily lives and the great social/political issues of today. It aims to develop, through examination of relevant content/issues and expression of opinions and reaction — confidence, control, and the ability to articulate and criticise, as well as creativity and the major breakthrough factor of group co-operation. These skills are all necessary to the students if they are to not only survive in their world, but to question it.

This strategy involved a particular step-by-step learning process, which is carefully outlined in the book and backed up by practical examples of successful application. The bulk of the book is written in descriptive anecdotal form. Basically it involved dealing with important social issues (such as: sexism and women, unemployment, migration and racism), beginning from the standpoint of the students themselves, and then gradually expanding the issue at the students' pace of understanding and interest until it reaches universal significance.

The drama course also aimed to develop co-operation between the students, which was completely lacking. This was not only the cornerstone of the curriculum development ideas but important if this underprivileged group were to achieve anything in society. Hence, before anything else, McCarty and Rattley set about creating group solidarity and trust within their classes. The ultimate fulfilment of this co-operative action is the public performances — but it also had expression in the fact that drama students were in the vanguard of protesters calling for the funding and completion of the area's Community Centre — a strength unheard of before.

Clare McCarty and Jac Rattley refer throughout the book to their personal experiences at the Parks, giving examples of class discussions and lesson plans, ideas they found successful when producing performances, and student reactions to the course. It is to be hoped that such a successful programme, through this book, can be extended — not copied but used as a basic idea, **"an argument for boldness, experimentalism, practical problem-solving and democratic student/teacher relationships"** — for they are not merely ideals, they work in the very real world of the Parks, and work better than traditional alternatives.

Alexandra Hurford

ASPECTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

AN AFTERNOON IN THE PARKS

Tania Lienert is a matriculation drama student at Unley High School, S.A. Asked by LOWDOWN to have a look at the students' view of drama courses at the innovative Parks Community Centre School, she returned bubbling with enthusiasm and filed this report.

A sunny afternoon off from school, on the day that we had won the America's Cup, had me in just the right frame of mind to take a bus ride out to the **Parks Community Education Centre**. I was to spend that afternoon taking part in Jac Rattley's drama lessons and there they all were — some sitting, some lying — all in a big circle talking about the 1950s. It is only the second day for this group of Year 10's, and they are discussing with their teacher just what it was like to be a teenager back then. It seems they've got to come up with six comedy pieces to present in cabaret style for a 50s night here at the Parks Centre Coffee Lounge.

Jac — they all call him by his first name — is reminiscing about high-school dances, and his first kiss at fourteen. He'd just been telling us how all the boys used to sit at one end of the hall and all the girls at the other, and about the rush to get a girl when a dance was announced — and someone questioned whether there were more males than females back then, and yes, Jac remembers, there must have been more boys.

The whole afternoon's discussion and drama continually sparks off quite fascinating comparisons of life today with life back in the fifties and it's great to be able to listen and take part in history, social studies and drama lesson all at once. It seems that it won't be only Jac's stories that the group is relying on either; everyone is going to have to do research from books, films, television or with their parents. Anthony's Dad was a bodgie, so he'll be a valuable resource.

We all separate to do workshop sessions on what it was like to court a girl in the 50s, and we have time to see one of them at the end — Dennis sings a love song, 'Hey hey Paula' to one of his teachers. He's on his knees, she's sitting demurely on a park bench clapping her hands dreamily, and they're both really hamming it up.

A new class of Year 11 girls filters in and Eugene and Dennis are recruited to stay on and help, representing the male. I guess that it is only the second day on the theme for this group too. One of them asks, "Will we work out our characters now, or will they just come out?" During the course of the one-hour lesson they 'just come out' sure enough, revealing themselves as the drama evolves.

This group obviously started something good yesterday and are keen to get back into it. Even just in a classroom workshop situation their knowledge of lighting is pretty impressive, and I find they are able to handle every area of theatre and not just acting.

The scene that they are developing is about a couple who didn't go to the school dance that the other class is doing, but who went to the pictures instead. Jac asks if there are any late-night movie addicts in the class because we're going to need a really soppy soundtrack. One of the girls volunteers. Then Jac tells us how they always played God Save the Queen at the beginning of the pictures back then. We all just laugh, it seems so funny that we find it hard to believe him. He goes on to say that people often arrived late to the pictures on purpose so that they wouldn't have to stand to attention!

So we all sing God Save the Queen to set the scene, and this time we get Dennis into the act. We do it again, and then a new idea comes up — why not have somebody offstage speaking their 'thoughts' into a microphone and just have the actors miming the anthem. But where do we get the microphone from? Oh, the coffee lounge only seats 80, we probably won't even need it.

Ideas start to flow. We could get the school band to play the anthem, and all our other music — live



"The lighting person will have to draw up a lighting plan and proceed to light the show."
— from 'Acting together'.

music suddenly gives the whole thing a new perspective. Hey! They could arrive at the pictures on a motor-bike — I mean a real one ... they could pull up outside the coffee lounge doors so that everyone could see them. Were picture theatre seats noisy back then Jac? — we could have some fun with the God Save the Queen bit at the beginning 'cause they're not going to want to stand up, are they? The 'old bag' next to them can try to get them up. We can get the dancers to fill up the theatre seats and make a bit more noise.

The action starts. There's the moral dilemma of having a cuddle in the back row. They also have to contend with the rather offended 'old bag' and a nosey usherette, not to mention the theatre manager. As the parts come up everyone immediately volunteers, or perhaps are sometimes pressed to do a part they don't want — they've all got to be faced though.

The 'thoughts' start to work. Wondering about bad breath — toothpaste had just begun to be marketed heavily then — and, "I hope I haven't got too much perfume on" and the like. When the two suddenly look at each other at the same time, and giggle, we're all killing ourselves laughing. The way that the scene ends tops the lot; it's all totally spontaneous and so all the more fun. It's this continual exchange of ideas — a constant process of refining, adding and improving — that made for one of the most refreshing experiences that I have ever had in the classroom. It relies on total involvement and co-operation from everyone to come up with the goods.

I talked with a couple of Year 9 and 10's who came back after school had finished. They told me that everything they do is put together, just like this afternoon, out of their own and their friends' experiences. It's active rather than passive learning — it's creativity and use of imagination that is encouraged. As Dennis said: "If you want to be in it you can just make up your character and do it your own way". And they do!

Tania Lienert



The graduate

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Young graduate of the Parks Community Drama Course, **Sandra Lillingston**, has landed a lead role in a new A.B.C. Television series. The show, presently going by the title of **Sweet and Sour**, follows the exploits of four young musicians struggling to put together a band called 'The Take Aways'. Sandra will get to play the role of Chrissy, the band's saxophonist.

Others in the cast include Tracy Mann and Martin Vaughan, veteran actor of 'Power Without Glory' and the film about that horse.

But the really hot rumour is that Sandra is on the short-list for a starring role in **Mad Max III** — the kids at the Parks will really believe they're onto a good thing if she gets that one!

STOP PRESS



The Chairman of New Moon Theatre Company, Bruce Shepherd, announced the appointment of a new Artistic Director for the 1984 season: **HELMUT BAKAITIS**.

Helmut is presently Artistic Director of the St. Martin's Theatre of Youth in Melbourne, a company he founded in 1978 at the invitation of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

Bruce Shepherd said "We are very fortunate to secure the services of such a progressive director. He is undoubtedly Australia's leading youth theatre practitioner, which with his earlier experience in mainstream companies will combine to create an adventurous program and company for 1984."

Mr Bakaitis takes up his appointment next month.

Mr Shepherd paid tribute to the outgoing Artistic Director, Terry O'Connell who he said "did so much to establish New Moon's reputation, style and large audience throughout the region". Mr O'Connell is presently freelance directing at the Marionette Theatre of Australia.