

December 1982

Vol. 4 No 6

TOWNDOWN

YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

INSIDE :

"Race Matthews speaks...."

Victorian Ministry Funding - 1983

"About to be killed ?" - on the D.R.C.

"Bouverie St. - One TIE Team for Two?"

"An Alternative
to VYTA?"

"Where to 'We're on'?"

"Moomba" and more

*a picture from
Victoria*

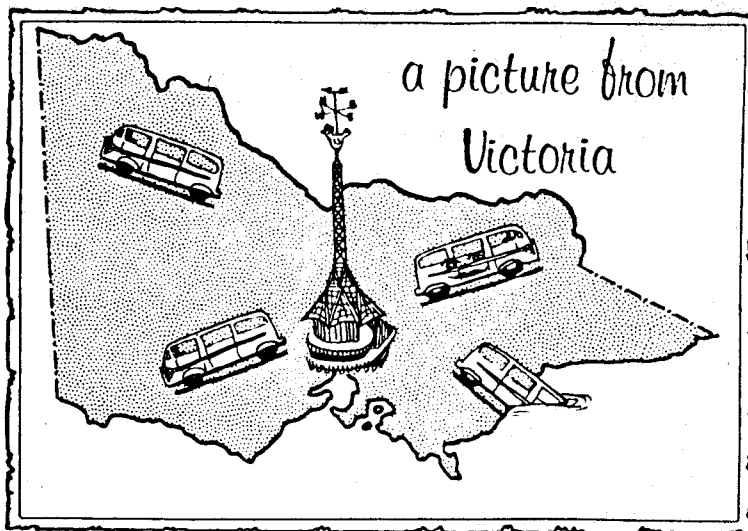
\$3.50

PLUS :

"The Arts In Everyday Life" -
Dr. Timothy Pascoe.

NEWS and REVIEWS.

AND, in "CHAMP NEWS" - "China Story"



In October, Lowdown's NSW correspondent, Lyn Tuit, spent several days in Victoria speaking to those involved in the area of youth performing arts.

This edition's "PICTURE FROM VICTORIA" has been compiled by her.

* * * * *

In May this year, Lowdown introduced Mr Race Matthews — Labor MLA for Oakleigh — as Victoria's new Minister for the Arts.

In that edition, we promised to speak to Mr Matthews later in the year to find out his attitude and proposed policies particularly in the area of youth performing arts.

This interview was held before Mr Matthews announced Victoria's funding allocations for 1983. It provides background information on the way Victoria has allocated its funding priorities — announced in his November press release that: "We believe that the creative element has received inadequate attention in past government funding of the arts in Victoria, and we are signalling clearly that from now on the situation will be different."

RACE MATTHEWS speaks...

Lowdown:

Mr. Matthews, I wonder if you could outline the Government's priorities with regard to arts funding in this State.

Race Matthews:

Overwhelmingly, the Government's priorities lie with improving access to the arts in Victoria. We see our prime responsibility as being one of opening up further opportunities for people to participate in the arts, both as audience and as practitioners.

Lowdown:

How do you propose to go about improving access to the arts?

Race Matthews:

We think a start has to be made in schools. Many art forms will only be appreciated and certainly people will only come to participate actively in them if they're introduced during school life and preferably as early as Primary School. We have a great problem between the education system in as much as the arts education presence has been allowed to fall away in recent years to the point where we have not a single teacher of dance in the Government school system, where there are very few full time teachers of drama and even a staff ceiling of 100 teachers where instrumental music is concerned. These are very serious limitations which have to be overcome, and for that reason, one of the first things that the new Government did was to establish an Arts Education Ministry Working Party which was to address itself to the whole business of how the arts could most effectively be got back into the schools.

Lowdown:

With regard to arts in the schools you have been speaking mostly about teachers, are you concerned about getting performances of the arts to kids in schools?

Cont. . .

"RACE MATTHEWS SPEAKS . . ." (Cont.)

Race Matthews:

I am concerned about getting performances in the schools, and concerned about getting the students into the places where the arts are normally presented. Concert halls, theatres, and so on. I think it is most important that right from the earliest stage children feel that the concert hall, the art gallery, the theatre are all places where they belong, and that they are not being preserved for some totally different sort of people.

Lowdown:

With regard to this inter-departmental committee, looking into the arts and education, could you perhaps elaborate on the aims of setting up the committee?

Race Matthews:

I wouldn't exactly describe it as an inter-departmental committee, because inter-departmental committees have an appalling connotation. It's a joint working party between the two Ministries and it's been told with great emphasis that its responsibilities don't lie in the field of research, because a great deal of research into this whole area of arts education has already been done, and that the priority now is to get on with the business of giving effect to the findings of that research. For instance the points I mentioned earlier about the paucity of teachers of the arts were brought to life in the work that Warren Lett did a couple of years ago. Now the committee will be addressing itself to a whole range of issues in schools, for example the Minister of Education has said that he wants his time with the Education portfolio to be remembered as much as anything for the renaissance of school music and that's a very important part of the agenda item for the committee. And we're hopeful that it will be possible to relocate the Film and Television Training Department at Swinburne Institute in the College of the Arts where it so obviously belongs. This once again is something that has been put forward for action by the joint committee.

Lowdown:

Are there any artists or teachers on the committee?

Race Matthews:

The committee is made up from representatives of the teaching service, that is, it is drawn from the art and craft teaching area, and the music area as well as the central administration of the Department of Education. In the same way we tried to get a reflection on the Arts side.

Lowdown:

So would there be practitioners in the fields practising, on the committee?

Race Matthews:

As far as teachers are concerned, certainly people who have been active as arts teachers and who consequently have become organisers of arts teaching, for instance Bruce Worland is a senior departmental inspector in charge of music. Now they're the sort of people we look for, people with both practical experience and an overview of what's needed.

Lowdown:

One thing I would like to ask you about is the role of the Drama Resource Centre, which I realise is part of the Education portfolio but is heavily involved in the Youth Performing Arts area. I was wondering if what the Drama Resource Centre actually does will be looked at by the committee?

Race Matthews:

I think that the Drama Resource Centre is one of the groups that the committee will draw its resources from.

Lowdown:

But what the Drama Resource Centre actually does, will not be assessed by this committee?

Race Matthews:

I don't think so. I don't see this committee as being in the position of assessing anyone's work.

Lowdown:

Regarding groups going into schools; do you feel that there should be any controls over these groups that go into schools?

Race Matthews:

I think it's very important that there should be a quality control mechanism developed. We certainly don't have it at the present time, all we have is an exhaustive listing of the groups who are available to go into schools, which is circulated every year or so through the schools, and teachers choose from it. In some cases I've no doubt with great discrimination, but in others they just don't have the assessments at their disposal to make informed choices. Therefore I am not satisfied that the performances going on in schools are as good as they could be.

Lowdown:

Given that you see that there is some need for quality control, do you envisage any kind of mechanism for setting this up?

Race Matthews:

That indeed is the sort of thing that the joint committee might come up with — a recommendation about mechanisms of quality control. I certainly wouldn't envisage it trying to implement quality controls itself.

Lowdown:

I understand that in Victoria there are two organisations working in the area of Youth Performing Arts and a new organisation called PYCT which I believe stands for Professional Youth and Community Theatres. Have you

.....
had any contact with these organisations and are you aware of what they do?

Race Matthews:

There hasn't been an active dialogue on this subject, because frankly one of our preoccupations in the first two months of office has been away from the schools and towards the area of new Performing Arts Centres which are in the process of opening up throughout Victoria. I believe there will be 11 of them before the end of the year, and they've been very much the inheritance of bricks and mortar without any clearly defined plan or use being made of them, or indeed any plan for how they might be funded.

Lowdown:

These are throughout country and regional areas?

Race Matthews:

Yes this is true enough, and the closest of these to Melbourne are the Geelong and Warrigal Centres. I have visited all but one of those centres and I am very anxious that we should get down to the business of making them run effectively. Once again, they're a key to access as far as geography is concerned, and people should have as near as possible, the quality of access to the arts irrespective of where they live. And these performing arts centres have taken us a step forward towards achieving that goal. Following these visits and the discussions with the people concerned, we have introduced a system of funding in the recent budget which will give every one of the centres a basic underwriting, as far as the employment of appropriate professional staff is concerned, and also promotion of development activities within the centre itself. Where Warrigal and Warnambool are concerned, we've added an incentive for the local councils to associate themselves with the parent council, on a regional basis. This has been particularly valuable in Warrigal where up to 8 municipalities could be defined as being within the catchment area.

Lowdown:

Would you be aware if any special provision has been made for youth in these regional centres?

Race Matthews:

There has been virtually no policy established about that at all and it is expected to be a very important agenda item for the coming year. In some instances of course schools have assembly halls and theatre facilities of a sort available to them but it is going to be important to encourage them to make use of the far more sophisticated facilities that the Art Centres can offer and also again to get used to being at the formal Art Centres, as some of these kids will stay in the same areas for the rest of their lives and we want a situation where a performing Arts Centre is as much a part of their habitat as the local electronic games parlour.

Lowdown:

Talking about the new Arts Centre here, has any special provision been made for the youth at this Arts Centre?

Race Matthews:

Once again, the planning for the use of the two theatres available early in 1984 is at a pretty embryonic sort of stage. Very early on in the planning of those Theatres, arrangements were made by the Trust and the Melbourne Theatre Company that they have use of the principal Theatre for 40 weeks of the year which doesn't leave very much available for anyone else and there hasn't been any discernible inclination on the part of the M.T.C. to interest itself heavily in the affairs of the children.

Lowdown:

So you would see this as something that could perhaps be looked at?

Race Matthews:

Oh, emphatically yes. We also have a special committee to look at all the Arts institutions, sensitive to the needs of children, and to see that children have greater access, particularly to the visual arts and museums.

Lowdown:

Getting back to this area of artistic standards which we were discussing a moment ago, I was wondering if you believe that all performing arts companies should be subject to artistic assessment by the Government's artistic advisor, that is, the Ministry?

Race Matthews:

I think that is an extremely difficult area for any Government to work in. But a good deal of thought has been devoted in the past of course, to the concept of arm's length funding. I am not satisfied with the present system of assessment of our first year of funding decisions. While we will have to carry on through the funding decisions arising from this budget, pretty much on the basis of those arrangements, I hope by the time the next budget comes around, something different might take place.



(Cont.) . . . Race Matthews — Minister for the Arts in Victoria.

"RACE MATTHEWS SPEAKS . . ." (Cont.)

Lowdown:

The reason why I ask is because here in Victoria you have a Theatre-in-Education company called Bouverie Street which is funded directly by the Education Department and works in schools but is not subject to artistic assessment by your own Ministry. As this has been an area of criticism if you think it is justifiable; for there to be one company in this State that does work in the area of arts but is not subject to artistic assessment by your own Ministry?

Race Matthews:

The only justification for a Government or Ministry making artistic judgment of any sort is where an application for funding is concerned. Obviously the group is totally funded by another agency and it is up to that agency and not for us.

Lowdown:

One area I did particularly want to talk about is, given that Don Dunstan has been appointed Director of Tourism. Are you planning a close link between this Department and your own to utilize the skills and contacts that Mr Dunstan has already developed in this area?

Race Matthews:

Oh a very close link indeed. I think for two reasons. Firstly, we have someone experienced and successful in the development of Arts Policy. Mr Dunstan is. It is only common sense to make the greatest possible use of his advice and services and secondly, I think there is a logical, organic link between the Arts and Tourism, which we simply have to develop and capitalize on. Potentially, the attraction of the Arts in Victoria for people elsewhere in Australia, and perhaps ultimately overseas could be very great indeed.

Lowdown:

Another thing I did want to ask you about, given that State Grants and the budget is due out next month, is it likely that the existing level of support of youth here will be at least maintained if not improved.

Race Matthews:

These decisions are still in the process of being made. Effectively the "Cultural Development Fund" from which most of the funding for most companies comes is being indexed by 11%, indexed formally by 10% of another \$50,000 handed on by the Treasurer. A very great proportion of that Cultural Development Fund is committed in advance through tied, or what are virtually tied grants, when the major companies are told in advance that they won't get any less than last year and that puts constraints on what you can do with the overall fund. We are anxious to see some new initiatives open up with the Cultural Development Fund as well as existing ones maintained, and that's fairly difficult to undertake.

Lowdown:

Given you have said one of the priorities of the Government would be access, would you see that youth might fall into the category of being a priority through access.

Race Matthews:

We have got Youth Arts in Melbourne, in St. Martin's, that's the sort of initiative with which we are going to be concerned.

Lowdown:

I just want to ask you a bit more about St. Martin's, whether you see there may be a possible role for St. Martin's to take part in some of the activities of the new Arts Centre?

Race Matthews:

Oh, I think it is entirely conceivable that from time to time St. Martin's will throw up a production that is more suited to the Arts Centre than its own complex. It depends on the quality of the production and the likely audience. And finally those judgments will have to be hammered out both by the St. Martin's Management and I suppose the Management in conjunction with the Trust.

Lowdown:

In your very busy schedule, have you had the time to see any of these performances, activities either done by children or professional companies working for children.

Race Matthews:

I have seen two productions at St. Martin's and a number of other productions to which a significant number of school groups are going — such as Heavenly Creeps, Female Parts at the Universal Theatre, and the other recent Universal Production of the "Capeman". But I haven't yet had an opportunity to see anything of the working of those groups whose activities are purely school areas. I am anxious to see the production by the Why Not Theatre but I just haven't so far.

Lowdown:

Thank you very much Mr. Matthews.

**Lyn Tuit for Lowdown
with Mr. Race Matthews
MLA for Oakleigh, Victoria
Minister for the Arts, Police
and Emergency Services
(October, 1982)**

"The opening of the Melbourne Concert Hall adds another performing arts facility to the impressive string of venues now operating throughout the country. By 1985, each Australian mainland capital will have a major performing arts centre, each with a role to play, not only in increasing creative activity in its own city, but, with the other centres, in making a contribution to artistic development throughout the country."

George Fairfax

OPENING CELEBRATIONS...

The Opening Concert was held on Saturday, 6th November followed apparently, by a grand rort — the kind of party that provides anecdotal dinner parties reminiscences for years! That is, if one is part of the 'arts elite' who attends such functions. However, the Victorian Arts Centre has not, of course, been established to provide a venue for this narrow sector of the population.

As part of the opening celebrations, a luncheon forum was held in the Stalls Foyer of the Concert Hall to discuss the issue of **"The Arts Centre Phenomenon"**. Speakers at this luncheon were Donald MacSween, Director General of the National Centre for the Arts in Ottawa; Stewart Warkow, former Executive Director of Carnegie Hall, New York, and George Fairfax, General Manager of the Victorian Arts Centre Trust.

An Arts Centre was defined as 'the complex of buildings that represents the cultural centre of a city', and, as such, as MacSween pointed out, "arts organisations are like Chinese restaurants. They tend to cluster. The benefit of Arts Centres is that they can provide a high-profile physical location for the arts and a central and cohesive administration for activities", he said. "We have a tendency to secularise our arts experiences and the opportunity for a community to share these experiences is a major rationale for Arts Centres. The most difficult problem is for the creators of arts activities — how to foster creativity in such a large, imposing and awesome context."

George Fairfax spoke of the process involved in the planning and establishment of an Arts Centre, and

Stewart Warkow talked about how an Arts Centre can and needs to operate with other organisations in a city, and how it develops an audience for its activities. The latter, he sees as an "almost bottomless pit" of opportunity, but particularly important he claimed is that such a complex should provide programmes and events for children and young people. Arts activities for young people can "give them another option on life. They may affect the decision of what they will do in the future."

Susie Leigh, as the Education Officer at the Victorian Arts Centre, organised this event as part of her brief to plan programmes and activities that involve people from a wide cross-section of the community in the Arts Centre. Particularly, this brief is towards children and young people.

An opening event held on 19th November was an outdoor evening concert at which 'kids' performed for 'kids' — **"Kids 4 Kids"**.

The programme included clowning, juggling and acrobatics performed by Small Changes from Albury-Wodonga; "Foreman Material" by the Blackburn High Stage Band; and performances by bands from Braybrook High, Debney Park High, Syndal Tech, Windsor Tech and the Eltham College Swing Choir.

"It drew a reasonable crowd," said Susie, "and those who were there had a good time, and enjoyed the programme."

A **Country Pilot Project Day** held on 20th October was a similar initiative. School groups from Benalla and Euroa came to Melbourne on a day train trip, toured

Cont. . .

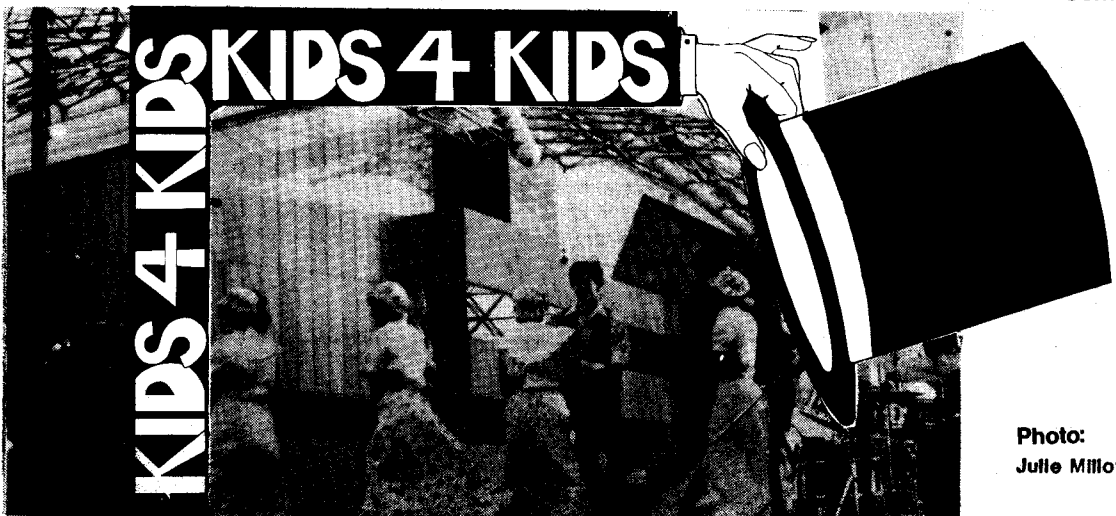


Photo:
Julie Millowick

OPENING CELEBRATIONS . . .

. . . Cont.

the Arts Centre, and members of the schools' bands performed in the Concert Hall with the Melbourne Police Band.

Students from Benalla High sent Susie a journalist's report describing the Concert Hall:

"The first thing that is noticeable when you walk through the doors of the new Melbourne Concert Hall is the magnificent light reflecting chandelier, Arcturus, sculptured by Michel Santry. It cascades through five levels of the foyers in the building and is suspended from steel rods, symbolic of rain. It is made up of highly polished steel, brass and perspex and is lit externally by forty spotlights. The chandelier sets off the theme of Australia's minerals and gemstones which is the main contention throughout the hall.

John Truscot designed the basics of the arts centre in just one week. The concept of the centre was to be of natural Australian minerals like brass, gold, leather, wood and pure wool to replace the common use of emblems such as kangaroos, koalas and boomerangs.

The walls in the foyers are covered by light beige-coloured Australian leather with strips of brass lining. The whole interior of the concert hall has been set off by brass ornamentation. The floors are made of marble imported from Iran and every level of the seven floors has a different lighting structure in the ceiling.

There is one feature wall hung with a series of 136 frames,

each containing six original paintings by Sir Sidney Nolan. This series is one of two — the latter of 84 frames will be hung in the theatre building due to open in 1984 — and is titled "Paradise Garden". The work that had gone into these paintings took 2½ years.

The acoustics are superb in the concert hall itself which makes performances more enjoyable to listen to. The comfortable seating arrangement has been positioned with the aid of a computer to provide an uninterrupted view, and the seats have been tested for proper back and arm support for over long periods.

High above the stage, situated in the wall and around a little platform where an organ sits, are hundreds of organ pipes of many shapes. The protruding wedge-shaped wall surrounding the pipes gives them their own place high up in the wall.

From the walls above the highest balcony are hand-woven curtains which have been made as near as possible to the same looking texture of the hand-painted walls and may be adjusted to change the acoustic levels in the hall."

Kay Petrohilos and Trudy Sebaly

Susie aims to continue to invite country students to the Arts Centre, and to move into other areas of performance.

Accessibility is a high priority for this new phenomenon — one that has been long-awaited, and of which there are great expectations.

Victorian Ministry For The Arts Funding Allocations 1983

DRAMA

Recurring

Arena Theatre	\$66,000
Australian Association of Theatre Technology	\$2,200
Australian National Playwrights Conference	\$2,500
Australian Nouveau Theatre	\$45,000
Handspan Theatre	\$22,000
Laiki Skini	\$12,000
La Mama Theatre	\$19,000
Melbourne Theatre Company	\$455,000
Mixed Company	\$8,000
Playbox Theatre Company	\$200,000
St. Martin's Youth Arts Theatre	\$170,000
Victorian Drama League	\$7,500
Fools Gallery	\$5,000
Mushroom Troupe	\$35,000
Why Not Theatre	\$5,000

New

CP CP	\$14,000
Classics Group	\$12,000
New Blood	\$9,000
Nomadic Arts	\$15,000

Dance

Australian Ballet	\$100,000
Australian Dance Theatre	\$260,000
Human Veins Dance Theatre	\$7,000

Community Theatre

Crosswinds	\$35,000
Mill Theatre	\$50,000
Murray River Performing Group	\$45,000
Theatre Works	\$45,000
WEST	\$50,000

Moomba

The Melbourne Moomba Festival is a yearly focus and celebration of a broad range of activities that personify Melbourne's identity in sport, entertainment, community involvement, recreation and the arts.

This focus should therefore mirror and embody the unique and special nature of the arts in Melbourne.

While the mainstream theatre, ballet, opera, orchestral companies and galleries that are generally referred to as "high art" have a definite place in Melbourne's cultural profile, because they continue to produce and aspire to products of excellence, they are not necessarily the best purveyors of an indigenous art. (N.B. The Australian Ballet will present a free performance of the "Nutcracker" in the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.)

Alternatively, while Community Theatre Companies, street theatre, cabaret, is not a new, nor an exclusively Australian phenomenon; it is a far more useful, immediate and exciting vehicle through which to explore and comment on a particularly Australian (albeit Melbournean), humour, culture and environment

As part of the **1983 Festival**, Moomba will present: West Community Theatre's production of **"Outcasts"** at the Old Melbourne Gaol; Handspan Theatre's production of Nigel Triffitt's **"Secrets"**; Theatreworks production of **"Breaking up in Balwyn"** on a Yarra river cruise boat; Nomadic Arts production of **"Don't Stand On Ceremony"** at St. Martins Theatre, The Australian Playwrights Theatre's (now known as the Melbourne Writers Theatre) seasons at La Mama and the City Square's Theatre; Fringe Network; the Multi-Cultural community; various street theatre performances; a diverse range of music presentations; and a few surprises.

These companies and performers are committed to work that is

constantly challenging and reshaping an audience's range of creative experiences, either by the very nature of it or simply because of its juxtapositioning in a Moomba context.

Diversity is essential for a healthy, vital arts scene. This being important in a continuing sense, must also be reflected in an event like Moomba that seeks to be a focus.

Moomba is not looking to become an Arts Festival, it is looking, closer than ever before, more equitably at its content and commitment to the arts.

Homing in on that which is Melbourne, is not an insular direction but a desire to re-assess, refine, research, highlight and ultimately celebrate.

However, despite this rampant positivity, there are limitations.

Moomba '83 will be the 29th festival. In human terms this would allude to an element of maturity, however in Moomba's case, it means a solid base of tradition. This tradition and experience can offer positive fruits like the seminar for Victorian Festivals that Moomba recently hosted. It also carries with it styles and patterns of funding, entertainment priorities and resources that need, not necessarily dynamic instant changes, but a steady reassessment and redirection to implement the policies outlined above. For instance: As government and corporate funding bring with them certain limitations, finance that Moomba can itself create has inescapable commitments like the provision of river lighting, security, toilets and garbage control. The conclusions are obvious.

The idea that the arts are to be presented alongside the Birdman Rally, (Theatre of the Absurd??) carnival rides, fairy floss and hot dogs may cause some to recoil in horror. Moomba thinks it's exciting, accessible and simply another choice for the people of Melbourne.

YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS IN MOOMBA

For a number of years the Hotham Permanent Building Society sponsored the Hotham Youth Drama Festival. It took place in the Treasury Gardens and the performance space was the FEIP stage. The drama festival was open to a selection (!) of secondary schools. For Moomba '82, Hotham redirected its sponsorship allocation to another event — Youth Day.

At that stage it wasn't possible to find another sponsor. However, we decided to go ahead with the essence of the project — performances by various schools — and provide the elements that were available, time and a venue. The venue was a large stage in the Alexandra Gardens that at night was used for music performances. The stage was a very good one — for rock bands!! — unfortunately totally unsuitable for drama. The major problems were wing space/changing facilities, and acoustics. Due to the ambient traffic and general noise it was impossible for an audience to hear except with the use of microphones. The problems that were caused to freedom of movement etc. of course were considerable. The audience consisted of primary school excursion groups, the occasional strolling member of the public and other school groups that were scheduled before or after the current performance. Hardly morale boosting stuff!

Few groups were positive, most expressed understandable to extreme disappointment.

Needless to say the exercise will not be repeated in 1983.

Attempts have been made to design another model but this has proved to be very difficult mainly because Moomba is clearly not an expert in the field and the time investment to make a festival or showcase of this nature; something very special; is beyond our means.

I would be more than happy to hear from any individuals or groups that would be interested in suggesting or helping design a Youth Performing Arts component for Moomba '84.

Brigita Strods
Arts Co-ordinator
Melbourne Moomba Festival
191 Collins St.
Tel: (03) 63 7111.

ABOUT TO BE KILLED...?

The fate of the D.R.C., a unique service for school-based drama, set up and funded by the Victorian Education Department, has been uncertain for some time.

In October, Graham Scott, Director of the D.R.C. said "on paper, the Drama Resource Centre is about to be killed". It now seems that his statement has an ominous ring of truth.

According to a Drama Resource Centre spokesperson in early December, it's difficult to get a definite statement about what is actually happening because senior Education Department officials each tell a different story.

However, it seems that at this stage, staff will be maintained at the D.R.C. through 1983, but the death knell has been sounded for 1984. Staff numbers will be cut in 1984 to leave only the TIE team and three research staff. The latter would be drawn from the current consultancy staff (now numbering eight) and would be employed to research curriculum projects. The Drama Resource Centre as such would not exist.

This is the position at the time of *Lowdown* going to print but it does seem to change daily. During 1983, staff levels will be maintained, but all, except for those who are to continue in 1984 as outlined, will be employed "in excess" and are expected to see it as a year of transition, and apply for other jobs.

It remains to be seen how this will affect morale and maintenance of services. Perhaps the year may at least allow time for alternatives to this apparently ruthless cutting to appear. The perilous brink may provide new energy and enthusiasm that reinvigorates services that should not have to be done without; or, it could prove to be a rather agonising terminal process that saps their vitality.

Lowdown will try to keep in touch with what does happen in 1983. The following interview provides some background to the aims and endeavours of the Drama Resource Centre as it exists now and its relationship and attitudes to youth performing companies working in Victorian schools . . .

Lowdown

Graham, can you outline for me what the Drama Resource Centre is and whether this has changed much since its inception.

Graham Scott:

No, it hasn't changed much. It has developed and the development has been in the same areas in which we began. Since its inception, we have mainly aimed to support the teachers in the schools. That was the first thing it was set up to do and it has been done in three different ways. Firstly, by making sure we have curriculum models, curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and stimulus material; and secondly by making sure that they have support services like, for example, Theatre-in-Education, knowledge about Youth Performing Arts and activities their own youth could take part in and the services and resources of Theatre Art Support Design. Now, when we started, we tried to do everything. Obviously now we have grown and I suppose customer demands have become more sophisticated, so we have had to deviate into areas of expertise. I now have a team whom I call the "Programme Development Team" and those people are mainly the curriculum side. The "Theatre In Education Team", whose role is not just to put on plays and be of service to schools, that is part of it, but whose main function is to investigate how schools can successfully use Theatre in Education and report

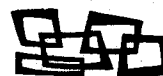
on this and make sure that teachers understand it. The third group is Sue Galley's "Youth Performing Arts" which provide services straight away to teachers on what is available and the services and resources of our own Resource Programme, with its materials and Tony Clarke who is the Theatre Arts Consultant on design and setting up of theatres and productions.

Lowdown:

How many staff does the D.R.C. have?

Graham Scott:

We have 14 now. We did have 18 until the middle of last year. That's when the late Assistant Minister of Education decided to cut people. Now we were able when the cuts came on us, to turn that to our advantage. What we did was to move two people that were on my staff, who were placed on the regional team at Benalla and two people that were on the team at Ballarat into those regional offices, so that they are now no longer tied to us physically as they were then. They are now quite literally **Regional Theatre Teams**. So, we are quite pleased — that was the development we were looking for.



Lowdown:

How do you see the future of the Drama Resource Centre. Do you see its direction changing?

Graham Scott:

I wish I knew. The Education Department is in the throws of re-organizing its curriculum support services and we were caught up with something we wish to have nothing to do with. There is no answer to that. On paper the Drama Resource Centre is about to be killed. There is in effect quite a strong group that sees that centralized support services such as this ought to be thrown out and put everything out to the regions. I think that we would be quite happy if we thought there was a Drama Resource Centre in every one of the 12 regions, but this is just not physically possible. There would be more people in the regions supporting non-teachers in the schools then. On paper the situation is supposed to be this, that the Theatre-in-Education Team and its bus, and one or two rooms in this building, would be given to the regions to be of service. That the Programme Development Team would be brought down to a Project Team of about six and that everything else would dry up. Now that is on paper, what they plan is part of a general plan. When it is pointed out to them what the implications of this plan are that no school would get serviced and resources won't be available to them when they call; that Projects they have asked for won't be developed; and that the Theatre-in-Education Team, whilst on the treadmill of providing programmes is actively going to be competing with the Teams outside, which it doesn't at the moment. It puts on shows, but has never been seen as a competitor. It is to develop models and help others to develop their Programmes along the same models. That will disappear. They will only just become a treadmill team and that State-wide development would just not be undertaken. They don't want that so I really think that they have not yet come to grips with what is going to become the support service for the schools.



Lowdown:

How do you regard the Drama Resource Centre fitting into the general sphere of Youth Performing Arts?

Graham Scott:

When we started, the Director General demanded we make sure we have strong links with the Community. So Youth Arts, outside of schools was also part of our brief and we cultivated this in a number of ways. Some things have died and some things just didn't work. For example, we tried to set up a Youth Theatre right here. There is no hinterland. People don't live in Carlton around this building. They live in other parts of Carlton and they won't travel to here, especially at night. So there is no local Community. So we have then gone out and helped others with their setting up of Youth Theatres and we have then used this building for those groups to come into. We have helped Youth Performing Arts in two ways. We have made sure the schools understand what is available in terms of performance for them. Now, it is not our role in a situation where the schools are supposed to be in charge of curriculum, nor is it anybody else's role, to

tell them what they can or can't have. If they want to have "Oh Calcutta" on ice, naked, then it's the schools business. If they can justify that in terms of curriculum, great. I want to hear it. But we can simply make them aware of what is available and the implications of what they get. We can't make any decisions for them. We can simply show them what is available and if they are going for things that perhaps we may not consider suitable, then we would explain to them that there are other things as well and point them towards other peer teachers who have used a number of these shows, so that they can get a parallel point of view to their own, so that they can make a decision. We have also opened up the possibility of what youth can do, for performances. So we run a Youth Performing Festival called "**You're On**", which is in the middle of the year and that is for groups that have been doing good work in their school programmes, and which doesn't become the "local school production" — it is just the solving of dramatic problems as part of their school programme — and some of this should be seen. So by setting up a Festival, giving them the opportunity to share this with parallel peer students, that has been successful and has actually developed a life of its own. Now, schools are able to decide on a model they want to look at and we can provide them with a professional Actor or Director to go and help them develop it, so it's not just a school production. It is for that particular problem, so we help that. With the Victorian Youth Theatre Association as overbody, the **Victorian Youth Drama Camp** is run by the staff here and that has been going ever since 1976. It is wonderful. It is the best thing we have got. It is an intensive period of time where young people can dive into the drama experience and swim hard for a week. It is a sort of extension of a school programme that schools can't give. Schools are good at the slow, maturational development over a year or a number of years of a programme, the acquisition of skills over that period is what they are developing. Knowledge and attitudes as well. They can't, without destroying the time table, give students an intensive experience in one facet of their curriculum without destroying all the other parts of the curriculum, so we can add that on to them and that is what we do. We just give it a bit of publicity in the schools and the teachers who see students that could use it send them along. Another thing we have been doing in the past couple of years is a **Careers Week**. We tried it, thinking we would just knock it off in one go because we have a number of requests as to what is available in careers in Performing Arts. It has become a sleeper. It is one of those things which we have to do every year now and last year we ran three.



Lowdown:

Graham, I would like to talk about artistic standards in this area of work that goes into schools. It is an area about which I have heard a lot of criticism in Victoria; that there are many more groups working in schools in Victoria than there are, in New South Wales, for example; and that it is a much more "open slather" in Victoria; and that standards are a lot more variable in Melbourne. I guess what I have actually seen would probably confirm that. Given that there is some

Cont. . .

ABOUT TO BE KILLED . . . ? ... Cont.

criticism that there is a big difference in artistic standards of what goes on in schools, does this concern you at all?

Graham Scott:

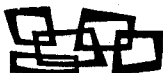
No, it doesn't really. If you take our bell curve, yes. Simply by the fact that you have got two things, one is going to be better than the other. I would say the bell curve's the same in every State but it is just, you are quite right, we have got more things happening. I would like to think the market force would wipe out the ones that aren't going to be artistically viable and this has happened.

Lowdown:

It does happen or is happening now?

Graham Scott:

There have been a couple of companies that have gone to the wall. I would like to think the market forces are working on artistic levels but unfortunately I believe, in many cases they are not. They are working on, I nearly said the word "curriculum", but they are working on current fashions and fads. So that the astute Director who picks up something on the trees — everyone is on about trees, next year it will be about youth or aged, I can't remember — but anybody who picks up the current fad should be able to do something well and make some money out of it, whether it is good or bad. So that worries me, that the market force may not be working on artistic levels. What we have to do, is work within the constraints of the schools being the ones who make the final decisions and no one can take that away from them. There is no way that the Education Department is going to get into censoring or setting standards and licensing as we used to years and years ago. There is no mechanism for it. But, I believe that it is happening in New South Wales.



Lowdown:

Would you be opposed to any mechanism for it.

Graham Scott:

I would.

Lowdown:

What would your reasons be?

Graham Scott:

I would not like petty autocrats who can say yes or no to what is good or what is bad. I don't believe you or I or anyone can say what is going to work in a particular school at a particular time.

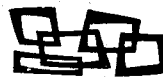
Lowdown:

For example, under the NSW system, if there is someone who just gets together a show right away and the Principal hasn't heard of them, he can say "have you been authorised", that is not to say "have you been censored" or anything like that but it is just "has your show been viewed by the Education Department" and I guess it works in a fairly fair kind of way; and the Education Department doesn't worry too much about the fact that there are companies who

have fairly good reputations. That doesn't mean though that one of their shows may be bad, and they may well be.

Graham Scott:

I think that happens all the time and I think companies that have a good reputation have to maintain it, they can't have three bad shows in a row or somebody starts to scratch their heads. But there are companies that can live on their laurels and can afford to be, we would hope, experimental and can afford to have a disaster once every six months but I don't want to comment on that. It sounds like N.S.W. has got a system that breeds problems.



Lowdown:

Sure, it does have problems, so what I am saying is do you think there is a danger in trying to develop some sort of mechanism to protect teachers, I guess from people whose work is appalling, to protect children from work that is very bad, it is not necessary.

Graham Scott:

Protecting teachers ought to stop. If they are going to be in charge of curriculum they have got to take the responsibilities and I think that what we have tried to do, and what we are getting through to them at last is an awareness of their responsibilities and a knowledge of how companies can be not very good by a continuing in-servicing programme so they understand how to use companies.

There are two types of programmes we are talking about. One is the sort of thing that goes into general cultural enrichment. You can see some of those Principals. They tick it off, we have had a theatre team, we've had a bit of music and we have taken them to the Art Gallery and that is their bit of Art for the year. In that context that is up to the Principal to say what is "a good thing" for the kids to see because it is class theatre and then there is the other things where a teacher says "I want something with health, humour and innovations, I want something that is going to illuminate my social studies teaching, I want something of Australian history of Australian folk songs or what ever and I need a puppetry lesson, I need something. We haven't had something in here for a while. I need a clown, haven't had clowns for a while, it has been straight, all been musicals". Now that person, firstly, you have got to have explained to them that over the 4 or 6 years of post primary and six years of primary, students ought to have a range of all these things. So if they have puppets for three years it is time they change just because of that. We explain those sort of things to them and explain the value of an enriched programme which doesn't just mean, well to take one example, we have something which I don't think you have the same problem with in NSW. It isn't really a problem, but you don't have as heavy a touring programme through the Arts Council.

Lowdown:

There is none in New South Wales at all.

Graham Scott:

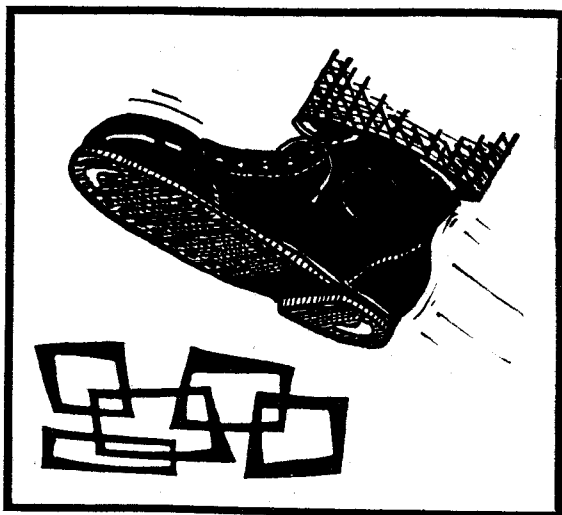
Well, the Arts Council in Victoria is very strong and its School Touring Programme has been very strong and there are schools which only take what the Arts

Council brings every year. What the Arts Council puts out — they book. That is almost censorship. What ever they are brought is of a certain standard. I have great objections, I am on the Arts Council Board, but I often have grave objections to the sort of things that are going out. I know theatrically, it will always be good but sometimes I think, why bother, it is not worth doing even if it is done well, but that is another thing. What worries me is that good companies, like for instance Mixed Company — they were great, terrific, they went and toured with the Arts Council and were terrific. The Arts Council toured them all over Australia in the end, terrific — but, they came back and tried to pick up the same schools that loved them the year before. They wouldn't book them, even though they knew they were good. No, we only book Arts Council programmes. The Drama Resource Centre want to make sure the curriculum decisions the teachers make are made on good grounds. So our job is aimed fundamentally at the teachers. Now we have no right to play the dictator to the company and say "you do this and do this", we find them and point things out to them. For example, we brought them all into one room this year and said "did you realise there are three companies all doing post primary programmes in Social Studies on football". Now they didn't. Everyone suddenly thought "football", everyone is mad on "football" in Victoria, we'll do a "footie" show and cut their throats. One of those was a good show, two of them are great shows, but there is only the market for one. What we are trying to do, and it is really going to burst the transistor on somebody's computer, is to get everybody's touring schedules so we can overlap them, look at them and make up a matrix so that we can show the companies our basic role is to then, show this data to the regions. We have 12 regions in Victoria now, and we can show this data to the Regional Directors and say "do you realise that there isn't a show coming into your school in primary and these are the only sorts of shows whereas you should have had all these models coming through, why don't you offer an inducement, a touring allowance or something to get them to come up? Why don't you contract a group to do this? Why don't you hassle the Arts Council and make sure something comes through your Region of this particular sort." Make them aware what is coming in and what is not coming in. It is both. There is no sense in having feast in one area and famine in another. Their role is to ensure that schools have got the resources of development, a good curriculum, those experiences are necessary.



Lowdown:

Graham, what would you say to the argument I have heard from several performing companies here, who work in the schools area, that the Drama Resource Centre is helping prop up groups whose artistic standards are very poor and this reflects on the rest of the groups working in schools?



Graham Scott:

I would like to see how they would develop such an argument. I would not say we are propping up anybody. But I would say we are opening up the possibilities of using everybody by the schools. To that extent you could say some may get bookings that ought not to. Well that is the fault of the teachers if they have made that decision. For example, I keep coming back to this, there is an assumption that some of these ought to go to the wall. Now on certain standards I would agree but you and I may not agree that those standards are being applied by me or by you to the same show. We produce as part of our in-servicing to the teachers, a booklet, "**Theatre in Schools**", which shows this is available. No right or wrong, or that they all have got their 'Good House-keeping seal of approval' on them. We then run previews, and, time and time again, two teachers come out and one says, "I am glad I saw that, that was disastrous, I'll never book it" and the other says "Just what I need". Well sometimes I take the second teacher away and say "Have you considered X, Y, Z or P, Q, R" and other times I take the first teacher away and say "Wait a minute, have you thought about....." Not to try and over-influence them but to find out whether they have missed things that may be useful in their context because I don't know, you don't know what the school contexts are.

**Lyn Tuit for Lowdown
with Graham Scott,
Director — Drama Resource Centre**

**Just \$18 a
year
gives you the
LOWDOWN**

Bouverie St — ONE TIE TEAM FOR TWO?

Lyn Tuit looks at Victoria's Education Department T.I.E. team...

In the current climate of tight arts funding and education cutbacks, the **Bouverie St.** TIE team is now almost unique in Australia in that it is funded by an Education Department. It is housed within the Drama Resource Centre and its actors are all seconded teachers. There are rumours that **Bouverie St.** may itself be hived off into various regions as a result of future Education Department cuts and that a similar outcome may lie in store for the Drama Resource Centre as well.

What does **Bouverie St.** do, and how does it justify its existence to the powers that be? According to Graham Scott, Director of the Drama Resource Centre, **Bouverie St.** was not set up to compete with outside TIE teams; it is there to investigate the role of theatre in education and to develop models of working in theatre-in-education. For example, the **Bouverie St.** programme explains the model of accommodation to teachers, that kids need time to reflect after they've seen the show and that workshops and follow-up activities are more beneficial if left for a few days after the performance.

Dennis Gill, Artistic Director of **Bouverie St.**, says that the work that his company is doing assists other TIE companies by looking at the effects of young people's theatre on children and by examining how it should be used. During September, the company was performing at the Alexander Theatre at Monash and through this would be examining the impact on kids of doing a show in a theatre as opposed to a school.

Much criticism has been made of the salaries enjoyed by the **Bouverie St.** company who are in receipt of teachers' wages. The current salaries of the company are approximately twice that of an actor working in other TIE teams such as Toe Truck, who in fact are

already earning 15% or more above the TIE award wage. Dennis Gill saw the salaries issue as being a typical example of the conflict that lies in being part of the arts community, and also part of the education community. He felt that the salaries differential was justified because his actors could not otherwise be expected to do work of a curriculum nature (research, report writing and so on). Both Graham and Dennis shared the view that actors in general were very poorly paid and that **Bouverie St.** should not be brought down to this level. The actor/teacher was

seen to have an advantage in a school situation for he/she was capable of making decisions of both artistic and a curriculum nature, skills which many actors may not have.

Bouverie St., because it is Education Department funded and does not receive funds from the Theatre Board or the Ministry for the Arts, is not subject to the usual round of artistic assessments. Other companies such as **Salamanca** and **Magpie** receive regular, ongoing artistic assessments by outsiders at both Federal and State levels. Artistic assessment for **Bouverie St.** is done on a more informal basis by the company itself and by the Drama Resource Centre. On an educational level, the Research section at Curriculum Services assesses their work whilst everything of a project nature goes through the Curriculum Council.

It does, however, appear to be anomalous that the State Government's proper artistic adviser, the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, does not have any influence or say with respect to the artistic quality of the company's work. Dennis Gill indicated that he would be quite happy to have the company assessed by both the Theatre Board and the Ministry for the Arts. Perhaps a more efficient use of scarce arts and education funds would be to transfer the Education Department allocation for the team across to the Ministry for the Arts who could continue to fund **Bouverie St.** as a curriculum based company whilst at the same time applying the same artistic and management criteria to **Bouverie St.** as are applied to all other general grant recipients. It remains to be seen whether such a rationalisation will be looked at by the new joint Education and Arts Committee.

**"part of the arts
community . . .
and part of the
education
community"**

Lyn Tuit

AN ALTERNATIVE TO VYTA?

A question of umbrella organisations . . .

In the mid 1970s, when the Victorian Youth Theatre Association was established, it was seen as an organisation which could cover the needs of both teachers and performing artists and companies working with young people. It succeeded in establishing a dialogue between companies and individuals working in this area but a number of groups now appear to be disenchanted with the direction that VYTA has taken.

In response to this disenchantment, a new organisation, which may be known as PYCT (Professional Youth and Community Theatres) is in the process of being established.

The preliminary work for this organisation has been carried out by representatives of four companies:

Peter Charlton — Arena Theatre
Andrew Foster — Mixed Company
Dennis Gill — Bouverie St. TIE
Helen Rickards

— **Handspan Theatre**
Lizz Talbot — Bouverie St. TIE

The broad aims of the organisation are as follows:

1. To establish theatre as a vital and essential element of our culture.
2. To raise the quality of life of children and adults by presenting theatre to all areas of the community.
3. To ensure that Youth and Community Theatre in the State of Victoria is of a high standard both artistically and educationally.
4. To bring into question the social worth of all pieces of theatre in terms of their content, style and form.
5. To develop the standing of professional workers in this field in the eyes of the community, the acting profession and the media.
6. To ensure that the potential to present a wide range of styles and mediums within the Art Form is encouraged.
7. To encourage experimentation in this field and preserve the right of experimentation to fail within the terms of its stated aims.

One of the main issues leading to the establishment of an alternative organisation for professionals is that of artistic standards. In Victoria there appear to be far more companies working in schools than there are in NSW. It would be fair to say that the Victorian situation is "open slather" in comparison to NSW (where companies have to be authorised before they are allowed to perform in government schools) and that artistic standards in general are much lower.

"One of its most important functions will be . . . artistic assessment of each other's work . . ."

The companies listed above all believe that poor standards reflect on the area of TIE as a whole. The "We're On" Festival was often cited as an example of the poor artistic standards of companies working in schools who are also members of VYTA. The members of this new organisation believe that one of its most important functions will be that of artistic assessment of each other's work on an informal basis.

Peter Charlton (Arena Theatre) felt that VYTA was unable to meet all the needs of professional companies working in the youth area. **Dennis Gill (Bouverie Street)**

was also of the impression that issues such as artistic assessment could divide and fragment VYTA. In response to this criticism, **Sue Galley**, chairperson of VYTA, felt strongly that VYTA was able to cover the needs of all the performing companies working in the youth area throughout Victoria. Sue admitted that there were problems of overcrowding in the market place but thought it was important to offer showcases for companies other than the better known ones, such as **CAT, Mushroom** and **Bouverie Street**. With regard to the proposed new organisation, Sue was not prepared to comment on it as she didn't feel she had sufficient information. However, she did not regard it as a threat to VYTA.

Whether this new alternative organisation will actually get off the ground remains to be seen, as support from the community theatres, has been very guarded. Whilst most community theatre groups devise youth programmes, they do not wish to commit all their resources to this area. **Martin Foot (Theatreworks)** expressed the view that there was a limit to how many umbrella organisations one could belong to. He shared the concern regarding the poor artistic standards of work being done for youth but felt that community theatre had to maintain its own identity and status. Like other community groups I spoke to, he did not wish to have another organisation, such as PYCT, speak on behalf of **Theatreworks** with regard to funding applications.

Regardless of the success or otherwise of this organisation, there is obviously considerable concern from companies in Victoria about artistic standards and professionalism. In my interview with the Minister for the Arts, **Race Mathews**, he expressed awareness of the existence of VYTA and PYCT and indicated that he would be looking into the issues of artistic standards.

Lyn Tuit