

LOWDOWN

YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

LABORS YOUTH ARTS POLICIES

W.A.

IN A STATE OF EXCITEMENT!

Lowdown visits Perth
at Festival time as a new

Labor government
checks in.



SENATOR SUSAN RYAN
Interview

\$3.50



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NEWS, REVIEWS, CLUES AND WHAT'S ON*

A BOOM IN THE WEST?

Halfway through this year's Festival of Perth, Western Australia ousted the Liberal government which has held the reins for the past nine years, and installed a new Labor government — only two weeks before the Commonwealth did the same. Lowdown editor Andrew Bleby spent a week in the west while the new government settled in. He discovered that besides the change of government, a number of other extraordinary developments are taking place, and the number-plate slogan 'State of Excitement' is not the only appropriate description . . .

The arts in Western Australia have a most unusual and somewhat enviable problem. There is suddenly more money than anyone knows what to do with. At the same time, and not necessarily for the same reasons, Perth is nurturing several symbols of a resurgence in the youth performing arts. Some are true indications of renewed vigor — others are simply expressions of renewed hope.

The extra money, which represents a tripling of the West's previous arts budget, comes both from promises made by the new Labor government, and from a new Instant Lottery which will provide an injection of several million dollars a year into the arts coffers. (See box.) Those self-preserving activities undertaken by artists and organisations are now not aimed so much at scraping up enough money to stay alive, but at devising bigger and better schemes to spend more. Almost everyone can now expect to stay alive, and inevitable there are new attitudes to expansion, risk-taking and accountability.

Some of the immediate results for the youth performing arts of the Lottery include grants of \$5,640 to Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, \$2,250 to Deck Chair Education and Theatre and \$4,500 to Bent Pin Productions. \$151,000 went to the National Theatre; \$20,000 each went to the WA Opera and WA Ballet, and even the WA Light Railway Preservation Society Incorporated scored \$20,000 of the cultural give-away. All that is only part of January's allocation — there's more to be given away each month.

But changes in Western Australia are not all due to the Arts Lottery. Youth Performing Arts in particular seem to be active, and there are differences of opinion as to which activities represent real advances and which are token or ill-conceived.

The annual Festival of Perth attracts some criticism as a festival for the cultural elite, but for some years it has presented a "Children's Festival" at the Mount Lawley CAE Campus (the home of the new Academy of Performing Arts — see box). The children come to the festival for a full day, and see three or four shows one after the other. **Suitcase Circus** and **Steve Hansen** provided the international content this year, and most of the other performances were local, including

a number of shows provided by staff of the WA academy of Performing Arts. Ray Richardson reviews some of the Children's Festival in this edition.

The Festival also dedicated part of its adult programme this year as a **Salute to Youth**. The package included the Festival Youth Music Theatre Company (composed largely of students), the Festival Youth Chorale and Orchestra, the WA Youth Jazz Orchestra, the new Western Australian Youth Theatre Company and featured the Australian Youth Orchestra. The Festival said it chose to place a special emphasis on youth "in the firm belief that the provisions of an international platform for young Australian artists can provide a tremendous stimulus to the

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The WA Youth Theatre company — a special emphasis on youth in the Perth Festival.

development of both talent and our culture."

The Festival was also involved in another innovation, **Artcard** (see box), which provides ticket discounts to young people of up to eight dollars on student prices, although it did not apply to every attraction. This audience-building scheme will continue at least into next year, with regular concessions on admission prices to WA's major theatre, dance and opera companies.

The Western Australian Youth Theatre Company was established by the Festival and the WA Education Department after an enthusiastic response to a call for auditions. The company presented an English play (see review this edition) for the festival, and there are hopes that the company will continue to do further productions. Unfortunately, the company does not have a permanent director, nor permanent accommodation, nor an administrative centre, nor a stated philosophy or long-term plan under which it can develop.

The National Theatre Company has volunteered to take over the administration, but hasn't yet stated any firm plans for the company's continued existence. So far it has been pulled together largely by Gary Hodge, a busy young man in the Education Department's Speech and Drama Department.

**" . . . a resurgence
in the youth
performing arts"**

Another kite being held in the breeze ready for take-off is a new Dance-in-Education team. While Lowdown was in Perth, the Education Department was playing host to Jenny Kinder, director of the Tasmanian Dance Company which has successfully pioneered a

carefully-planned programme which introduces modern dance to schools. Jenny was taking a series of in-service workshops with teachers, and it was hoped that discussion would arise about the possibility of establishing a similar company in Perth. Indeed, one or two people appear to be waiting in the wings ready to go with it. Others are a bit sceptical of the speed with which the whole idea seems to have surfaced, and are looking for more consultation with dance educators in setting up any such scheme. The structure of any such company is still unknown, as is the source for any funding the team would require (a figure of \$250,000 has been mooted).

Perth's National Theatre is another area undergoing rapid expansion which could have a significant impact on the youth performing arts. Eight months ago, ex-Army man Patrick Van Rooyen was brought into the General Manager's seat to, in his words, "rebuild and revitalise" the

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Artcard is a system of providing discount theatre tickets to young people under the age of 21. For three dollars, young people buy the card and can use it to purchase cheap tickets for the Playhouse, the Concert Hall, His Majesty's Theatre, the Hole in the Wall, and the WA Opera and Ballet Companies, plus a number of Festival

of Perth attractions. Tickets are at least a dollar cheaper than normal student price, and in some cases several dollars cheaper. The scheme was initiated by the Performing and Visual Arts Links with Schools Committee (PALS) with the Festival of Perth and the National Theatre Company, although none of them thought up the original idea or the name. PALS was set up by the Director-General of Education, Bob Vickery, "to investigate links between Government and non-Government schools and the Western Australian arts community." The Committee includes representatives of Perth's major performing arts companies and organisations, plus the Education Department and the ABC.

Artcard is administered by the National Theatre, and seems to be something of a success so far. Over 1300 young people have bought the cards, in spite of some unfortunate timing of its release, just after schools finished for the year. It remains to be seen whether the number of subscribers to the card will increase to a substantial portion of the young population.

Very little subsidy is required to run the scheme, as each company involved suffers the lower admission price in the name of audience development. Young people must prove their age to receive a card (they do not have to be students) and they must also buy their tickets in person and sign for them. The card is valid until July 1984.

**Are you under 21?
Do you like
a good night out?**



is for You.

THE ARTS IN WA . . . (Cont.)

company. Facing a large deficit and low audiences, Patrick has decided on an old Army tactic to get out of the mess. "When you've got your backs against the wall, sometimes the only resort is to attempt what's known as a breakout," he said. He immediately spent \$40,000 on renovating the Playhouse theatre (which was achieved in a mere five weeks) and bumped up the company's programme from nine productions a year to sixteen, some of which are occurring in a new second venue, the Green Room. His rationale for this apparent rashness is that with an expanded programme, it's possible to increase the number of sure-fire hits (they recently made a killing with a well-supported run of **Irene**). But Van Rooyen's approach goes further than that — he wants to set up a second theatre-in-Education company because, he says, the present company (National TIE, directed by John Preston) is unable to cope with the demand.

He would need another \$70,000 in grant money for that. The present company (see this edition's News for this year's programme) is hoped to break even or perhaps make a small profit this year, counting production and salary costs against grants and box office income of one dollar per head.

On top of the second TIE team, the National is planning to take over operation of the new WA Youth Theatre company and tie it in with the theatre classes now being run for young people by another innovation, newly-appointed Youth Development officer Peter Morris. Further to all these plans, Patrick Van Rooyen has offered the facilities of the National Theatre Company to a number of other small companies working for young people. Discussions are in progress with Spare Parts Puppet Theatre about combining the Puppet company's typist and administrator with National staff to effect a rationalisation of resources, and the offer is

apparently open to other companies as well. Van Rooyen promises that such companies would retain artistic independence, but this writer modestly suggests that it is not possible to effectively separate artistic and administrative control. No doubt there will be many discussions before we have anything more definite to report. One of the reasons Patrick Van Rooyen offers to support his idea of such a broad umbrella is that it is necessary for the people of Western Australia to identify the National Theatre company as the source of many good things in the arts, so the company's position in society is strengthened. If anyone then suggested dismantling the National Theatre, they would be proposing the destruction of an enormous chunk of Western Australia's performing arts activity. The company is quite serious about audience development, and also runs occasional **Schooldays**, a scheme which has equivalents in South Australia and Victoria, in

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WA ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING ALLOCATIONS 1981-82

BALLET AND DANCE

General Purpose Grants

Australian Association for Dance Education	250
Australian Ballet School	7,750
Kinetikos	4,560
West Australian Ballet Company	227,000
TOTAL GENERAL PURPOSE GRANTS	\$239,560

Special Purpose Grants

Australian Association for Dance Education	400
Bunbury Arts Council	900
Fran Bridges School of Dance	500
Grass Roots	600
Janice Heale School of Dance	240
Kinetikos	2,000
Old Austria Club	320
Perth City Ballet	3,140
South West Ballet Schools	4,000
South West Regional Dance Committee	4,000
West Australian Ballet Company	14,832
TOTAL SPECIAL PURPOSE GRANTS	\$30,932

DRAMA AND PUPPETRY

General Purpose Grants

Australian National Playwrights Conference	3,000
Hole in the Wall Theatre	53,250
National Institute of Dramatic Art	7,000
National Theatre Company	221,300
Rae Gibson — Mime Artist	3,475
Victorian College of the Arts	15,500
TOTAL GENERAL PURPOSE GRANTS	\$303,525

Special Purpose Grants

Albany Youth Drama Committee	1,000
Bent Pin Productions	4,900
Garrick Theatre	500
Hanson, Jon	50
Hole in the Wall Theatre	1,500
National Theatre Company	426
Playlovers	500
Town of Geraldton	4,000
Spare Parts Puppet Theatre	22,260
Swan River Stage Company	7,000
Winter Theatre Inc.	11,200
Writers/Performers Workshop	3,000
York Theatre Group	500
TOTAL SPECIAL PURPOSE GRANTS	\$56,836

THE ARTS LOTTERY

HERE'S HOW THE DREAM MACHINE WORKS

The Western Australian Government recently introduced a new Instant Lottery to the State — the kind of lottery where a little card is scratched to reveal codes or combinations which may or may not represent a prize. It offers instant gratification or disappointment, rather than having to wait for the televised Lotto draw on Saturday nights.

When the lottery was instigated, the government decided that apart from the usual cut to charity, ten percent of all money raised through the Lottery would be used "for the active encouragement and assistance to various cultural groups and organisations." A similar amount is handed out for sporting and recreation purposes. It's called the **Sports-Cultural Instant Lottery**.

It could mean an extra four or five million dollars a year for the arts. Total state government grants for the arts in 1981-82 were about two million dollars.

A special committee was set up to distribute funds to the sporting side, and another was to be established for the cultural grants. They're called Instant Lottery Distribution Advisory Committees (ILDACs). However, in the case of the arts, the Arts Council of WA was given the task of becoming an ILDAC. The Arts Council normally determines all arts grants, small and large, as well as handling touring to regional areas.

Anyone can apply for lottery money — up to \$20,000. In the first carve-up of funds, nearly half a million dollars was allocated to over 60 organisations. Surprisingly, in spite of the guidelines, several grants of over \$20,000 were agreed, including several which promised up to \$20,000 per month for up to six months. The Council says it handled 118 submissions totalling two million dollars in the first month alone. A grant of \$90,000 (over several months) was given to Western Australia's arts magazine **Artlook**, which responded with a sycophantic front-page article featuring much praise for the then Arts Minister, Bob Pike. Bob Pike not only lost his portfolio in the recent state election, but lost his seat as well.

The Lottery distribution system was set up and the first bunch of grants handed out with astonishing speed. **Artlook** admits that Mr. Pike "has been adamant that he wants the money handed out — fast." It was handed out just before the State election. **Lowdown** understands that even the Arts Council staff, whose job it is to process the applications, had no time to follow up each application or even insist on adequate budgetting and accountability. Some applications came in without specifying the amount being applied for, and one telephone enquiry

from an arts enthusiast asked if it was necessary to have a project in mind when applying for a grant! In the words of one Arts Council officer, "it's a cock-up."

The new Arts Minister, Ron Davies, says "the previous government seemed to have a real Christmas morning party handing out the prezzos, without proper regard to the ongoing result. It's public money and you can't just hand it round because someone asks for it, you've got to find out that someone will benefit from it and hopefully that there will be a lasting benefit." Mr. Davies has frozen the distribution of money temporarily "unless there are special and significant requests for money" until proper guidelines for grants can be established. In the meantime, he has made an election promise to double the amount of money available to the major WA companies including the opera, ballet, orchestra and theatre company, "the standard-bearers" as he calls them, and he pointed out to **Lowdown** that some of the Lottery money will have to go their way to fulfil that promise. At the same time, Mr. Davies says the decision-making powers will remain vested in the Arts Council "for the time being, unless some better scheme is proposed to me." Just how much power will remain with the Council is yet to be seen. The previous minister overturned several of the first batch of recommendations and added his own favourites, and Davies has indicated that he will maintain some personal control of the purse-strings himself (see our interview with the minister in this edition).

There doesn't seem to be any plan to include the Lottery money within the overall State budget allocation to the arts, although it may represent three times the amount handed over through treasury. Mr. Davies predicts that treasury will want to cut down its allocation because of the Lottery money, but he says he will fight against that "because I believe the Arts Lottery is a bonus which we should be enjoying the full benefits of. We will more than double the amount of money we can pump into the community. It's very good — it's exciting, what we might be able to do."

Mr. Davies says he will be consulting the Arts Council, the Sport and Recreation Department, and other advisers about setting up guidelines for the disbursement of Lottery money. In the meantime, people in WA are comparing this sudden embarrassment of riches to the early days of the Whitlam government — lots of excitement and sudden activity, surrounded by some confusion and impending chaos. Greediness and a lack of research, planning and direction have marked the Arts Lottery so far. It is certainly a dream scheme, but one which will probably not be operating perfectly until there have been a few nightmares experienced.

THE ARTS IN WA . . . (Cont.)

which school students come to the Playhouse for a day and see an audiovisual presentation, a backstage tour, and a matinee performance by the main house company. Cost is \$3.50.

Another symbol of the resurgence of youth performing arts in Western Australia is the re-formation of Western Australian AYPAA — the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association. AYPAA (WA) is an entirely separate organisation from the National AYPAA which used to publish *Lowdown*, but the association in the west has decided that there are things to be done on a local level which require a joining of forces. Their first act was to publish a newsletter called **Rundown** which provides news of some of the new initiatives being undertaken in the west, and they hope to be able to act as a lobby and advocacy group on behalf of youth performing arts. There are also vague plans for a youth performing arts festival later in 1983.

One of the stalwarts of youth performing arts in WA is CATS, the Children's Activities Time Society, which celebrates its 18th birthday in 1983. Initiated by Joan Pope in 1965, the company has been under a cloud for the past couple of years as Joan has moved aside and the team has had to establish new directions and standards. Philip Cross has been brought in as new Administrative Director, and hopes to bring the company back onto an even keel. An immigrant from the UK, Philip's experience lies in cabaret and variety performance, and cinema management and publicity through the Rank Organisation. The new CATS team includes Philip plus Christine Mearing (now known as Surabhi) as Community Arts Co-ordinator and Rosemary McTaggart as Education Arts Co-ordinator. Philip Cross is planning a new life for CATS, building on the base activity such as Clown performances and in-school shows to develop a new philosophy to guide the organisation away from its \$12,000 deficit. The company is currently working on two new projects — one a pair of programmes based on Aboriginal dreamtime stories for the

Aboriginal Arts 83 festival to be held in April, and the second is a musical play about a search for a magical drum. CATS does not have a permanent team of performers, but picks people up on a temporary basis, usually having to pay less than award wages or contracting only per performance.

“ . . . youth performing arts represents a boom area in WA . . . the questions now being asked relate to long term developments”

Two other relatively new companies have started up in Western Australia, **Deck Chair** and

Bent Pin. Both operate out of Fremantle, which seems to be preferred to Perth by young and alternative companies. **Deck Chair** has arisen from two past members of the National TIE team who have been preparing their first production **Wheezily Distinguished**, which is about asthma for high school audiences. **Bent Pin** is preparing a two-hander production called **Talkback**, a critical appraisal of the media for the 10 to 15 age group. Artist Mandy Browne (who designed this year's Festival of Perth poster) has teamed with Murray Oliver (an original Pipi Storm member) to form the company, and they hope to be able to provide an alternative TIE team which will have a big impact in the west. Murray has already written a couple of successful plays, one of which, **Confessions from the Male**, is being successfully toured in Victorian schools.

Another small group to have emerged is **Dial-a-Show**, which is currently presenting a production called **It's All Greek To Me**. This is a curriculum-based show for touring to schools which looks at the school drama syllabus and ties together a number of themes from such favourites as *Macbeth*, *Oedipus* and *Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll*.

So activity at least appears to be booming in the west. The questions now being asked relate to long term developments — how will the extra money be allocated, how will decision-making structures in the arts be altered, who will plan and co-ordinate all this activity? John Catlin, newly-appointed Performing Arts Project Officer for the Arts Council of WA, says youth performing arts represents a boom area in WA at the moment, not only with children's theatre and TIE companies flourishing, but with adult companies looking at establishing various kinds of youth programmes themselves. The problem is that there is no separate youth policy within the Arts Council or the government.

The Arts Council in WA is unlike most other Arts Councils in Australia, in that it fulfils the function of not only a touring

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agency, but also the function of a Ministry of the Arts and of all arts funding bodies. Opinion is divided as to whether the current structure is adequate, and many people (including some councillors) have criticisms of the current make-up of the Council itself. Without a Department for the Arts, the government must rely entirely on the Arts Council for all policy and funding recommendations. But the Arts Council is composed of part-time, honorary and amateur councillors, with barely a practising artist amongst them. The Council then relies on the advice of the Arts

Council Director, but there hasn't been one for some time, and Margaret Gill, the Acting Director, is also director of Touring so doesn't have much time to look after the Council in times of crisis. With the additional responsibilities of handing out the Lottery money and advising the new government on how to plan for a massive expansion in arts activity, the Council is beginning to look sadly inadequate. There are accusations of ignorance and political expedience being levelled at the Council, and it is likely that some changes will be made when the

new government finds its feet (see the interview with the new Arts Minister in this edition). At present, the general feeling in the arts seems to be one of energy, rather than quality. The possibilities are tremendous, the potential overwhelming. The new embarrassment of riches can provide a superb injection into the arts, and indeed into the youth performing arts. But it could take some years of careful re-structuring and planning to make those extra funds bring in real returns and solid growth.

Andrew Bleby

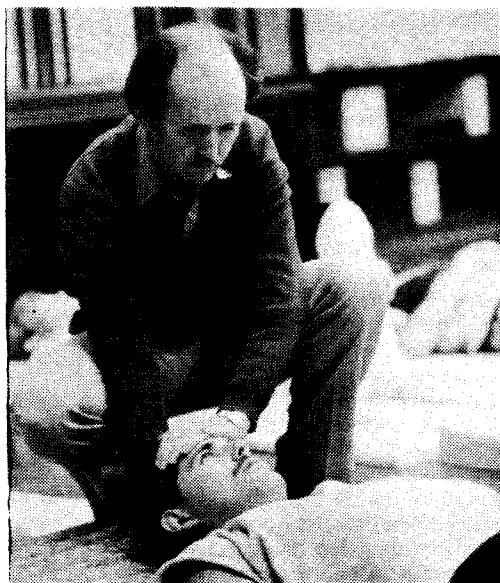
PICKING UP SKILLS IN THE WEST

The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts is one of Australia's newest, biggest training grounds for professional performers in music, dance and theatre.

Established by former Premier, Sir Charles Court, the Academy offers Diplomas in Performing Arts specialising in each of the three areas, aiming to prepare students for life as a professional performer. The dance and music courses also offer options geared towards teaching. The Academy sees itself as not only providing preparation for aspiring professionals, but also inservice training for the profession, and its brief also extends to "servicing the performing arts needs of Western Australia" in city and country areas.

In a comparatively small city like Perth it is not possible for such an institution to exist in isolation from its surroundings, and so far the Academy seems to have made quite an impact on life in the West. Local professionals are involved in the teaching programme, the Academy's facilities at Mount Lawley are widely used, and there seems to have been an enthusiastic reception to some of the public performances which have been presented by students of the Academy.

Lowdown spoke with Nigel Rideout, Co-ordinator of Theatre Studies, about his approach to setting up a new drama training school. An experienced director and teacher from LAMDA (the London Academy of Music and Drama), he has very firm ideas about what students need from such a course. His philosophy is that theatre is a craft, and that students need to be taught to know, understand and use their tools (the body and the voice) through a careful progression of improvisation and gradually-broadening group work. Students from the three sections combine for some theatre productions, although they don't combine classes — "an actor works by feeling, a dancer by counting," says Rideout.



Nigel Rideout teaching voice using the Alexander method.

The drama school has presented several productions for children "because you have to be so honest in performance when working for children" and the Academy plans to combine occasionally with the National Theatre in producing large scale works. For student productions, the budgets are increased progressively according to the level the students have reached, in a conscious effort to avoid the pitfalls of providing enough production whizz-bangery to hide the performers themselves. Public performances presented so far have been packed out. Much of the 'Children's Festival' of the Festival of Perth was provided by staff of the Academy.

The ultimate aim, according to Rideout, is "to uplift the standards of the profession, not only in the West, but throughout Australia." He sees no direct conflict with the role or aims of NIDA in Sydney as a training school for actors, nor with the Victorian College of the Arts. "Anyway," he adds, "a little competition can be healthy."

A MINISTER WITHOUT A DEPARTMENT

An Interview with Ron Davies, Western Australia's new Minister of Arts

Ron Davies has been in Parliament for 22 years, having moved into Labor politics from the Airforce (during the war) and then the WA Railway Officers' Union. A previous Health Minister, and opposition leader, his current portfolio encompasses the Environment, Multi-cultural and Ethnic Affairs (previously Immigration) and the Arts (previously Culture). He's an old-style Labor man who is delighted to be back in office after a nine-year stretch of Liberal Government. Lowdown spoke to him less than a week after he had been sworn into the new portfolio, and found a man full of enthusiasm for the arts, but as yet unclear about the directions and initiatives his government could take . . .



Ron Davies:

No. The National Theatre has been doing some work in schools, and I do want to get this done. My first feeling for the arts came when I went to the Museum as a child at school, and visited the Art Gallery. My first feeling for symphony music came attending school concerts in the Capitol Theatre when I was ten or eleven. I believe there is too much fun poked at the arts, when there are people with particular skills and talents who would possibly develop them if there wasn't this macho idea that you have to be pretty good at football and cricket and drinking beer. That's ridiculous. I think it's very important that we encourage young people to think that all forms of art are just as important as all forms of sport, because you can go on to get greater satisfaction from the arts than you can from being a good footballer. I believe there's a lot to be done to promote it and encourage it.

Lowdown:

What do you think a government can do to encourage it?

Ron Davies:

Involve them in participation, get them coming to the theatre and take theatre to the schools. I'm not suggesting this isn't done now, but I believe it could be done more widely — you can even promote the arts with prizes, for young playwrights and so on. I want to encourage if I can a purely West Australian factor within the arts, although I don't know how you divorce Western Australia from other places in the east over there. We should be able to fund plays by young people who stage them, and if they show a loss then the government picks up a tab. That doesn't mean handing money out willy-nilly, but it could be a play that's got something to say, something of interest. Then of course we have our very excellent Academy of Performing Arts. I've got to give the previous government full marks for that, and they're turning out excellent work. Now some of the stuff out there I've seen I thought was bloody rubbish, but it's been well-performed rubbish, and the talent is extraordinary. Now what are these people going to do if we haven't got some theatre or dance or music going in Western Australia?

Lowdown:

Presumably you also need to develop the audiences to go with any expansion?

Lowdown:

Mr. Davies, I understand you are still freshly installed in office, but have you identified any problems in the arts in WA to which you now want to address yourself?

Ron Davies:

Nothing except political patronage, which has at times bordered on the obscene. The arts, as I feel them at the present time, have been very unhappy, the way things have been going. It's always been looked upon as a less important portfolio, and it probably is less important than some, but in this day and age it's becoming increasingly important, and it's vital that we coordinate and help these people who want to do things to employ themselves.

Lowdown:

Do you have a particular policy or vision relating to youth performing arts, or a notion of what the arts should mean to young people?

A MINISTER WITHOUT A DEPARTMENT (Cont.)

Ron Davies:

That's it. The audience here has fairly clearly demonstrated that they want pot-boilers.

Lowdown:

Does that come down to getting them while they're young?

Ron Davies:

Exactly. Making them want to listen to things and take part and express themselves while they're young. Making it the thing to do to go to the theatre.

Lowdown:

So you do see a possibility, now that you have increased funds at your disposal, of being able to divert more funds into companies working for or with young people?

Ron Davies:

Yes, I think there's scope there, but of course there's so much being done in the arts in Western Australia that is being done by young people, a lot of dance companies and so forth who are working hard to promote themselves, and they have still to attract the audiences. Now unfortunately, with the downturn in the economy, the money doesn't seem to be there to fill places like the Entertainment Centre or the Concert Hall.

Lowdown:

How do you see the role of the smaller companies who visit schools? Do you think that's important?

Ron Davies:

Excellent. It's really good to give them the experience of the theatre, and I'd like to see more of it, providing they meet a standard and they have something that children can relate to and understand.

Lowdown:

And how do you assess that standard?

Ron Davies:

I would have to get my advice through the Arts Council, initially, but then you would have to assess them with the kids themselves — for God's sake, you've got to give them something they're able to tolerate, even if they don't say they'll enjoy it thoroughly — you know, if it's not as good as Cop Shop.

Lowdown:

Now that there is so much available to young people through video and television, do you think it's still necessary to promote the live performing arts?

Ron Davies:

I'd ban television if I could. But I do love quizzes — that one that Tony Barber runs — I often see that before I go out to an eight o'clock meeting. And I like historical things about the war — and you see how what they're saying relates to the way you remember it.

Lowdown:

Earlier, you mentioned a personal interest in fine art and music, but do you also have a particular interest in theatre or dance?

Ron Davies:

Love them all! Love them all! I reckon the greatest thing to do is to go to the theatre and enjoy yourself. Sometimes you come away arguing about what it meant, but I suppose that's part of the enjoyment as well.

Lowdown:

Have you seen any of the work that's being done for kids or teenagers in Western Australia?

Ron Davies:

No. I see on my desk a submission from the Playhouse (National Theatre Company — Ed.) to continue again their education through the theatre and they're doing a good job. I'd like to see that carried on. It's a huge task, but I think if you keep chipping away you can get to people. But I'd like to see more plays presented at school, not the annual Christmas thing, but kids making up plays themselves — I did that at school. We'd read something about Dampier landing on the Western Australian coast in our history, and we'd go out on the floor and make a play about it. You know — you're Dampier, you're somebody else and you're the boat — that kind of thing.

"I'd ban television if I could. But I do love quizzes . . ."

Lowdown:

I notice there is a new Western Australian Youth Theatre Company which has been formed. . .

Ron Davies:

Well you're ahead of me, where is it?

Lowdown:

Their first performance is on tonight at the Dolphin Theatre for the Festival of Perth . . .

Ron Davies:

Well I'll forgive them for not asking me . . . But that's admirable. And so much is already being done by the young people, and of course there are a lot of dancing academies, and mothers pushing their precocious children to perform.

Lowdown:

With the establishment of activities such as the Youth Theatre, do you see a need for a close connection between those who run the arts and those who run education?

Ron Davies:

There must be. It's essential. That's partly why I want a couple of officers here with me to keep me constantly prodded about what needs doing, rather than the Arts Council or some other organisation coming back and reminding me from time to time — I want to be constantly reminded, so the arts come to mean something. Now there's tremendous scope for employment within the arts.

Lowdown:

Will you be employing a couple of officers here?

Ron Davies:

Yes.

Lowdown:

Is that because of a lack of communication in the current system? Does that account for some of your criticism of the previous government?

Ron Davies:

I believe it was as much a lack of communication as it was political opportunism, which turned to obscenity at times.

Lowdown:

Do you hope, through these officers, to have some extra liaison with people working in the field?

Ron Davies:

Yes, I think people just doing that, instead of making policy or only working in the arts part-time. The Arts Council's chairman does a great job — I think he's spent half his retirement working for the Arts Council. But the others, no doubt, take it in varying degrees, but like all boards some would just rush in there and read the agenda, nod their head and march out again. I don't say that particularly happens in the Arts Council, I've got no evidence of that, but I imagine it's a situation that can happen on so many other boards. That's why we need people with the time and the energy and the expertise too. I want to see the Arts Council as fully as possible representative of the community and the arts community in particular. Some of the appointments don't seem to have been motivated for the good of art but more for politics, and that's got to stop.

"The minister has control of that cultural budget"

Lowdown:

So there's a lack of expertise on that Council?

Ron Davies:

I'm not familiar with them all, but from what I hear, some people play a peculiar game in regard to matters associated with the Arts Council. But it's early days yet, and I don't want to make any sweeping statements about that organisation until I've time to talk with them, find out what they're doing and where they may have some weaknesses which I can help strengthen, or if their charter needs changing in any way. But the Arts Council will remain, for the present time, doing the job they've always done in accordance with the government's requests.

Lowdown:

I notice that the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association has revived itself in Western Australia. In matters relating to the youth performing arts, do you only look to the Arts Council for advice, even if there is no-one with any expertise in that area?

Ron Davies:

Basically, at the present time, the arts are handed over to the Arts Council, and I think that's got some faults in it. I believe if they wanted to the Arts Council could be obstructionist. If a radical or reactionary policy — either — was put forward by a government, the Arts Council could say "no, we don't think that would be good". That could be obstructionist. I think broadly the Arts Council is there to put into effect the policy of the government of the day. I think the previous government wanted to do things its own way, against the advice of the Arts Council.

Lowdown:

I suppose there is a fine line, however, between a board being obstructionist and that same board giving advice which the government doesn't accept.

Ron Davies:

It is a fine line.

Lowdown:

Would you put the difference as being between artistic judgements and general policy?

Ron Davies:

It could be both. A minister might have a favourite in the field that he wants to promote, and the majority of the Arts Council might also have a different favourite in the same field that they want to promote.

Lowdown:

Who would win?

Ron Davies:

Who would win?

Lowdown:

I'm asking you.

Ron Davies:

The minister, obviously. At the present time the minister has control of that cultural budget, and money controls everything. But that would be bad if it ever developed between the Arts Council and the government. But within government service there is no-one looking after the arts. I'm a minister without a department, and I don't want to build up a big department.

Lowdown:

It has been suggested that the government should set up a ministry for the arts.

Ron Davies:

I'll be having a look at the position in each of the other states to see what they have done, but I don't want a duplication of services — I do want co-ordination. With my Department of the Environment I can go up to the Department and get amongst it and it's all there. With the Arts Council I have yet to go through their doors, but I repeat it's early days yet and I believe we'll get something done. I'm very proud of what Western Australia has done — we can stage almost anything here, indoors or outdoors.

Lowdown:

Finally, what would you like to see as being the legacy of your time in office?

Ron Davies:

On the craft side, I want to see a crafts centre established which can be a showplace and many other things. I want to hopefully get the arts united, instead of running in various directions as they are at the present time. I would like to see some permanent, ongoing appreciation of the arts through the schools, if we can firm that up, but I've yet to find out exactly what happens there. I'd like to see our WA Symphony Orchestra expanded, and that may be possible. I would like to see the development of the cultural centre at Northbridge — it's going terribly slowly because of lack of funds. I'd like opportunities for young artists to have public showings, and I'd like to see use of the cultural talents of our ethnic groups.

I do hope that we can co-ordinate the arts and provide opportunities and help to young people.