

**PERFORMANCE  
PERFORMANCE**  
Magazine

**CRIPPS ● POINT BLANK ●  
POLITICS OF DRAG ●  
MIDLANDS REPORT ●  
REVIEWS ●**

**No. 6**

**60p**

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## DIRECTORY OF ARTS CENTRES 2

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## PSEUDONYM SPOTTERS

The new British Alternative Theatre Directory is now out, and the main way to review invaluable indexes of information is to show your erudition by pointing out the omissions "I don't want to be churlish but..." Well there is no way this can be done here, because just about everyone concerned is sent a form to fill in with what like for inclusions. Therefore those omitted have usually been, so I am informed by the publishers, too lazy to fill in their forms. Anyway, this Directory is utterly invaluable to fringe groupies, pseudonym-spotters, alphabet-soups, telephone salesmen, Bavarian Television, American colleges trying to get rid of their students on placement, practical jokers, heavy breathers, private detectives, and the Inland Revenue. We also find it quite useful.

## CULTURAL GASTARBEITERS

Rumours coming through of an invasion by the Dutch. The Greater London Arts Association are trying to persuade the Dutch Government to fund a showcase festival for Dutch companies in London in the near future. Which would be a welcome reversal of the situation where British fringe artists are forced to be cultural gasterbeiters in Holland while Dutch artists fight for some sort of identity of their own against the Anglo-American domination of the Amsterdam culture-palaces. Let's hope it isn't all the white faces and sub-hippy clown humour usually associated with that country's fringe output.

## JAVELINS UP THE MALL

As the Olympics approach, and we make up our minds whether 'this will be the year' to book our tourist packages, the Art-Sport connection is being made once again, (after Brecht, after Warhol) at the ICA where there is a whole season of sporting art, martial art performances and demonstrations of gymnastics, trampolining and other sports. Javelins up the Mall anyone? But what no one has realised, and I suppose it's too late, that the Olympics has traditionally held, as a sort of sideshow, an 'Art Contest'. This has fallen into obscurity of late, but records show a number of entries, mostly from Eastern European

countries, with titles such as 'Effort', and 'The Glory of the Discus Thrower'. This year this is being revived in the form of a children's art contest—but what a pity this hasn't been taken further. In the spirit of the times it would have to be performance art—in the arena of course. Perhaps it's not too late to contact the British Olympic Association. Or at least a letter explaining why you must regretfully withdraw your entry to the Art Contest.

## WILL ANYBODY GO?

Edinburgh Fringe approaches again, and the Magazine will be producing a rundown next issue. But will anyone go? And will any performers want to pay £92 (the new fee) for the privilege of making all their own arrangements, finding a hall and then competing for an audience? One performer says: "I paid my money last year and never saw a single one of my posters up". (One of the only things the fees buy you, apart from inclusion in the programme.) As a result, if you are not careful you will, as Paddy Fletcher put it some issues back, find yourself playing to "two old men, the Scotsman reviewer and a three-legged dog, while the Dalkeith School of Cookery packs 'em in next door with Lady Windermere's Fan".

This is David Greenwood, the American performance artist, passing through on his way back to the USA after an enthusiastically received series of events in Yugoslavia. His current work includes the spectacular 'candle man', Greenwood's body bedecked

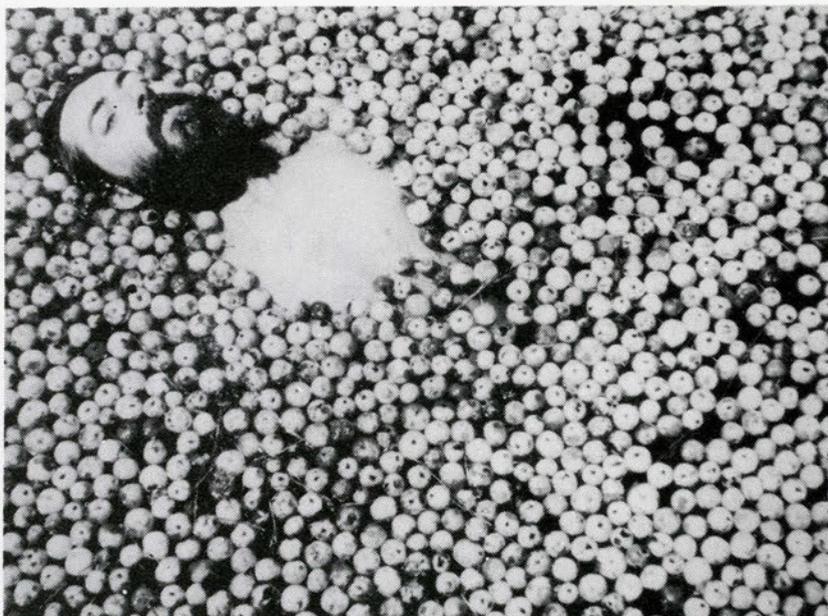


technology

## HAS THE PICTURE STOPPED?

Times are changing for the London Video Arts Group, which organises showings of new work by video artists and performers, usually of the 'difficult' variety. A recent evening of theirs at the Acme featured the work of one Mary Steele; a student at the Byam Shaw Art School, whose work can only be described as belonging to the saturation school of video performance. To the video-recorded accompaniment of chairs being noisily shoved around the floor Ms Steele proceeded to charge about the room armed with a TV camera mounted on a tripod whilst busily wrapping herself up in toilet paper. When a separated audio recording emanating from a 'music centre' on the floor announced 'it's raining' she casually picked up a watering can and produced the desired effect all over herself. "How very seventies" murmured one of the audience. Seventies? But Mary Steele kept the would-be critics on their toes. Whenever we were about to relax into

with lighted candles in performances that are a striking blend of theatre, ritual and performance art. Pictured here back home surrounded by apples, Greenwood is currently leading performance workshops per visual artists at Cleveland State University.



a random cliché she was able to laterally transpose it; by brute force if necessary. Before long, she had disappeared through a door and up the stairs with a camera on a long lead, as a result of which we were privileged with a delightfully composed shot of the Acme cleaning cupboard. While viewing the contents on a monitor we got those same brooms and mops one by one, on glorious 3-D, hurled at us through the half-open door. More of the hidden places of the gallery were yet to be revealed. An inverted shot of the kitchen upstairs, with an obvious, but actually fairly fascinating shot of a bottle of wine being poured uphill was disturbed by sudden rushes downstairs—"would anybody like some?" All this, by the way, was accompanied by a sound-track on the music centre which could only have been recorded from within a ventilation system in Tokyo on a very hot day, apart from the voice of the performer repeating the word 'apples' over and over again. The videotape was out of focus, featuring meaningless jerks, the ideas were facile, the actions gauche; but all criticism was, as I have said kept at bay by an overdose of activity, and the atmosphere of boredom and I've-seen-it-all-before cynicism so often hanging in the air at such events was non-existent. Which is something.

Mary Steele: "Has the picture stopped?"

Audience: "Yes".

Mary Steele: "Oh, it's over".



You may, or may not have noticed that the 'Performance Magazine' has been somewhat sporadic in appearance of late. Well, we are now on an even keel again, and will be coming out as a regular bi-monthly issue. The next issue will be out on August 22, and we want you to write, criticise, send information, suggestions, and even unsolicited articles. The sort of thing we are interested in is anything unusual, radical, and likely to fall through the gap between visual art and theatre. By 30 July. Also, apologies for the price rise. It now costs 45p in printing costs alone to produce one copy of the magazine. Work that one out!

R.L.

**Thus does yesterday's safeguard become tomorrow's style.**

Art again. The caterpillar as chrysalis. Control to counteract changes come 'out' emotion that a good artist can create. 'I wish I could fly.' Speech. 5 pushbuttons tuned to pre-selected stations (4 Medium wave, 1 Long wave) give you the programmes you want, instantly. And you needn't take your eyes off the road. Is there any danger to the eye itself in this operation? No. Because the eye itself is untouched. Pike with saffron sauce. It's so easy FOR THE CONVALESCENT. A gift that will be greatly appreciated is this cosy little reversible bedjacket. Its double-thickness means warmth and protection where most bedjackets fail. The original was knitted in pale blue with a pink lining.

**1st objection. Eyes 2nd objection. Hands Head 3rd objection. Mouth Ears Nose Last objection**

Shape Armhole thus. Shape Top thus. The Right Front of Main Part. The Lining for Right Front. The Lining for Left Front. Shape Neck thus. Shape Shoulders thus. Shape Toe thus. First Finger.— Second Finger.— Third Finger.— Finger.— Thumb.— Left Hand Right Hand The Left Front of Main Part. The Lining for Back. The red and white colour. The storming of Maxim's: The Acid Test. The Ultimate View. The retreat from woman. The Legs. Three days for a play, 10 years for a novel. Dominic is sitting on the attendant's lap; Ahmed Pochee cradles Ben. In many cases, worms may not cause any symptoms for a long time, and tape worms may grow to many feet in length without the patient even feeling off-colour. 'Evidence' for a book without text. The desert, with its mile upon mile of completely open space. The artist content to cast himself in the modest role that suits him. Yet he feels misunderstood. Paranoia develops after enough nasty experiences. The clock is completely silent, too. Towards infinity. Perhaps it was years ago, the fascination of those half-forgotten faces. Lovers whisper endearments and learn to love the powder. Wrestling with a Vision: The author just before the operation. Dressing the part: the consultant. The man in the white suit: approving gaze. The old-fashioned doctor: the secret of success at home or on the beach. What the well-dressed man is flaunting: a hole in the head.

make more sense



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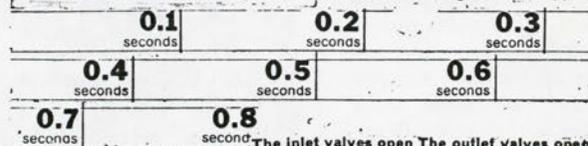
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The pain begins. You feel it in the tautness of the heart. You feel it in the comfort of the moment (from back to front). You feel it in the Sexual and genital Hot flushes. And you hear it in the quiet. It stops the shadows fading. It brings back the lost horizon. Arty facts. Unique process captures the reality Today - building another image. Will the voice become as famous as the face? Looks the river and she decorated it herself with a faultless eye for space, balance. Lack of chi-chi. Furniture is limited to a few choice items: a pair of Albrizzi modern sofa, a soft camel-coloured carpet. The focal point of her white bedroom: a bamboo four-poster bed, made especially for her by Heals. It is flanked by a big two tiny framed tapestries, their backs mounted in nineteenth-century editions. To me a bedroom should always be a calm room; a retreat from everything.

**sights, sounds, tastes, views** all the atmosphere and

every word taking you, gently, step by step, if you need it, in either with fire or a damp cosmopolitan for mouth, pen, eyes, lips and cheeks. This outline shows you where the colours go.

**another gloss on reality heart**



The inlet valves open. The outlet valves open. At the start of the beat. The inlet valves close. The outlet valves close.

**you can put the smile on**

Floss Forster.

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# THE POLITICS OF DRAG

MARGUERITE MCLAUGHLIN  
ON SOME ATTITUDES TO  
DRAG AMONG PERFORMERS



Bob Van Dantzig

Drew Griffiths in 'Mister X'

Gay pride Week in June is always marked by a collection of events and performances aimed specifically at the homosexual community. It is striking that this politically active week always finds itself with a number of 'drag' acts, although it is generally accepted in the more political section of the gay movement that drag is not a desirable art form. Political drag, however is an event unlike its usual embodied forms.

England thrives on two very different types of drag. One type belongs to the public sector of female-impersonator-as-family-entertainment, which can be found in vast quantities in nightclubs, the West End and on TV in watered down versions. The second, which has attracted numbers of sociological studies is the in-group phenomenon of gay pubs/clubs populated almost exclusively by men. There are vast numbers of drag acts featuring in gay clubs throughout the country with circuits of professional drag 'queens' who tour them.

What will be on view at Oval House, Action Space and other fringe venues in London in Gay Pride Week from 23 June belong to neither of these camps (no puns please). There are a number of gay theatre groups born out of the need for homosexual visibility and the need for alternative culture. These groups look to gay people as their audiences although often the productions have a wider appeal. The use of drag is featured in the work of gay male companies because of the tradition of drag as the oldest form of recognisable gay culture in performance style, although regular drag is now quite disapproved of—a direct result of feminist analysis of sex roles and the oppression of women.

Men performing in women's clothing or performing as a woman has been in our culture from the start of any sort of performance. In ancient Athens, before the drama festivals were established, the Dionysiac dithyrambs (fertility ceremonies) had male actors in female masks to symbolise important female deities. Roman drama, also with origins in harvest festivities, were the first to create female characters played by male actors who tried to act like women for comic effect. As a result we have inherited a 'Housewife Superstar' in Barry Humphries and never-ending variations on Danny La Rue style anti-woman humour. It is this nature of mimicry that causes women with any awareness of feminist ideology (formal or informal) to object to such degraded images of women.

The way in which several of the more politicised gay-identified companies have challenged and continue to challenge both the status quo of insulting female impersonation and of the homosexual entertainment circuit that glorifies 'drag queens' is to satirise or ridicule it.

Traditional gay entertainment drag presents images of women as catty, bitchy, vulgar, brainless bits of vain fluff who would do anything to possess their very own man—no matter what a poor specimen he may be. The comic value of these performances is the ability to laugh at what poor pathetic creatures these 'women' are. Some of these acts will mime women seduced, pregnant and abandoned by men, one actually goes as far as to enact an on-stage abortion while mouthing to a pre-recorded song about 'I've lost my baby . . .' The very idea of masses of men laughing at spectacles such as these is nothing but horrific.

One of the first plays to present an analysis of such acts was the original Gay Sweatshop production 'Mister X' in which a drag queen literally assaults the audience with anti-women, anti-homosexual jokes reflecting the self hatred the participants must feel to subject themselves to such an experience. "Laugh, yes laugh", demands Drew Griffiths in the role of the drag queen. "Why not since we're all jokes too."

"Mister X" was a play about one man's fight to deny and then to hide his homosexuality while simultaneously being pulled further into the ghetto atmosphere of secretive gay life. It is in this atmosphere that he encounters the spectre of the hateful drag queen.

"Occasionally it totally backfired on us, sometimes a section of the audience would visibly relax when the drag entertainer came on at the end", Drew remembers "they hadn't been able to take what realities were being presented before, but with the drag they were on home ground. It didn't happen often, but we always had discussions afterwards with the audience".



Drew Griffiths and Gordon MacDonald. In 'As Time Goes By'

Another way political theatre groups have used the drag image is as an historical symbol of past oppression. Drag has often been used to portray men who embraced the only alternative image available to them. In this way the different subject of transvestism is sometimes explored. 'As Time Goes By' another Gay Sweatshop production has one act set in 1930s Germany and features a man who earns his living as a drag queen but who also spends the rest of his life in women's clothing. It is a sensitive characterisation of an individual coping with social pressures in the only way possible to him.

The 'Brixton Fairies' will present their new play 'Gents' at the Gay Pride Week festival and drag is also used in this production as a representation of a gay lifestyle manifestation of the past, rather than as a confrontational device. There is some confusion however in the name 'Brixton Fairies' since it also seems to include not only a theatre company but a community of gay men living in a row of houses in Brixton. It was the community itself—the local inhabitants of Brixton, who coined the name since that and several obscenities would always be hurled in the wake of these men who use drag as a daily confrontation to the narrowminded on London's streets.

Frank Egan explains that although he is not in the theatre company he is included in the more generalised term 'Brixton Fairy' since he lives in one of the several houses occupied by members of the company and members of a new group calling themselves 'Sexual Outlaws' after the name of their first play (also being performed for Gay Pride Week). "What we do is not actually drag but 'gender fuck', we go out wearing drag because of its power. People who would shout and call me names if I'm wearing jeans, a T-shirt and a gay badge go silent if I'm in drag. When people do talk to any of us they either pretend that nothing unusual is happening or they tell us they think we look great and like what we're doing", says Frank. "Even the police are more polite, you know, even though they ask me if I'm

Photo by Derek Speirs.

a man or a woman, which is absurd I think because I don't try to look like a woman, I look like a man in drag". Jim Ennis added "If I'm on the underground and people near me don't ask me but say to one another—'Is it a man or a woman?' I always tell them, not aggressively, just so they know that I don't want to be viewed as trying to look like a woman".

There is power in the use of drag as direct confrontation when people have such violent reactions to it. Often jokes are used to break the tension caused by the confusions socialised deeply into everyone—including those who consider themselves as worldly individuals, when confronted by men in women's trappings. Even within the political gay community there is controversy as to what is acceptable even in alternative drag. 'Bloo Lips' a theatre group belonging to the gay community, currently on tour, use outrageous drag in their cabaret act and their play 'Lost In Space'. Their style, like that of the Brixton community, uses costumes which are a mad combination of conflicting social messages and they are always recognisable men. Their style is full of energy, enjoyment of what they are doing, and are thoughtfully entertaining, yet there have been times when they have been cat-called off the stage by politically involved gay male audiences who felt that they came too close to traditional drag.

In discussing the experiences of these groups, each expressed an interest in pushing the uses of drag further since it is still far from a dead issue. There has been very little done to pull down the straight institution of drag, yet there must be ways in which the format itself could be used to subvert the very people who follow the genre. There is still potential use of drag in performance which questions what the foundation of most of our humour is based on. Christmas pantos have gone virtually unmolested and yet are perfect material for alternative activity.

Yet anything is more acceptable on a stage than off it judging from the way crowds part like the Red Sea when



Frank Egan and Jim Ennis.

the 'Brixton Fairies' are afoot. An island of empty space is left around them even in the busiest rush hour crush. They are constantly asked if they are on their way to perform even if they have only gone off in search of a loaf of bread, as though if they are proven to be actors all is well. As one elderly lady asked: "Are you bringing back the 'happening' dear?"

Photo by Harry Pimm.

# THE ACME GALLERY

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## ANDREAS TECHLER

'Dommage a Charlie Chaplin, but I've always preferred Buster Keaton. (A piece of non-permanent space-art.)

Friday 27th June—Elephant & Castle 'Round-about' (Molto furioso)  
Viewing Room open 9 to 5, 14th floor London College of Printing

Saturday 28th June—Leicester Square  
'SQUARE' (Marcia funebre)  
24 hours

Monday 30th June, 11-7 Acme Gallery  
'UNDERSTANDING/DEMobilISATION'  
(andante sostenuto)  
A real live-motion-picture, upstairs in the Acme Gallery, culminating in a concert-performance: TRIO CON BRIO at 8pm. John Russell—guitar Roger Turner—drums, Andreas Techler continuo. Admission £1.

Tuesday 1st July, 11-6, Acme Gallery  
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JUNE 26th to 29th (Thurs. to Sun.)

Brixton Fairies present "GENTS" - a play about attitudes to male sexuality. Part of GAY PRIDE WEEK. £1.50, £1.00 unwaged.

JULY 3rd to 5th (Thurs. to Sat.) 8.00 p.m.

Moving Parts present "THE MINDY'S CURSE" & "DID SHE FALL OR WAS SHE PUSHED?" - a double-bill by a new socialist/feminist group using comedy & music to comment & question. £1.75.

JULY 10th to 12th (Thurs to Sat.) 8.00 p.m.

PLATYPUS THEATRE CO. from Cheltenham present on Thurs. 10th & Fri. 11th "THE LOVER" by Harold Pinter & "TURN" by David Campton, and on Sat. 12th "MAVENSOUTH" - a revue. Each night £1.50.

Also LATE NIGHT these weeks (Wed. to Sat.) 10.30 p.m.

"FULL CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIALIST" - Roland Waldon as Harry Percival Muggins in this "original, funny, black socialist cabaret" Won Off-Broadway Award this year, run here extended. £1.25.

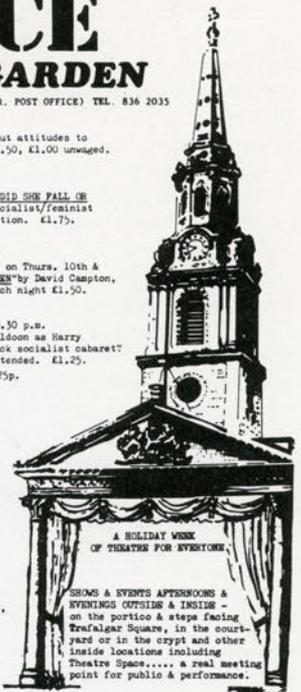
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'They'll  
squirm  
a bit'

ALEX HARDING  
AND ALAN POPE  
ON THEIR NEW  
GAY CABARET  
'POINT BLANK'



Mark Rusher

Out of the closet and 'a homosexual with no shame', Alan Pope tells all in 'Point Blank', a cabaret devised with Alex Harding as a sequel to their first touring show 'Double Exposure'. "Being funny about being in the closet is a cinch", Pope tells his audience, "but after you're out, that's a different story—a minority within a minority that's a shining example to the rest". In a show that is both sophisticated cabaret and intimate autobiographical revelation, Pope, with the music of Alex Harding, looks at the confusions and contradictions, the problems as well as the delights, of being openly acknowledged as gay. It is a sharp and an extremely funny show, written and delivered with disarming honesty. Both Pope and Harding are aware that the candour of the show may well aggravate other gays, and as for heterosexual audiences Pope admits that "they'll squirm a bit". None of that worries them. "I don't mind people being embarrassed", says Pope, "so long as it's positive embarrassment".

'Double Exposure' was a show with two distinct acts. In the first half Pope described the difficulties of his early homosexual life. After the interval he reappeared in the guise of Mary Whitehouse accompanied by Harding's 'Sister Cilla' in a scathingly funny personification of moral hypocrisy. In describing the genesis of the show Pope explained to me just how the two parts related to one another.

"Mary and Cilla evolved out of a Gay Sweatshop cabaret called 'Man Mad'. Alex and I had talked a lot during the tour of 'As Time Goes By' about getting a cabaret together and after I left Sweatshop I started to work on one. About a year previously I'd found this pornographic novel which I'd written years before and didn't know what to do with. Then I thought, why not use it in a cabaret. I was told, mistakenly, that Oval House was doing a season of one and two handers. So I 'phoned them. And they weren't. But they said do it anyway. So I had an opening for an unwritten show. Alex was away on tour with Sweatshop so I wrote the show while he was in Edinburgh. Meanwhile I'd been asked to do Mary Whitehouse at a CHE conference. I did all the research for the show before that conference. I didn't really write it; she did. The few things that weren't true in it were obviously not true. Often the funniest stuff was hers." The other half of the show developed out of the rediscovered novel. "The two parts were related in that they both began in Chester—both Mary and I come from Chester. But also the link between them is that the reason

people behave like I did in the first half is because of people like her."

Only two of the songs in 'Double Exposure' were original. The others were from Pope's past. "I thought of all the songs that were important to me and then jiggled the show around them." In 'Point Blank' all the music is by Alex Harding who, between the two productions, wrote the music for and toured with the Sweatshop production of 'Dear Love of Comrades', Noel Greig's play about Edward Carpenter, arguably the best musical to come out of British alternative theatre. "Let's face it", says Harding, "I'm a good writer of songs and because I'd worked with Sweatshop before, I was the first person who came to mind. Because the script contained so many songs it was a real challenge and because the issues the play raised are so relevant today I wanted the music to be modern but in a pastoral setting. The play toured for three months which was a drag. Because of the dreadfully disorganised tour, and inept management, great harm was done to the play's potential."

On his way to New Zealand at the beginning of this year Harding was able to stop off and see the American production of the play. A newly formed gay theatre group called 'Carpenter's Children' had mounted a production in San Diego and Harding was greatly impressed. "Their professionalism was just superb, right the way down the line from management to performers. And they received absolutely no subsidy, yet music, script, *attitude* was just incredible." While Harding was abroad Pope wrote the bulk of 'Point Blank' sending out the manuscript as it came off the typewriter. Music to three of the songs was composed in New Zealand.

Harding sees 'Point Blank' as "a much more sophisticated show than 'Double Exposure' in terms of how we are both presented. Musically I want to aim in a commercial direction but at the same time I still want to write songs for the theatre." It is this mixture of sophistication, popular appeal and theatricality which makes 'Point Blank' such a strong cabaret, a point which David E. Thompson, Alex's partner, and the impresario behind the production, emphasises. "Cabaret has been seen as a soft option—I don't see it like that. I see it as being perhaps *the* most effective of socio-political comment makers. It is interesting that the 1980s in Britain should see a return to a form associated with pre-War Germany. I like the fact that it



Mark Rusher

combines so many elements. I love working on shows that have music in them. Sure, I'd like to do a show with a twenty person chorus, but I'm being realistic."

Currently interest in cabaret as the theatrical form of the '80s is flourishing and even within gay theatre it is possible to see just how various the form can be. The simple, unadorned intimacy of 'Point Blank' contrasts startlingly with the camp and glitter successfully used by Bloodlips for example. Thompson doesn't see 'Point Blank' as being a show exclusively for gay audiences. "I think 'Point Blank' reflects the current dilemma in the gay movement. The gay world is only a microcosm, it's not an alternative and we are not exclusively a service industry to the gay movement. The impressive thing about 'Point Blank' is that it is a piece of cabaret theatre."

The cabaret takes on the atmosphere of an evening at home with Alan and Alex, something emphasised by Martin Sherman's quiet but telling direction. Harding, at the piano, wears a magnificent double-breasted, grey, 1950s suit with a sliver-spangled tie. Pope is dressed somewhat more casually and is based on a bar stool. Both are given plenty to do by Sherman but never obtrusively too much. The show is punctuated by conviviality: there is a tea break with the daintiest of china cups, a joint is rolled and passed around, brandy is resorted to on one occasion.

Pope talks about his personal experiences: coming out on a train between Windsor and Clapham Junction; joining Gay Sweatshop; working backstage on Fiona Richmond's 'Let's Get Laid' where he found that over half of the crew were gay; telling his parents, by post, that he was gay; cruising and living together.

Painfully honest, moving, candid without being narcissistic, the show deals frankly with Pope's own experience but relates it to the current state of gay politics. Monogamy is discussed. The problems of being a 'liberated' politicised gay are admitted. "Men won't go home with you if you're wearing a badge," Pope tells his audience ruefully, announcing that his motto is "Leave the sexual politics until they're putting their trousers back on". Towards the end of the show Pope says: "Coming out is a bit like riding a bicycle; it's fun at first and OK when the sun is shining, but when it's raining it's often tempting to take the bus".

Was it difficult for Pope to be so honest about himself? "Some of it was OK because I don't mind", he says. "Some

of it was difficult. The relationship things were difficult. The most difficult thing was talking about the way money affects a relationship and this was the last thing I wrote. It's the touchiest subject. I don't have any illusions about myself."

Pope says that the political issues were much easier to deal with than the personal ones but he has succeeded in illuminating many areas of emotional life which are generally untouched in theatre, gay or straight. Indeed his forthrightness about the problems of living together reflects on problems in heterosexual relationships just as in homosexual ones. Pope recognises a slight feeling of jealousy amongst heterosexuals who see the show. "They see how unrestricted my life is and they envy that sexual mobility. I think I could have written very much the same sort of show if I hadn't been gay. The emotional problems are everyone's."

With its spikily sharp lyrics and stylish music, a glitter of memorable aphorisms and performances as amiable and accomplished as you will find anywhere, this is true cabaret theatre of a kind which forcefully reasserts a debased usage applied today all too often to shows which are no more than burlesque or vaudeville entertainments with none of the intimacy of political directness of the true cabaret.

After opening most suitably at the Schwarzes Cafe, a 1929 cabaret space in Berlin, 'Point Blank' was seen at the Birmingham Arts Lab, at Oval House and is currently playing at the Old Red Lion in Islington until 6th July. The team will be back in August after a brief break to revive 'Double Exposure' for a short run at Theatrespace, followed by a period in Sweden and an as yet unconfirmed tour of Australasia. 'Point Blank' will be touring in the regions again in the late Autumn.

Meanwhile the three of them will be pursuing individual careers. David Thompson really does want to be a Diaghilev; Alan Pope is working on a new musical version of William Wycherley's Restoration comedy 'The Country Wife' transposed to the 1930s ("I's about sex which I know a lot about"); and Alex Harding wants to write "quality, sophisticated, gay songs. We've got gay theatre, gay cinema, but no gay music. Gay theatre has always begged and borrowed music from straight origins... I'd also like to be a pop star—a gay Paul McCartney!"

# Performance

There are around a dozen venues in this country that put on performance art with any degree of regularity. The one-day performance art festival at the Nottingham Midland Group provided a rare opportunity to see collected at one time and place a reasonable sampling of current work. Both the director and exhibitions officer at the Midland Group transferred from the

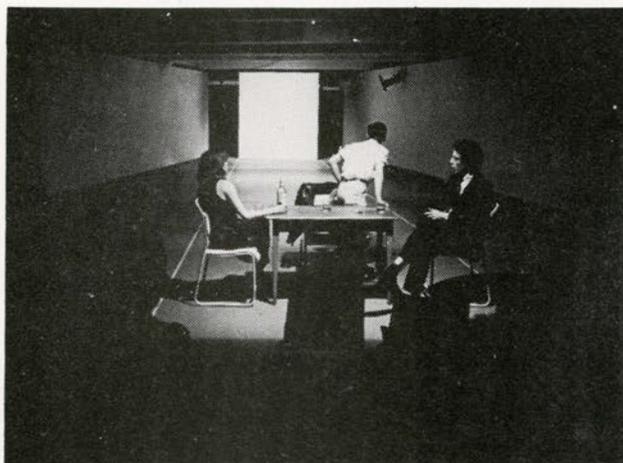
Ikon gallery, Birmingham. They have obviously brought with them the same sort of flare and commitment to a wide range of activities with which they established the Ikon. Taking part in the festival were three duos and four solo performers.

Mick Banks' *Pushing at the Frontier of Everything* seemed inappropriate amongst the presentation of new pieces, for after some initial witty comments on the nature of performance art and its historical development within the context of the visual arts. We then settled down to what was in effect a retrospective lecture on the work of the Bradford based group The John Bull Puncture Repair Kit. Would not this group, with its Monty

Pythonesque humour feel more at home in a festival of street theatre?

Through the seventies, visual artists turned to performance as a source of a more direct, immediate form of contact with an audience. It formed part of the reaction against the sometimes stultifying atmosphere of sanctity towards the art objects hung on the gallery walls. It fell alongside parallel shifts in preference within the visual arts—leanings towards concept rather than physicality, ephemera rather than permanence, installation rather than artefact, all forms created by the central question—art for whom? Performance art retains its special relationship with the visual arts by virtue of both the training of many of its acolytes and their desire to retain the visual as the predominant formal language.

The role of the performer was itself \*



Ikon Gallery

Actions—Julian Maynard-Smith



Midland Group

Charlie Pig and Miriam Bird

The Ikon gallery in Birmingham, a spacious converted furniture showroom, is an independent gallery funded by the Arts Council and West Midlands Arts. Since opening in these premises in 1978 (from 1965-1978 they had been situated in the New Street shopping centre) Hugh Stoddart, the new director, has been faced with re-establishing the gallery's identity and reputation. His policy has been to present an ambitious, flexible cross-section of contemporary work, especially third area activity. Over the past year he has presented Jochen Gerz, Max Eastley and Ron Haselden. During May and June this year he organised 'Actions', a diverse programme of installations and performances, along with films by Stan Brakhage. Taking part in the programme were Simon Power, Julian Maynard Smith, Marc Chaimowicz,

Denis Masi, Jan Mladovsky, Michael Meyers (the New York artist and writer) and Stuart Brisley and Iain Robertson. Third area work tended to be dropped at the old premises due to burgeoning economic difficulties—performance is notoriously labour intensive to put on. Stoddart though is keen to see it as a regular part of his gallery programme. The Birmingham Arts Lab is the only other place in Birmingham which runs performance, though Gillian Clarke, the new director says: "Over the past three years there have been enormous teething problems". With the recent departure of Ted Little the Lab has been in a 'state of flux'. They have no performance space as such; performance tends to be presented around other events, in say a theatre intermission, in order to catch a pass through audience. If the Arts Lab is

going through a period of transition, Hugh Stoddart is willing to take risks. This is amply borne out by the number of young, untried as well as established artists he has shown. The usual provincial worries about parochialism, about being seen as cultural backwoodsmen, are vigorously being conquered by Stoddart. The Ikon has the potential to become a vital source for third area experimentation outside the hegemony of London—a hegemony that is extremely difficult to penetrate even if you have the energy of Stoddart. On the whole though Birmingham looks to be a disarmingly depressive place, considering its size and resources, for performance activity. Perhaps its geographical position has something to do with this: too near to the beckoning charms of London to develop an identity and confidence of its own.

John Roberts

Charles Hustwick

\*the subject matter of Linda Clarke's *The Bad Life Performer Show*. With her back to the audience during the first quarter, Clarke moved slowly, gesturally, whilst a tape played. Her monologue, an introspective commentary on the feelings of a performer, sorted out authenticity from fantasy. Then to Bowie's *When You're a Boy*, she ripped down a screen on which were projected shots of motor-bikers. So far so good; but further additions of layer upon layer soon became bewildering—a strip dance, a fox-trot a la Rodgers and Astaire (with a hatstand and evening suit on a hanger) and then a tap dance. Last came a film of a girl in pigtails in a room with the atmosphere of a dance school. As she practised, her movements were cut back to their starting point again and again.

Also much concerned with the problem of identity was Anne Darlington's *Beyond The Frame/Corresponding*. She, and her fellow performer were dressed in chic, studied punk and their stage equipment more akin to that of a rock band. Are they out to impress us one mused during the delay in setting up. Spoken parts commenced individually, becoming superimposed later. Slides interspersing simple blue geometric patterns of light with shots of faces amongst palm fronds illustrated a text which drew analogies between relationships and pictorial and photographic language. A leitmotif became apparent. In this enormous frame of light a woman stands waiting. Their scripts ended This moment will not be repeated This moment will not be etc. The performers moved away from their microphones to end at their point of origin, seated in the light of the projected rectangles. It was unfortunate that the use of the cine projector which should have formed their planned ending, had to be abandoned.

Technology formed the basis for Hayes and Davidson's *Ratman 2*. In one of the most interesting performance concepts of the day, their premise was to start with a given collection of hardware, as a raw material as it were. They then formed their improvisation upon the internal dynamics of the relationship between the two protagonists. Any defect in technology could be allowed for by swift adjustments to a new set of circumstances. And for the audience it presented a far more intriguing pattern of events, some dreamy, some as precise as metal.

Film was also used by Andrew Kort. From two projectors strapped to his body, flowed images of violence

and contemplation simultaneously. Kort seems to want to provoke reaction in his audience, to make them sit up. His emphasis is didactic—the mere physical juxtaposition of images did not seem sustaining enough for a piece with such an intention.

Krystan Bogdan's solo performance was essentially mime orientated. Appearing first as a marionette like character she cast off her costume resembling a battered wedding dress slowly hauling it off-stage as if pulling at some enormous weight. She reappeared in comically absurd (particularly her platform shoes) costume to parody a strip routine and finally donned the attributes of the goddess Kali. En route she incorporated a virtuoso sequence ascending and descending a step ladder and left quizzically eliciting response, looking back and forth between audience and her masque head-dress.

Pig and Bird's *Waitress* succeeded in balancing improvisation and structure through mime, dialogue and music. Male and female protagonists twice swap roles as waiter/waitress and customer in a restaurant. Their crucial analogy is between class power and money, and sexuality, their central image cannibalism, and their method extremely humorous. Pig ate

everything in sight including lettuce sewn on to Bird's green evening gown, her fruit pastel necklace, a three-course meal, the candles from the dinner table and his cigarettes. I understand that he now wishes to learn how to eat glass. Their sets and costumes were Impressionist in gaiety and meticulous in detail; for example the beefsteak that Pig gorged was dressed with bride and groom cake decorations. Their insistence on the incorporation of what they term real time elements ca rivets audience attention, and the genuine cathartic element in their work places them outside conventional theatrical practice, squarely within the field of performance art.

Altogether the seven pieces covered a wide range of style and quality, in an area where patronage, subsidy and encouragement does not come easy. The festival organisers demonstrated their commitment to promote performance art in holding a lunchtime discussion for all comers on patronage, with the aid of the Arts Council officer for special projects. The beneficial effect at so many different levels of a festival such as this held by the Nottingham Midland Group cannot be overestimated.

Charles Hustwick

No mention of the Midlands would be complete without a passing reference to Leamington Spa. This seemingly inconsequential town is a magnet, for some reason, for all sorts of cults, extreme political groups, and performance activity. It is the H.Q. of the anti-abortion lobby, a focus for some of the more way-out activities of the National Front (the Historical Truth Society, for example,) the Divine Light Mission, not to mention the annual Leamington Spa Festival of Health and Awareness. All things considered the place could be said to, well....jump.

For some years it has been the home base of the highly successful Cycles Dance company, working from the Bath Place Community Venture, which acts as an over-used central focus for a number of burgeoning activities. Among the latest arrivals in this ferment of activity has been the Raging Id company, which has just started touring the country with what can only be described as ruralised versions of the Ubu cycle. (e.g Ubu Chelt-Ubu in Gloucestershire.) And



The Raging Id

there are many other activities going on in this corner of Warwickshire. This small regency town, with its Pump Rooms and Tea Dances by the River Leam may be obscure, a bit middle class, and be home to a lot of right wing loonies and religious cults, but the fact remains that it is a sanctuary for artists poets and performers in the West Midlands.

Rob La Frenais

in the Midlands

# AFTER THE FIRE..



Weegee 1937 Courtesy Side Publications.

# Cripps goes back to his ordinary job as a performance artist

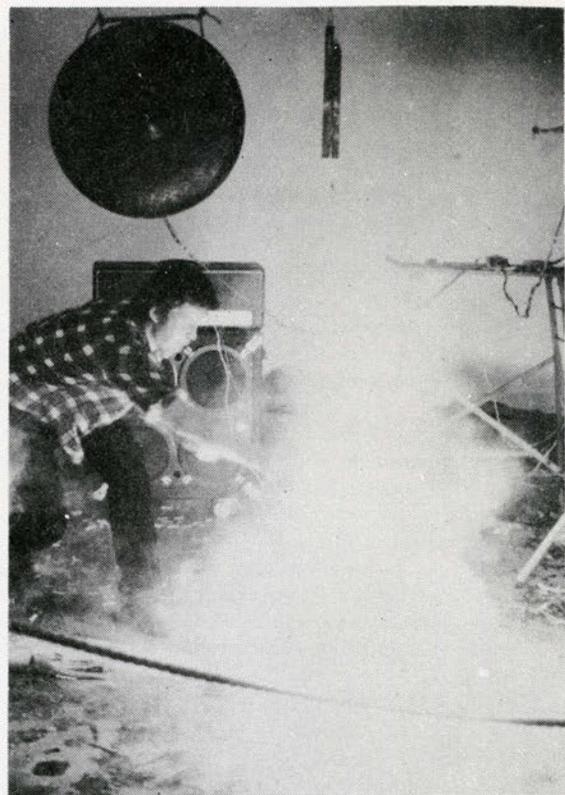
Watching Cripps set up is like watching a bomb disposal expert in reverse. His whole body weight shifting forward, overhanging the base of various wireclipping and twisting operations, a cherubic half-grin on his face; he moves through the accumulated debris of previously incendiary performances adjusting flour bags, taping charges to gongs and horns, unwinding lengths of detonator wire. From the cigarette dangling from his mouth you get the sort of nonchalant devilish confidence which to the uninitiated implies a sense of professional control. (Cut to bomb disposal scene in movie—"Can't you put that cigarette out Sarge—it's giving me the willies"—"It stops my hands shaking Johnson".)

This assumption is justified. Cripps is on his annual leave from the Fire Brigade: from the sweat and metal polish atmosphere of a semi-military public service he holidays amongst the primary-coloured throwaway foppishness of a first-night small gallery crowd. For the professional performer there is always the sometimes awkward necessity of a 'straight' job looming around the corner. For Cripps the Fire Brigade was "of all the straight jobs you can get, one of the things that takes you to your fullest capacities." After having the fire brigade called out to several of his performances this was the ultimate ironic choice. For Cripps this was also an opportunity to learn more—to pick up something about the field he worked in: smoke, fire, bangs and flashes. But something like the Fire Brigade is bound to change you; it is not something you could just slip in and out of. "They wanted to know I wasn't going to just stay a few months and write a book about it." However, now settled in his Fahrenheit 451 style conversion, Cripps does find that his experience helps him to have much more control over his materials. "I see explosives as my paints". Although he is never quite sure what is going to happen, his latest performance appears as a well-co-ordinated set of intersections between sudden and slow heat and light. Slow majestic processions of smouldering touch paper are interrupted by staccato reports of firecrackers. The darkened room is initially filled by a long, resonating hum. This is the recording from a microphone strapped to a railway line in Winnipeg as the Canadian Pacific Transcontinental express approaches. At the instant the wheels hit the point of contact detonators are pressed and a charge sets a huge gong vibrating. Cripps can be seen in the smoke fiddling with the ends of wires about a foot away from the explosion. He never moves an inch. In fact he is slowly going deaf. "I refuse to wear earplugs—it's not really fair." The risk to himself is always an added part of his performances—"it's like the tightrope walker, you know". But he dislikes it when people applaud the explosions. There are times when the shock value and his semi-mythical reputation (he once cleared the Acme Gallery by lying in a bed and setting light to it—filling the place with choking smoke and bringing the simultaneous arrival of police and fire brigade) tend to work against him. Like the opening night of his show at the Acme—the tightly packed and quite drunk crowd, having already survived several spectacular explosions at close quarters—started to show some signs of nervousness by singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' as an amount of blue touch-paper burnt a sculptured path from ceiling to floor. Expecting some sort of climactic sensation, the singers received no explosive finale for their efforts; the

show ended on a quiet note: possibly deliberately.

What reactions did Cripps have in the old days when the brigade were called out to his shows? Apart from some annoyance and tension when they haven't been informed—especially during the IRA bombing campaign, the following is characteristic: "We had this silk wedding dress which floated in the air above a fan. They came round and I switched on all the things and they all thought it was very interesting." But one's everyday experiences of the great show when the fire-engine comes tearing round the streets with firemen hanging off the sides suggest that in their own way, firemen are no strangers to performance. In fact, during the firemen's strike—when they were all camping out in front of the stations—baking spuds of fires and waving to motorists who hooted their horns in support; the scene was not unlike a primitive/urban encampment constructed by Welfare State International. The sometimes absurd situations that occur in close-knit groups of people who live with a common sense of danger are there too. Cripps "When I came on for my first night after training I had forgotten about the tricks that get played on you. I heard all about them but I just went to bed in the dormitory as usual. I woke up and they had tied me to the bed, carried me out into the middle of the road and were throwing water over me. Then they left, called the police and said "there's someone in a bed in the middle of the road". The police arrived, laughed and went away without doing anything."

There is also the whole adrenalin-boosting rigmarole of going down the pole when you go out on a shout (the term for 'alarm'). But there is a whole series of cool procedures. On his first shout they were all sitting there when a whole



Jonathan Harvey

lot of bells suddenly started going off. No one moved an inch. What was it like getting into the Fire Brigade? Firstly you can't have a beard, because of having to wear oxygen equipment. Then there was six months training somewhere in Surrey, including "a lot of bullshit. But it's important; when someone says 'jump' you've got to jump because there's a wall falling on you." Did the other firemen accept him? "They're not sure about me." When they ask him what he does as an artist he says "exploding sculptures" and changes the subject.

Steve Cripps has always had an interest in fire. He dimly remembers nearly burning his parents' house down at the age of three by throwing a match into a waste-paper basket, then when someone came into the room putting it behind the sofa. Now—"it's a drag to be in the middle of your supper when you're called out and all the kids in some housing estate are setting fire to all the skips. You get to one and put it out and they're all round the corner setting fire to another one". Did he enjoy a good fire? "At all the really *good* fires there's no time to enjoy it." Now he's in the brigade he takes a pleasure in really controlling fire, and this is reflected in his choice of materials in his show. A mixture which slowly ignites itself, for example, or his favourite lycopodium powder, which can be quite safely used to a highly effective degree. He considers his work now shows a different approach—"more controlled rather than just thumping away".

But he has not lost the sense of mischievous glee which gives him his reputation; standing there, fingering the wires; working out which one he's going to connect next. Once, in Birmingham there were a number of complaints from residents about a series of events he was doing with people like Paul Burwell, so they set up the whole event, put Cripps in a chair with all his fuses around him, and chained him up. Everything was ready for use, but was tantalisingly out of reach. The frustrated incendiary then had tambourines full of water gently chucked over him by the musicians.

The whole subject of performers taking on certain roles in life; or people leaving those roles to become performers; basing their performances on that experience; or indeed mingling one with the other is a complete subject that needs to be dealt with at length in future issues. Certainly the Fire Brigade must offer a high yield for research, although it is always impossible to be quite as objective as that. With such complete involvement there must be a certain amount of schizophrenia, although in Cripps' case he has made clear what his background is. In fact—"they're all quite extrovert. I'm about the quietest one there". On the level of 'infiltration', other careers suggest themselves, the Police, the military, undertaking: those whose uniforms and traditions engender a sense of the absurd and the unreal against the background of real life; although the former are somewhat unpalatable when compared with a real public service like the Fire Brigade. Also the concentrated life-style opens up all sorts of other issues. What is the *actual* difference between an artist who becomes a fireman and a fireman who, say potters around a bit with paints in his spare time?

Cripps is looking forward to going back. At first he just 'wanted to know if you could do it' but now the practice of stretching himself to the limits, fighting fires and actually saving lives seems to have become more important.

And the future? "I'm waiting to be called out to an art gallery."

Rob La Frenais

# NAKED ART FILE No. 1

*checked by  
Simon Thorne*

In the age of mechanical reproduction the unrepeatable instant of live performance has become the last reserve of the avant-garde in a sea of kitsch. The authentic moment suffused with the aura of its own uniqueness once again permits the art-object to transcend the banality of a commodity-ridden existence. Everything else is after the event—the documentation, analysis and value judgement. The moment is actual—now. But if there was once a belief that the actual and the now might spontaneously happen, Naked Art at Action Space was a sage reminder that this is not the case. Happenings are made. The instantaneous present is riddled with assumptions, presuppositions and conditions.

Naked Art are a bunch of artists centred in Sheffield who have abandoned the notions of the performing arts for that of Performance Art. They perform as individuals but work together to produce their documentation and apologetics. There is a youthful Messianic zeal to their claim upon the arena of actuality as their artistic domain. 'Actuality in a condition of special use' generates Naked Art; art which is 'neither representational nor formally autonomous'. Without recourse to traditional criteria of artistic worth this stripping down to certain bare essentials gives us art which is art only because we say so. But though the bride stripped bare displays a naked optimism, the metaphorical nudity of actuality in its condition of special use finds itself caught up in the problems of Being Transcendental.

Non-theatrical performance which eschews the 'aesthetic illusions' of acting is always problematic. What am I watching? what is being said? I see an activity which is only significant as I choose to perceive it. The image of a man sucking violently at a tube of toothpaste through a clear plastic tube: the tube slowly fills with toothpaste so the action is reversed and the contents of the tube are blown onto the floor. The toothpaste oozes out in limp drips. In neither instance does the result match up to the extreme exertion of sucking and blowing. Finally the man squeezes

another half-spent tube suspended from the ceiling—a drip falls and the lights go out.

The actuality of Martin Bailey's performance was not the spontaneous interaction between performer and object. The prop existed for the purpose of the activity. The performer has a clearly defined task. The spectator has a task which is equally clear. He must define it.

A second image: a young man in a red shirt and bow tie sitting at a table. The audience congregates around him and he invites someone to have tea with him. The tea table is presided over by a figure made out of chicken wire. The performer fleshes it out with photocopies of aspects of his own person. He is by turns polite and withdrawn, laughing at his own private joke. The lights black out periodically. Wojtek Dmochowski sets fire to the paper skin and the face of the chicken wire figure burns away. This tea party was a refined anatomy lesson, alienating in its intimacy.

John Lake's 'SPILT—ain't no use crying over it? (the cycle-logical affair)' was a much more elaborate operation. The scope of its allusion was more precisely defined although in its totality it remained as elusive as the other pieces presented. A space was circumscribed by a collection of memorabilia, photocopies and more photocopies of the photocopies. The significance of the objects was explained in a friendly manner. Spilling wine water and oil the performing space was jokingly yet ritually defined. Only at the end would we again be able to examine the objects, by then transformed into the mess left after the performance which was 'spilt into a space'. "All that's left is memories/In blinkers shaded/Those images faded". Thus he sang while engaging in activities aimed at reviving and destroying those memories. The obsessive nature of the activities was played out with a sense of sardonic humour. Again the dividing line between intimacy and alienation was a fine one. But it was a much more comfortable performance than the others. The activities were not so hermetic and the transformation from concept to realisation was much more literary. Images may not be representational, but they had very definite signifying properties.

A conditioned actuality such as this came closest to broaching the problems of traditional theatrical performance. John Lake took his space not merely to perform an activity but to perform in the general sense. Problems of timing, and of the spontaneous realisation of a sequence of premeditated actions were all brought into play.

Which makes Martin Bailey's ability to empty a tube of toothpaste an even more extraordinary achievement. What are problems for John Lake as a performer, he has managed to land squarely in the lap of his audience to resolve for itself.

In all the performances the antithesis between performer and audience was acutely and sometimes very elegantly defined. But there was a suspicion that the art object stepping down from the walls, becoming flesh and moving was asking to be contemplated in the same way as the ones left hanging. I am not sure what it means 'to objectify in order to realise the subjective'. On this occasion there was not a sense that the collective subjectivity of Naked Art was pushing towards a new objectivity. Questions of Reality were private metaphors. One could only talk of meaning retrospectively, as the result of individual interpretation. But by then it was too late. The moment of 'actuality in a condition of special use' had passed on.

The fact remains that in a world of many differences some contradictions are more fruitful than others. In the age of Sonorama it will be interesting to see if Naked Art can transform their novel theoretical stance into a practical critical tool.



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**An occasional series  
in which Neil Hornick  
explores the outermost  
fringes of the theatrical  
hinterland**

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The scene is the Reception Hall of 'the Mount Venus Club in the Virgin Islands'. The Club, we learn soon enough, as naked girls assemble indolently before our curious eyes ("Anyone for tennis?" cries one sportive blonde at her first entrance) is actually a brothel, and business is bad. However, hopes of livelier trade are high, as they await the arrival of a new proprietress, Yolande. But there is some confusion when it turns out that Yolande thinks she is taking over a horse-breeding establishment. The Offer of Sale has been mistakenly placed in 'The Horseman' journal instead of 'The Whoresman'.

On this subtle premise is built 'Wot! No Pyjamas', 'a French Sex Comedy by Simone St. Clair' at Paul Raymond's Whitehall Theatre, starring Fiona Richmond and featuring 'The Pyjama-Less Dolly Girls and Men Only Magazine's Sensational Playmates of the Year'.

'Hey, hold those horses!' I seem to hear our more purist readers murmuring. 'Is this quite the sort of literary outing we would expect this magazine to embark on?' Well, never fear. The professional life of at least one actress in the show, the programme tells us, 'has been spiced with cabaret work and fringe theatre; the producer, Paul Raymond, is described as "The Maverick" of the West End Theatre-land, the man who refuses to conform to the outdated and out-moded ways of running theatres'; the star, Fiona Richmond once co-produced and appeared in 'Women

Behind Bars', an avant-garde production emanating from the Warhol factory, and, if that isn't enough for you, they played a disco version of 'Hair' during the interval.

It would be pointless to subject 'Wot! No Pyjamas' to searching critical analysis. It's a gruelling, dim-witted farce—about twenty-five years old, I'd guess—based on the old formula of impropriety trying unsuccessfully to disguise itself as respectability, with the business-like Fiona gamely adopting house undress-uniform while trying to conceal the true nature of the business from a gorgon aunt and her own involvement from a client at the brothel—her father, a judge! Were the girls in the show wearing scanties throughout, instead of frequently going nude, it would be an utterly tame 'naughty' family entertainment, circa 1955; for, unexpectedly, there's not a glimmer of on-stage love-making, in striking contrast to Fiona Richmond's notorious literary output.

It must be allowed that Fiona Richmond, compared to The Pyjama-less Dolly Girls, most of whom move and act with self-conscious awkwardness, flaunts her 'stunningly well-preserved figure' with highly professional ease. She possesses a kind of equine hauteur which carries her through an evening in which the only (welcome) intimacies exchanged are the smiles of the actors trying to enliven the proceedings by corpsing each other.

The next day, on your behalf, I made my way through the cramped and murky backstage recesses of the Whitehall Theatre to meet Fiona Richmond, daughter of a (now deceased vicar), former air stewardess, Playboy Club croupiere, Penthouse Club Assistant Pet Mother, and, by 1970, swimmer at the Whitehall Theatre in a Paul Raymond show, to whom she suggested the idea of writing about her sexual exploits abroad for 'Men Only'. Since then she has appeared in several shows, written six books, made a few movies, and gradually made inroads into the more respectable world of journalism by writing articles for Punch and the up-market Sunday newspapers.

In his introduction to her book, 'Fiona', which is based on her sexual exploits as an air stewardess, one 'Adam', a 'friend and lover', who, as luck would have it, happens to work for a public relations firm, enthuses about the authoress. Among other things, 'she is very punctual'; 'The nicest thing about Fiona is her *niceness*'; and 'Just about everybody who ever sees her falls in love with her'. How would she measure up in actuality?

There are four adjoining dressing-rooms, mysteriously labelled 'Leeds', 'Liverpool', 'Edinburgh' and 'Glasgow'. I am invited by the truly punctual Fiona into 'Liverpool',

**Fiona Richmond:** Paul Raymond hasn't called in any critics at all, because he thought they'd just come in and slam it. But you see, I really don't believe in a show like this it matters, quite frankly, what they say. The thing that I think is important is that it's covered, as we were last time I was here... 'Cause for a start it's a chance for the heavies to use a bona fide picture of a nude bird under the title of a review (LAUGHS) I don't think it's ever mattered in the past what people have said about the shows. In fact, most people come in to see if they're really that bad. And they are. (LAUGHS)

**Neil Hornick:** They are?

**Fiona Richmond:** No, let's not kid, it's not a great artistic informative evening. I mean, most of them are rubbish. This is probably one of the best ones I've done, 'cause it's actually got a well-written script and a plot, but I mean, let's not kid, for what they are, for their slot in our enter-

tainment—I think we should have a place for nude entertainment—they are very, very good value for money. People come in and they can look at nude birds and, above all, get a laugh, and I think that is one of the best formulas for this type of entertainment. It's definitely not a show for a heavy breather 'cause there ain't none o' that, it's send-up time... It's quite clean actually... Essentially it's nude girls. What we have here in 'Wot! No Pyjamas' is the typical Whitehall farce with everybody running in and out... It's exactly the same as Brian Rix—Brian Rix dropped his trousers, which I think is not a pretty sight—I mean; I don't just mean Brian Rix. I just think men in underpants and socks and suspenders look pretty ugly and that people of both sexes would rather see pretty girls, and that's the formula here.



**Neil Hornick:** Just before the first act curtain, the most well-built man in the show actually drops his trousers, but, unlike the girls, he was wearing underpants. What's your view about that?

**Fiona Richmond:** Male nudity? Well, we've done it. We did it when we re-opened the Windmill, in fact with the same actor, Kevin Sheehan, who's glorious, he's been in everything I've done... He is the closest thing I've got to an elder brother who looks after me. He's magic, absolutely sensational. I adore him... We work very well together, we're comfortable together. Kev is in the Guinness Book of Records as the first male nude at the Windmill... It's a personal opinion, but I actually think that the male form on the move is not particularly an aesthetically pleasing sight. I think the anatomy of a man is weird, to say the least (LAUGHS). If you're personally involved with it then I think it's fine and it's lovely, but I don't think that women have quite the same sort of feel about naked men running around on stage. I know I roared with laughter at 'Oh Calcutta!'. I don't think that it's at all necessary in this type of show. I don't think that if Kevin were nude it would bring in more people.

**Neil Hornick:** ...Can I put some questions to you from another perspective? There are nude girls on stage. And since they're scarcely differentiated it could be argued that they are depersonalised—sexploited. Would you say there's anything in that kind of argument?

**Fiona Richmond:** Basically, yes. They're there for how they look, the smaller-part girls. One of them is my understudy. Exploitation? You see, I don't believe I'm exploited. I don't believe any of them are exploited. You can't actually force them to do it... I mean the ads in 'The Stage' are very clearly worded, that it's nude. Nobody's dragged into it if they don't want to do it. While women's lib are talking about exploitation, *everybody's* exploited in one way or another, whatever their line of business, from housewives to prostitutes and back again.

**Neil Hornick:** Don't you think this reinforces a rather limiting image of women which they're trying to overcome?

**Fiona Richmond:** Well, I don't think women are limited, being a woman—

**Neil Hornick:** But you're a particularly successful woman—

**Fiona Richmond:** Well, I've been lucky, you see. I can't imagine being a married woman who is dependent on her husband for her income. I've got used to earning my own living and looking after myself. I would find it terribly difficult to cope with if every time I wanted a pair of shoes or whatever I had to ask the breadwinner... I don't particularly agree with women, especially the English Collective of Prostitutes, who think that housewives should be paid and that would stamp out prostitution. I mean a lot of women enjoy being at home and I feel that Women's Libbers have done a lot of harm making those women feel they shouldn't enjoy just looking after their bloke.

**Neil Hornick:** Don't you think there's a direct relationship between both kinds of stereotype—the domesticated hausfrau limited in opportunity and the sex symbol, aren't they parts of the same complex?

**Fiona Richmond:** Yes, they are really... but I actually don't think it's terrible if a bloke looks at a magazine like 'Men Only' and his wife's big and fat. It's probably better for him to look at that, or come to a show, or indeed bring his lady wife, than to be totally without an opportunity to do that if he wants. I think that need—and there obviously is that need in an awful lot of fellas—should be catered for in some way.

**Neil Hornick:** Near the beginning of the show the girls rather playfully talk about the times when they were raped. One of them says, 'Oh, I really enjoyed it the first time'. There's been a lot of concern recently about the suffering that's actually undergone through rape experiences. Is rape something that can any more be treated so flippantly?

**Fiona Richmond:** Well, I quite agree with you. I don't really understand why that's in the show anyway. I presume it was supposed to raise a laugh, but I wouldn't think it would raise much... I was just thinking that's a bit silly in the show. On the other hand, I don't think you can say as ladies like Mary Whitehouse would, that a man coming to see this show would go out and rape a woman when he wouldn't have done it before... No, I quite agree, victims of rape—it's horrendous what they have to go through to get justice.

**Neil Hornick:** Do you think of yourself as more of a comedienne than a straight actress? In fact, what is your attitude towards acting? Do you have any aspirations as an actress? Do you take it seriously?

**Fiona Richmond:** I take it seriously in so far as I'm quite tough on people whom I reckon don't come up to scratch, like in rehearsals, always looking to see when the break's going to be. To me it doesn't matter if I start at 6 o'clock in the morning and I'm still going at midnight... I mean, you're in this business and you want to do the best you can. I'm very keen on that. I'm an incredibly hard worker, and I think from that point of view I'm very professional... and taking care of the way I should look and care of for my body, and insisting as I do that I wear make-up and the girls should as well—not that there's anything wrong with my skin, but it just looks better. If you set out on a glamorous image, which I suppose I've got, it's incredibly hard work, from the neck down it's harder than the neck up (LAUGHS), even than learning lines and having to do interviews and going on the television, because to keep all

this—I mean I'm 34 now—to keep everything in good order is much harder once you're over thirty than when you're in your twenties...

**Neil Hornick:** How do you keep everything in good order?

**Fiona Richmond:** Well, a lot of it's good luck, 'cause my mother's got amazing skin and she looks lovely... my sister too. But a lot of it's hard work. If I eat too much one day I cut out the next. I mean I'm not constantly like this (INDICATES HER BODY). But it's my job. This outside casing is my profession. So you have to take care of it.

**Neil Hornick:** Do you exercise as well?

**Fiona Richmond:** I don't do as much as I should, no. But I burn up a lot of energy nightly on stage. I do bicycle occasionally.

**Neil Hornick:** Any injections?

**Fiona Richmond:** Oh, goodness me, no. I'd like my bottom removed (LAUGHS).

**Neil Hornick:** To what extent is your career embedded in the Raymond organisation?

**Fiona Richmond:** Well, I went on tour last year, which wasn't anything to do with the Raymond organisation. That was my first theatrical venture outside the Raymond stable—probably the most successful thing I've ever done (LAUGHS), which is extraordinary actually. We had one hell of a tour, absolutely amazing, with capacity business everywhere. Now whether I can do that once around the country and that's it I don't know. But I certainly have an enormous curiosity appeal. I don't think it's particularly stardom talent, but I think a lot of people are terribly curious to see what sort of phenomenon this is... That obviously helps the box-office receipts.

**Neil Hornick:** You obviously feel quite a bit of pride in the skills you've developed in doing the work you're doing. But do you feel at all frustrated by the image? Does the image ever prove constricting?

**Fiona Richmond:** Oh, God, yes (LAUGHS).

**Neil Hornick:** Let me put it this way. It would be understandable if people suspected that your image—sexy but basically a nice girl—is something of a hype... The public Fiona Richmond is a kind of myth. Now I believe that myths are compounded of both truth and fabrication. To what extent does fabrication function to your detriment? How does it function?



# REVIEWS

## LAST BENEFIT AT THE ALBANY

The scenario is all too familiar: flourishing fringe venue, a little seedy perhaps, left-field; growing council unease; accusations of elitism, mismanagement; prime-development site; eye-sore, structurally unsound. The GLC's decision to demolish the Albany Empire, Deptford this October to make way for something large, ugly and un-needed (in this case a roundabout) is yet another version of an old, old story in a city which is seeing an increasing disregard for community relations (real community relations not those implanted by bureaucratic decree) and independent cultural ventures. Although the Combination's political cabaret **The Last Benefit** takes the closure of the Albany as its theme (a church hall is under imminent threat of flooding from a suspect sewage pipe) the piece is ostensibly a showcase for the subversive talents of two comedians: Alexi Sayle, compere at the Comedy Store, and Keith Allen, an ex-Comedy Store performer, who considering the short time he has been working as a professional stand-up comic has a remarkably commanding stage presence. Plot and polemic were not so much uneven as given over to a slap-happy succession of songs, jokes and routines. The emphasis, despite the attendant gloom, was on having a good time. Allan's humour will justifiably be compared to that of Lenny Bruce. It possesses the same rare kind of knuckle-rapping political brinkmanship. Allen visits the edge,

looks over, but doesn't so much wander around as fall in—head first. He appeared on stage for his solo-spot near the end in an SAS style balaclava turned back to front, holding an imaginary machinegun. The SAS he told us were in fact automatons forever kicking their detachable heads around as footballs, when they were not throwing themselves against walls on silly missions. The Catford police station bombing was transformed into a wily, police PR exercise. Most of the audience found it difficult to adjust to this part of Allen's weirdly perverse act. Sexual matters always sit more comfortably on the consciousness even if they are bestial in character. Allen's hilarious rap on the forbidden delights of fucking dogs, rabbits, donkeys, even an elephant, showed his comic range as a mimic, and also revealed the discomfiting autobiographical core of his work. "I must have fucked a pig to have had you" his father tells him. Allen adopts the role of 'bastard', toting images that unequivocally disfigure Nature. His humour perhaps finds an echo in the maxim, much borrowed by punk, and once aestheticised by De Sade, that 'we are all victims'. The notion that affective humour is 'dangerous', excites, tenses and shocks, exiles the good and the right, is well applied to Allen's aggressive, manic act.

Alexi Sayle's humour could be said, in the classical sense, to be warmer in style. And accordingly more attuned to reflecting his audience's values—in this case young, middle-class, left-wing. Whereas Allen victimises himself and his audience, Sayle observes with affection, no matter how crazy or chewed up the images are. As in the best observational humour Sayle extracts that which is base from that which is profound or self-important. Like Woody Allen, and

the Python Team things culturally incongruous are set against each other—Brecht doing the Watusi in a Liverpool disco in the late '60s. Sayle's humour deals more with language and appearance. During the show, as the leader of the Pop Up Toasters, he rapped and skanked through a number of musical parodies. His account of the drug scene (circa somewhere around 1967 at a guess); its argot—'T.F.M.' 'Too fuckjng much'—mores and style (or stylelessness) was imaginative, fixated stuff, reminiscent of Cheech and Chong. You weren't really living unless you were lounging around on your scatter cushions overdosing into paralysis, watching your brain expand and float in waves up to the Habitat paper lampshade. The high point of the evening though was the rap on Bertolt Brecht. The effectiveness of the joke rested on the uncanny resemblance between the cropped, thick-set Sayle and Brecht. Going through his routine in a Liverpool disco Bertolt Brecht Look-alike Alexi Sayle is approached by a young woman. She asks him if he is the author of **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** and **Mother Courage**. Thinking he's onto a good thing he says yes. "Are you Bertolt Brecht?" she asks. "Er, yes", he says. The girl then gives him a good thump. "What was that for?" "That was for the Blitz".

Sayle and Allen were the undoubted stars of the show, but the support cast, especially Trevor Allen as Slim Panatella a Jerry Lee Lewis style rock 'n' roll preacher, were also excellent.

John Roberts

## GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS IN PARIS

One of the major performance events in Paris this spring, and one of the hottest tickets in town, has been Le Grand Magic Circus's 'Melodies du Malheur'. Jerome Savary's itinerant troupe, on the road since 1965, have reached a state of respectability similar to that of their British counterparts, the People Show. While People Show are now playing the likes of London's Royal Court, Le Grand Magic Circus has found itself performing in the Chaillot, a vast,

**Fiona Richmond:** Goodness me . . . Well, you see, I don't really get bothered by it. . . My family, my boyfriend, my close friends all know exactly who I am and—I don't mean to sound selfish or conceited—apart from that it really doesn't honestly worry me what a lot of other people think . . . But I get very few nasty reactions, once people have actually met me and talked to me . . .

**Neil Hornick:** Did you write your books yourself, they're not ghosted?

**Fiona Richmond:** Oh, absolutely. I was wondering when you were going to ask that question. Only men who interview me ever ask that. When I do interviews with ladies they never dream of suggesting that I couldn't write my own material.

**Neil Hornick:** Well, after a while I began to doubt whether 'On the Road with Fiona' was written by yourself, because, to be frank, it might have been written by anyone, it was the sort of stuff that's usually written by men.

**Fiona Richmond:** Would you like something to drink? (FIONA OPENS THE FRIDGE TO REVEAL A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY OF WINE AND CHAMPAGNE).

**Neil Hornick:** Well, since I'm not a policeman I guess I

can drink on duty . . . Does money play an important part in your life?

**Fiona Richmond:** Oh, huge! (LAUGHS). Yes, it does, I would say.

**Neil Hornick:** How important?

**Fiona Richmond:** . . . I'm far less materialistic than I used to be. I think I went through this beginning phase of 'Ohhh!' when you start to get money and you can buy things. But I've calmed down considerably now. I don't really think it's desperately important to have forty-five fur coats and a Rolls Royce. I'm extremely happy with what I've got. Incredibly. I never cease to be amazed by my good fortune . . . (SHE GIVES NEIL HORNICK A GLASS OF WINE). An interesting little wine . . . Cheers!

**Neil Hornick:** Cheers . . . (DRINKS). If the guys at the office could see me now! (Thank God no!—Ed.)

(THE TELEPHONE RINGS. FIONA ANSWERS IT)

**Fiona Richmond:** (ON THE PHONE) Yes? . . . oh yes, you can come back-stage afterwards. . . Yes . . . Look were you pissed yesterday, we had this conversation yesterday . . . I didn't say John Inman was prudish, I said if he's doing

wonderously equipped auditorium and one of the Theatre National in Paris.

Descending marbled stairways to the thundering sounds of the March of the Radiators, the audience were given a ninety minute 'aperitif' in the foyer before the performance proper began. A rich brew of environment, circus, music hall and jazz concert it was an extraordinary prelude. Props and scenery—including palm trees, a London telephone box and a complete, albeit three walled, Victorian interior,



littered the imposing space while attendants in grinning masks looked on.

Eventually Savary drew the thronging audience around four draped cages and presented his 'human menagerie'. A blind, crippled trapeze artiste was in one cage, an orphan in another and a simpleton in a third. Each, we were told, had a story and we followed the cages into the theatre for those stories to be told.

The show was grotesque, vulgar, horrifying, sentimental, vivid and spectacular, built around a quartet of penny dreadful tales animated by Savary with the flair of one of the greatest of metiers en scene. Siamese twins were cut apart, jilted tight-rope walkers fell to near death, dwarves found their love unrequited and abandoned women were forced into lives of semi-prostitution. The mixture of genuine pathos and voyeuristic black humour was well judged and the company immensely talented and seemingly inexhaustible. Even when the show ended after nearly four hours of energetic performance, there was a prolonged series of curtain calls in the form of a theatrical jam session, the members of

the company doing their party pieces, stilt walking, fire eating and the like, while the band played on.

Ringmaster and performer, Savary was in total control throughout, moving in and out of the action, perpetually fine tuning the production even as he was taking part in it. This was the grandest of grand Guignols.

Luke Dixon

### FOCO NOVO AT THE ICA

William Quantrill, the renegade Confederate Colonel who led raids across the Missouri-Kansas border during the American Civil War, has long been good for a shiver. He first hove into my view in 1958 in the person of Brian Donlevy in a B-Western called 'Quantrill's Raiders', and he rode again this very week in a direly juvenile tele-pilot, 'Legend of the Golden Gun' in which he is portrayed as a very traditional baddie, clad in black and sporting—interestingly enough, in view of the vampiric element in Bernard Pomerance's treatment—two gleaming silver front teeth.

In Pomerance's new play for Foco Novo, Quantrill firmly takes the centre of the action as an anti-hero of epic stature, Lawrence, Kansas, is depicted as a town infected by the moral rigidity of its Puritan establishment—a place not unlike Arthur Miller's Salem in 'The Crucible'. Close by lies the forest, a Western jungle of dark and menacing forces. Here is Miller in his introduction to 'The Crucible':

'The Salem folk believed that the virgin forest was the devil's last preserve, his home base and the citadel of his final stand. To the best of their knowledge the American forest was the last place on earth that was not paying homage to God.'

It might stand as the epigraph to 'Quantrill in Lawrence'.

Quantrill sacked and burned Lawrence in 1863, an act of terrorism which helped earn him his eminence among other atrocity-mongers in that atrocity-ridden war. Pomerance has used the incident as a take-off point for a nightmarish reverie on the moral struggles of the time—and of ours

ours. When word comes to Lawrence from Union High Command that some of its daughters are creeping out at night to consort with Quantrill's band, and spilling military secrets into the bargain, the town establishment promptly locks up its daughters. Only the German-born wife of the Mayor (played with impressively troubled dignity by Mary Ellen Ray) has the courage and moral balance to question this act of summary male justice. And when Quantrill himself infiltrates the town in female disguise she colludes with him in the hope of getting her daughter released. Quantrill captures both the Union Major sent to kill him and Mayor Cane, subjecting them to torture and disfigurement deep in the forest. He becomes increasingly crazed, and the play ends with the ritual burning of Lawrence and the humbling of what's left of the community in the face of its destruction.

There's something familiar about this forest, though. It is somewhat Ardenish. For Pomerance, like John Arden and others before him has applied the Shakespearean epic theatre model to his subject, deliberately throwing up references to, among others, 'King Lear' (ungrateful daughters, blindness, mad kingship), 'Richard III' (Quantrill as playfully wicked villain) and 'Hamlet' (a revelatory play within a play). The language is poetically muscular, too. It's like 'Armstrong's Last Goodnight' in a Western setting, full of dark and bloody deeds, bloodshed and strife.

Pomerance also draws on other dramatic myths to furnish his tale. When the three daughters finally appear in their night-gowns, rebellious teenagers who have rejected Puritan austerity for the sexual vitality of Quantrill's roughneck horde, they're uncannily like the victimised Brides of Dracula, impenitently, sexually awakened, assertive, in love with danger, i.e. life. So it comes as no surprise when, towards the end, Quantrill kneels to drink blood from the gaping bullet-wound in the back of one of his assailants.

For the figure of Quantrill is elevated to the status not only of Scourge and Angel of Death but the Devil himself, and like that

'Pyjama Tops' in Australia without nudes it's like doing 'Hamlet' without words... I'll see you later... Bye... (TO NEIL HORNICK) The Sunday People!

**Neil Hornick:** Oh yes, I've been bothered by them in my time... Do you have any interest in the alternative performance scene?

**Fiona Richmond:** Experimental theatre? I went to America and I brought over 'Women Behind Bars', that was experimental theatre. Did you see that? It was a shame... I mean, co-produced it (never again) (LAUGHS)... we ran just over six months, which is reasonable. If it had not been been a Paul Raymond theatre, if it had not been me in it, if it had started at the King's Head and transferred, I reckon that show would probably have become a cult thing... It was a sensational show, it was absolutely terrific.

**Neil Hornick:** Would you be interested in doing something out of your usual slot?

**Fiona Richmond:** Yes. I went and auditioned for the Wakefield Tricycle Company some time ago.

**Neil Hornick:** At their invitation?

**Fiona Richmond:** I can't even remember what it was...

anyway, I read for the part... and I didn't get it... because the other artists in the show complained.

**Neil Hornick:** On what grounds?

**Fiona Richmond:** That I wasn't a proper actress.

**Neil Hornick:** You're an Equity member, aren't you?

**Fiona Richmond:** Indeed I am. They skin me alive every year (LAUGHS)... That's the reason I was given.

**Neil Hornick:** Would you have been interested in the role?

**Fiona Richmond:** Sure, I would have been. Of course I'm interested in doing all sorts of things, working for other directors...

**Neil Hornick:** Do you get many out-of-the-way offers?

**Fiona Richmond:** (LAUGHING) That's the only one I had. Oh no, I had one from the Royal Court Upstairs but nothing came of that. I don't think they even did the show. But of course I'd love to do something like that. Very very much so. I'd love to do some sort of experimental theatre...

**Neil Hornick:** Thanks for being so generous with your time.

**Fiona Richmond:** It's been a pleasure.

other demented villain, Richard III, he wins our sympathy by the grotesquely playful style in which he deals come-uppance to the Puritan fall-guys. Major Blood has his eyes gouged out, and upright Mayor Cane is tempted by swishy containing a hallucinogen so powerful that within minutes he is experiencing a bad trip that would gain him instant admittance to Monty Python's Hospital for Over-Acting.

The dramatic technique, then, is familiar, but what makes the play very much of our time is its highly explicit feminism and its feverish portrait of megalomaniac militarism.

Lawrence may be Unionist but not because it opposes slavery. It simply opposes the presence of black people in America. And, besides, it has slaves of its own. The women are in thrall to the men of both sides, their sexuality and spontaneous feelings held rigorously in check. When the young girls break loose, so, too, does all hell break loose in Lawrence, just as it did in Salem two centuries earlier, just as it does in Dracula-land. The generous female principle has been violated and forced underground, only to surface perversely, and emblematically, in Quantrill's taste for female disguise; in the masquerade of the ravishing of Mayor Cane's daughter, cruelly re-enacted by Quantrill and the young Jesse James; in the humiliation of Mayor Cane, inveigled, while spaced out on morphine and whisky, into donning the same Mother Riley skirt and wig. The play is about split consciousness, literally *bad faith*. And in its images of genocide and hallucinogenic ritual murder, it carries obvious associations, nearer our own time, of Charles Manson and Vietnam. Indeed, Pomerance's Quantrill, with his deadly poise and power, joins Coppola's General Kurtz and Herzog's Aguirre in what by now constitutes a familiar genre of apocalyptically berserk militarists.

It's a dark relentless play, its language sinewy and often piercingly affecting (a grief-stricken father is appalled that his murdered daughter's limbs were not even arranged tidily on her body); but it's also, I feel, overwrought and certainly too long. You gradually lose patience with the endless succession of exits and entrances that crowd the second half. This may be something to do with the limitations of setting and casting. The action is played out on a square upraised wooden platform, on which the actors are deployed with pace and precision by the director, Roland Rees (though I could have done without Major Blood's mimed horseless canter). But despite the fact that there are fourteen in the cast, the space still looks underpopulated. Perhaps only David O. Selznick could do justice to the burning of Lawrence. And the production does suffer from that chronic ailment of English-based versions of the American scene—a distractingly uneven grasp of the American accent. Some of the acting, consequently, leaves a lot to be desired. But David Scholfield as Quantrill rivets the eye and ear, holding your attention like a posed rattlesnake. He looks mean enough, with his wall-eyed glare and pitted skin; but he's also a powerfully organic actor, feline, centred and vocally supple. His authoritative performance truly holds together this ambitious, hard-driving yet ultimately wearying and somehow inflated play.

Neil Hornick

## THE EIGHTIES: A RETROSPECTIVE

If this truly extraordinary evening really did presage performance in the '80s as was

claimed then the future is not quite so gloomy as one has been led to believe. For a month, under the seasonal title of 'The 1980s: A Retrospective', Action Space has shown London what, in the eyes of its programmer at least, it expects to be the shape of performance to come.

The second week brought together a potent triple bill. Mick Banks and Corinne D'Cruz, familiar for many years as alternative performers at Bath Arts Workshop and elsewhere, surfaced with their new company British Events, and Mary Longford, newish but with a cult following and a growing reputation, devised a new event especially for the Drill Hall. By way of prelude and entr'acte an unknown troupe from the antipodes, Quickflash, caused a stir or two in a corridor. It was programming of real initiative and imagination, using the rambling building more imaginatively than I can remember it being used before.

'Midway', British Events' frolicsome documentary drama, recounted the story of the Battle of Midway, decisive sea engagement of the Second World War, with two performers, spectacular technical effects,

### BRITISH EVENTS



### THEATRE COMPANY

slide show and a dazzling array of airfix kits. This was without doubt, as their publicity stated, small scale theatre taken to its logical conclusion—one thirty-second-scale action. The performance was an unlikely but telling amalgam of Broadway musical, visual symbolism, models and technical ingenuity.

It is an unusual show to find touring in these days of financial and artistic stringency where economy of effect and aspiration is all-pervading; and for that reason especially welcome amidst a mediocrity of one-man shows. The technical complexities of the show have limited its touring potential, even gigs aboard ships and at the Imperial War Museum have had to be declined, and Action Space was not, it must be admitted, the most suitable of venues. But within the confines of the downstairs theatre British Events brought off a succession of miniature theatrical coups, plastic aircraft winging over the all-singing, all-dancing Hollywood spectacle beneath. For the climactic battle itself every firework flash was visible through the binoculars with which each member of the audience was supplied. There was a tendency to over-extend some of the ideas, the serious moments in the performance were submerged in the fun of the whole affair, and after a false ending no attempt was made to integrate the final sequences into the event as a whole, but despite these few misgivings this show produced unalloyed pleasure.

Whether 'Quickflash Exposed' was a pleasure I am less sure, but there is no denying the artistry with which this short, camp, unashamedly blasphemous piece was conceived and executed. Taking religion to

be an essentially narcissistic act, and the bible to be a gay primer, 'Quickflash Exposed' was a religious service of sorts that mocked the conventions of such services while at the same time using them as the



basis of a piece of theatrical eroticism. This was Genet as performance art and at times lived up to the master's own outrageous standards.

And so to the divine Mary Longford and her 'Looking out of the Window'. As Quickflash replaced their jock straps and cellos we were ushered upstairs to the Drill Hall's rehearsal room which overlooks Chenies Street. Large tables were bare except for bowls of pop corn; a man sat impassively guarding a tape machine; chairs were lined up along the windows. There was nothing else to do but look out on the scenes beneath. And so that is what we did. As the moments ticked by the rumour spread that it was some sort of hoax. Were we ourselves the performance? But no, a figure appeared near the entrance to the International Chemical Industries building opposite and, sprinkling what appeared to be salt, spelled out the words, THE END. That in itself as a brilliant gag, would have made the evening memorable. But it was only the beginning. More, much more, was to come.

Slowly the tape which had been playing all the while intruded into our consciousness and, amidst the snatches of Satie and noises of traffic, a fractured female monologue began telling us of a party, a pick-up and a rejection while the salt sprinkler took up a variety of poses related, however tangentially, to what we heard. A newspaper she was reading caught fire but unconcerned she carried on reading. Another time, fainting in the road, she caused a passer by to go to a telephone box and make an emergency call. Taxis drew up, precisely on the cue of the tape, to disgorge contestants for a ballroom dancing championship. Punks came and went. And through it all the spontaneous, uncontrived street life carried, on amidst and around the performance becoming a part of its peculiar richness. Never has the ordinary seemed more extraordinary. With dozens of delighted eyeballs we watched in growing wonder.

Wonder grew even greater at the final performance when irate neighbours, disconcerted by a week of observation by so many strange faces, called in the local constabulary. The performance was not so much broken up as augmented in an utterly unexpected way, and the police, unwittingly perhaps but who knows, possibly at Ms Longford's behest, blurred performance and reality, merged spectator and performer, as every member of the audience was escorted by them into the street.

The conceit was a great one and its realisation, in a precisely organised, ordered and choreographed performance, was immaculate. It was at once performance art of the highest order, a radical new form of street theatre, and a mighty giggle.



DANCE FESTIVAL AT

# DARTINGTON

Deep in idyllic Devon Dartington College, that little cultural cocoon for dance teemed with newcomers and habitués. Small groups and individuals from Scandinavia, Europe, America and England came to learn, entertain, enlighten but seldom exasperate despite some dilatory displays. There were the purists, their styles unclouded, the performance artists, the folk dancers with samples from the Third World and the exponents of the relatively new forms of release and contact.

Contact is a duet movement in which two people engage in a spontaneous physical dialogue, focused on momentum and shared weight. Release integrates imagery and action and develops one's movement responses to the language of the imagination. The growth of these two forms is largely due to Steve Paxton and Mary Fulkerson, both tutors at the college and highly esteemed performers. Their guidance and influence enabled their students to produce some individualistic pieces. Of these, Yolande Snaith's original poem-dance left little doubt as to the exciting state of things to come. An ex-art student with a keen sense of observation and powerfully controlled flow, she collated a series of words spoken on a rhythm like a sustained bass to which is introduced aleatory movement. She smoothly rolls to the floor, sprints up, spinning dangerously off-centre, legs darting out of the spiral, as she speaks her poem in an effortless breath '... dead ... vacant ... skeletal ... landscape ... grey ... blue ... green ... grey ... three ... men ... pacing ... spaces ... down ... the ... bleak ... grey ... green ... slope ... and a dog ... three men ... and ... a dog ... stops, looks ... and returns ...'

Of things past, there is Steve Paxton's *Flat* first performed in 1963 at the experimental Judson Church in New York. No doubt outrageous at that time, today it is amusing, perhaps self-consciously so, skimming close to clichés of the old avant-garde. Nonetheless, it was not so far behind the slow-paced creations of European experimental dance of the Seventies. Sitting on a chair in a cream suit and white shirt, he takes off his shoes and

socks and stops, almost absent-minded, then resumes. He removes his jacket, his shirt and trousers and hangs them onto his chest and back where he's stuck two small hooks that transform him into a walking clothes rail in boxer shorts. He sits in classical poses, his clothes falling around him like layers of peeled skin, the remnants of an identity. He dons the garments, stopping blankly between buttons, and walks away as though nothing had happened.

The Little Theatre's late night show devised by Mary Fulkerson, Miranda Tufnell, Libby Dempster and Chris Crickmay is intended for browsers and loungers to catch glimpses or full chunks of this desultory narrative punctuated with lackadaisical movement as one figure frolics on top of a large bale of hay, another sits absorbed in a book by the dim light of a lamp, against a film projection of a room filled with warm dusky sun. Chris Crickmay creeps between the table legs, snakes around the chair and inches onto the table. Occasionally they all stand clustered, squirming and bursting into a flutter of runs. The permutations endlessly trickle forth, the show goes on and on.

Laurie Booth has concocted his own bizarre version of the *English Wildlife* which bears more resemblance to surrealism than to botany. His movement is agile, athletic, spontaneous, contorted, often mimetic, and sometimes self-consciously clever. In the first part of the piece he marches along a diagonal, turning unexpectedly to do double takes, diving to the floor, breaking into a series of funny walks while a taped voice ponders about the changes of direction that occurred in his past. Part two is a film of Booth offering his bare arms to a roaming and very healthy tarantula. Camera cuts to a profile of Booth as a private eye who dwells in dark corners and who keeps the live arachnid under his hat. Booth then reappears off the screen to improvise sequences of rubbery contortions and supple rolls—a contact duet with the floor.

"What do they do with the old moon, when there is a new one?" a young man asked Nasrudin. "They cut them up. Each old moon provides forty stars." Aloft on a ladder, Mary Prestidge shines a torch on the nether land while a lone figure stands still, outside the light's reach, and a voice coats the darkness with monologues. The setting unconsciously hints at the fifth planet where the Little Prince meets the lamplighter who witnesses 1,444 sunsets every twenty-four hours. In 'Rise to Standing, Heavenly Bodies' the voice asks basic, sometimes simplistic metaphysical questions about gravity, weight and matter, tells of a hummingbird's daredevil descent from a high ledge and its instinctively



Silvy Panet-Raymond

Sorry, no Hinchliffe or Fletcher this time. Instead Pete Shelton is

# LASHING OUT-

See how long you can look at the screen before throwing up . . .

timed rescue from the final splatter. Together on the ground, the two women intersperse their queries with an in-depth analysis of real mayonnaise ('nothing added for kicks') as they shuffle around, barely hinting at movement. A slow game of pick-up-sticks ensues. Carol deVaughn struts around with three long sticks held between her thighs, evoking the burdened yet elegant walk of an insect who pushes the stray pieces of wood into a neat pile. They pick up the last rod and rest it on their respective foreheads, a giant hyphen to their thoughts.

Small, dark, moustachioed and American, John Rolland approaches dance with a kind irreverence, gleefully poking its ribs with parody. He mixes dance styles—the soft shoe shuffle bursting in on the ballet bravura that tumbles down into the abyss of emotional flourish and emerges to portray a series of characters: a camped-up Isadora Duncan strangled by her manic red scarf; the pyjama-clad fantasist, a kerosene lamp in one hand, whose rude awakenings leave him to face a staring audience rather than an ephemeral, ethereal beauty; then there's the smug magician who tosses a ball from gloved-hand to gloved-hand to the quickening pace of Beethoven's Sonata op 57. As the crescendo nears, he pops the ball back into his velcro pocket, grinning at his audience who stumble on the well-timed anti-climax. It's parody all round.

Another American, Albert Reid, one of the original Cunningham dancers also portrays a special brand of humour, though in a much more abstract and concise vein. In the non-sequitur 'Vignettes', his vocabulary, highly technical and full of unexpected, ordinary gestures, is as quirky as the accompanying wonky-tonk music of Conlon Nancarrow. Reid loosely drops his head onto an out-stretched arm, the hand flapping like a snail. He darts on pin-point steps, his back curving and undulating; while one leg twitches he slowly cups his hands around his other knee. One feels that he can account for every twitch, every emphasis such is his control and definition.

From Sweden came the three Wind Witches, nordic twirling dervishes, hypnotically circling, never faltering, but altering their rhythm by subtle changes of direction or bursts of breath that propelled them ever onward. The three women, dressed in silken pearl grey, spun mostly in silence, except for the audible breath

"What's this place called? A theatre, isn't it? And up there is the gallery, right? Then if I work here, what does that make me?"

Sorry, no score for those who thought the speaker was an actor, director or stage cat. It was, in fact, part of the eloquent musings of a surgeon as he attempted to explain to a television audience the sheer artistry and panache of his profession.

Judging by recent TV programming you would be forgiven for thinking that the upper echelons of BBC and ITV had taken his dictum seriously. But the reason for the epidemic of programmes devoted to the medical profession may well be attributable to very different sentiments.

In an age when the rumblings of Depression grow closer it seems that TV has been forced to look far and wide to find heroes that can be glorified for their miraculous achievements. Heroes it seems are the only means that we can be immunised against the bleak world outside. As heroes have also become rather thin on the ground, the medical profession seems to suffice as second best.

Dr. Kildare died of a severe attack of angelic good intention, and Emergency Ward Ten was cut down long

as the down beat to multiple Mobius phrases. Half-way through, some atonal piano music encroached on the light eddies, and only served to murk an otherwise entrancing experience.

Contact advocate, Kirstie Simson who works outside the Dartington enclave presented 'Solo' an improvisation stemming from momentum constantly regenerated and rechannelled. Her brawny, almost sculptural body is braced to take up the impulses into a handstand, into long strides, into an arm swing that tapers to quivering fingers. She lets these impulses ricochet until they take over her whole body, like cross-currents with a strong undertow.

Dartington College's original dance student, Rosemary Butcher has since gone on to create a unique approach to choreography, devised from structured improvisation which is altered by cueing systems; the outcome of the piece rests on the performers' choice

before the current economic strategy could have terminated its work. This left the magnates of broadcasting no option other than to resort to the real thing. And it seems that it has required all of the ingenuity of programme makers to pull the humble medics up by the gown-ties to the elevated position of performers.

A notorious example of this being BBC's *The Rhesus Conundrum*, about the fascinating subject of mothers-to-be with rhesus negative blood unwittingly killing off their babies with rhesus positive blood groups. The first warning signs came with the director's pronouncement that the programme was to be a detective story of how the cause and cure for this phenomenon came to be found. If the director wants us to see doctors as detectives it is a sure indication that something is not well—and we didn't have to wait long to find out what this was. The doctors concerned have aged somewhat since the discovery, indeed some of them were obviously on the brink of senility, uttering such pearls as "it must have been a revelation from God".

For a really fine bit of thriller try instead the opening credits for *Your Life In Their Hands*. Even if it is ob-

of alternatives and the extent to which these are developed before one of the dancers gives another cue. The risks involved ensure that no two performances of the piece will be the same, thereby plucking the work from tedium and rote. In 'Six Tracks', Julyen Hamilton and Sue McLennan carry out a set of mutable instructions on a six-track course: building up speed they swiftly overtake each other, arms cut clear diagonals, feet etch out rapid, intricate designs, bodies almost interlocking in mid-air, they are drawn together and apart like magnets that keep changing polarity.

The prolific output of this small but dedicated band of experimental dance artists, undeterred by harsh economic straits, testifies to a healthy growth in a relatively short period of time, and points to new inroads on this largely unmapped territory.

Silvy Panet-Raymond

vious that it was the surgeon who dunnit, you can admire the sheer poise with which he prepares himself for his gruesome piece of butchery. However, the contents of the programme are somewhat different. They basically comprise an exercise of 'see how long you can look at the screen before throwing up'.

Here the central character is the consultant or surgeon, with a supporting cast of anaesthetists and nursing staff, whose prowess is looked on by a bunch of medical students who look as if they have been issued with keys to the drug cabinet. A recent programme showed a Caesarian section being performed: an excellent opportunity for the consultant to demonstrate his dexterity while we curl up in sympathetic agony for mother and baby. Baby is delivered without problem—but then it is discovered that it is failing to breathe properly. Pandemonium ensues, during which an army of green gowned characters tried to beat the clock (yes, they showed that too) and establish respiration. Miraculously, the baby survived in spite of injections, tubes fed down its throat and being wrapped up in tin foil. This sense of organised panic might be called the Dr. Kildare syndrome—



smashing television, but is it true to life?

On the one occasion that I was within distance of this operation taking place I was astounded to see a doctor lurching, zombie-like, from the operating theatre in a blood-spattered gown, only to learn that he had been on duty for 48 hours, and was incapable of negotiating a door, let alone an operation. That's half the truth, but the exploits of yesteryear's television hero have not been totally erased from the minds of those who follow his profession in real life.

Witness to this fact being an occasion when a hospital was in the process of cutting a poisonous growth off my body. Content whilst a medical team poked and cut around, I became alarmed when all and sundry departed post-haste to the sound of a shrill bell, leaving blood fairly spurting out of me, and hoping that the fire-brigade would soon arrive. However, fear not! The reason for this hurried exodus was the hospital's policy of assembling twice the necessary team to cope with a heart-attack ten seconds *before* the ambulance drove in a cardiac arrest patient. And with such an exciting flurry of drop everything and run mentality I can hardly wait for my

first heart-attack.

Another angle that has been used by TV has been an expose of medicine as a secret society. In Granada's series *Medical Ethics* topics such as the doctors' oath of secrecy were put under the grill. Here the central role was wisely given to a lawyer (a profession well versed in performance), with GPs, consultants and other hospital staff having to talk their way out of tight corners. To a constant barrage of "would you inform the police if . . ." came equally constant rejoinders of "no". A most reassuring display by the doctors, but before you confide your secrets to a doctor, beware. There are always means of extracting the necessary information—and, no surprise, the Mole was the hospital administrator, who seemed to be remarkably happy to be prying through your medical files.

The programme tended to confirm one's suspicions that doctors are, for the most part, conscientious, reliable, slightly paternalistic, and having the patients' interests at heart—even though they acknowledge that the science of medicine is not complete. I doubt whether showing us the Errol Flynn of the operating theatre will ever change this view.

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# FUTUREPERFORM

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## ACTION SPACE

This summer we shall be able to revel in the experience of the original pneumatic Paradise e Inferno as Action Space brings to us the Touring Heaven and Hell Road Show run by Freak Show enthusiast George and his dubious-sounding partner, Bible Salesman and Patent Medicine Flogger, Dr. Rotgut. We shall be able to linger in Limbo, visit strange human-monster freaks, human-parrots and human-animals in the Wretched Inferno crawling with beasties and, no doubt, relieve ourselves in the pneumatic delights of Paradise!  
5-6 July Parliament Hill (behind Kites Hill);  
12 July Chichester Festival  
13 September Salisbury Festival.

## CIRCUS LUMIERE

Lumiere and Son continue throughout July with their extraordinary circus that takes place in a specially made black beetle-shaped tent. Done in collaboration with Wimbledon School of Art Theatre Design Students, the show concentrates largely on clowning in an attempt to recover some of the subversive energy that is absent from much contemporary circus or street clowning.

10-13 July Lambeth Festival;

16-19 July Taunton Brewhouse Theatre, Coal Orchard, Taunton, Somerset O823 74608;

23-26 July Digswell House, Welwyn Garden City.

## HOXTON HALL HIGHLIGHTS

July jumps with variety at Hoxton Hall this summer.

4 July Dancers Anonymous, a collection of dance students and others present an evening of experimental and contemporary dance which promises to be worthwhile;

12-13 July The Shoreditch Festival event of Hoxton Hall's own kids' show 'The Fat Cat' which has already played to a number of kids;

Hoxton Hall, 128a Hoxton St. Hoxton N1.

## CRYSTAL THEATRE at the ICA

The well-loved Crystal Theatre will be performing Jeremy Sandford's play 'The Fatted Calf' which deals with the dilemmas, problems and politics of prostitution, in the first week of July until the 6th.

Also at the ICA are two new lunchtime plays that promise to be interesting:

'Mzilikazi: Trial of Blood' by Group Three, written by Steve Wilmer, about a white missionary and his black acolyte caught in the middle of the Rhodesian War. 9-19 July at 1.15pm.

'An Honourable Man' written and directed by Alan Drury with John Price till the 5 July at 1.15pm.

There will also be an afternoon devoted to Letterist Poetry at the ICA on Tuesday 8 July at 1.00pm with John Cage presenting Jean-Paul Curtay.

## KABOODLE COMING BACK

Kaboodle will be back from their visit to Holland in July and will be performing their show 'Inside Story' from 21-26 July in the Portico at Covent Garden during lunchtimes. Certainly an event worth catching.

## BULL AND GATE VENUE OPENS

A new venue opens in Kentish Town this month, the Bull and Gate pub on Kentish Town Road, near Kentish Town Tube station. It will open on 17th June with Hesitate and Demonstrate performing 'Excuse Me' and Smith and Goody will perform their new show 'The Gambler' about—guess? on 6th and 7th July.

## FORKBEARD FANTASY

Forkbeard Fantasy, much appreciated and as English as ever will be doing the Fairs this summer though we don't know what they will be doing as yet. What we do know is that Forkbeard have always done excellent things and if anyone can get to these somewhat remoter areas it would be well worth it. Profile on them next issue.

19 July Winchester Fair;

26-27 July East Beyhault Fair.

## JAIL WAREHOUSE

This July sees Jail Warehouse back in London with 'ff Klein Luftpause', a show centred around The Opera Experience. "You know I can't stand Caruso". "I thought it was the other one—you know—Giggly". Derek Wilson, Laura Gilbert to-



gether with Dave Holland have already played this show to a few venues in London and have a tour of some more this July and a spell at Covent Garden.

7 July The Alexander Estate Community Centre, 48 Boundary Rd, NW8-

11 July Hoxton Hall, 128a Hoxton St, Hoxton N1 01-739 5431;

12 July Montefiori School, Deal St, E1.

## THE PEOPLE SHOW No. 85 GOES WEST

'That show' from the Royal Court is going to Chapter Arts Centre, Market Rd. Cardiff from 9th July-12th July. Also at Chapter Arts, an Asian Dance Festival featuring a number of Balinese and Kathkali dancers. From 30th June -12th July. Details 0222-396061.

**FUTUREPERFORM** our selected listings service needs information at least a month and a half before it takes place. Please send us a carefully worded release on anything interesting and unusual and we will try to print it. Next deadline: August 1st. Bruce Bayley.

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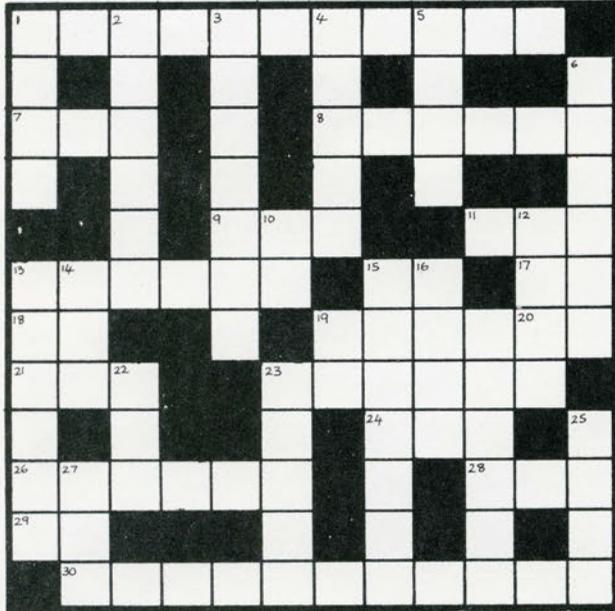
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PERFORMANCE CROSSWORD No. 2 BY DAZED



Apologies to all our readers! In the last issue something went terribly wrong somewhere. For those who did not bother (Very sensibly) trying to do the crossword I will explain . . . CLUES WERE MISSING, WORDS LEFT OUT AND LETTERS WERE INTERCHANGED! Any way this time we'll do abit more proof reading.

To make you all abit more angry, Performance crossword No. 2 is going to be a COMPETITION CROSSWORD! Entries should be sent to the Performance Magazine office not later than 10th August 1980. There will be a £5 prize for the winning entry picked out almost at random.

ACROSS

1. It rings, applauds and scratches (11).
7. Bring back sentimental plays, says boss (3).
8. Hindu audience participation, 'that's the way to do it!' (5-1).
9. Strike in the record industry (3).
11. Dressed in silk hats and the like (3).
13. Top group with fake lustre (6).
15. Cut the initial performance from the mournful tear (2).
17. Acting in a school with most of this garment (2).
18. Issue Six without her (2).
19. Gertrude and cigars; a thermo-nuclear reaction (6).
21. The Girl sets Hugh's plastic lights (3).
23. Universal soccer stars entertain us (6).
24. Seats cost more with no extra value (3).
26. More at length than Wakefield—but not as wide (6).
28. Cold for two (3).
29. Who whips the company out of some mess (2).
30. The magazine that executes ants! (11).

DOWN

1. A mouldy load of actors (4).
2. We are not a museum, but he's a hall (6).
3. The dolls don't pull any of themselves (7).
4. Don't panic, a sad machine to rob (5).
5. Was lying, dead as a door nail (4).
6. Itinerant improviser (6).
10. Ms replaced Miss bur removes herself for the present (2).
12. It's not true, only part of the flies is used (4).
13. The correct benefits of the Performing Society (6).
14. Some of the fuses have been utilised on the board (3).
15. It's nearly our Roman platform (7).
16. It's that man again! (4).
19. Money order for a child star (2).
20. Hoax, heavy without a hall (6).
22. The kids' lion grows up and gets shorter! (3).
23. A small mace in chaos leading almost over a minor but featuring role (5).
25. A cape can slow your step (4).
27. It makes it louder (3).

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