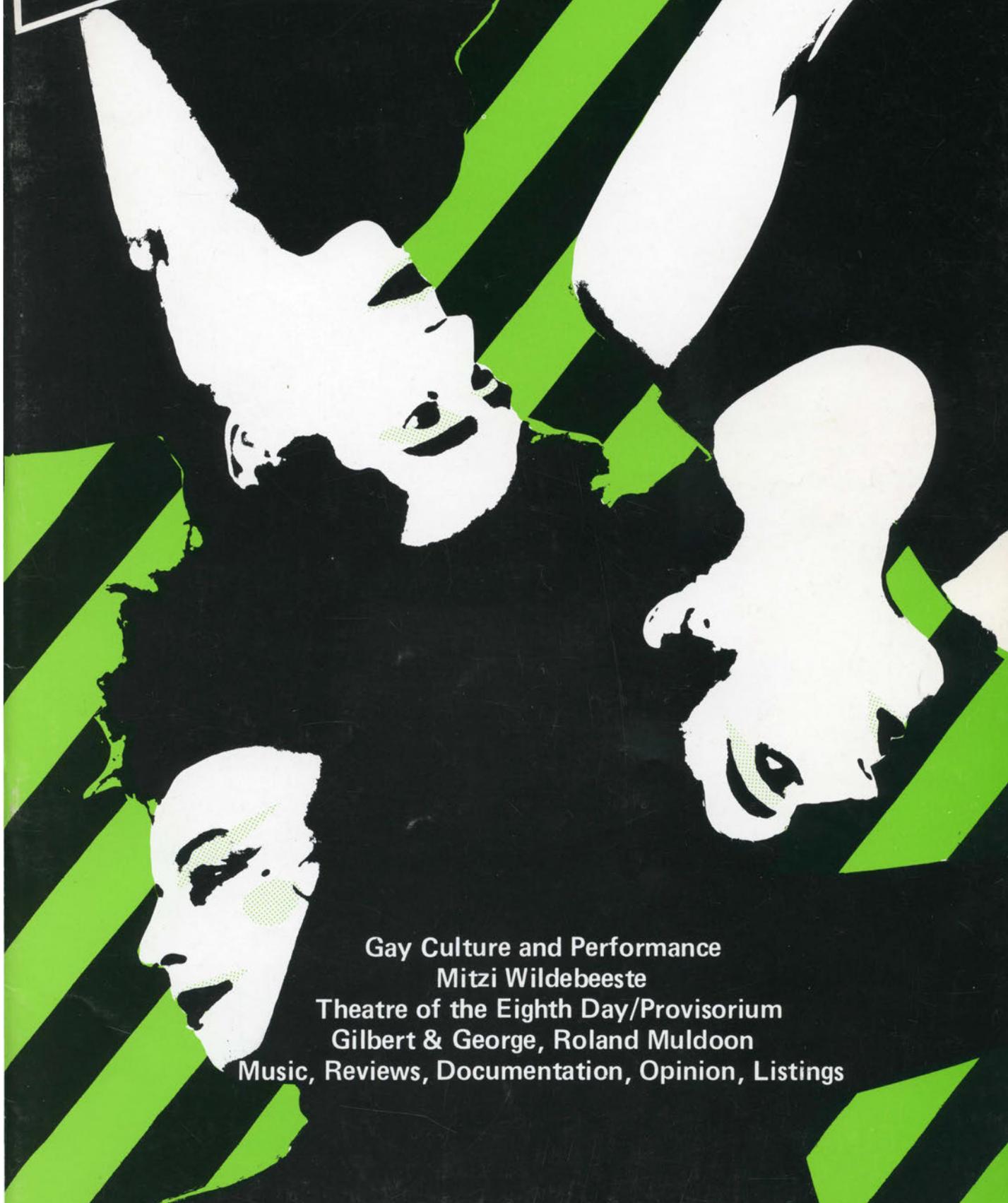


PERFORMANCE
MAGAZINE
Magazine

The Regular Review of Live Art in the UK
No. 13 75p.



Gay Culture and Performance
Mitzi Wildebeeste
Theatre of the Eighth Day/Provisorium
Gilbert & George, Roland Muldoon
Music, Reviews, Documentation, Opinion, Listings

LUCKY STRIKE
A HRANT ALIANAK FEATURE

Three people
with nowhere
to go.....
but hell

LUCKY STRIKE

written and directed by Hrant Alianak
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September/October 1981

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Several articles which I have recently read in 'Performance' and in particular a piece by Jeff Nuttall titled 'Godless Ceremony' which appeared in No. 11 have provoked me to write about my ideas concerning the relationship between theatre and art as they co-exist under the name of 'performance art'. During the seventies the term 'performance art' described a broad spectrum of activities which included at one end, non-theatrical live work — body art, self mutilation, protest, actions etc. — and at the other, work which reinterpreted theatrical skills like dance, music, acting, making entrances, within a new context which challenged the stereotypes and assumptions of straight theatre. Performance art is a juxtaposition or collaboration of basically theatre and fine art concerns. However, in practically everything I have ever read about 'performance art' the theatrical element has been underrated, overlooked, condemned, or misunderstood. A curious fact when the impetus of artists to break into performance from the restrictive and rarified forms of painting and sculpture was intrinsically political.

The word performance should not be a mere adjunct or extension of the word art. Like art, performance has a long history and social context, to be reckoned with, challenged and understood. The word performer for many people implies entertainer and a vast industry of actresses, actors, dancers, singers, musicians, and clowns who create popular entertainment which, now through television, reaches many people.

In the nineteenth century the distinction between artiste — performer, and artist — painter, sculptor, writer, composer, and occasionally choreographer, was arrived at as a consolidation of class difference which served the needs of a growing industrial capitalism. While the artist, who was usually male and middle class, was funded, reviewed, and supported by the ruling classes, the artistes provided a cheap and popular form of entertainment for working people in variety, penny gaffs, and music hall, and were usually from working class backgrounds themselves.

The history of British theatre and performance is rooted in the history of class division. Even within the profession itself there has always been a split between what was considered low and high theatre, patent and minor theatre. The Theatres Act of 1843 which stated that any house, room or public space which held a burletta licence could put on plays in effect legitimised music hall which flourished from 1850-1950. Before this act was passed, the so called legitimate West End London theatres protecting their box office income and respectability were continuously taking managers of unlicensed East End theatres to court; and sometimes whole companies of performers, and even audiences who attended these theatres. Particularly too in urban industrial areas

like the East End of London where many working people lived, the corruption of theatre and entertainment was considered a threat to the stability of a work force necessary to growing capitalism.

Many performance artists have been trained in art schools as opposed to stage schools, and avoid the use of theatrical imagery, effect, illusion, and characterisation, preferring to exploit 'real time' rather than play acting. Many others, however, draw source material and inspiration from traditional modes of theatre performance, like music hall, using the language and methods of improvisation, confrontation, structuralism, and the avant garde to place their work in a critical relationship with mainstream culture and ideology. This process was particularly evident in the work of Limited Dance Company (myself and Sally Potter), Rose English, Di Davies, John Bull Puncture Repair Kit,

Womanless Ceremony?

By Jacky Lansley

Marie Leahy and Keith James, Shirley Cameron and Roland Miller, Bobby Baker, Phantom Captain, The People Show, Welfare State, Judith Katz and Sally Cranfield, Carlyle Reedy, Dance Organisation, Zena Mountain. The degree to which theatrical elements were involved varied considerably, depending on the nature of the work and the backgrounds of the artists concerned. Some of the people I have mentioned above may be appalled by my suggestion that they slot into the theatrical end of the performance art spectrum. Nevertheless there were definitely theatrical devices and influences being used in the work of all these people; whether it was developed consciously or not.

The juxtaposition of art and entertainment is not a new idea. In the early part of the century Futurist groups in Europe and Russia experimenting with collage techniques soon discovered the power of performance and mixed media, and mounted concerts which included poetry, music, banter, and painting. The First World War produced Dada and the Cabaret Voltaire founded by Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball in Zurich in 1916. Here the traditional skills of music hall, song and dance, acrobatics, juggling, fire eating, and improvised chat were juxtaposed in nightly entertainments which attacked war and the society which supported it. Although the power of the performance to confront and challenge is

exploited within this situation, the specific contributions of Emmy Hennings who was an established cabaret artist, or Mary Wigman who was a dancer to the ideas of Dada are usually totally ignored — a fact which suggests that theatrical performance is degraded and dismissed because traditionally it has always involved many women.

For women to be connected with theatre and the performing arts has historically always meant a connection with prostitution. This attitude still lingers and taints the profession (or art form) with a vaguely unrespectable image. It is still difficult for a woman to call herself an actress, a dancer, or a performance artist with any pride. However, despite public harassment and church moralising the performing arts have been one of the few professions open to women, and in particular working class women. For many it was their only route to any kind of independence, although it usually involved displaying their bodies in some form or other for male pleasure. It is easy to see why male artists do not want to identify with this voyeuristic aspect of performance, or with the vast chorus line of women (or chorus boys) who merely seem to decorate. The problem however does not vanish simply by ignoring theatrical performance, which as we have seen very often means ignoring the work of women.

Women artists cannot afford the luxury of ignoring oppression as we experience it every day of our lives. The experience of profound pleasure which Jeff Nuttall in his piece 'Godless Ceremony' describes as the *raison d'être* of art does not always seem such a priority given the world context in which we live. In the work of Limited Dance Company the materials of oppression in many instances became the materials of performance art; handbags, high heels, toy guns, miniature tea sets, stage blood — the paraphernalia with which society surrounds women — became the objects of analysis and visual juxtaposition. Bobby Baker used food as her material, drawing on the traditional role of woman as nurturer to attack oppression with her larger than life food sculptures. In this context the woman is not subservient to the objects that surround her, but is seen to manipulate them according to her own scenario.

As many people have discovered it is impossible to come up with a definitive definition of performance art. Art and performance together create vast scope, and vast conflicts between forms, ideas, the working and middle classes, men and women. The performance artists who have chosen to identify with theatrical performance have done so for very real and important reasons. Many of these artists approached theatre because they refused to be contained by gallery situated performance which maintained the mystique and privilege of 'art'.

Andrea Hill's much needed but somewhat defensive article 'Critics and Doormats' (issue no. 12 Performance Magazine) reinforced the impression that Performance Artists feel they are hard done by: if they are not ignored by the national press then they are lampooned and described as parasites of the tax paying population. They complain that their work is more often than not dismissed as 'bad art' or 'bad theatre' and not considered as Performance in the terms they adopt towards their own work. They complain that their work does not receive the right amount of exposure to the public — either by being relegated to antipodean venues or by being quite simply ignored. Inevitably they add the universal complaint of the lack of funds to carry out their work and in some cases to survive. I wish now to take what has to be a fairly cursory examination of these complaints.

In reality performers probably receive more encouragement and funds from subsidising bodies or directly from the venues they perform in than many painters or sculptors. Certainly they have more opportunity to expose their work to the public than those individuals working in the plastic arts. After all performers can work galleries, art centres, theatres, pubs, music venues, fairs, festivals..... in fact virtually any where if desired and receive some kind of fee for their work — be it liked or not. One has to admit that art administration is often inefficient: posters (sometimes produced by the artists themselves) have been left lying around offices and not distributed. The 'door' has been left to the artists to run, and there is a general suspicion that the administration is perhaps more interested in extended board meetings and drink than in the art taking place. A comparison of artists' and administrators' earnings reveals the source of much of the aggravation felt by artists. Obviously this is not always the case — 'one off' events, festivals and series of events have often been sensitively organised and successful in drawing reasonable audiences. In regard to performers being shunted off to perform in 'geographically and ideologically fringe' venues I always thought many performers saw it as part of their 'brief' to work out in the 'sticks' and that in some cases these small, little-known venues have been preferred to the larger and more sophisticated city venues. The former are often more enthusiastic and harbour less preconceived ideas about the work and are more able or willing to provide an interesting environment and atmosphere for the work to take place in. Fees are lower in Great Britain than in other European countries, because public interest and audience attendance is greater in those countries. I believe J. B. Priestly once said that the only time the English were interested in the arts was during the Second World War, and that this was partly due to escapism, and partly due to a

new-found awareness created by the daily tension experienced by the nation. If, then, we accept that the nation as a whole is not too concerned with the contemporary arts, and that the British public is not inclined to take the risk of going to see work of which they have neither the 'form' nor have seen well received by the press, we have some basis for what is a small, sometimes non-existent audience for Performance Art. Nevertheless I believe the absence of a real following indicates more than just apathy or a lack of information. Some spectators that I have spoken to, and who are in the majority knowledgeable about the arts, confess to being confused, bored and feel that they have been 'used' after experiencing a performance. So, perhaps we should also consider what Performance Art offers audiences. To do this we need to clarify what the nature of the art form is.

Earlier we noted the performers' dislike

A Selfish Art?

By Roger Ely

of their work being dismissed as 'bad art' and 'bad theatre', but at the same time there seems to be some reluctance to define the medium. It is not possible to have it both ways; and even though an all-encompassing definition seems impossible, it must be possible to find a common denominator or generally accepted attitudes to distinguish performance from art and theatre. Otherwise, we are supporting the notion that there is no such thing as a bad performance — that it is merely the stance or motivation or documentation that matters. If that is the case, then the audience is not important — so why are people invited and charged for the pleasure? Is it because the performer needs the audience and not the reverse? In my opinion what differentiates performance from theatre is the refusal of a performance artist to assume another identity — to act out a part that has no basis, or is not true to his own world. A performer seeks to express ideas and feelings which are the product of his/her own experience and knowledge. They are not machines that can absorb a personality — an alien rôle — and then by a process of memorizing the words that dictate this rôle, adopt and regurgitate it on stage at will. To a performer that is a lie. It might be an effective lie, it may well embody aspects of the actor's real self but it has nothing to do with self-expression. A performer is essentially concerned with behaviour, be it of a rational, absurd, fantasized or ritual nature; he/she

replaces the worlds of plot and props with one of abstraction and sculpture. If one wanted to further differentiate performance from both the plastic arts and theatre, one could underline the ephemeral nature of the art form and its refusal to shut out life. Also, whereas a play may develop/change in its early stages through revision of the text, it is inevitably crystallised, whereas, a performance for good or worse will accommodate change and chance to varying degrees depending on the artist's working method. A performance becomes a means of discovery, not just the presentation of one. In many ways a performance is the working out and the result of ideas, feelings and actions presented simultaneously. The risk of a performance failing completely or in part depends greatly on the amount of structuring present in the work — on how much the performer leaves to improvisation. Success or failure could depend on the atmosphere and nature of the performance space, the mental state of the performer, and in some cases (but not all) the response of the audience.

The spectator, therefore, is gambling not only on the content, but also on the standard of the performance: that is, on the ability of the performer to create and transmit his ideas. Furthermore, the approach and attitude of the performer to the spectator varies from one artist to another and from day to day. However, some performance artists seek to establish an approach to the audience quite unlike that found anywhere else. The difference

of approach in such performers may be illustrated by a comparison of political debate to an act of terrorism. For instance, we have a speaker in the House of Commons. He puts forward his speech, amongst others. The act is debated and then finally it is deferred, passed or thrown out. Place this next to the direct political action of Carlos and his Palestinian compatriots at the O.P.E.C. meeting in Vienna. There, a violent and speedy political gesture left a minister dead/a hand shaken, and international publicity guaranteed. Sometimes it is necessary to use a gun and not make a speech; sometimes it is necessary to attack an audience. As Jeff Nuttall in 'Performance Art: Memoirs' puts it; 'I was not concerned to entertain or communicate... it's one thing to watch a riot from the fifth floor of a building. It's another thing to find yourself caught up in it. I wanted to conduct exactly this sort of excitement, to involve the public in a riot, not give them a safe viewpoint'. An audience present at such a performance is not expected to applaud it — no more than one is expected to applaud an act of murder'. Coum Transmissions in the 1976 issue of Curtains: 'Our story begins with an attempt to erase security. If you decide to clutch at a straw you must expect COUM to try and tear it away...'

Not all performances are created for an audience. They may be of such a private

nature as to be only known by the artist. Joseph Beuys's interaction with a coyote, for example. I would suggest that some performances performed in public would be as well performed in private, because we are merely seeing the 'shell' or outer appearance of an exercise, whose primary purpose is to extend and develop the artist's understanding of himself, and the world that surrounds him.

Some performers set out to build a 'bridge' between their ideas and the audience. Jimi Hendrix once stated that he despised his guitar, in that it was a wall between what he imagined and what he could reify. He desired a machine that could translate his inner sounds. In turn, we could go a stage further, in the manner of Aldous Huxley's 'Feelies' and plug the audience directly into the artist's mind. The problem is that we are not as yet able to communicate as one entity and until the time comes when we can, we must build a bridge to communicate. That bridge is a marriage of content and form — it carries the magic of the artist. If it crumbles, all we are left with is the approach of the artist, and we can only get the impression of watching someone inside a great machine of their own making, that no one has seen before, and who is gently playing with himself while trying to figure it out.

In contrast to the very real efforts of performers to blend life and art, and in some cases communicate, the following event seems to embody the communication of the self. I had just taken my place in the first 15 rows of the local Social Security office, when I realised an old fellow up front was causing amusement and drawing the attention of the waiting people. He was wearing grey stained and baggy trousers that were just about held to his waist by an over-sized belt that dangled over — no shirt, a ripped jacket and a patch over his eye with his hat pointing out like a limp dagger. A veritable pirate. He was delivering an anxious appeal for benefit through the internal telephone. Funny looking he may have been, but it was obvious that he was in much need of repair. Throughout the exchange he was always side on to the waiting people, whom he occasionally glanced at, whilst he mixed his problems with a very entertaining patter with the listener on the other end. Seemingly, it was to no avail and he disappeared unobtrusively.

In fact the telephone had been out of order. What he had done was direct his pain, his anger, up the telephone line — it could have been to God, or an abstraction, but not to the people present, who had in a real sense become his audience. Why? Because he had kept them interested and the process had made them think about the situation — he did not attempt to involve them in his own game. In the process he had divulged his private and internal nature, and had brought about an intimacy by his careful 'direction' of himself. He did not turn the awaiting people against him — they were caught, not held or bombarded.

Roger Ely

Gay Culture and Perfo

"Heaven is GAY POWER—EUROPE'S LARGEST GAY ENTERTAINMENT COI
+ disco + restaurant + cabaret + theatre + rock + parties + leather + denim + hot -

Time was when Gay Power equalled Gay Pride, both resulting in a gay cultural search; that time was when performance processes threw up agit-prop, cabaret, street performances on gay days in parks, 'living theatre' communes, outré images with costumed queens, rituals of coffee-taking with cruisers on Hampstead Heath: all motivated by the growing consciousness and expression of gays energising and focusing on building up their own culture, searching, documenting, dialoguing, provoking and questioning themselves in many challenging ways. Much of the form these activities, especially performances, took had an exploratory and provoking dynamic, different groups searching for new ways of expressing elements of gay culture. People were concerned with inventing and experimenting. Things were said and done, questioned and thrown out or fed back into some other focus within the gay community through someone else's repertoire. Like the two Greek Classic masks seriousness/outrage/anger analysis stood side by side with fizz/fun/celebration/pride and were knitted together with concern, through wrangles, ideological and artistic conflicts within the gay cultural search and without, to Society at large. Gay Pride Week used to see the amalgamation, concentration and dissemination of all this. And there was Dialogue and Somewhere Else To Go in the process of establishing Gay Culture.

Gay Pride Week in 1981 in London made me (at least) aware of the effects of the economic and social climate on areas of Gay Performance. It seems that as life grows harder for all of us, those of us to be hit hardest are those who, even in times of supposed 'acceptance', find themselves in difficulties being part of the 'working society' — these include gay men and women. It could be that as life on the bread level is becoming more and more pressurised, the motivation for 'celebration' and involvement in gay activist performance is becoming more and more restricted to fewer committed individuals and groups.

That one could point to 6 active venues in London where live performance were held (only 2 of which offered changing programmes) throws up the starkness of the situation. Whereas in 1979, the map of Gay Pride Week looked like, and was promoted in terms reminiscent of, the Edinburgh Festival with dozens of venues used for workshops, performances, exhibitions, gigs of one kind or another, in 1981 there were a few isolated pockets of activities like shelters from a storm. So, finance could be the major limitation. 'But,' I almost hear you say, 'all the more grist to the mill.

People will continue to build on new frames of reference, in new venues, becoming determined to create new spaces.' Where and when this did occur it was limited to one venue in North London, the George Pub, fostered by Consenting Adults in Public and a totally unsuitable hall in Kensington by Back Room Productions. However, times are hard, what else is new?

Oval House, London, held the official grand opening of Gay Pride Week and while it was a good occasion it was still very much a port in a vacuum. In Oval House Cafe, Red Bucket's TIE Company's presentation of 'The Great Wendy' was a wonderful self mockery and a romp. Reversing Peter Pan's heroics in favour of elevating Wendy with all her protestations on how she is traditionally treated, Uncle Noel, Uncle Steve and Auntie Sue subverted a lot of music-hall and pantomime type images and songs to great effect. What really happened to Tiger Lily? Well, what she did was not so silly — she cut off the Captain's willy! Each incident contained innumerable cracks and questions about theatre, performers, self-consciousness, cruising, ingrained sexism, role-playing and 'socialism' and 'democracy' that sit somewhat uncomfortably at times on the shoulders of gay performers and activists alike. And yet, it seemed that this form was not treated seriously enough by the audiences who, to some extent, enjoyed it as a 'Free Fun Cafe slot'. Is it that we can laugh at ourselves and then move away from this kind of a vehicle dismissing it as just a 'romp' until the 'real' work happens later on? If so, it tells a sad tale in my opinion, for I see this kind of potent, extremely funny, community-singing type of form as one of the more interesting and serious endeavours during the week. Seriously silly, what's wrong with that?

Most of the work at Oval House took the form of cabaret tending to draw on images, music and actions that may well have proven successful, but were reminders of the 'show-biz' tradition at the heart of much gay performance that really takes us round and round in one large continuous and repetitive cliché. The songs might be newly written, or adapted old ones in the cases of Mark Bunyan's solo evening of songs and chat and Philip Howells and Terry Crabtree's 'The One That Got Away' but the point I'm trying to make is that it may well be good entertainment but are we not going to challenge each other anymore? I ask this only because of the excess of cabaret theatre — not terribly challenging — that was around that week

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Peter Rolison

The Gorgeous and The Damned

at the Oval and Heaven. Not that there's anything wrong with cabaret theatre but there really was so little else!

New Heart's production 'The Gorgeous and the Damned' leaned heavily on established images, Brechtian music and chunks of previous work. Written and performed by some of their members under other programmes in the past, it was theatrically extremely good and inspiring in that it invited elements of performance that surprised some sections of the audience with a loyalty to the traditional cabaret form, but was disappointing on the content level in that it had little that was original, stimulating or provocative. 'Ah, but' I almost hear you say again, 'new audiences would not be aware of that.' Situations do not change all that much and so entertainment reflects ongoing circumstances in very similar ways. So what's your grouse? Well, I counter, that may be true of entertainment but it seemed to be the face of gay performance almost everywhere I looked. New Heart, Philip Howells and Terry Crabtree and Mark Bunyan draw on

material that they perform very well — and certainly I was moved in many moments of New Heart's show — but there is little relevant dialogue left. It all remains very much 'entertainment' and little else.

Heaven, under the Arches at Charing Cross, mounted a major cabaret for Gay Pride and here again, with two exceptions, it seemed very much a rallying round for a Gay Pride Summertime Special that took on Variety Show dimensions, which may have been nice to watch but rested on not very interesting material. Quickflash, one of the exceptions, performed unaccompanied chanting, using images from established oppressive cultures (the Jewish and the Moslem) and interlaced dramatic mime sequences with modern rock and musical numbers. The effect was staggering — this strange, unpredictable juxtaposition of old and new linked themes of oppression and liberation from that oppression in continuous movement while, also drawing strongly from ethnic traditions of the past. 'Quickflash' seemed according to themselves to have 'got the wrong kind of venue'

for their work — and that is precisely what was ordinary about this sort of cabaret evening. It didn't take enough risks, it didn't present startling and challenging situations for us — even the lay out in front of the stage was staid and had the self-consciousness of a Seaside Pier Show.

The other exception was Eddie Maelov and Sunshine Patterson, whose performance approach incorporates their own music (taped and live) and old hits from the past, elegantly subverted, slides, relevant contexts and superb timing. It was significant that the Event Group — becoming more widely known for their own brand of music performances having surprise and discovery elements in their provocative and challenging approach both to venue spaces and audiences, presenting potent images, strange humour and, at times, manic activity — had been asked not to perform as their gig would not have been suitable. And yet their work has in essence what gay performers tend, in general to lack — challenge, indulgence

Continued on page 10

MURDER

AT GLOUCESTER ROAD STATION
10.20 p.m., ON FRIDAY, 24th



COUNTESS TERESA LUBIENKA

Will all persons who were
Gloucester Road Station
within the vicinity, particu
those who descended in the
on the night in question, betw
9.30 p.m. and 11 p.m., and
have not yet come forw

*Part of the official police poster which was circulated after the murder of Countess
Teresa Lubienka at Gloucester Road station; the killer was never found.*

PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION
Extract from URBAN ART GUERRILLAS No 2
Synoptic Realist artwork in 12 parts
CHARLIE PIG & CHARLES HUSTWICK 1970-80.

IN MEM
TERESA

THIRTE

Documentation



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Continued from page 7

and confrontation. The performances may not always 'work' but the spirit engendered leads to a process of disturbing and challenging people's complacency. Gay Liberation used to stand for those things as well, amongst other issues. There was not a lot of evidence of that this June.

In terms of more conventional work, *Consenting Adults in Public* was the only company presenting questions of a not very 'popular' nature. In 'A Nice October Day' by Peter Robins, the questions were about elderly gays. Who is concerned about them? Who cares? What are we to expect from the gay movement as we ourselves grow old?

Their own programme note runs: 'Nowhere in the gay community today, where youth and beauty are sold as the ideal, is there any mention or concern for the ageing or elderly. Gay politics concentrates on the rights of the young but we all grow old in time...'

Here a whole series of concerns and questions were thrown up and the content of the play brought to light several challenging issues involving the need for gays to look after their own elderly gay people. This was the 'seamier side' of the gay community being brought into the open — relevant, critical, concerned and presented through comedy and ultimate hope. This is not complacency but it still is 'entertain-

ment'. There is some kind of dialogue here and there are issues to take hold of. While unchallenging in form, challenge lay in the content.

Jill Posener's 'Might As Well Live' (of which I was a part) also focussed on a similar kind of questioning in the only actual play that was offered at Oval House. Even though it was only given a rehearsed reading, it still presented an opportunity for certain issues to be raised. How is it that in the gay community people still cease to become priorities and kill themselves? How much do we really care and support each other? Through the eyes of an older lesbian certain points of criticism and disillusion are brought up — how much trust can there be between gay men and gay women? How big is the step between gay brother and straight threat? and in the words of the character: 'And have you thought about who will help you down the stairs when you've lost the movement in your right leg or the sight in your eyes and who will change your sheets for you when you're an incontinent 75 year old sister...'

These two plays offered in content the kind of dialogue that gay theatre needs desperately at this time — a chance to take stock, self-criticism and self-appraise.

The other theatre company was Back Room Productions and it was questionable in my opinion that their 'Matrimonium' should ever have been there. It dealt with an ex-Vietnam soldier returning

home to an unfaithful wife. In his frustration he turns to a relationship with an older man. When that man has taken all the young man's strength from him he deserts him to get married. So far, so good. But the ex-soldier, in his frustration bashes the daylight out of a woman whom he hold at gun point. It was well-written and well performed but if Gay Pride stands for anything can it stand for frustrated men bashing women up? Billed as 'in Honour of Gay Pride' it was either the result of a somewhat cynical and laconic sense of humour or a greatly insensitive choice — which leads to my biggest question.

What does Gay Pride include and what performances do we hope to nurture within our movements? Does it include any performance on any level by anyone who happens to be gay? or are there some other qualities that gay performers involved in Gay Pride can be bringing into focus? Such as integrity, challenge, questioning, continuing a positive search for our culture in many ways of experimentation — searching for different forms in different spaces or searching for different concepts and questions to highlight in less experimental forms. Are we able to nurture fresh performance values or are we content with drag, disco-dancing and such old style images purpose built for Europe's largest Gay Entertainment Complex?

Bruce Bayley



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No 6 Midlands, Naked Art, Drag, Steve Cripps, Point Blank Dartington Dance.

No 7 John Cage (Interview), Merce Cunningham, Street Performance, Tadeusz Kantor, Lumiere and Son, Forkbeard Fantasy.

No 8 About Time, I Giselle, Tom Saddington, Stefan Brecht, Pip Simmons (Interview).

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Mitzi Wildebeeste

Diana Simmonds asks:
Can South Africa really
be funny?



Jane Harper

When Barry Humphries first plucked Edna Everage from a passion play in Melbourne, where she was playing the seminal role of Mary Magdalene, he surely had no idea that she would one day grow to dominate both his career and the world. Nor that eventually, she in turn would be responsible for unleashing another monster in the form of Elaine Loudon's *Mitzi Wildebeeste*.

Not that Wildebeest is yet in the same class as the Grande Dame of Australian culture and performance art. Yet these two are unmistakably out of the same mould — and as Sir Alexander Fleming found: put culture and mould together and the results can be quite far reaching.

Mitzi is closely related to Dame Edna although their birth places (Mooney Ponds and Pretoria) are thousands of miles and arguably, a gender apart. Their mission in life — it is nothing less — is to convey to the world their overwhelming sense of right: personally, politically, nationally and culturally. They are portraits of blissfully ignorant provincial bigotry and they both come perilously close to the line in that each could be seen by blissfully ignorant provincial bigots as the epitome of all that is noble about their respective homelands.

Dame Edna usually stays *just* the right side of that line; by the end of an evening with Mitzi, it is clear that she cannot.

The difference lies in the gulf between Australia (the world) and South Africa — and the British perception of those differences and of the two colonies (for British laughter is still about Empire); and in their handling of the comedy style adopted by Humphries for Everage. The 'cultural soirees' that both women indulge in are largely made up of that peculiarly sweet form of torture — audience participation. It is mental banana skin humour, mainly comprising vicarious and terrified glee, and a great deal of self congratulation and

relief — either when one has managed to perform as the lady requires; successfully been the butt of a laugh or, avoided being singled out altogether.

Crucially however, Dame Edna has been on the road for a decade and is total mistress of her audience. The feats of memory at the heart of the performance where she constantly refers back to certain members are virtually faultless and, more importantly, she is able to manipulate her, by now, willing victims into positive participation by probing questions that elicit helplessly honest and therefore funny replies (imagine being unable to resist telling the Dame and several hundred awestruck and giggling voyeurs the colour of your bathroom...) Mitzi's relative inexperience as a cultural ambassador and hostess is evident in that she commits the mortal sin of forgetting guests' names; neither has she yet fully worked out how to *use* them and thus their lame fate is to be neither anonymous nor heroic.

However Mitzi's real failure is that she is South African, and that isn't her fault. She founders on the cruelty enshrined in that country's constitution and ruling psyche: a nation whose contribution to the world is measured in carats, prison 'suicides' and rugby tries is not an obvious source of humour. It is almost impossible to satirize a society that is already a grotesque parody of human behaviour: 'I'm very good to my housegirl' says Mitzi sincerely. 'She eats the same food as I do, I let her have all my old clothes, I let her children visit once a month, I even let her husband visit. But...' and the eyes blaze messianically lest we get the wrong impression, 'I won't let him stay over. I won't have any of *that* sort of thing...' The London lefty liberal audience laughed at this nonsense, but it isn't funny, it isn't satire, it isn't parody — because it's true. White South Africa thinks like that and it is not funny.

Mitzi continues with a slide show: 'This

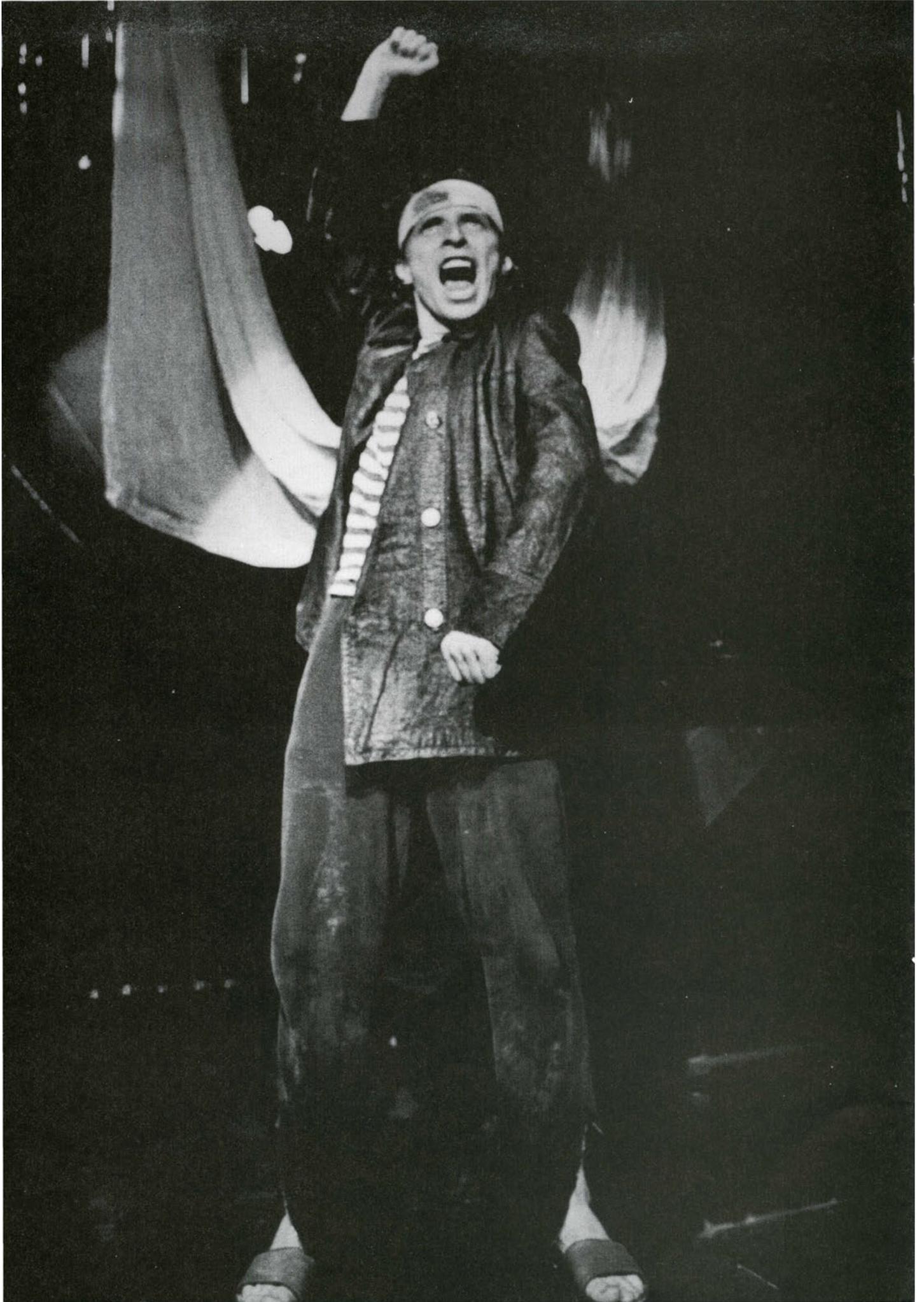
is one of the Bantu homelands.' We are shown a luxury Beverly Hills style hotel complex. 'This is where we're sending all our Bantu — free of charge! The rest of it doesn't look like this of course, it's completely barren. But I can tell you, they're going to make a real go of it! Isn't that nice!'

Can we hate her? She really believes it, she is not an unkind person — but she is not a parody, it's no satire — she is a faithful reflection of thousands of South Africans.... and they are not funny.

Which is where Dame Edna scored and why she succeeded where Mitzi must fail: much about Australia is hilarious, a country that can launch Pashie Pavlova on the world (a concoction of passion fruit, ice cream and meringue) is inevitably going to get Funnel Web Spider Cake and Banana Surprise (erect bananas in pineapple rings covered in chocolate) hurled right back. South Africa's folk cuisine is built around Biltong (sun dried meat strips) and mealie pap (maize meal porridge). It's about survival, toughness and it's no joke. Australia seeks after a cultural identity with a passion that gave birth to Edna. South Africa imports Terry Scott and Val Doonican and silences Andre Brink.

And yet... Australia's racism knows no bounds when it comes to Aboriginals and potential immigrants of a conspicuously non-white skin colour. Joh Bjelke Pederson, governor-for-ever of Queensland, does his best to emulate Nazi Germany on an off day — and where is Dame Edna? Filling a West End theatre or, latterly, the Royal Albert Hall. Edna's main concern is pillorying the pretensions and aspirations of the middle class of her Wide Brown Land: it's easier, more obvious and the target doesn't move, indeed they're usually waving Gladdies from the stalls. So perhaps she, despite her Superstardom and extraordinary ability is going the way of all Superstars: right down the middle of the road to the bank. Which leaves Mitzi Wildebeeste tentatively (and bravely) exploring the outer limits of the unacceptable face of white middle class behaviour.

It is fascinating to note that they have both achieved success in London (Dame Edna bombed on Broadway and Mitzi has yet to cross the Big Puddle). After holding her at arms length for a while, Edna was finally embraced by the Poms with almost crushing enthusiasm — the BBC let her sing about spunk and lesbianism, so total was her victory. Mitzi's debut has been proportionally as wildly received with raves from *Spare Rib* and *Not...* (Edna didn't set Fleet Street on fire first time round either) and a series of by-popular-demand return engagements. It isn't hard to see why: as the former heart and now the arsehole of the Empire we love to see colonials reassuring us that their little countries are really ridiculous, despite being unconscionably rich, vibrant and sunny. A deeply racist, sexist and exploitative society can also take comfort in the living proof that it is really much worse elsewhere....



Decoding the Polish Message

Pete Shelton looks at the background to the recent visits
by Theatre of the Eighth Day and Provisorium

When the critics eventually sit down to write their definitive histories of the twentieth century avant-garde, the one area where they are likely to find a consensus will be with the Polish post-war theatre companies. No, I am not suggesting that they will agree on individual interpretations, nor even on the meaning of the movement as a whole. But as a footnote to history they will surely have to record the apparently excessive time needed to create each production (measured in years rather than weeks). The more generous of them will no doubt be prepared to add that not only vast amounts of time were needed, but also an equivalent measure of personal commitment was required from the actors; the sort of total dedication to a technique that involves the prospect of barely seeing the light of day from one year's end to the next.

That much more surprising, therefore, to a visitor to Poland late last year that not only were the actors not to be found hard at work in rehearsals, nobody had *any idea* of their whereabouts. Whole companies apparently vanished off the face of the world. They were not, in fact, busily tunnelling their way to the Vatican to escape the possible backlash against the Solidarity movement, but amidst cries of 'No Time For Art' had abandoned their rehearsals and were making banners, printing leaflets, and running between meetings: thrusting themselves into the front line in the battle for the official recognition of Solidarity. I would go so far as to say that there was not one member of the avant-garde theatre movement that was not very directly active in the early formation of this national free trade union. In short, there has always been a broadly political ideology underlying both the people and the work created by the theatre companies. But this is a very simplistic assessment of what they are doing, and certainly does not take into account the remoteness and complexity of the Polish situation to British minds.

The opportunity to see two of these groups performing in London was certainly one of the main attractions of the London International Festival of Theatre, especially as Teatr Provisorium (performing at the ICA) and Theatre of the 8th Day (at the New Half Moon) were previously little known outside Poland, and neither had appeared in Britain before. Surely here was the possibility of hearing the voice that even Tim Sebastian and the merry bunch of Fleet Street reporters on elongated duty in Warsaw could not convey? We were not to be disappointed, they did say volumes, but were we able to



understand them? The problem was not language — both groups went as far as they could to present their work in English — but one of culture. At first sight the Poles seem to have lost none of their peasant instinct — intensely nationalistic, romantic, maybe even a little naive — to our eyes incomprehensible and seemingly as remote as Martians.

Yet for the discerning spectator there were enough messages that transmitted themselves in spite of these problems: not the kind of coded messages that had to be smuggled out under the noses of the authoritarian regime, but messages conveyed by the kind of groups they are, by the broader meaning of their work as an *action* that has a real place in a real world, not as merely theatre existing in a given space to be observed, and not as a series of images and words whose detailed significance must be comprehended if the whole is to be understood. If one is prepared to pick up this end of wool it will unravel to reveal a remarkable insight into what has been happening in Poland over the last year, what the meaning of Solidarity is that is far and beyond that of a trade union (however free), and what is meant by *consciousness* in the Polish context. That's not an exhaustive list, but it'll do for starters.

At first sight Teatr Provisorium seem the more accessible of the two groups. Their politics of resistance are made clear to see, and the feel of the underground inhabits their work. It will come as no surprise that they have never been assisted by the state entertainments/arts body (Estrada), and that their base is a small, minimally equipped, virtually attic theatre in a university building in Lublin. Not bowled over by the bright lights and

relative comfort of the ICA, they managed to preserve much of this crowded, intimate and gloomy atmosphere without which their resistance would have no meaning.

Their objective is the preservation of prohibited opinion, and their tool is irony. They are a living newspaper, created from savage political cartoons and impassioned editorials. Their imagery is sharp and telling: the transformation of the national emblem of the eagle into a black raven with elastic ties that bind the fists of protest, the headless dummies who share the stage with the actors, subsidy being allocated by a blind man throwing worthless currency in the vague direction of any appeal 'for the best actor' and 'for the worst actor'. All these factors point towards an easily identifiable interpretation of their work. It is easy for us to see how in a world of heavily controlled information, the media have to be replaced by the arts as a means of keeping alive opinions that are banned. Certainly this is an important aspect of their work, but in rationalising them so we are limiting their ideals to ones that we can easily understand, and disregarding whole levels of their work that we cannot.

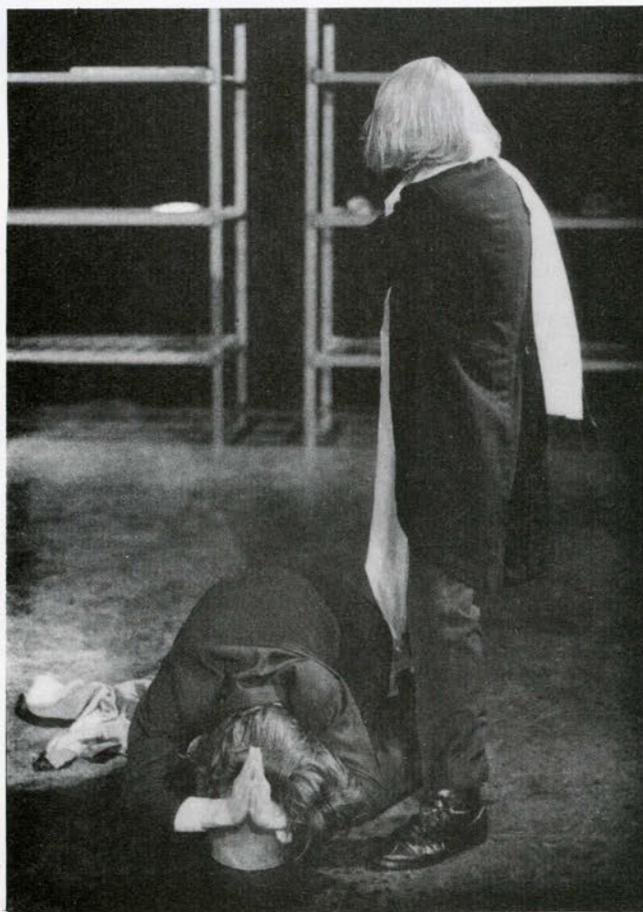
To understand more, the experience of the Theatre of the 8th Day is very helpful. Their performance bounces between the anarchic and surrealist energy of massive visual assaults and a relaxed, almost off-hand, style that thinly covers some highly disconcerting one-liners. Were they attempting to create a cohesive statement condemning their situation, or were they to be presenting a complete picture of a viable alternative, these would be strange means of achieving such ends. One becomes aware that they cannot smash a dogmatic hammer with a dogmatic hammer. They counter restrictions with a huge feeling of liberation, and the half-truths not only of the authoritarian state, but also of everyone's assumptions and beliefs, with niggling doubts and questions which stick in the mind as persistently as some of their impressive visual images.

Certainly, here again there are political beliefs which underline their work — but to call them a political group is to give them only short shrift. Their concern is the consciousness and imagination of a people that the authorities have tried to stamp out of existence, and equally how the search for uniformity and apparent simplicity in any society's institutions, and even the institutions we create inside our own minds, leads to the suppression of a genuine freedom of imagination and possibility. They are calling for a revolution of humanity which can take place only within the human being.

Left and above Theatre of the Eighth Day

C. Shakespeare Lane

Christopher Pearce



Provisorium

The first steps of this transformation are visible not only in the theatre, but on the streets of any city in Poland since the emergence of Solidarity: where there was once only one approved way of living, where there was almost a visible distinction between the permissible and the unpermissible, where imagination and independence were a direct threat to the dominance and blinkered direction of the Party, a movement emerged which gave the possibility of alternatives, a movement gaining support from workers, the Church, artists, and intellectual opinion in the universities, but yet not simply aligned to any one of these groups. The movement has started to transform the grey down-trodden faces of a people towards the path that the theatre has travelled: a festival of humanity — bursting at the seams with life. Of course, these are still early days, but it is as if the nation, like the theatre, has taken the all important decision to try to survive, rather than being carried on the tide that leads to oblivion.

The problem of the Polish nation is not primarily political, but that (in the broadest sense) of the need for a cultural consciousness. And this is surely the importance of the avant-garde, following Grotowski's dictum 'We must re-discover our roots'. The purpose of the avant-garde has been to keep alive the spiritual and emotional realities of a people, and the imagination and hope of the individual

through, as the Poles' own imagery has it, the long cold winter, until they can bloom again in the spring of a new Polish nation. It is not a question of the avant-garde having a parallel development to other political and cultural thinking, nor of one leading the other: they are not only inseparable, but identical. Thus to estimate the importance of companies such as the Theatre of the 8th Day in establishing this movement is impossible and irrelevant. And in case it might seem from outside that they have achieved their aims in the formal establishment of Solidarity, it is worth noting that theatre companies have not lost their fire, just as Solidarity is merely the tip of an iceberg, only a symbol of resistance and change, a sign-post to the potential of the future.

But, as I have suggested before, the work of Theatre of the 8th Day has a universality stretching far beyond the borders of Poland. The fact that they have chosen, along with other Polish companies, to work through a style that is super-real, is a testimony to the fact that they are trying to find a new way of looking at human beings which offers possibilities that naturalism and realism do not. The quest of the actor in publicly dissecting his own mind and spirit is not carried out for the sake of his masochism, nor for the audience's voyeurism. If they wanted just to show how extraordinary they were they could resort to countless well-documented forms of immolation

to achieve this end. Their purpose is to examine the invisible parts of the human being — their performance 'Oh, how nobly we lived' started from the assumption first stated by the drunk in the railway station, 'There is no good'. Society disregards the rantings of the drunk as stupid. Theatre of the 8th Day take his cry seriously, and in the hour that follows search every recess of humanity, every created ideology, forms of escapism and any straw that can be clutched for 'security', to see if good can be found. Essentially critical of all the props we lean on, the process is by the combination of this criticism and the enormous injection of excitement and energy that the company bring to each area they examine. They offer the audience the chance to look at themselves as critically as the actors do. If there is to be a new and genuinely humanitarian world created then it can only be achieved by people who are genuinely free from the strictures of the old, and this is the challenge that they lay at the feet of their audience. In this work they are following in the footsteps of the two giants of the Polish avant-garde, Kantor and Grotowski, but many people in Poland believe that the Theatre of the 8th Day are now the finest exponents of it.

If (and I do say *if*) Theatre of the 8th Day can be called a company who are concerned with what we do to ourselves, then maybe Teatr Provisorium might be called a company who are concerned with what we do to each other. In reality, of course, the distinction is minimal, but the slight difference in emphasis might help to explain why they seem more immediately accessible to a British audience. Certainly the breadth and depth of what they are trying to achieve are no less than Theatre of the 8th Day. Their climax spoke volumes. After forty minutes of intense energy everything stood still, and the actors confronted their audience directly, and, through the voice of a poet, they delivered an impassioned plea against an ideology that can create the 'perfect' state, yet ignore the hunger of individuals. Coming on the night when Poland had seen its largest protest ever over food shortage, this plea was hardly devoid of meaning, but in the context of their performance it came also to mean the hunger for *consciousness* created by the steam-roller drive of the Party towards the One Way, just as in Poland the hunger both physical and spiritual are caused by the same symptom. But beyond this, the plea was couched in personal terms: how can one person, consciously or unconsciously, behave like this to another?

For those prepared to open their eyes here was the truth from Poland, the awkward fusion of both hope and despair, presented with a passion that no media report, however well meaning, could hope to convey. For those prepared to open their minds, here were questions, culled from the unique experience of the Polish people, to which we all have to find an answer if we too want to stop our own society walking unthinkingly into the jaws of despair. ●

The Living Sculptures Look at Life



Lynn McRitchie considers the controversy generated by The Gilbert and George Show

How easy is it to be with art in 1981? For this, you may recall, was all that Gilbert & George would ask in the late Sixties. Well, not perhaps as easy as it was. The outside world has a nasty habit of intruding on even the most arcane of lifestyles, the smartest of acts. One of the most immediately striking things about Gilbert & George's recent show of photopieces at the Whitechapel Gallery was quite how much their long-term residency just off Brick Lane has affected the content of their work.

How they have chosen to present their particular surroundings has stirred up a certain amount of anxiety. The East End News hated the show, thought it racist and advised pity for the two individuals so bereft of human feeling as to have been able to put it together in the first place. 'Not...' also attacked what it saw as the show's racism. Certainly there are images in the show which are ambiguous. And there are images in the show which are offensive. But the basis of such ambiguity and the

wide range of interpretation of the work which it renders possible requires a more careful analysis than the two attacks quoted bother to give. It also gives an opportunity to consider some of the features of that approach to art which often finds its expression in performance. This canvasses the presentation of a very personal view of the world, making no attempt to differentiate between outlook and idiosyncrasy, taking no stand. An art based on life-style implies an acceptance of circumstance, of the world as it is perceived to be. A certain passivity becomes inevitable. A further aspect of this approach which seems to be peculiar to English performance and certainly features heavily in the work of Gilbert & George is romanticism. England has a long tradition of romantic artists in literature & painting. The term has been understood since its inception to imply not just appreciation of the beauties of the natural world but the metaphorical association of these with qualities of the human spirit. Thus,

'wandering lonely as a cloud' does not imply some sort of self-pity, but rather a splendid isolation wherein great thoughts might strike. Flowers, clouds & streams become metaphors for freedom, nobility, purity etc. But time and history have dealt hard with the original concepts of Romanticism. Notions of liberty and nation do not lie easily with an empire in decline. The original concepts still operate, but, debased by events, they are confined to the mechanisms of nostalgia. Gilbert & George's sober suits and grave bearing are the Boys Own Paper version of a ruthless past, the seeming order of which is endlessly attractive in the teeming disorder of the present.

For in their house in Fournier Street, Gilbert & George are at the centre of one experience of the living contradiction which is the British Empire now defunct. And in their large and impressive photoworks they capture remarkably what it feels like to stroll around Aldgate and walk down Brick Lane. Often, the titles of their pieces are drawn from graffiti photographed which makes up part of their content — 'Fuck', 'Piss', 'Bent', 'Prostitute', 'Communist', 'Fucked Up'. Sometimes the presentation of the work is deadpan — 'Blackman' is made from a photo of a racist painting, its scale enlarged by blowing up the original image in sections. Sometimes the works seem more dynamic — 'Fucked Up' shows photos of the Stock Exchange, soldiers, Gilbert & George and the graffiti itself. Often, the same subject is shot from different angles, tinted a different colour and given a different title. Thus, a churchyard griffin crossed in red is 'Nationalism' in one panel. Left stark black and white in another it is called 'Living with Fear'. One panel of lines of soldiers is called 'Marching'. The same lines of soldiers in another piece become 'Death March'. The change of titles makes a doubletake necessary when considering the image's possible meaning. More ambiguous still are the portraits: naked white youths share their panels with emblematic flowers and streams, Indian youths gaze dreamily into space. Only the young white men snapped in the street confront the viewer directly with their gaze. The imagery is as powerful and confusing as the experience of the street outside. It is disturbing in that the desired direction of the spectator's response is nowhere indicated, and, left thus to roam in subjectivity, cannot be predicted.

Gilbert & George do not adopt a stance of comment. Instead, they themselves are present as part of many of the panels. In 'England', they strike aggressive poses. In 'Depression', their faces, deeply shadowed and tinted lurid green, mimic despair. Sometimes they pose like the gargoyles pictured in other panels. An earlier series shows them getting drunk and drunker in the pubs of the Commercial Road — 'To Her Majesty'. 'Of Human Bondage' shows the wreckage of a drinking spree, and its victims, themselves. But why, in this and

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Martin Ives Acme Gallery



A stand-up Zen Buddhist comedian who is capable only of cracking jokes about Photography was the subject of this installation at the Acme by Martin Ives. His performance persona, Morrie Minamoto, who actually hates Photography (as well he might with a name like a single lens reflex camera) appeared in person earlier this year at the gallery, and was apparently received very well. A similar tiradic monologue has been presented in audio-visual form under the punnish title 'Only Zen Can One Hate Photography', with slides of scenes in a Japanese monastery juxtaposed with a videotape of Martin Ives/Minamoto dressed in oriental garb expounding further doctrines concerning Photography, Zen Buddhism, and his hero to the camera's villain, Landscape Painting. Upstairs, a sound tape of his original performance 'Camerakaze' disported itself aurally among what were indeed, Landscape paintings. The sound on the video was very difficult to hear, on account of the odd voice changes he uses to emphasise a particular point combining unfavourably with the Acme's acoustics downstairs, so it was necessary to gather the main impressions from the sound tape.

From the barrage of words issuing it was difficult to extract much more at first from the work than an out-of-control Art-World

In-Joke, with the funny voices he used being if anything rather offensive to Japanese people. But, as is often the case with these things, persistence paid off. The alienating function of the changes in intonation became clearer, and the intensity of verbal image managed to deflect from appearances, blurring ordinary judgement until phrases like 'Why did the Photograph cross the road' began to seem actually rather funny. The constant setting up of the ideal 'Landscape Painting' against the barbarities of the photographic image — 'an instrument of mass consciousness' — slowly began to reinforce a sense of irony bathed in which, such debates on the nature of artistic expression assume a monstrous absurdity.

'Fine Art has always had a very special appeal to Morrie Minamoto' starts the carefully understated leaflet. Although not a very understated sort of person (more like a leftover from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera than a gentle sage) Minamoto explores the world of delicate stoicism and paradox of zen and regards the static work of art as a sentient entity which, he explains in a more lucid period, is 'perfectly happy to remain exactly what it is, and isn't always lusting after some new experience, like music, film, or the theatre are.' Ives is clearly caught up in some of the traditions of Zen Masters who, when not boxing their students ears and sending them to the market to purchase non-existent asses, is delivering one-liners calculated to boot the acolyte over the threshold into satori.

At the same time he is also, like General Idea posing in berets and smocks with palettes, generally satirising the cliches of oriental inscrutability along with a dash of British art-school territorial skirmishing between disciplines. When Morrie Minamoto isn't meditating, he 'fills the time with Landscape painting'. 'In my next life', he finishes, 'If I turn out to be a Landscape painter again — I won't be a bit disappointed.'

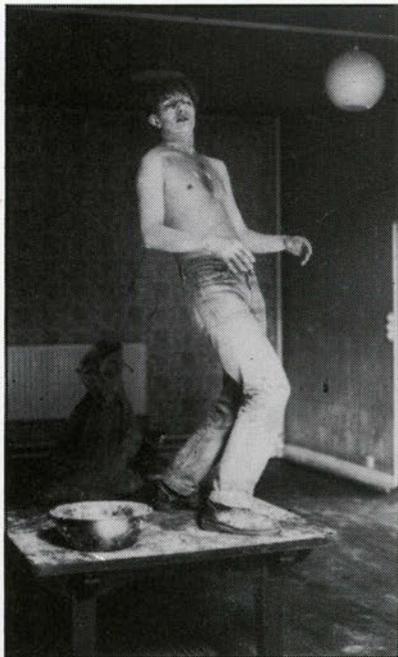
Rob La Frenais

Marty St James Bluecoat, Liverpool

Approaching a room in the Bluecoat Gallery one could see it was in near complete darkness. On the floor in the doorway held down by chalk rocks was a photostat of the White Cliffs of Dover, sand and sea. Entering the room there were more photostats of the same image around the floor, and in the centre a fairly large rectangular table. On one end of the table there was a large stainless steel bowl containing sand, and towards the centre a cone of sand, on top of which was placed a flickering candle. At the other end was another stainless steel bowl with tiny chips of ground chalk rock. Laid out in the middle of the

table were various sizes of chalk rocks in the shape of some 'skeleton'. On the floor away from the table and near a wall was a stainless steel bowl containing water and a large lump or 'island' of wax supporting another flickering 'beacon'. Hanging from the ceiling at one end of the room by some blue rope was an empty sack. At the other end, standing motionless, was the artist, stripped to the waist, his face whitened by chalk dust, and knotted around his head was some blue rope which stretched to a sack full of sand on the floor. Keeping the rope taut, Marty St. James began to jerk his head animating the sack. To separate himself from the sack, the sack was brought to one end of the table and was lifted by entwining the rope over his back and shoulders. By shortening the distance between him and the sack in this manner he could then rest the sack on his back and push it up to the table top. It took several attempts, and the rope left a number of 'weals' on his back. Walking round to the other end of the table, the rope still knotted around his head, he held the rope taut over the candle until it broke. The activity now being centred on the table there began a 'ceremony' of sound. Sand was taken from the bowl and hands held as if in prayer were rubbed slowly backwards and forwards over the candle on top of the cone of sand. Wet sand fell on to the flame which spat and hissed. Small 'bones' from the 'skeleton' were thrown into the bowl of water on the floor splashing droplets creating that candle to splutter. The artist stopped whilst both candles hissed and spluttered to one another, then repeated the action. Small chalk 'bones' were also thrown into the steel bowl at the other end of the table letting out a ring sounding like some ominous bobbing bouy at sea. Climbing onto the table the artist proceeded to move the chalk rocks about destroying the 'skeletal' appearance. He concentrated on the rocks by moving them about on the surface of the table, attempting to balance a rock on his head whilst standing on two large lumps, and bashing two rocks together to 'erode' them. It was during this 'erosion' that a piano could be heard faintly playing in one of the rooms above. Marty St. James brought our attention to this by hesitating and stopping his banging of rocks whenever the piano was heard. The delicate sound of the piano heightened the sound created by the hitting and clattering of broken rocks crashing to the table, and the two flickering 'beacons' occasionally crackling.

Throughout most of the performance seen that afternoon, the artist kept a blank expression on his face. If he wanted or needed to draw our attention to elements external that intruded into the dimly lit room, he would do so like a mime artist with a crick of the neck and movement of



Marty St James

the eyes. When he tied the sack full of sand by the blue rope to one of the table legs it was as if the table had been transformed from a piece of land to a boat. At this point the artist brought our attention to the wind by staring impassively at the curtains which were being moved by the wind. Lifting up from the table a large lump of chalk rock, he then balanced this on the back of his neck and shoulders and crept under the table. A strong image was conjured up as he stretched out his feet and hands and rested them on the cross-pieces of the table at either end. Rocks on top of the table, a man underneath trying to support a rock on his neck, the billowing curtains, the sack like an anchor and the slow near inaudible mutterings and spluttering of the word Liverpool through mouthfuls of dribbling saliva brought a strong image of the Slave Trade, which the Port of Liverpool played a major part. The word Liverpool became clearer and gave way to loud words of — 'Where's the Bow-wow-wow: the woof-woof' said as though a three-year-old child was speaking — The Great British Bulldog? These words were repeated, the intonations varying from anger, bewilderment, inquisitiveness.

Throughout the period I was there the performance existed on various levels from just the physical interaction with materials dealing with weight, tension, etc. to materials manipulated in such a way as to conjure up images whether as symbol or metaphor or as just the image. Marty St. James brought a magic to that time and place that afternoon, conjuring terse images and using simultaneous outside noises and events that made one seize at a variety of meanings. This improvised, materials-based performance is different from recent previous works of Marty St. James in that there was no real pre-structuring of the actual performance and the duration of time was much longer. In

previous pieces such as 'Oxford' the performance was approximately 20 minutes, the performer was a 'character' dressed in black suit, clean shoes, etc. and the action was very mannered. In this performance the body was not imbued with a character but used solely as a material and a manipulator of materials. The materials themselves could be said to have taken on a 'character'. The three basic materials — white rock, red sand, sea-water (blue) are colours of the national flag and the 'White Cliffs of Dover' where they were taken from, has connotations of English romanticism, history and culture. Marty St. James pushed and manipulated this 'character' in a variety of ways which gave rise to the questioning of our social and political morals.

Emrys Morgan

Sardonic Fish Corporation/ TV! Scream Open Studios, Brighton

'Brighton is fast becoming a pornographic centre rather than a conference centre'. So uttered councillor Blackman, whose only other previous claim to fame or for that matter exposure in the local rag — The Argus — had been his virulent (dare I say failed?) campaign to close the town's nudist beach. He continues in pretty much the same crusading tone 'It's degrading and disgusting for the whole town' and 'It is yet another example of the depth of depravity to which this town is descending'. Well, what was all the fuss about? Art, it would seem, or to be more precise a play, written by no other than Howard Brenton of Romans in Britain fame and performed by a local theatre group called The Sardonic Fish Corporation. As is to be expected neither Blackman nor the press had bothered to read the play in question — Christie in Love — before making their comments and the end result was packed houses and a deservedly good review from the Argus, who conceded that the prior coverage had all been a storm in a tea cup.

The Sardonic Fish Corporation is made up of a new breed of talented young performers and musicians who have already contributed much to a once again revived Brighton scene. Choosing Christie in Love was as much to do with testing their own individual talents as it was to raising the often horrific issues set in the play. None of the performers had acted in a play conceived outside of themselves before — in one case had never performed before. The play centres around the mass sex murderer John Christie who was executed in 1953 and it is worth taking a closer look at the play, partly because it has been little performed and partly because of the recent Yorkshire Ripper case.

The performance happened between the dark and damp arches of the Open Studios

situated on the sea front which contributed much to what was a minimal but effective set. The centre stage was taken up by a chicken coop-like structure which was stuffed with crumpled newspapers and represented the back garden of 10 Rilington Place, where many of Christies victims were buried. A noose hangs almost unseen from one of the arches. A Constable of not too great an intelligence laboriously digs for bones, pre-recorded statements are repeated over and over again which hint at the motives underlying Christies crimes: 'He hated his mother, father and his sisters' and more disturbingly 'As I gazed down at the still form of my first victim I experienced a strange peaceful thrill'. The idiotic Constable (also seen drunk later on in the play) forces out the occasional rhythmic obscenity and is in turn reprimanded and tutored by an equally coarse ('some like it dead — and some like it live') but vicious Inspector. It is apparent that they have little understanding of what they are faced with or any real desire to find out. They are portrayed as glorified dustbin men, ie their job is to 'clean up the mess'. From the moment that Christie is resurrected from the grave — he appears from beneath the garden his face disfigured at first and form broken up by the flashing police torches — the play centres on the nature of the police interrogation. This in turn is punctuated by absurdist flash backs that demonstrate the hate that Christie harbours against women, the technique by which he murders and the means by which he achieves sexual gratification. The questioning of Christie concerns itself not with his guilt — but with the destruction of whatever dignity Christie has left (even if it is misplaced) with a deriding, negative and bully boy technique that has little chance of revealing truth or an understanding of this human being. In fact it brings into question the capability of the police to deal with someone like Christie — perhaps also our ability to face the 'darker sides of human experience'. The play ends with the police hanging Christie from a short noose.

I feel bound to say that it was very amusing, and in fact would have been intolerable without the strong element of black humour, at times reminiscent of Joe Orton's style but in the end more politically pointed and questioning. Joel Roszykiewicz directed the production with care and found the right balance between the humour and the seriousness of the subject matter, making full use of the minimal set and lighting facilities. Ian Smith gave a convincing performance as the Inspector and Rob Hayes as the Constable and Lol Henderson as Christie handled performances that had to vary in pace and tempo with considerable skill.

The Sardonic Fish Corporation intend to present more performances but of a 'home grown' nature. Ian Smith who was drawn partly to this play because of his interest in crime (His last performance called Christopher Chappell: Kill To Live — a murderers philosophy might well be

Continued on page 21

Towards The C

A Performance diary of 'Towards the Celestial City' a transposition of John Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim's Progress' for Birmingham Arts Lab using canals of Birmingham as the route from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.

DAY ONE — Monday

Somehow it all seems much more possible at the end of today than it did early this morning on the train to Birmingham. The Arts Lab staff, despite recent upheavals, are as friendly and helpful as ever and the team includes everyone on our original short list.

A mad venture maybe but a containable one. There aren't many such projects around any more, save perhaps the Oval spectaculars, which bring together performers from a number of groups for a one-off. As we spent the afternoon in the cavernous Lab 'garage' the atmosphere here was resonant with long forgotten events recalled vividly to mind in the odd prop or item of clothing rediscovered for this one but used originally years before with *The Phantom Captain*, *Natural Theatre*, *Lumiere and Son* or whoever.

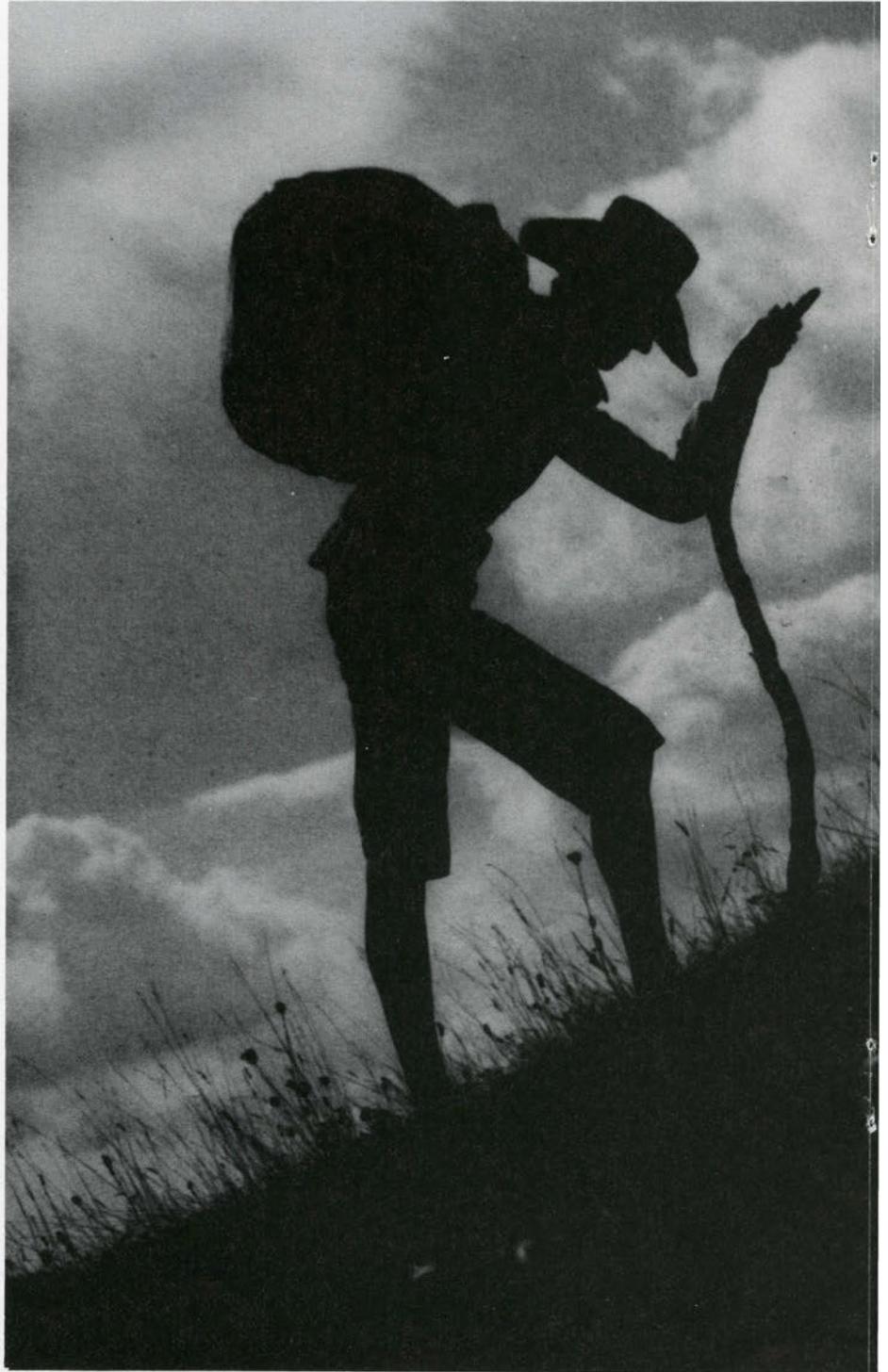
So the route along the backside canals of Brum has been fully explored, the characters established, the performers assembled and work begun in earnest. And less than 48 hours until the run-through. No workshop volunteers for the afternoon session; perhaps Neil had some this evening: if not we will have to go it alone.

The digs are OK. A rambling, land-lady less house miles from anywhere which we've rented for the week. The *Andrex* was inscribed with the legend: 'Julie Covington's — hands off!'

DAY TWO — Tuesday

A long hectic day of chasing around. The logistics are going to be everything on this gig. The canal system is an alternative world unseen from roads and one can drive around beside, above and beneath it without ever being aware of its presence. So access points for the performers are quite a problem, compounded by most of them playing more than one role. Over walls and fences, through gardens and woodland, we have now, thanks largely to Brian Popay's exploratory zeal, worked it all out. As the narrow boat moves sedately along the water a flotilla of motor vehicles will be scurrying unseen around and about depositing performers at predetermined spots.

Few major problems so far, save for the impossibility of using a dinghy to carry Phil Grimm himself. The boat we were to have used had sunk, was recovered today and arc welded into ship-shape only to promptly sink again. A replacement was found but the outboard motor proved to be so noisy and temperamental as to rule out its use.



Still there is some good news. Seven volunteers turned up last night but by the time they had found the workshop Neil had scooted off to the movies. Four though showed up today and have been put to good

use. And best of all not a seat remains unsold for the opening night.

No decision yet as to where to put the thirty foot long cascading fireworks which both the Waterways Board and the

Celestial City



H. A. Rayner

University have vetoed. And can I really work on that ledge high above the water amidst ferocious shrubbery wearing only body make-up and a jock-strap? Tomorrow will tell.

The weather is scorching hot, morale high and camaraderie in abundance. All so far bodes well.

DAY THREE — Wednesday

Our guide and narrator, Ralph Oswick joined us with Tory on secondment from the Great British Bike Ride and we did a dress run.

By the time the boat reached my eyrie it was nigh on an hour late thanks to who knows what mishaps earlier along the route, and it was virtually dark. Cold, bitten to distraction by blood-sucking insects, virtually naked, and the cause of concern to the drivers of the trains passing beside the canal below I must have looked a rum sight.

But the approach of the warmly lit barge through the overhanging trees, the musicians on board jamming merrily away, was a glowing moment, making all the discomfort worthwhile.

After the boat passed I was whisked off to the end of the route to join the celestial city crowd. The angels are a marvellous sight; Hornick's God is a cricketer on golden umpire's ladders; while Ian Johnson's St Peter is an avuncular public school headmaster. There is something quintessentially English about much of this British event.

'I like this gig,' said Cindy on the way baack to base, even though her wings were drooping after an hour or more of angelic swinging across the canal suspended from a tree. I know what she means.

DAY FOUR — Thursday

Lengthy post-mortem after breakfast at the digs, each of us with our tales to tell and myself with the bites to prove it. The main problems last night appear to have been a delayed start and difficulties with the dinghy which Corinne attempted to use after all as a vehicle for Companion. The route was discussed in great detail with the aim of clearing up confusion and ensuring a speedy voyage and an end by 10pm.

Raining as we all went our separate ways at lunchtime for last minute shopping, collection of props, procurement of costumes for the band, typing and printing of programmes and a host of other things. No time again for actual rehearsal but everyone seems confident of what they are doing and, despite the delays last night, happy with current progress.

By mid afternoon though it was raining and the question of cancellation began to be talked about. 'Come rain or shine,' we had told the lady from the local radio the day before but now we weren't all quite so sure. The general feeling of gloom at the prospect of cancelling was complicated by pragmatic factors. If it continued to piss down the audience, even on the boat, would get wet. For some performers there was a positive danger in working in lots of fresh mud. Drenched costumes would hamper a performance tomorrow. If we

did go ahead it could be an unpleasant experience for all concerned. But none the less there was a feeling that perhaps we should go ahead whatever, The Lab were happy to leave the decision to us and deal with any audience who turned up. We decide to go ahead and postpone a final decision until 7pm.

The rain got worse and just before 7 we cancelled the performance. Some of us went off to the starting point to tell Ralph who was decorating the site and turn away punters. Meanwhile back at the Lab another post-mortem then off to do some last jobs and drink at the Sack of Potatoes.

DAY FIVE — Friday

Well we did it. In unrelenting drizzle that often became real rain, and with a truncated ending to save the audience getting too wet. But we did it.

Everything went much faster than we had expected and there were plenty of hairy moments — notably disembarking the audience which proved more than a little dangerous. And the confining of heaven to a tiny pavilion rather than the expanses of the University playing fields themselves was a disappointment. But to the audience no doubt everything seemed fine and with bottles of VP sherry inside them they were in a very merry mood by the end of the evening.

The sherry indeed looks like becoming a major feature of the show. Ralph dispenses it early on. Brian as the lone fisherman, thigh deep in water, hauls bottles from the canal bed and passes them aboard. And finally the heavenly host of angels processes with trays of the stuff.

Simple panic to ensure everything happened on time may have cramped the performances a little but time to remedy that no doubt tomorrow.

DAY SIX — Saturday

A long session this morning and through lunchtime discussing last night's performance in great detail. Some important changes — Ralph is to have Tory assist him on the boat; an earlier start; the use of the 'Niagra Falls' fireworks at the City of Destruction; the full heavenly ending with additional lighting; bubble machine to be set up — and much tinkering.

Then an afternoon getting the changes together. Our musicians delve deeper into their songbooks. Paul Kevill arrives from London to see the show and is seconded onto the team.

And off we all go to the site once more.

The fires are spectacular; the fireworks a whizz; the boat departs full and in good time; a single late comer has to chase down the tow path to meet with the boat at Vanity Fair where all is jollity; the bubble machine fills the boat and the tow path with a cloud of bubbles; a friendly shop-owner is supplying Newcastle Brown at 20p a pint to the performers as they debauch up and down a ladder and in some kindly resident's front rooms. Then off goes the boat to meet up with Companion

and later Mary and Barry Mingeworthy.

The Mingeworthies join the boat and soon encounter Mr Worldly Wise-Guy (Ian Johnson) selling off new houses at a conveniently placed building site. It is now that it becomes clear that the canal has been lowered during the day and Paul, our cheerful bargee, has to manoeuvre with great skill here as elsewhere on the route to avoid running aground. Mary is close to coming a cropper as she disembarks to buy one of Ian's houses.

Meanwhile Pam, Paul and I have been dropped at the Valley of The Shadow of Death and are hurriedly rigging up fireworks, smoke bombs and extinguishers. I strip in the road to a by now regular audience from adjacent flats and before we know it the headlight of the boat shines through the trees having picked up a message from a cherub lowered over the bridge before us. The Apollion routine goes well and the smoke and flares inside the tunnel look astonishing even from where we are.

Ever onwards past Brian's fisherman and Cindy's swinging singing angel, to the Celestial City where all is panic. The gates to the running track have not been opened, the lights have not been switched on, and the swiftness of the trip tonight is making for some desperate costume changes and running about. But somehow, marvelously, only a matter of seconds before the audience appear, the gates open, and the lights go on; Beethoven's Ninth thunders out of the PA; Cindy appears with a flaming torch; the angels get into position; the red carpet is unrolled and with a nice mixture of solemnity and silliness our audience is brought to meet their maker, who apologises for not being a woman; Phil Grimm has the sins of the world cast from his shoulders; yet more sherry is plied to the merry band; the entire audience turn out to have won the raffle and thereby a chance to be reborn; off they all go in the luxury coach provided and we relax as I pass around the brandy, after a well-nigh perfect event. We actually had a chance to enjoy ourselves tonight, embellish all we did and make things almost slick with good organisation.

Back to the digs for chat and booze finally all falling into bed around 4am.

DAY SEVEN — Sunday

The last night already and many turned away from a full boat. A spectacular send-off with plenty of fire and brimstone and fireworks at their best.

Plenty of surprises on route for all involved, myself included. So tanked up were the audience by the time they reached my tunnel that when I shouted 'Thou shalt not pass here,' they to a man yelled back, 'Oh yes we will!' But it was not all such ribald popularity and the ending tonight, with Neil's God in full Phantom Captain rig, had a touch of the metaphysical to it. A magical evening in every way.

Back to the digs to repay some of the kindnesses shown to us with a party for all

involved. Good humour, high jinx and the rearrangement of beds long after the booze had run out. I even seem to recall a bout or two of arm wrestling in the early hours. Ralph left asleep amidst the debris of bottles and fag ends and off to bed as the dawn rises....

DAY EIGHT — Monday again

... Only to be woken by the abstemious Neil a couple of hours later as he whistles up the crew for breakfast. Ralph and Tory dash off to rejoin the great British Bike Ride somewhere near Darlington while the rest of us slowly depart for the Lab to organise an orderly withdrawal from the scenes of performance. By lunchtime the last of the pròps have been recovered, flora returned to normal, fond farewells said and drinks downed at the Sack of Potatoes.

And so misty eyed back to London to sleep it all off and exchange yarns on the train. A train. Now there's a performance possibility....

BRITISH EVENTS and friends were

Mick Banks as Phil Grimm
Corinne D'Cruz as Companion
Luke Dixon as Sloth, Apollion and God's Right Hand Man
Tory Forbes-Adam as Miss Pringle
Neil Hornick as Evangelist and The Supreme Supreme Being
Ian Johnson as Drunken, Mr Worldly Wise Guy and St Peter
Ralph Oswick as The Reverend Broad-Cindy Oswin as Merry Maker and Secret shoulder
Chris Peacock as Mary Mingeworthy and Sir Lionel Lightfoot
Brian Popay as Fop, Fisher of Men and Basil the Bold
Dik Waring as Pliable, Barry Mingeworthy and Acolyte with Lady as Trixie the Dog and Sally Duggan, Miriam Shire, Hope Walker Walker and Paul Kevill as Wantons and Angels
Musicians: Trevor Bailey & Steve Rumbold
Stage Management: Rob Taylor & Pam Hardiman

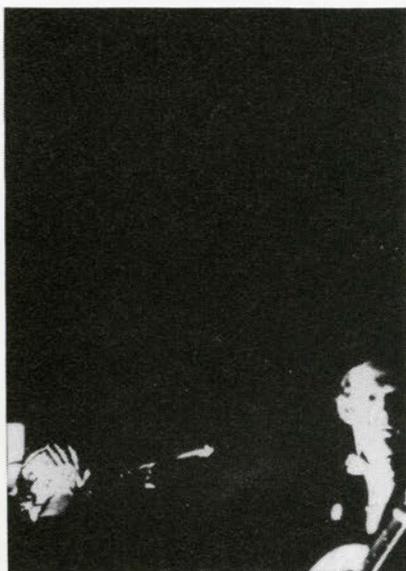
Gilbert and George from page 15

another panel of the same subject, the use of a swastika symbol (made out of rope in one, chain in another) laid over the photographs? Why a fascist symbol in a picture of personal despair? Perhaps the philosophy of posing breaks down when confronted with the personal experience of alienation. But does a weighted symbol such as the swastika, with its shock effect, become a way of saying something about human relationships? Or is it still most significant as the symbol of a political ideology?

If Gilbert & George were fascists, their message would surely be more clearly stated. Its very confusion would seem to imply that what is offered is an aesthetic response to a political reality. For many artists, performance artists among others, the existence of their art and its assertion of their individual ability to respond to the world is, in itself, comment enough upon the world. But the path of ambiguity is a tricky one to tread. And England in the Eighties is not a place in which the politically naive can for ever expect to be given the benefit of the doubt. ●

Reviews

Continued from page 17



TV! Scream

shown at Crew Police College) is a performer who works in a semi-improvised manner and is very much in the process of experimenting with various media working under various aliases. For example Mr I. P. Smith (artist) set about to parody art exhibitions ie 'the creation of his work involved a mixture of spare time 'hobby activity' and years of serious thinking, meticulous research and brow beating in general' with a series of 'scenettes depicting the trials and tribulations of the human condition?' As Voodoo Smith he plays the drums (not his forte but amusing all the same) with Lol Hendersons band T.V! Scream, who manage to incorporate rock, sound effects, sound poetry and a sense of theatre into their performances. The vocals in the band are mainly handled by Lol (gtr) and Laurie Morris (sax) who sings with power and confidence and contributed to what was an unusual but exciting set on a Sunday lunch time at the Kensington Pub to a somewhat startled audience of locals, punks and specimens with hangovers like myself. As if that was not enough we were met outside by Brighton's only busking band called Pookie Snack 'n Burger, who played a variety of numbers which included Waltzing Matilda, Lullaby On Broadway and a number by the Specials. This band are currently playing at the Edinburgh Festival and feature amongst their instruments an accordion, a violin and a hollowed out telegraph pole!

All in all the weekend had proved to be very interesting and enjoyable and it's worth pointing out that there are many other performers and musicians producing imaginative work in Brighton that I have not had enough time or room to mention in this report. If you can't make it up to Brighton then what is probably the best

known of the recent Brighton bands 'Birds with Ears' have an album released on the Attrix label and distributed by Rough Trade and Pinnacle. The music is distinctly English and has a little of the early Caravan/Soft Machine flavour to it. The lead vocals and the majority of the lyrics are produced by just plain Ian Smith this time, and are of an amusing and surreal nature. Tracks like Head in My Bag and Master Fool are instantly catchy. Bill Cowie (keyboards) composes the majority of the music, Rob Hayes plays guitar, Ian Porter on Bass and Simon Lewis on drums make up what is a fresh and thoughtful band.

Roger Ely

Natasha Morgan Royal Court

I went to see Natasha Morgan's 'Room' on a warm summer evening, one of those evenings when the streets are full of that scent which conjures up memories..... Somehow that quality of memory — a little hazy but piercing none the less — is a quality captured in 'Room'. One of the strengths of performance art, and one which serves to distinguish it from conventional drama, is the ability to make the objects, clothes, spaces or whatever the artist decides to use, meaningful in their own right. Natasha Morgan uses this very well in 'Room'. Books are stacked in piles, ferns tied on strings, pans of milk boil over, bowls of water gleam — all seem heavy with associations. 'Real time' too makes an appearance, through the fading light of a window onto the street, its curtains open as we enter, opened again as we leave. The piece — for it is surely a 'piece', atmospheric, referential, seamless, and not a 'play' — attempts a similar effect with language, but less happily. Some moments and lines are near perfect — the man who enters as the women authors names are being read out, interrupting with a shout of 'Hey there, I Say...'. Or the woman printer who wanted to be a painter but did not have 'a view of things'. But too many monologues in posh voices begin to pall. Perhaps this is explained by the necessity of inventing a fictional character, Lillian Raine, who must bear the familiar mantle of Virginia Woolf.

For the executors of the estate would not allow the real Virginia and her works to be acknowledged as inspiration or quoted from on stage. Thus there is some awkwardness, some over-layering of text. Too many facets of a woman's life also attempt to cram into the piece — maid, mistress, worker, mother, wry observer of men. But these are faults of too much care rather than too little, trying to recognise and appreciate too much at once. Readings from letters and a diary obviously contemporary and very real — about the problems of sharing a communal house and child care — make an excellent counterpoint to the conjured Bloomsbury-ness of an 'everyday life' of gardening and literature in grand houses which is itself

now a symbol. That 'Room of one's own' for women still proves hard to come by, it seems. And excellent work like 'Room' continues to be created in, and informed by, difficult circumstances.

Lynn MacRitchie

The Mad Show Collegiate

Is there anybody out there who remembers 'An Evening of British Rubbish', featuring Bruce Lacey, Jill Bruce and the Alberts? It flourished at the height of the Swinging London boom, and its prime ingredients were roughly made but fully operative mechanical contraptions, trad jazz and a plentiful relay of British Empire paraphernalia: pith helmets, knee-length shorts, gunfire, explosions, and of course, Union Jacks — lots of them! The style was rough, but to those of us who spent our early adolescence tuned in to the Goons it was a welcome live extension of that radical radio-wave absurdity, and lays plausible claim to being one of the first manifestations of Fringe Theatre.

It's therefore an eerie experience to see the whole thing resurfacing in *The Mad Show*, a self-styled 'Salute to the Great British Eccentric'. An advertisement in 'The Stage' invited novelty performers to audition, and 'The Mad Show' cobbled together several of the successful auditions' acts.

I went along, hoping to have my mind boggled by a concentrated display of weird feats — something, perhaps, to rival La Petomane, France's legendary musical farter. But only one performer approached this peak of conceptual art — Ronnie Henry Smith, 'The World's first and only underwater composer and musician'. Towards end of the show he plunges in frogman's gear into a large tank and proceeds to play the piano. But it's too brief, the sounds are clearly pre-recorded, and it comes too late to save a show mostly scuppered by dreadful ineptitude.

Not that some of the acts aren't amusing. A middle-aged gent dressed in nautical cap and fish-net tights, who struts about the stage reciting B-movie dialogue, cuts a somewhat bizarre figure. Captain J. J. Wallah, 'Self-explosion expert. The mightiest man in the world', comes on clad in a combination of flying-officer gear and leopard-skin to perform a deadpan act consisting of send-up circus feats and fey muscle-man posing. Dorren Critchly ('Beauty in cookery. Every dish a dream.'), the only female eccentric, mixes various gooey foodstuffs to create hideous culinary replicas of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. Rip van Wonkle, 'The oldest, most decrepit magician in the world' enters covered in dust, spilling cards and balls from his fusty dinner suit with every move as he shuffles about ruining various conjuring tricks. Roy Irvine ('Few people have worked out what he's doing, or why for that matter') goes to enormous lengths rigging step-ladder, chains and rope to re-

trieve a small green bag containing toothbrush and toothpaste. And I was genuinely creased up by a droll deadpan trio calling themselves 'The Greatest Show on Legs' who tap-dance with dustbin-lids attached to their feet (a routine derived from Gene Kelly's 'It's Always Fair Weather') and bring the house down with their 'Romans in Britain Cha-Cha', a nude balloon dance jeopardized by their constantly bursting appendages.

But the overall format is what ultimately set the tone of the evening. If the acts had been presented by a strictly straight-faced compere, for instance, it might have been a highly successful entertainment. But the producers had chosen to provide Bob Flag as link-man, as well as giving him a couple of (interminable) spots of his own, and to inject the whole proceedings with a painfully passé 'I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet' style of presentation, complete with a girlic chorus-line, direly choreographed by, of all people, Dee Dee Wilde, creator of Pan's People. Bob Flag goes in for British Rubbish-style humour with a vengeance, but he lacks the genial charm of the Alberts and presses grimly on in a tense strained manner, severely trying one's patience. On and on he goes, does Bob Flag with his flags, and the show inevitably...flags.

All pretence at being a 'Salute to the Great British Eccentric' is dropped when audience members are invited up to do their thing, any old thing. The night I was there we were treated to a dour skinhead drummer, a clumsy can-can performed by an ad hoc group of giggling schoolgirls, and a pre-arranged recitation of Hilaire Belloc's 'George' by an obvious audience plant. This ill-advised interlude brought the show to a running-time of 2½ hours. It was a great relief when it finally ended.

The facile descent into rowdy Butlins-style audience participation, of course betrays the show's real purpose - which was plainly to cash in on the Charles and Diana Wedding Craze by pulling in lots of foreign tourists with its own crudely manufactured brand of Swinging London Union Jackery. But I Am Not a Tourist. I Live Here. And besides, as the Big Day itself amply demonstrated, the Royals are so much more professional at this sort of thing.

A glance at the production credits is revealing. Two of the producers are Stephen and Fiona Kendall-Lane who recently achieved national press exposure in their clash with Equity over Sunday Performances of their revue, 'That's Showbiz'. The third producer, Andrew Corbet Burcher, as well as being married to choreographer Dee Dee Wilde, trained at Sandhurst and, during his commissioned service in the Royal Artillery, 'staged many shows for his regiment, including Noddy the Squaddy'. And the director, whose first London stage production this is, 'is a successful television producer/director well known for programmes like The Golden Shot, New Faces, Celebrity Squares and London Night Out'. You get the picture?

They would all probably argue that the

show's relentless shoddiness and amateurism was an essential feature of its appeal, perhaps even a fitting metaphor for poor old decaying Blighty literally soldiering on in adversity with a laugh on its beleaguered lips. The trouble is that, while it strove occasionally to be topical, the show as a whole failed to be truly endearing or, more fundamentally, extraordinary. Instead it went in for slipshod strenuous zaniness, with such wheezes as a banana fixed to a radio mike and trousers whipped from the legs of squealing chorines dressed up as Grenadier Guards. But Hellzapoppin or The Crazy Gang it wasn't. It wasn't even An Evening of British Rubbish. Nor can it be. Because that was done long ago, in its appropriate era. Perhaps foreign tourists might have something sufficiently exotic to satisfy their taste. But grizzled sixties veterans would find themselves glancing frequently at the time and date on their watches.

Neil Hornick

Almeida Festival Almeida Theatre

Tucked away around the corner from the King's Head in Islington, a major new venue opened in London early in the summer with an ambitious international festival and the promise of a continuous performance programme commencing in the autumn. Eventually expected to seat some three hundred when conversion is complete, this elegant Victorian literary institute, renamed the Almeida Theatre, stripped to bare walls and with the most basic of facilities improvised for performers and spectators, can for the moment comfortably accommodate about one hundred and fifty people in a unique space that excited all who performed in it. We did not get to see every event but were able to sample a few.

British Events

'It is four minutes to nuclear midnight in Fairyland,' in a setting described by one of its inhabitants as 'a cross between a Bed and Breakfast and a pixie brothel.' Here with its 'pink and proud' fairies, cargo cults, tropical climes of Bounty Bars and Nivea, its tap dancing mediaeval knights and wishing well, is a show that could only have been concocted by British Events.

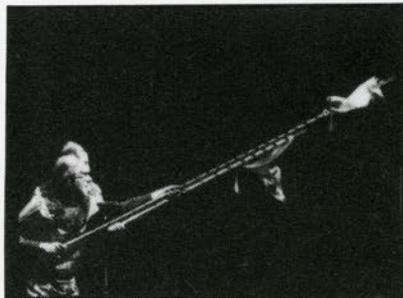
In a powerful brew of fairytale, myth, Shakespeariana, pantomime, Hollywood musical and Wagner, a technicolour Elizabeth Taylor and a post-holocaust Roy Orbison rub shoulders with Lancelot and Snow White. What you might call a small-scale touring Disneyland.

An elaborate show, 'Storm Warnings' is a worthy successor to 'Midway' but would have benefitted from a technical sophistication that the Almeida, in the circumstances of a festival with shows chasing each others tails, was unable to provide. The considerable space swamped a performance which, by all accounts looked more at home framed on the stage of the St James' Theatre in Bath where it began its

tour.

The themes, on paper, sound a bit silly, but there is a very serious core to this show that makes it genuinely moving and quite disturbing at times, and the iconography — blue armchairs at the edge of the known world, self-immolating chests of drawers and rogue potatoes impaled on the walls — is potent. A sort of 'Tinkerbelle meets Apocalypse Now', this show brings out the subversives who are not afraid to shout out for all the world to hear that yes, they believe in fairies.

Luke Dixon



British Events

Mary Longford Inc.

Following soon after was Mary Longford's performance devised and developed specifically for the Almeida in the form of an off-the-wall commentary on the history it must have all been rather obscure. Baffling even. If you had not heard that one of the first mummies brought to England from Egypt was publicly unwrapped in that very building years before, or of the transvestite Mr Beck of 'Beck's Carnival Novelties' murdered by his outraged son where performance artists now tread the boards, you might have been more than a little baffled. And what was the relevance of the French theatre director, the old woodworking tools or the arcane **hom-mage** to an all but forgotten Hesitiate and Demonstrate Show? Perhaps it little mattered given the richness of the visual texture and images so interesting in themselves.

The rudimentary space was unadorned save for a litter of theatrical and film paraphernalia that, with the performers themselves, was used as the raw material for Longford's witty collages. 'Found' images and texts, found performers even, were juxtaposed and manipulated into a performance. The boxers were real boxers, Mary Longford was really Mary Longford, the silent Egyptian presumably hailed from Egypt, and the gorillas (ah, yes, the gorillas!....) really were wearing women's clothing.

As beautifully rhythmed and immaculately put together as one would have expected from Longford's previous work, 'Looking for Something?' was, as one might guess from the irony of its title, tucked away into obscure corners of the festival schedule but proved to be the surprise success of the whole beano.

Luke Dixon

Reinhild Hoffman

There were two performances taking place at the Almeida the evening Reinhild Hoffman presented her programme of solo dances — Solo Abend.

The one we, the audience, saw was a highly theatrical display of visual images.

The other was a strangely emotional affair going on somewhere inside Hoffman's head but which we were never allowed to see fully or understand.

Hoffman is an extraordinary dancer — a strong dynamic body, and a large Germanic face that at times looked almost contemptuous of the audience, and at other moments was contorted with some unknown emotion that left me feeling somewhat like a voyeur witnessing a woman's private tragedy.

This mysterious emotionalism in her dancing has the effect of making the strongly visual imagery rather hollow — almost contrived. In the four dances, each dealing with restrictions put upon movement by external objects, she deliberately set out to set up movement 'stills'. Sections of movement were followed by tableaux which were held up to the audience like canvases. This idea worked very effectively in her first piece 'Solo with Sofa' but when it was repeated again throughout the programme it lost its impact. This plasticity would have been more acceptable, however, if Hoffman had not added a strange undercurrent of emotion — which, left unexplained, was meaningless.

In 'Solo with Sofa' Hoffman has restricted herself by wearing a voluminous white skirt which was attached to a sofa at the other end. Within this 'trap', she moved around and across the sofa, sometimes attempting to run away, sometimes hiding under the material as if in surrender, eventually standing on top of it in a moment of triumph. Working with the static shape of the sofa and the ever changing shape and texture of the skirt material, she set up some beautiful and extraordinary effects. At times she moulded herself to the sofa to become part of it only to move away again 20 or 30 feet, connected yet detached from it.

In 'Bretter' (Planks) which was performed in silence, Hoffman moved with two 10-foot wooden planks strapped to her back. She played with the idea of dual control, sometimes allowing the planks to control her movement but also using them in a very skilful fashion. The noise of the wood was sometimes delicate, as when she knocked one against the other, and at other times deafening as she rolled across the floor.

The third set of objects she used was stones, 'Steine'. These were laid out in patterns on the floor and the piece consisted of Hoffman moving around collecting them in a series of white muslin sacks tied to her body. By the time she had collected most of them her movements became not only restricted but dangerous as she allowed the heavy sacks to swing away and back to her body in a very maso-

chistic way.

Her final piece used another person, danced by Geta Bahrmann, as the object of restriction. Both women are from the Tanztheater Bremen where Hoffman has been Director since early 1978.

This piece, 'Auch' (Also), was an effective resolution to the whole programme. By using another dancer, Hoffman brought the human dimension to the relationships she had been working with before with the inanimate objects. We saw power struggles for control of the situation, attempts to escape domination, surrender, and support when both dancers helped each other in a caring way. This piece also had the added dimension of restrictions not only of movement but of will and mind also.

Hoffman's dancing and choreography differs greatly from the familiar English and American style. She comes out of the European tradition which spawned such dancers as Mary Wigman back in the early part of the century. She received her later training from Kurt Jooss and exhibits the same kind of spirituality that is a hallmark of many European dancers. **Liz Stolls**

Raving Beauties Riverside Studios

It takes a little more than five women and a male producer to make a feminist cabaret. But then, maybe the Raving Beauties never intended to be one anyway. For nothing in this evening of songs and recitations by these well established actresses and performers — as the programme is keen to inform us — would have the boys shaking in their shoes. The delivery of the song 'I just ain't satisfied' summed it up — they might not be satisfied, those beauties, but they were certainly willing to have another try. (The response of the male members of the audience — for there were a few, just checking things out — seemed to suggest that, as far as they were concerned, they'd have little to fear this time, ha, ha, ha)... Watching this show I began to understand what 'Playing to an audience' really means. I began to realise just why women friends who have had drama or dance training have reacted against it in later years with such horror. For what these women were doing was *pleasing*. No matter how controversial, interesting or even moving some of their material was, it was presented in a way that soothed, that said — as their penultimate song did — 'it's going to be alright'. Well is it? And if so, why? For there was no hint in this hour's worth of snippets of the struggles and efforts that HAVE begun to change so many women's lives over so many years. There was no hint of the many women who refuse to live the lives that most of the songs described or satirised — lesbian women, separatists, and the many women who choose to live their lives apart from the constant recognition of the world of men in which these cabaret items were all so firmly placed. But we all have to start somewhere, and, taken contextually, these

performers were also doing what they could in their own terms. For it must make life a little difficult even now to be in the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre and be known as a feminist. SO thanks for trying, Raving Beauties, keep it up. **Lynn MacRitchie**

Decadence New End

Earthy, physical, surreal... a typical selection of adjectives used to describe a Berkoff piece. A less common word is sensuous and his use of a performer's body and voice to explore a wide range of emotion and experience points to his work having sensual being as a foundation and vehicle. Drawn by temperament towards the darker, unseen side of humanity, Berkoff comes close in sympathy to the sculptor Hans Bellmer's notion that the two privileged explorers of the body are the lover and the murderer.

Both are present in his latest piece 'Decadence'. A perfect gentleman (Berkoff) and a fine lady (Linda Marlowe) consort together to woo and coo at each other. The lights dip and the couple, despite their finery, have transformed into their opposite numbers on the social scale. The gentleman has become a murderous East Ender and the lady a working class woman. There is no linear plot; instead the action is anecdotal cutting back and forth between the couples exploring their situations in clearly focussed scenes in accordance with Berkoff's preference for the short story and it's ability to present a succinct picture. So we see the lady recounting the tale of Scheherezade, the gentleman succumbing to the effect of ten successive g. & t.s while the thug sketches out ludicrous murder plans and the woman derides men's childish dependencies.

This album of incidents contains a wealth of ideas and viewpoints. The duality of opposite characters contained within one performer becomes a metaphorical account of personality effected through Berkoff's and Marlowe's extraordinary ability to transform themselves completely. Both couples are loafish and foul mouthed and reveal a devouring consumption of each others minds and bodies. Masterful use of mimetic technique focusses attention on their gross attitudes to reveal the comforts of modern life as being a sordid pseudo-Dionysian indulgence in drink, sex and frivolous fantasy. The strong realism never becomes naturalistic; instead powerful caricatures emerge with a biting critical energy that are more akin to the style of James Gilray than to Gerald Scarfe. Following on in the spirit of the caricaturist, humour abounds in this piece but as with the best humour one laughs through recognition, applauding another's descriptive insight — much of which seemed to be lost on the audience.

The Hampstead rabble had thronged into the New End, eager for fun under the respectable veneer of an evening at the

theatre. Obviously unaware of the irony as wine glasses chinked in the audience while the most bitter satire on social manners elapsed on stage, they roared with laughter at any 'naughty business' while genital slang earned delighted guffaws. Their misplaced laughter was finally frustrated to titters at the gentleman's patronising racism as if there was a sudden dawning that this was not quite the hippest moment to be laughing. And so was created the most ironic of situations: upper and lower classes being depicted as being driven by the devils of appetite and excess, egged on by the middle class esconced in the auditorium and equally condemned by their crass and greedy desire for entertainment.

Maybe the completion of the trio of the classes by an unsuspecting audience was unintentional but 'Decadence' is full enough of formal and emotional devices and emerges as a deeply powerful piece. As the fringe becomes more and more an opportunity for small time straight companies, Berkoff's antiliberalism stands out as a genuine force rebuffing the constraints and niceties of the theatre and revealing a passionate intensity, brilliant technique and an acerbic eye for human endeavour.

Phil Hyde

National Theatre of Brent - ICA

There's a limit to what you can do with two men in dinner-suits and this is it. With little more at their disposal than two vast floor maps, some help from the audience and 'the art of nemesis', Patrick Barlow in his persona of Desmond Olivier Dingle and Julian Hough as his side-kick Bernard R. H. Black, have been recreating the events leading up to *The Charge of the Light Brigade* for many a moon now, travelling the length and breadth of their visual aids to bring their little show to wide audiences. Last summer they played under the portico in Covent Garden. This year they moved up market and indoors under the fearless management of one Dave Jones International (sic) and were to be found lunchtimes through July at the ICA.

Behind their act is one of those bezer ideas so simple one is surprised that no one has thought of it before: to present epic historical events with next to no facilities, the dynamic of the humour coming from the constant incongruities of scale and the sight of our two perspiring dinner-jacketed heroes up against impossible odds. Perhaps the concept is not wholly original, *The Smallest Show on Earth* for instance has a similar comic base, but Desmond O. Dingle's National Theatre of Brent, for it is they, develop it particularly well, making an unflinching forty minute playlet out of what is essentially only the stuff of a much shorter sketch.

Patrick Barlow's Dingle is the showman and comic of the team to Julian Hough's straightman and mime, Bernard R. H. Black. The relationship between these

two, a classic double-act, provides a continuous dramatic sub-text as they bicker, sulk and fight for the limelight. 'You do the words, I do the movement', says a disgruntled Hough at one point. 'If you forget the words how can I do the movement?'

It is all a Boys' Own Paper prank with the audience willing accomplices, being lured from their seats to people the large floor maps and take on the roles of the opposing armies.

The lads' other show, 'Zulu: a re-enactment of the Zulu war of 1879' is much of the same, identical jokes, dialogue and situations even, but stretched over two acts and an interval, far further than the idea or the material developed from it can go without being strained close to snapping point. And whilst the Crimea War has no political implications today, the Zulu War, in the current South African context, does. Appearing in London at the same time as Elaine Loudon's scathingly funny 'Mitzi Wildebeest' show, comparisons were unavoidable and it must be said that not only is Ms Loudon's show much richer in its humour and in its writing, but it has the added depth of a chilling political awareness that leaves 'Zulu' looking decidedly twee.

Luke Dixon

A Pair In Shorts London Musicians Collective

If you were asked to list some of the most traditionally obvious male obsessions sport would probably come first, closely followed by Railway Trains. A Pair in Shorts pursue both these themes as part of a mode of expression that seem powered by some of the 'new dance' ideas about Men, ideology, and expression. Indeed, both members of a Pair in Shorts have themselves written about these subjects in the 'New Dance' Male Issue, Doug Gill in 'Coming to Grips with Wrestling' and Phil Jeck in 'Football — a Personal History'. Relating the competitive and 'macho' aspects of sport to an anti sexist male perspective is a rather difficult task not entirely addressed by those articles, and that issue of New Dance itself, although the conclusion could well be drawn that no form of personal expression should be restricted unless it is seen to harm others.

Myself, I find Sport a depressing and shabby business in whatever form, and I was glad to see the Pair focus on that other great fascination of small boys and men; the Train, many of which were in evidence engaged in what used to be known in steam days as the 'long haul' up Primrose Hill behind the London Musicians Collective. The Pair, dressed in hawaiian shirts entered and adopted the symbiotic roles of traveller and porter, doing impressive 'suitcase' dance which ended up as a sort of flaccid railway train. This involved quite a lot of mime 'business' during which the audience seemed to laugh rather nervous-

ly, which was a bit unsettling as I felt humour was not the intention at this point, and which impression was re-inforced by a sudden change of mode by the performers to a jerky spasticity, in the manner of Reindeer Werk's 'behaviouralism'.

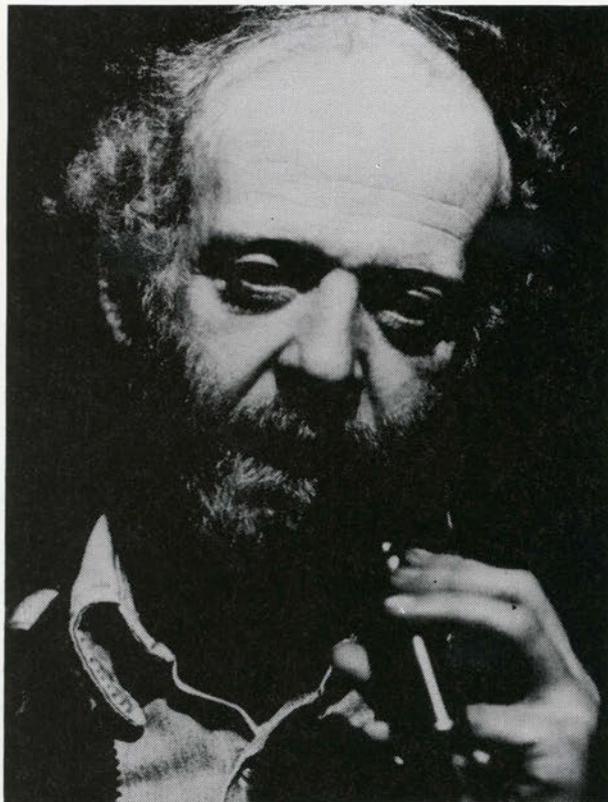
At this point the train arrives. There were a couple of taped-out railway lines coming out of swing doors stretching across the space, from the doors emerged a long, silver capsule, inflated? The W.C. Fields dictum about not working with children and animals should be extended, in my opinion, to inflatables, at least indoors. Sure enough, the thing got stuck in the doors, but Gill and Jeck handled it quite well, and almost managed to use the thing effectively by jumping at and over it in a way that involved an amount of personal risk on the hard floor. Once they'd got it out of the way the next phase began.

The piece was called Major Works By the Railway, and as the LMC is so positioned one could be excused for assuming that the title had been taken as literally as possible. Not so. The performers disappeared through the doors at the back of the space, in the direction of the train sounds, and to what we were given to believe were the platforms. After some prompting, a hesitant audience followed them, breaking what had been quite cleverly set up with the placebo of the inflatable train, invoking the theatrical format where we expect to be fooled by entrances and exits leading to 'another place' which we all know is in fact the dressing room. Instead, the audience was led down back stairs candlelit, and leading to a small courtyard that was indeed immediately adjacent to the tracks. The Pair immediately clicked in to the 'sporting' mode, or at least the outward bound exploratory one. Climbing up among the debris of a rotting water tower, dangling precariously over the line under an abandoned footbridge, all of which were floodlit, Jeck and Gill presented what must have been a startling spectacle for travellers on the 8.42 sleeper to Carlisle. Clambering out and down on to the tracks, they made sounds calling out to the answering horns of the passing diesels. Finally returning to tunnel below us into a drainage tunnel and push 'things' up at us through the grille. The outdoor setting was very beautiful in a mournful way, giving the evocative almost victorian whiff that abandoned railway architecture, particularly of a type found in the North London 'Railway Lands', has.

Whatever the attitudes involved, my particular prejudice against dance as involving graceful forms cavorting tastefully in leotards is successfully broken down by performances like these. The risks, the use of environment, the odd touch of humour, and the unsettling change of pace were all present in Major Works by The Railway, and ought to be in every performance. There is no excuse for playing safe these days.

Rob la Frenais

The Confessions of Roland Muldoon



Not a petrol bomb's throw from Edgware Road tube, in the palatial expanses of a Victorian mansion block that once housed the entire Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre, live the Muldoons, Roland, Claire and the kids, and it was here that I came face to face with the crazed red dope-fiend on an arts council grant. CAST was the original 'fringe' theatre group and prototype political troupe. For more than sixteen years Muldoon and the group have been taking their particular brand of subversion to performance spaces of every sort throughout Britain. But they are forced to slink around the obscurest of venues when they come to London and are now having to promote themselves in the capital. As we talked on the day after a weekend of rioting in Southall and Toxteth I wondered why this was, and what was the future of political work in performance.

Muldoon Well, in the late seventies there was always articles that started to say 'political theatre is always appalling...' 'I'm surprised,' the review might say, 'I thought all political theatre was a boring stereotyped lecture to the audience, and when I saw blah blah yesterday they made me laugh.' D'you know the type of article? Every critic had to put down political theatre first before he ever praised a political theatre show. With the exception of Sandy Craig who kept on liking them... In the provinces and out in the countryside there is still a tradition of going to see our shows and all the rest of it. We had difficulty in London venues. No-one wanted to do 'Sedition '81'. But we like London and intend to play here more often.

Dixon Even after 'Confessions of a Socialist'?

Muldoon Nah!

Dixon In a way it was a surprise to see 'Confessions' going into late night having come from New York after winning the OBIE and all that. There weren't strings of venues 'phoning up to say 'Bring this show into the Bush.'

Muldoon Oh no! They wouldn't in case it was political. They don't want to know about politics.... You see here we are today

talking on the day of Toxteth and the wee end of Southall when the Asians defeated the Nazi skinheads. Black and white people uniting in Liverpool 8. I think it's Liverpool 8. Anyway we lost our equipment exactly there. They looted our equipment two years ago after we'd done an anti-fascist play in that area. I can't say we liked it but we did understand. And we could see then in Toxteth that something was going to happen. So it's a really political world where people are rising and doing all sorts of things... So everything is so political but you're not allowed to draw those conclusions... Trendy London venues always feel that their trendy London people won't want to see that. 'Sedition '81' and 'Confessions of a Socialist' did in some way prove that to be wrong. We've had a lot of off the street audiences because of our advertising campaign.

Dixon So you promoted both those shows yourself?

Muldoon Absolutely, that's our policy. Screw the critics! Screw everybody! Just put the adverts in and see if people like the shows. And they did. They do because we succeed in reflecting the political situation.

Dixon Let's go back to the beginning. It developed out of Unity?

Muldoon CAST? It did in some respects, yes. Except that it goes back even further. I'd been at school and it developed out of the fifties generally. There was a rise in the potential of working class culture in Britain. I used to do acts at school. So did other kids. I've met hundreds of kids that did. So it was quite a phenomenon going on.

Dixon But why CAST? Why a company doing that particular sort of work?

Muldoon Well I don't know. I'd been politicised along the way. I wanted to be an actor. I went to the Old Vic school as a technician in Bristol. I was part of a strike there. The only strike ever in a drama school. And there was the Cuban Missiles on one hand and silly middle class finishing school of theatre on the other hand. I could learn the work of the technical thing and understand the dynamics of theatre but I just couldn't stand the people involved in it. So I couldn't get a job and I worked on the Shell building site which was a communist run shop stewards committee at the time. And they said to me, well if you've got all these skills why don't you go to Unity Theatre which was a political theatre. So I went there. And for a couple of years Claire and me built a great technical team.

Dixon So you were politically aware at the same time as you were becoming involved in theatre?

Muldoon I was right wing as a child. I was a fascist when I was twelve. I've always been involved in politics. My family always discussed politics. My mum voted Conservative and my father stood as an independent getting all the people from one pub to vote for him in an attempt to get on the council as a sort of independent radical... We've always rabbitied about politics. Until I became a socialist which then philosophically tuned me up to what I felt theatre should be saying at this specific time. I don't see any difference between politics and art. I don't mind people who do but I personally can't.

Dixon So how did CAST come about? Were there other models?

Muldoon When I was a Teddy Boy (I was fifteen) I remember seeing The Alberts. Everyone crowded to see The Alberts and they came on with pith helmets and Union Jacks and we all stood there and stared. They were nothing to do with us. It was like a cultural chasm. But they took the piss out of Britain and everyone fell about laughing. I mean I think that was quite an influence. And then groups — I like groups. My best mates became the Nashville Teens which despite their name were a British rock band really — from Adlestone. And all the people in CAST at the beginning were maybe frustrated musicians. We were emulating rock bands really.

Dixon I'm interested in the climate of the time. Nowadays if someone wants to set up a political theatre group or a feminist group they just go out and do it because everyone is. But they weren't then were they?

Muldoon Nobody was doing it. Absolutely nobody. The contradictions came in Unity Theatre where they were playing to twelve people plays that weren't even political. There was an enormous CND movement outside, in decline, but the one that we had been affected by. And there it was out there in the big wide world, and Unity, a smelly old theatre, believed in all the great ideals of socialism but had got no audience. So we joined a faction that was

trying to change that and I got expelled in what was like a Stalinist trial but the consequence of that was that we hired a pub room and formed a theatre in that pub room... It was so obvious to us that if we wanted the audience and all the rest of it we had to devise a theatre that would fit in these pubs. But groups were a thing of the time. It wasn't so isolated. It was a part of the whole culture. The Beatles, The Who, The Stones. To be an individual act at that time was an uninteresting thing. Bob Dylan was quite unique in that. So it didn't seem to us such a strange thing. But immediately we were quite good you see and people took to what we were doing. And other people couldn't form groups that followed our style. They found it very difficult. They had to form committees, like Red Ladder did. There was a committee immediately. They couldn't follow this group-type vision of the rock-band. It had to relate to Brecht and be lined up with Russia and all the rest of it. CAST hadn't really come out of that strain of ideological Stalinism, and all the rest of it. It really had come out of, I believe, rock culture. We had been made left wing by Vietnam. We were rock rather than folk music. And they weren't in CND. We wanted to change and harness the cultural things that were going on. I can't remember, Luke, as I sit here and talk about all those pure motivations. I get fed up with talking about them. I'm much more interested in now really.

Dixon Well, let's talk about 'Sedition '81' then. How does a show like that come together. Did you sit down and write it?

Muldoon Did I sit down and write it? It evolved. CAST is becoming effective again, for the first time for a long time, (if it doesn't make it this time I'm going to give up) as a group again. An ensemble. A group. And they wanted the experience of playing out front to the audience which variety gives you. 'Cos that really is the whole key to it. I've done some time with the Mime Troupe and watched the way they deal with it in San Francisco. To me it all depends on talking to an audience and communicating to them and taking them on and them taking you on. So a lot of the show is modelled because of the need to have that experience for everybody in the growth of the group. So I didn't sit down and write it. We thought of moments that would be needed.. This group's quite good and it could really improvise a lot more.

Dixon So 'New Variety' is something you're going to develop in future work?

Muldoon I imagine so. But I think New Variety is bigger than us really. I think the whole thing that is going on is New Variety. I've been reading your magazine recently. It's not New Variety, you said, that Cabaret Futura was doing. But I'd say it was really. CAST comes out of committed political theatre but now we can play audiences who are apolitical and they look at us and say, 'all right this is political theatre. I don't mind I'll watch it, I'll see how well they make me laugh, see how funny it is. Or see how pertinent it is. All right I'll even believe them for a while. I won't think of anything when I walk out of this theatre, I promise myself that, but come on then left wing, entertain us.' And we really work hard and we do. And they go, 'Oh! oh!' So we can even change a bit of their mind. And that to me is a variety experience. You don't know what the act's going to be like. You go to see it to see what the act's going to be like and this could apply to all types of theatre happening in Britain now, not just us.

Dixon Is it deliberately provocative?

Muldoon New Variety? Yes. I think it's of the age...

Dixon I'm surprised it's still possible to cause a shock any more in a way.

Muldoon Listen! It's all starting again. This is another age. It's not the one we were in. This is a really political age.

Dixon Has all the trouble surrounding the show surprised you? The Teddy Taylor business and all that.

Muldoon Nah. I liked it really because it shows you're pressing the right button.

BOTH LAUGH

Dixon Were you surprised not to lose your grant at Christmas?

Muldoon I always thought Mrs Thatcher would be political enough to get us in order to show to Tory colonels when her monetarist policies were failing, to look militant, she would attack political theatre groups like us. I didn't believe the Arts Council would be able to cut us because if they did they'd be hypocrites about their own cost effectiveness. CAST have really worked very,

very hard. So I wasn't surprised we weren't cut from the Arts Council for doing our job but I did wonder wouldn't Mrs Thatcher look good if she got us personally.

Dixon What about your audiences? Do you hope to really change their minds and outlooks? I suppose I'm really asking why you do it and whether you've become cynical about doing it over all those years.

Muldoon Well it's hard to be left wing and be cynical... It's very hard to be cynical. You can be frightened shitless... If you're saying do I feel bad about how naive I've been all along I agree with you. (LAUGHS) I feel sometimes completely gone. I am tired of it all. I suppose I wouldn't mind doing another job but it's a bit late now if you see what I mean. I think I was always a mouth and I was always a spontaneous type of comedian, clown-type guy and all the things that have formed me are truer now than they were in the past. If you are asking me personally if I get fed up with it all, I do, I could scream, I'm bored to death with it all, except look what's happening today as we're doing this interview. What's been happening this weekend is amazing. Is CAST relevant enough? No! Is the left relevant enough? No! It's pathetic. Are your audiences big enough? No. Is CAST any good? No. We should be a much better company and this is the problem of underfunding and the teaching given to people coming into theatre. All they've done is colonise the fringe into another petit bourgeois orientation towards career

I'll tell you my big claim for 'Sedition '81' shall I, was that the Clive James' play and ours were just about to be launched at the same time. The reviewers never came to review ours but attacked Clive James for liking Prince Charles. The guy for years has been putting out this darling of the right theory. At last there's an intellectual flowering in the radical right! Mrs Thatcher brings in the new era. And Clive James was very much that sort of thing. How great! What a golden age! This guy's written a great long poem. His last ones were successful. He's a great wit. He's got someone off 'Not the Nine O'Clock News', and it's all going to be good. And they went along and said no it wasn't because he liked Prince Charles. Well, that's a strange angle for the critics to have adopted... Well, they didn't review us because they knew we cut the Queen's head off and they'd have to say 'Oh God, it was marihuana in the cigarette — or not...' They might even like CAST. How would they deal with that?... Theatre is the last place for freedom in this country, and possibly video as well. Because they can't control it..

Dixon How about other media?

Muldoon Yeh. I'd like to work in any media. I really would. I'd like to work in a cowboy picture. Because, you know, I am an actor and I do like fucking about making people laugh and I'm not limited only to being political either; I just fight for the right to be political and for CAST to be political.

.....
Muldoon Whatever you do you mustn't say you believe in anything. That's the first criteria of any good British artist. 'I don't believe in anything!' 'Oh, well let's have a look at what you're talking about. That's very interesting. Hang on here comes somebody.' 'I believe in something!' 'Fucking hell we don't want that. He'll just be trying to convert us with his art.'

CHRONOLOGY

CAST — Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre — was formed in 1965. It's first production was 'John D. Muggins is Dead' (1965) which was followed by 'Mr Oligarchy's Circus' (1966). Other important shows have included 'The Trials of Horatio Muggins' (1968) and 'Harold Muggins is a Martyr' (1968) which was devised with John Arden and Margarette D'Arcy. Amongst recent production have been 'Confessions of a Socialist' (1978); 'What Happens Next' (1978/79) the Anti-Nazi League show; 'Full Confessions of a Socialist' (1980) Roland Muldoon's one-man show for which he was awarded an OBIE in New York; 'From One Strike to Another' (1980) which featured 'the Smellnice Strike Committee up against the Government's Employment Act'; 'Further Confessions of a Socialist' (1980) at the Marina Theatre, San Francisco; and 'Sedition '81' (1980/81) originally produced with Belt and Braces Roadshow (see PM12).

As Union Circuit Promotions CAST toured Chuck Portz of the New York Labor Theatre in his one-man show about Jack London in Britain last year and in December are to bring the San Francisco Mime Troupe (see PM 9) to Britain for the first time.

Music in Performance

The music section of *PERFORMANCE* magazine is being expanded and we hope to include coverage of a wider spectrum of musical events in future. If you think that we should cover a performance you are giving, or know of a performance that you think we should know about, please let us know. We will be including the occasional record review, but will be trying to limit ourselves to records that relate most closely to performance, or that would not otherwise receive much press coverage, no matter how deserving.

Our interest is in original and experimental work that is new and exciting, or at least exciting.

For several years I have been involved with the organisation of the LONDON MUSICIANS COLLECTIVE which hopefully caters for such work, and my declared interest, (apart from trying to publicise my own work) is in drawing attention to the Collective and the volume of good work that goes on there. At present we are running a series of Thursday evening 'Club' nights, with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and two or three performance units. As we all know, the recession has hit all areas of our lives, and the first item cut from people's domestic budgets seems to be in the area of 'cultural recreation'. People are not prepared to take risks with their culture these days: The gap has widened between the major, media saturated event by the well known artist performer, or the less well known, usually more radical worker, so that things already known become better known, better attended and better publicised, and things which are unknown stay that way. Art has become peripheral to most peoples lives and consequently a lot of art is produced that is irrelevant (people tend to fill the roles ascribed to them). Magazines like *Performance* attempt to bridge the gap between mass media coverage and total obscurity. There isn't a good art critic working within the 'overground' media (there are good journalists who turn out the required readable column inches on an art topic, however) and there are no music writers who can do even that. As for television and radio, there is no one with even the slightest sympathy for good art or music. The people who undertake the role of arts producer or arts presenter are all involved primarily with the Institution of the media and the concept of some mythical 'Joe Public' towards whose intelligence their attitude is comprised of equal parts condescension and fear.

Towards the arts they toe some imaginary party line comprising a fawning respect for vacuous purveyors of tradition and a sneering ignorance towards the creative and new. Anyone who may attempt the opposite doesn't last long.

So...on to some news of a couple of blows against the empire... This month sees the launch of a long awaited new music magazine, *COLLUSION*, a magazine devoted to all that is obscure, bizarre or excellent in

world musics. It costs £3.50 for 3 issues per year, is available from 15 Norcott Road, N16, and the first issue contains articles on Diamanda Galas, Salsa, Ennio Morricone, Rap, Milford Graves and Nigerian Praise Songs. Another new magazine comes from the London Film Makers Co op, called *UNDERCUT*. It costs £1.50 and the next issue contains articles on me and someone called Jean Luc Goddard.

Although not a new magazine, *ZIGZAG* includes in its current issue a pretty thorough Independent Record Label catalogue, compiled by David Ilic, who also contributes to this column. This catalogue is of special interest because it includes the independent pop and rock companies and also their elder brothers, the experimental and improvised music labels.

Paul Burwell



Mu Mo Vo The Cockpit

Improvisation is the common linking factor between musicians, dancers and performers in work which can loosely be termed improvised performance where minimal ideas serve as a springboard for spontaneous and open-ended development of expression. The great growth in contact improvisation in the dance world, the blurring of distinct roles between actor/ress and performance artists, the interest in mime, juggling, clowning and other skills has meant that this field is wide open to those interested in blending and complementing media forms.

I have sometimes come away from such improvised performances, feeling aware that the willingness is there in abundance to let ideas co-exist in some slightly chaotic, but genially liberal well-meaningness. However there just isn't always the rigour and the performance skills to make it sharp and convincing. If the basic ideas have got to ignite spontaneous improvisation, then clearly they've got to be ideas with a lot of mileage, well thought through for their potential and not just slipped in because they are nice or fun or good looking.

It was with some of these thoughts that I

attended Anthony Wood's festival and on the whole I must confess that many of the fears that I had accumulated on previous occasions were confirmed. Naturally the work entails a very broad spectrum of disciplines and interests but often it seemed as though the work was based on an enthusiastic but confused realisation of ideas. At worst the work was pretentious, vacuous and tedious. At best it sent me away charged with well being and a sense of having witnessed something really fresh and invigorating.

The most obvious example of this for me was the duo of Katy Duck and Sean Bergin. The Dutch musician Misha Mengelberg uses the term Instant Composition to talk about improvisation and indeed the term Instant Theatre could be coined to cover the rapping, the oblique dialogues that come out of the air in the work of this duo. Sean Bergin is a burly South African giant of a saxophonist with the quickness of his jokes derived from his Irish side; Katy Duck is a vivacious American dancer. Together they make a lightning tour of the imagination. One minute Katy Duck was dancing to free sax playing (to dispel any stereo types of musician carrying huge horn, he chose to envelope himself in an enormous raincoat and play the soprano like a dog whistle) the next moment they were engaged in a spontaneous dialogue rooted in completely different contexts, Pinter fashion. And yet, because of the intonation used and the flow it actually synthesised into a very witty scenario. Moments later they had married off a ketchup bottle and a brown sauce bottle — props dragged from a plastic bag — and were off on a world honeymoon trip. What was so incredibly special about this performance was how total fantasy took off from wisps of ideas — a prop, a musical phrase, a word — as in a Lewis Carroll child's world where everything can be conjured out of nothing.

What was also so strong about this performance was that both people have moved a long way from the tentativeness of being very conscious of improvising (aware of the process). With both Katy and Sean there was a fantastic feeling of a natural, fluid stream of expression so that a word could become a gesture, or a song and the transitions were hardly noticeable. Above all they combined the strengths of projecting who they were with poise and skill and generosity.

I'd like also to mention the performance of the Feminist Improvising Group because in a different way, they have been for me, a really strong generating force in this area of improvised performance because it was taken for granted from the start that they could use any resources to express what they wanted to say.

This time, it was in fact a pretty strange

performance because when they started out the ideas clearly weren't cascading into view so they had to work and search for them, and that degree isn't always around. Of course in the end it was a great FIG performance with Sally Potter transformed into the languishing lady errant(e) (whither wilt I?) confronting a very suspicious 'heard it all before' Georgie Born brandishing a rolling pin through the window of what looked like a summer house door. FIG make instant theatre look the hardest and easiest thing in the world and they certainly send you away with questions and laughter in your head.

Hannah Charlton

James Chance The Venue

There was a packed house to see the first performance in England of James Chance (aka James White, of James White and the Blacks). The set started late, the announcer said that it would start 'as soon as we can find him' — apparently far from being strung out in some unknown hotel room (the implication) he was backstage trying to teach the pick-up band the songs (wasted effort in relation to Toby, the keyboard player dredged up from the depths of Funkapolitan for the occasion).

I've never much liked James Chance's records, especially his rotten tone on alto saxophone (which has improved — he just has to think up more than two ideas to play on it now) but I found the performance very interesting. He has a good voice, very strong, and good rhythmic phrasing, although he owes more and more to James Brown. Most artists start by being influenced by heroes and then develop their own style, James Chance seems to be doing the opposite, although in one of his songs, a dialogue with the black woman singer of the group, he was able to recognise the dubiousness of a skinny little white punk (his image) coming on like a heavy macho black stereotype.

I was impressed by his determination and sheer grit. He'd lost the audience before he even got to the stage, and he was never able to keep any momentum going because of the necessity of having to teach the band the next song after they'd lurched to the end of the previous one they'd just learned. In all, because it was a mess, I think that I enjoyed the concert more than I would have had it been very smooth and together. The audience for the most part didn't seem to be able to see further than the absence of the type of Style they were expecting.

I was surprised the gig even happened. James's girl friend had just died of cancer after a harrowing illness, and most of the original Contortions had just left him, and one of the musicians who came over from America with him had been prevented from playing by the Musicians Union. GREAT UNSUNG HEROES OF OUR TIME: THE DRUMMER.

The drummer worked hard and unrelen-

tly to make the band work and give the music some lift throughout the set. It's a thankless task and is physically and mentally draining without the compensation of the buzz you get from playing music that gells, but he played strongly and unselfishly. A lot of musicians in similar circumstances would have either tried to make themselves look good and show off their chops at the expense of the group, or just given up and coasted through the set but this musician (Say, who was that stranger, I never did catch his name...?) kept it simple, concentrated really hard and sweated to hold the group together.

Paul Burwell

F. Gerrad Errante October Gallery

For years now the musical avant-garde has borne a weight of criticism for its austere and humourless stance. Much of the reason for this may lie not with the music, but the way that it is presented. Whilst technical virtuosity undoubtedly forms a great part of the success of a performance, so too does the ability to draw and involve an audience in what is happening on stage, and it is often the latter which is neglected. There is certainly no room to doubt the performing abilities of the American clarinetist F. Gerard Errante. During a poorly attended evening, he dissolved the barriers between an appreciation of avant-garde music with an informal and, at times, magnetic delivery.

Errante boasts an impressive past — extensive work, both at home and abroad, a lengthy classical training and a brief flirtation with Jazz (he was then playing saxophone), and much of this experience was brought to bear in his performance. He doubles as both creator and re-creator, although this evening of eight compositions focussed more on the latter approach. Perhaps his finest offering was a reworking of Stephen Montague's "The Eyes of Ambush". Originally devised for any combination of instruments, Errante utilised didgeridoo, folk flute and tape delay along with clarinet, the piece showcasing his ability to study and understand the essence of foreign music cultures and to cross-reference them in a manner that detailed their similarities as much as their contrasting features. It is this attention to contrast and paradox that appears central to Errante's work, whether juxtaposing the darker, hidden tones of the clarinet, or coupling them with the services of pre-recorded tape. Or, as in Tom Johnson's "Scene for Clarinet and Tape" where Errante set up a dialogue, both verbal and musical, with a loudspeaker, introducing elements of theatre.

In some respects, Errante's multi-lateral entertainment has its downfalls. My overall impression was that he had crammed too much material into too short a space of time. He has much to offer and perhaps more concentration in a few areas would result in stronger performances with a

greater sense of direction than what was on offer. That said, I look forward to seeing him again. Hopefully, another visit to this side of the Atlantic will not be too far away.

David Illic

Whirled Music Quartz

Whirled Music is a performance for any combination of instruments whose sound is created by the action of whirling or spinning. As such, it is a logical extension of the work of certain improvising musicians who have regularly employed this technique in performance (my colleague, percussionist Paul Burwell immediately springs to mind, having used a pair of cymbals attached to pieces of string or elastic and whirling them, causing vibration through both air friction and the airborne contact with the walls and floor). Since making its debut at the London Musicians Collective in 1978, Whirled Music has been performed extensively in various parts of the world, and whilst originally seen as a purely experimental platform, the nature of the work and its presentation has changed during its three year existence. This will explain my lack of coverage of the technical background and anthropological aspects of the work, important as they are. They have been explored in the pages of MUSICS (Edition 17, 1978) and P.S. (Edition 3, 1979), the latter by the four artists involved, thus they hardly need reiteration here.

My initial response to the concept was one of mild amusement but the recently released album* and this latest live performance at the L.M.C. have done much to change my view to that of total commitment. Whirled Music is certainly a captivating musical and visual experience, inevitably a greater success on stage given the strong visual element of danger that is an inseparable part of the work. Indeed, at certain points in the evening this was clearly exploited by the performers, Burwell in particular who, during an overtly violent episode, drove his fellow performers to take cover behind a wooden barricade as he careered madly around the stage.

However, I feel that the greatest surprise lies with the record. So many projects involving theatre have proved to be totally inadequate when transferred to the one-dimensional medium of vinyl. The success of the recording is largely due to the adaptability of the performers, Max Eastley, Paul Burwell, David Toop and Steve Beresford. All are stalwarts of the British Improvised Music scene, with traditions gained not through a lack of competition, but more from their understanding of collective music making. The multitude of sounds created from this barrage of traditional and custom-made instruments is juxtaposed in a manner that demonstrates that the selection used at any given time in performance is not simply capricious, but governed more by thought and purpose. Often the interlocking of these

sounds can be disconcerting, pushing the tonal range to the extremes where the human ear experiences discomfort in coping with the aural attack.

I can only hope that this album does not mark the end of the concept. There are still many conceivable ways in which the work could be enlarged or changed (particularly in using obstacles in the flight path made of resonating surfaces). Given more opportunities to perform the work, these possibilities are endless.

* 'Whirled Music' is released by Quartz Publications — !QUARTZ 5. Obtainable in cases of difficulty from 114, Philip Lane, London N.15. **David Illic**

Association of Little Presses Festival London Musicians Collective

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday of September 23-25, the ASSOCIATION OF LITTLE PRESSES held their 15th Anniversary Festival at the London Musicians Collective. The Association of Little Presses is an Association of primarily poetry publishers who print, distribute and often write their own books and pamphlets. A lot of the work produced, in the early years especially was highly experimental — Sound and Concrete Poetry, with writers using the method of production (often duplicator) as an intrinsic part of the work. I attended the last night only which meant that I missed the introductory talks by the erudite Eric Mottram on the previous evenings. I saw readings by Peter Finch, Bob Cobbing, Clive Fencott and Bill Griffiths, including several group performances of poets work, as all of the poets have poems that function as performance scores for an indeterminate number of performers. I like most of the work of Bill Griffith, especially his 'found' poems (found in Jane Austen and others) and his translations of Old English and Nordic epics like these couple of lines from his translation of the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh...from the Story of the Flood from Gligamesh (Bill Griffith, Pirate Press)...

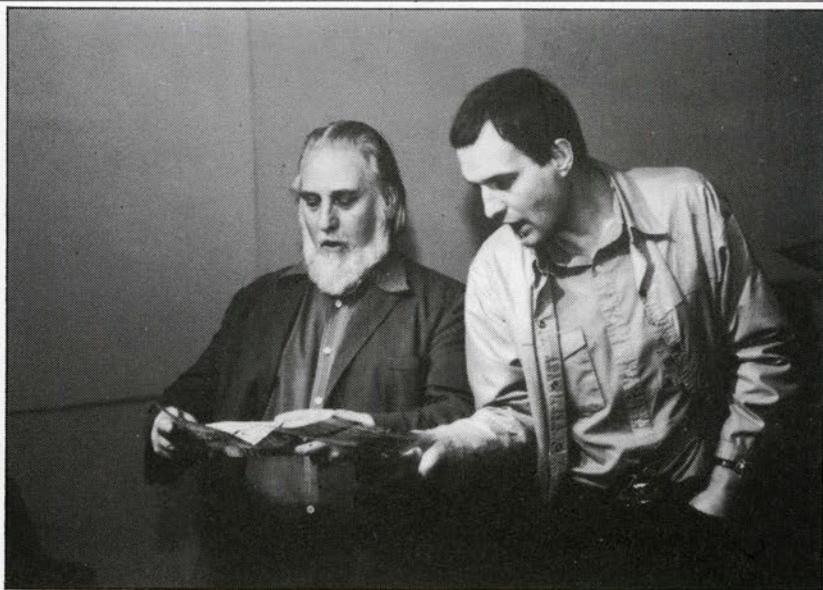
'I killed sheep day every yes
must, red-wine, oil and white-wine
to the workmen each (I gave) like
water of river.

a-great-feast I-made like the-day
of-New-Year

I unliided..ointment (to my) hand
I-applied

(on the day) 7th the-ship was-complete
(the launching) very difficult

Bob Cobbing, as usual, produced a new duplicator text for performance. His duplicator texts incorporate so much deliberately smudged duplicator ink that I am always surprised that they ever dry..in fact a couple of decades ago he decorated his living room with different coloured duplicator inks instead of ordinary paint, and the walls never dried in the several years that he continued to live there.



Bob Cobbing and Peter Finch

His work has been influential on many of the younger sound poets, but no one can match his vocal range or printed output. For 10 years he worked with some improvising musicians, and this helped him develop a much 'faster' creative performance mode — the ability to generate and articulate new ideas instantly and to synthesise new material at the moment of its perception. Previously he had done a lot of work with multi-tracked tapes, slowing down his own voice and learning to reproduce the same sounds with 'live' voice. His vocal interpretations of his texts are very strong, although I feel that he should take some time to re-assess his life's work (he's over 60 now) and use it as a springboard for some personal radical development of his Poetic and Performance Art.

Clive Fencott performed a solo for voice, transistor radio, amplified pocket and amplified voice, which was enjoyed, although the consensus was that it could have been stronger if shorter (a risky comment to make about Avant Garde work.. I'm sure we all know John Cages epithet on doing something boring until it becomes interesting — the aesthetic that launched a thousand performances — but these days I have more sympathy with Steve Beresford's re-working: 'If something is interesting for two minutes, try it for four. If still interesting, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not interesting at all, but very boring').

At the end of the evening Clive produced a very long (about sixty feet) poem, that performers and audience were invited to perform together, and this didn't take very long at all, as there was a strong tendency among the poets, when performing each others work to try and destroy the texts given them to perform from. I saw poems screwed up and thrown at the writer, shredded, soaked in buckets of water, set fire to (actually, I did that) and trampled on.

Peter Finch read some more semantic

poetry, and also did some two voice pieces. The one that was most semantic, and also I enjoyed the most was a well observed, loving but witty poem to Bob Cobbing written for his 60'th birthday.

Paul Burwell

AMM Music Matchless

AMM MUSIC Double LP Matchless Recordings, recorded 1968. Cornelius Cardew, Lou Gare, Christopher Hobbs, Eddie Prevost, Keith Rowe.

During the 60's and 70's AMM Music were a seminal improvising group. Everyone has an AMM Music story or anecdote to relate about one of their concerts. I saw them three times, and am still impressed by and learning from my memories and impressions.

People often say that its impossible to capture the essence of improvised music on recordings, and with AMM Music it seems that the recording medium is completely unable to record any aural signal at all. In performance the music was invested by a tangible atmosphere — a magical and very moving group creation of variety and incident. AMM Music present a true egoless music, not in an apologetic way but with great strength and conviction and an almost overwhelming intensity. For me, their records exist as an artifact, a memento or a testament to the work of the group. This two LP boxed set is an almost complete set performed in 1968 at the Crypt in Lancaster Road which, unfortunately, I wasn't at. It is a very well presented set, with a photograph of the group and two small pamphlets included. The cover is of the poster advertising the performance. I find it hard to discuss the music on the record. Its music you have to close your eyes and LISTEN to. You have to listen to hear the variety of events, the tension and the surprises. When I heard them play at the Place, they played in com-

plete darkness (except for intermittent use of bicycle lamp when one of them was looking for something). Their music is like swimming in a sea, its always the sea but it never remains the same, the water is always moving and changing.

Quoting Cornelius Cardew from one of the pamphlets in the set: "Documents such as tape recordings of improvisation are essentially empty, as they preserve chiefly the form that something took and give at best an indistinct hint as to the feeling and cannot convey any sense of time and place".

The best way of discussing this record would in fact be to quote verbatim the entire written material included with the records, but that would be too long, infringement of copyright and cheating. Statements such as the preceding by Cornelius Cardew obviously question the whole relevance of recording such music.. he also says '...It is impossible to record with any fidelity a kind of music that is actually derived in some sense from the room in which it is taking place..' If the performers call into question so deeply the validity of recording their work at all, then why do they do it? There are obviously no easy answers. For me their records exist as documentation of a fine, ground breaking performing group that I wish more people had gone to see and appreciate. I think that there is a point to recording this music, but the recording shouldn't be mistaken for its performance. AMM operated more as an almost tangible state of mind, a way of listening and a kind of preciseness, a clarity of attitude towards making music that communicated the ideals behind the music.

Paul Burwell

Penguin Cafe Orchestra October Gallery

Jingle Bells meets Michael Nyman in the return of the rarely performed Penguin Cafe Orchestra, led by Simon Jeffes and once described by Morgan Fisher as 'a rare evocation of Palm Court wallpaper music combined with the quiet anarchy one finds in Lewis Carroll and Erik Satie'. Fisher also describes their first record as 'one of the most extraordinary LPs of the decade'. So perhaps it was not surprising that the performance at the October Gallery was packed out with people all wondering why each other was there. This is what you call word of mouth, I suppose, as there was virtually no publicity, and I had just dropped in by chance to pick up a listing. On arrival I found a team of Japanese waitresses in impeccably exotic garb handing out tiny penguin-shaped biscuits, the entire membership of the Phantom Captain disguised as existentialists, and a disproportionate number of young men with bow ties and waxed moustaches. I felt as if I had walked straight into the party scene from Tony Hancock's 'The Rebel'.

The beauty of the Penguin Cafe

Orchestra lies of course in their sense of understatement, the tactfully placed ukelele, the almost banal percussive effects and the simplicity of the string repetitions. But though this aspect could be almost disturbing in its discretion, the orchestral occasional, ascends to peaks of polite exuberance that could almost be true avant-garde dance music, such as in 'Pythagoras' Trousers' and 'From the Colonies'. Talking of Pythagoras's Trousers, did you know he was the first westerner ever to wear them? So we were informed by Neil Hornick, who had somehow infiltrated the Orchestra (an anagram of 'Carthorse', by the way), to interpose links of a suitably

ambiguous relevance.

Enhanced by the ambience (which seemed to somehow persuade us that we had all managed to penetrate and gate-crash an extremely exclusive club catering for those of eclectic and esoteric tastes) as the music was, it was certainly highly elevating, if not entirely experimental. Their new record had just come out (on the Obscure label) and I went out to buy it immediately on the strength of the concert, almost without thinking about it, so you can take that as a recommendation if you like.

Rob la Frenais

Lyon Performance Festival



The author (above) in performance at Lyon

Performance Critics (yes they do exist) from both Eastern and Western Europe gathered in Lyon to see the work of more than sixty artists and to publicly discuss their views during a two day Conference. Since June many articles have been published in newspapers and magazines across Europe, but nothing about this six week long event has appeared in the art press here.

Because of this magazine's current policy, I was asked to concentrate on the British artists who participated, rather than on those from the seventeen other countries represented. As a result, those artists whose contributions to the Symposium would have given this article a broader perspective, Gina Pane, Carolee Schneemann, Salome and Castelli, Joseph Beuys, Hermann Nitsch, Tom Marioni, Heinz Cibulka, Nigel Rolfe and Benni Efrat have not been discussed.

Performance Magazine provides much needed reportage and criticism of mainly British events for those already interested in this area, but circumstances which prevent performance from reaching a wider readership persist. There is a scarcity of

committed critics' who write regularly on performance in this country let alone send articles abroad and our 'Art' (equals painting and sculpture?) magazines rarely publish articles on live work. Caught in this vicious circle where space is at a premium, information on foreign performers has to be restricted to allow any coverage of the home-grown product. As a result the rich variety of performance art in Britain is little-known abroad and has become increasingly isolated from the outside world.

In Europe Performance critics often write about 'foreign' events, and actively support artists by promoting their work abroad. German and Italian critics organise exhibitions of performance, Polish critics take their responsibility as far as running a gallery where every performer shown is backed by a named critic. Meanwhile the work in Britain remains unpublished, unknown, and relatively unseen in Europe. In the light of our own marginalisation, perhaps we can take heart from the example of what occurred in Lyon, France's second city, as a result of a con-

versation between two people in 1978.

The International Symposium of Performance Art in Lyon grew from the ideas, energy, and hard work of Orleans (Performance Artist), and Hubert Besascier (Lecturer), who refused to accept the artistic isolation and provincialism felt by many artists working there.

In the late seventies gallery venues for performance art were disappearing fast as the major art institutions of France were forced to tighten their budget-belts. The novelty of performance was over, painting and sculpture held not only promises of 'newness' but of financial return. A new era of the durable, investable art object threatened. (...sounds familiar...?)

In the face of this atmosphere and active opposition by some editors and administrators, seventy-two artists from across the world came to Lyon in 1979 for the first International Symposium of Performance Art. The plan was to inform the public by showing a major exhibition of Fluxus work which would give some historic context for the wide variety of styles of live performance. 1980 saw a smaller group of about forty artists, (including Roland Miller, Nigel Rolfe and myself) performing in a warehouse, galleries, ancient wine cellars, a theatre, a restaurant, and in the streets and squares of the city.

The Third International Symposium was perhaps the most ambitious so far, lasting six weeks, with ten days of performance, two days of critical discussion, a major exhibition of plastic art by performers, videos, films and other events which for the first time attracted financial support from the Lyon City Council. Again venues were found throughout the city in gallery and non-gallery spaces, but about thirty performances took place at Canubis, a large warehouse and other events were centred around the major exhibition at the Espace Lyonnais Artistique et Culturel (ELAC), a large, modern gallery at the hub of the city.

This exhibition was intended to reflect the growing interest in 'debris' from performance, to counter the myth that 'those who can, do, those who can't, perform', and to establish that such works were as interesting, if not more exciting than most gallery art. In Britain the role of live work is often read inaccurately as polarised in opposition to the art object. The more integrated history of innovative form in Europe creates a less paranoid approach; it is seen as introducing welcome influences from culture, which broaden the possibilities for artists of all disciplines.

The relationship between action, artifact and art institution has always been an issue of great concern to Performance artists here, fundamentally affecting the form, content, and context which we each choose for our work. The increased emphasis on the rematerialisation of the art object through performance, (encouraged by the dematerialisation of state sponsorship and a hungry art market,) puts new pressures on two basic tenets which many performers in Britain hold in common. Firstly

that our work is 'Time-based' rather than product-based, and secondly that its 'meaning' is as an experience through a consciously established duration, which extends it beyond the durable-object tradition fostered by the commercial gallery system. Can these principles be upheld if performers infiltrate the art market? Should they be?

'Les Oeuvres Plastique des Artistes de la Performance' showed a wide spectrum of attitudes to these questions, but firmly among those who seemed to uphold these fundamentals were the five British Artists who took part.

Marc Chaimowicz created a delicate installation, two diagonally cut sheets of glass leant against the wall, fixed to their backs a scattered arrangement of small hand coloured photographs. The installation was 'framed' and tinted by the changing hues of projected pure-colour slides. The intimacy of the work emphasised the private and fragile nature of the artists activities, glimpsed in the photographs.

The sound track which 'coloured' Kerry Trengove's installation worked in a similar way, creating an air of confidentiality for the spectator with its snatches of private conversations. Each short phrase was concerned with individual freedoms or institutionalised systems of existence. This installation re-activated the main elements of a real-time, seven day performance 'Portail du Territoire' which Kerry had undertaken three months earlier in Lyon. Living in a Roman Tunnel some fifty feet below a local gallery, with video and sound links connecting the two spaces, the artist conversed once an hour with visitors, then returned to his continuous activity of pacing the space and extending a modelled clay slab. This thirty foot long object, covered with drawn words and sculpted deer, formed the main section of the ELAC piece, making for the first time his private activity public. At the beginning of the slab a video tape of rutting deer establishing their territories, reinforced the elements of mental and physical freedom and containment. Seven 'drawings' arranged at either end of the slab, showed similar concerns, integrating private journal pages written by the artist during the performance, with public press articles, photographs of the tunnel and the gallery, all overlaid with drawn deer imagery. Though complex, this installation was made accessible by the juxtaposition of images and information, traditional and modern media, active and static elements, which combined to form an integrated language system. The work has since been bought by the Museum of Grenoble.

Duncan Smith built a long boxed corridor of corrugated iron, rusty outside but bright and new inside. A photo of hooded men with guns performing their mythological role to the camera was pierced by an out of focus monitor image which drew you in. Moving into sharp focus the spectator discovered a horizontal shelf where a mirror, let into a photo of a

near nude woman, reflected your own peering gaze. Only now did you become aware of the constant taped chant 'IRA, IRA, IRA...'

My own work, often centred round questions of role/identity, utilised the classic delineators, plinth and frame, to elevate personal possessions to the status of 'Art' objects. Subverting this assumed position through analysis and anecdote, a continuous sound track revealed new insights into the relationships between these objects and cultural and personal histories. The installation contained four original and ten facsimile objects, five painted to give an impression of surface likeness, five stripped of this skin to reveal the hidden form beneath. These static objects in the context of the sound tape, served as metaphors for the evaluative choices which we have when reading art, surface skill or underlying meaning, financial worth or lived experience, as well as for our own choice of role, active or passive, performer or spectator.

Stuart Brisley (performing elsewhere) contributed a number of video tapes of his live work which were unfortunately shown during a single day, creating a real-time marathon for the enthusiastic audience, who slowly dwindled away. Nevertheless respect and support for his work was much in evidence, particularly at the critics conference where Sarah Kent devoted her talk on British performance to his activities.

Station House Opera were the most energetic young artists seen at Lyon during the Symposium. Performing at Canubis warehouse the group continued its consciously unconscious, development of disintegrating structures 'Everything is in disguise, a test of recognition, of following a logic you cannot analyse' (Miranda Payne). This work originally based on a schizophrenic friend, was first seen at AIR yet has not been repeated, for the work centers on the notion of 'change — shape-shifting' — which avoids recognition of the precise action, role or object, but creates multiple associations which are never the same for performer or spectator. The performance despite its construction around the idea that 'objects and people cannot be generalised into classes of things', was rubber-stamped as theatre by those who saw it, an intended criticism which Julian Maynard Smith would recognise as praise. Sadly I hear that Station House Opera has since disintegrated. Lets hope that this is just a temporary shift of shape. Lets hope too that art by British performance artists whatever its shape, continues to be performed, constructed, activated or acted, and extends its horizons with the responsible support of a growing number of Performance Critics.

Rose Garrad
Editor's note: Performance Magazine's policy on covering international work is currently under discussion with a view to it being changed. If you have any views on this please write to us. (At present, we only print articles about British work abroad, or foreign work in Britain.)

NB: Station House Opera has not stopped. See Waterloo Gallery for Listing.

National Performance Listings

BIRMINGHAM **Birmingham Arts Lab** **Info 021 359 4192**

September 15-19. Midway Enterprises present 'Creeps'. A new group formed by Joan and Peter Oliver, the latter well known for his transformation of Oval House, London into an innovative Performance centre in the early seventies. After seven years touring with Pip Simmons company they have developed this performance based on the experiences of the author, David Freeman, as a paraplegic in a sheltered workshop where 'the aim is not to earn a living, but to occupy time.....' The inmates, all physically handicapped, organise a protest by locking themselves in the toilets, and they 'spit out their frustrations and their dreams' while the social worker bangs on the door. (Touring nationally — see other venue listings).

BRISTOL **Arnolfini Gallery** **Info 0272 299191**

One of the venues running events in this years Dance Umbrella, which combined foreign tours from Canada, France, Holland, Sweden and the USA with a selection from the 'British Contingent' of new dancers. (See other venue listings or call 01 437 2617) for general information on DU).
October 8-9 Maedee Dupres; October 14-15 Caroline Marcade and Dominique Petit; October 22-23 Charlie Moulton and Dancers; October 29-30 Bill Jones and Arnie Zane who 'comprise an exciting duo noted for humour, the use of words, athleticism and daring' in 'Valley Cottage' the final section of a ten year dance cycle.

BRIGHTON **Gardner Centre** **Info 0273 685447**

October 26,27, Charles Moulton and Company. October 29,30 Le Groupe De La Place Royale.

The Richmond (Pub) **Info 0273 506389**

Every Thursday Performance Art, New Wave, Jazz etc evenings. (Performers wanted, phone Neil Butler at above number).

CARDIFF **Chapter Arts Centre** **Info 0222 396061**

September 14-20 Atlantic Union — Broken Tales. New Cardiff based group

of performers, musicians, designers and cooks. 'Combine Performance with good food' working in the kitchen area at Chapter, also in and around outdoor structure with a nautical theme. Season starts at Chapter then moves to a Cardiff park: check for details.

September 21-26 Creeps by David Freeman. (See Birmingham listing); September 30-October 3 Diamond Age Company. The End of The World. One of Chapters resident companies. October 4-10 'Johnnie Darkie' Music-Theatre epic based on the history of blues and jazz in Cardiff's dockland. October 24 Terminal Cafe — Cabaret with waiter/ess service by The Termites. Last week in October (unconfirmed) performance by Project Voice — part of Cardiff Laboratory Theatre.

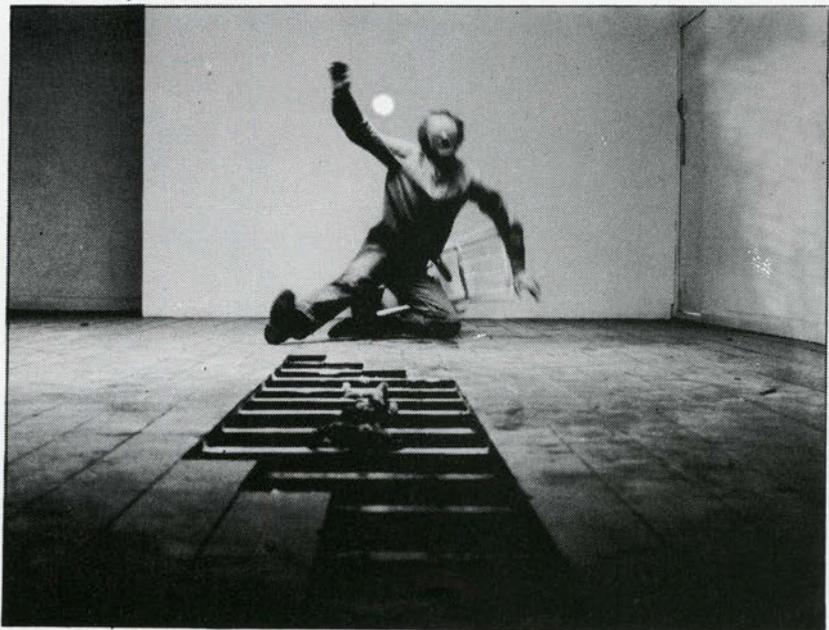
GLASGOW **Third Eye Centre** **Info 041 332 7527**

Dance Umbrella: October 9, 10 Caroline Marcade; October 14,15 Maedee Dupres; October 16,17 Charles Moulton and Dancers.

LONDON **Acme Gallery** **Info 01 240 3047**

The final performance season at the Acme Gallery before it closes down. September 4-20 Jill Bruce and Bruce Lacy. September 28-October 10 Stuart Brisley. If last months installation by Ron Hasleden is anything to go by, with

Stuart Brisley at the Acme



the lower gallery filled with scaffolding and flooded, it will be interesting to see what Stuart Brisley will undertake in his position as final marker of the nemesis of the Acme.

Action Space **Info 01 637 8270**

Cut by the Arts Council at Christmas, Action Space in its three sections (Drill Hall, Touring, and London) has fought back and will be re-opening in November. Already reopened for workshops and hire of space (phone above for details) and the Cafe, its return is very welcome for artists in London.

Air Gallery **Info 01 278 7751**

London Video Arts events (info also 01 734 7410) take place regularly at Air Gallery Tape showings, Performances and Installations. Check for details.

Almeida Theatre **Info 01 354 2091**

October 13 onwards: Shared Experience in Chekhov The Seagull (A literal translation by Lilia Jokolov); October 18 Glass Orchestra; Almeida Autumn Festival taking place over 5 week period, over 15 separate events, details unconfirmed.

Croydon Warehouse **Info 01 680 4060**

September 15-19 (lunchtimes) Vinyl Fantasy — The Doll troupe. New group

of ex-design students in highly visual performance in which large plastic forms (human and animal) circle around a sleeping dreamer.

Half Moon (Old) **Info 01 790 4000**

September 6-13 National Theatre of Brent in Zulu (see review this issue); September 10-26 Gorilla Festival — Selection of Edinburgh Fringe.

Heaven (Final Solution) **Info 01 439 1907**

Night Moves, run by the Final Solution Music promotion outfit, continues the Cabaret Futura-type format at the Heaven Disco on Monday nights. The Event Group, Eddie Maelov and Sunshine Patterson are among those regularly appearing. Also Night Vision videotapes. Heaven is under the arches beneath Charing Cross station, London.

ICA **Info 01 930 0493**

September 8-27. The ICA's own production of 'Lucky Strike' by Hrant Alianaka. September 29-October 17 New Anatomies, by the Womens Theatre Group Written by Timberlake Wertenbaker, it is about women who have impersonated men in order to do things they might not have otherwise done, set in the nineteenth century. Directed by Nancy Duguid. October 20-31 Dance Umbrella Events (unconfirmed, check for details). Also running September 2-20 — In Floodlight Brazil. Exhibition of aspects of Brazilian life and culture. Includes performance, film and poetry as well as visual art.

London Musicians Collective **Info 01 722 0456**

September 3 Club night, featuring Mike Cooper and Viv Cunningham; September 11 Evening of Video work; September 12 Closet Cabaret; September 13 Event Group; September 19-20 Movement workshops — Doug Gill; September 26 Group who perform annually called British Summertime Ends. Also a series of workshops. Phone for details.

October Gallery **Info 01 242 7367**

September 24-26 Theatre of All Possibilities. The Tin Can Man. Eclectic multi-national performance group who are known here for their interpretation of William Burroughs work 'Deconstruction of The Countdown'. The in-house company of the October Gallery, a newish venue which is gradually getting a reputation for putting on unusual and interesting events. October 5-10 Le Menaga; October 16-17 The Bald Soprano (Ionesco) by Studio 8. Also continuing in the Gallery until September 23 — exhibition of photographs of

performances, films and events in the lives of Brion Gysin and William Burroughs. (See interview in Performance no. 11.)

Oval House **Info 01 735 2786**

Dancers Dance season: October 2-4 Nin Dance Company; October 3 Jennifer Maskell; October 4 Car Park Event, with dancers, music, and transparent inflatable sculpture by Maurice Agis; October 7,8 Sue Weston and Co.; October 9,10 Fusion Dance Company; October 11 Lesley Crewdson; October 14 Claire Hayes — Is there any alternative to Willis? Abstraction — an evening of Dance by and about women; October 15,16 Sue McLennan — Oval Dances — programme of new dances including Tapping My Resources by Kirstie Simson; October 17,18 Gabby Agis and Lucy Fawcett; October 21 In Triplicate Mime; October 22,23 Still Mauve, Music, Dance and visual art group, highly recommended; October 24,25 Centre Ocean Stream; October 28,29 Transitional Identity; October 30,31 Gymnastic Dance Co. Also running upstairs: September 30-October 4, 7-11: The Dream, a ghostly comedy by Sue Jamieson. October 16-18 Dovetail Joint — Powercut; October 21-25 Thats Not It — Mothers Arms, a working title for the first showing of a new performance by Natasha Morgan and others. (See review this issue of Room); Coming soon: Jose Nava November 4-8.

Riverside Studios **Info 01 748 3354**

September 8-20 'Accounts' by Michael Wilcox, Traverse Theatre. September 23 -October 4, Palestine Theatre Company (El-Hakawati) Mahjoob Mahjoob.

Karole Armitage at Midland Group and Riverside



October 13 onwards Dance Umbrella events include Karole Armitage and Co, Eiko and Koma, Charles Moulton Company, Le Groupe de la Place Royale, Caroline Mercade and Dominic Petit, Werkcentrum Dans, Laurie Booth. Dancework, Maedee Dupres, EMMA dance, Anthony van Laast, Mantis Dance Co, Sue McLennan, Tamara Mclorg, Ballet Rambert. Charles Moulton will open the Dance Umbrella with 'Precision Ball Passing with Connectors' training volunteers to throw the balls.

Theatre Space **Info 01 836 2035**

Theatre Space has a widely varied and closely packed programme of short-run programmes, often booked at late notice, to give new work a chance. Phone above number for details.

Tricycle Theatre **Info 01 328 8628**

September 28-October 10 Creeps — Midway Enterprises (See Birmingham for details). October 12-13 Mike Westbrook Brass Band. Performance — Hotel Amigo; October 19 onwards — Blood on the Dole — Liverpool Playhouse studio.

Tate Gallery **Info 01 821 7128**

The Tate Gallery, after a long period of burying its head in the sand as regards Third Area work is finally organising a season of performances, video, and artists installations and films. September 22-October 8 Marc Chaimowicz — Installation, Tim Head — Installation, Chris Wellsby — Installation/Film; September 29,30 Partial Eclipse — Performance by Marc Chaimowicz; October 1-7 Programme of videotapes by

Kevin Atherton, Phillipa Brown, David Critchley, David Hall, Mick Hartney, Nan Hoover, Tina Keane, Tamara Krikorian, Richard Layzell and Marcelline Mori. October 7,8,10 Performance by Charlie Hooker; October 8-11 Films by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Stuart Brisley, Barry Flanagan, Lee Jaffe, Robert Morris and Bruce Naumann.

Waterloo Gallery **Info 01 720 5841**

September 23, 24, 25, 26 Station House Opera. Their previous show was "a piece where several things were happening at once in different parts of the performance space: relationships developing or disintegrating, objects moving and collapsing, people disappearing through the ceiling and coming in through side doors, in a sort of interpenetrating disorder." (Performance 10). They will be holding open workshops on September 27.

X6 (Chisendale Dance Space) **Info 01 515 4279**

X6 have now moved to Chisendale Dance Space and will have an opening event on October 3-4. October 5 — onwards full programme to be announced, including performances and workshops.

York and Albany **Info 01 249 7581**

October 14-18 Canvas Theatre in new show. October 21-25 The Camp by Griselda Gambaro.

MANCHESTER **Radiator (Various venues)** **Info 061 224 0020**

October 10 Public Spirit — The Next Step; October 17 Cliffhanger Theatre; October 20 Monstrous Regiment — The Yoga Class; October 24 Impact Theatre; November 3-4 People Show Cabaret.

NEWCASTLE **Basement Group** **Info 0632 614527**

September 25-26 (Midnight-Midnight) Alastair McLennan; September 30 Sid Smith — Performance with sound; October 3 Paul Burwell — Performance; October 10 Peter Savage — Who is speaking..... listening?; October 17 Dane Lavringa — Black and White Lie. October 21 Andy O'Hanlon — Installation and Performance; October 24 Cordelia Swann and Jim Diver — The Romantics — Tape/slide — The Mysteries; October 31 Martin Herne — Film.

Biddick Farm Arts Centre **Info 0925 466440**

September 20 Pig Jig — A harvest celebration. Action Space Mobile, Jill Bruce and Bruce Lacy.

NOTTINGHAM **Midland Group Arts Centre** **Info 0602 582636**

October 6,7,8 TNT — The Mystery. Nottingham based group whose performance combines pantomime with Keynes V. Monetarism. October 9,10 Karole Armitage and Rhys Chapman; October 14 Janet Sherburne and Michael Parsons. An illustrated concert of systems music for 2 pianos; October 17, 18 + 22,23 Hesitate and Demonstrate. October 24-25 Performance Art Platform. This important event was postponed from June because of the illness of the organiser, but is now going ahead as planned, with a number of performances by new artists and a discussion with Roland Miller, Carlyle Reedy, Jacky Lansly, Peter Godfry, Richard Strange and Jeff Nuttall. (See article by Jeff Nuttall in issue 11 'Godless Ceremony' and by Jacky Lansly in this issue 'Womanless Ceremony'.

YORK **York Arts Centre** **Info 0904 27129**

September 25-26. Obstacles. All woman performance art and music team including Jessica Loeb, Silvia Hallet, Karen Irving, Linda Martin, Kasuko Hokhi, Pamela Marre and Maria Carlota Silva.

We have tried to list as many events as possible which fall within our definition of Performance. If you feel we have left something out that should have been included, please write to us at PO Box 421 London NW1 0RF.

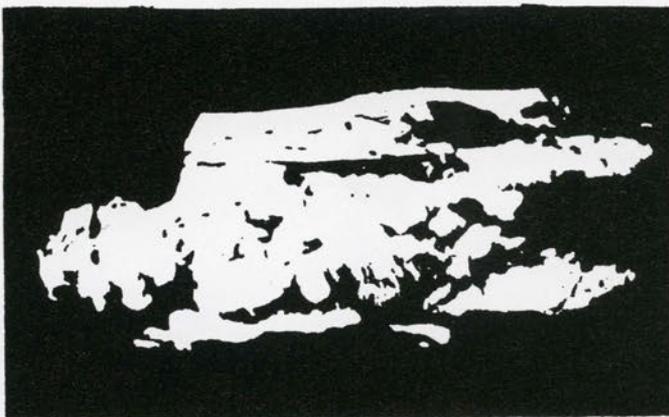
TOURING

This section is for artists and groups whose tours include events at venues not normally listed by Performance Magazine. It is particularly vital that we get listings in writing at least a month before a tour in order to be included.

Jill Bruce and Bruce Lacey **Info 0953 603262**

Bruce Lacey and Jill Bruce carry out ritual performances all over the country in outdoor locations, as well as doing installation performances in Galleries. They "collect objects from special places at special times and perform with all these in celebrations of special days, special times and special places, and in our own way relate to the energies which surround us"

September 3-19 Acme Gallery, installations and performances. September 5-6 Rougham Harvest Fair, Suffolk. Harvest performance. September 13 Barn Fair Bungay/Beccles, Suffolk. Indoor performance. September 19 Biddick Farm Arts Centre, Washington, Tyne and Wear. Harvest performance. September 23 Special place somewhere in the British Isles. Celebration of autumn equinox.



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If you would like to live and learn at Ilkley, please phone or write for details to Valerie Stead, Ilkley College, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 9RD. Telephone: (0943) 609010.

Ilkley College

Bryony Lavery Extraordinary Productions

Info 01 637 5516

Missing — a performance that experiments with the thriller format. October 5-7 Colchester Festival, Essex University. October 8-10 Swindon Wyvern Theatre. October 13-17 Liverpool Everyman Theatre. October 22-24 Battersea Arts Centre, London.

Centre Ocean Stream

Info 0962 51063

Performances of 'Forces of the Small'. Performance using visual art, music, masks and 'three dimensional makeup' which 'centres the attention on to the performers face to produce a colourful abstract character.' September 11-12 Library Theatre, Luton. September 22 Merlin Theatre, Frome, Somerset. September 23 St Austell Arts Centre, Cornwall. September 24 Beaford Centre, Devon. September 25-26 Arnolfini Gallery.

Ivor Cutler

Info 01 637 5516

Whether it is for his now near legendary appearances on the wireless in 'Monday Night at Home,' his gramophone recordings, his minor stardom on the rock scene, or simply his eccentricity, Ivor

Cutler, humourist, broadcaster, songwriter, teacher, lyricist, playwright, musician, performer, poet, cartoonist, prankster, bicyclist and cult, has long been held in special regard and affection — near reverence even — by a certain following. (Performance 9). September 25 Winchester Art College. October 2 Northampton Improvised Music Association, October 13 Goldsmiths College, London. October 30 Birmingham Arts Lab.

Mike Figgis

Info 01 254 1470

Mini version of Redheugh "...like a Rembrandt with some of the varnish worn away.... dim lighting, reddish brown or amber atmosphere, objects and people emerging or disappearing into the shadows, an occasional selective flood-lighting, all conspired to make the work of something of a masterpiece in evocation." (Performance 10). October 7-8 Third Eye Centre, Glasgow. October 9-10 Theatre Workshop, Edinburgh. October 16-17 Crawford Centre, St. Andrews.

Hesitate and Demonstrate

Info 01 274 1470

New Performance: Goodnight Ladies. Two emigre women drifting through a series of hotel rooms in unnamed

capitals of Europe are drawn unwittingly to their destination like moths towards a flame. October 16-17 Essex University, Colchester. October 22, 23 Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham. October 30-31 Old Town Hall, Hemel Hempstead.

National Theatre of Brent

Info 01 637 5516

See review in this issue of Zulu, their current touring performance. To September 6 Wildcat Theatre, Edinburgh. September 8-12 Old Half Moon, London. September 17-19 Seagull, Lowestoft. September 23-24 Middlesborough Community Centre. September 29 Cambridge ADC Theatre. October 2-3 Stafford Studio. October 5, 6, 7, Swindon Wyvern Theatre. October 8, 9, 10 Cardiff Sherman Theatre. October 13 Shaw Theatre, London. October 14 Southampton University. October 15 Winchester Town Centre. October 16 West End Theatre, Aldershot. October 21, 22 Essex University, Colchester.

People Show

Info 01 250 0842

People Show Cabaret is touring various venues in Britain, including White Cloth Hall Leeds, Cleveland College of Art. Phone for details.

