

Welcome to the first of four Adelaide Festival issues of *RealTime* Australia's only national free arts street paper. A team of writers from across Australia will offer their responses to Barrie Kosky's 1996 festival, offering something more than judgment—the experiencing of performances and visual art works, the accumulating feel and themes of the festival in the theatre and on the streets from participating and visiting artists and writers. Three special *RealTime* issues will appear on Tuesdays and Fridays. Over the next few days you'll also find *RealTime* on the Net building a comprehensive picture of the Adelaide Festival: <http://sysx.apana.org.au/realtime>

Angels Margarit, Room 1109 Hilton, Friday March 1
Batsheva Dance Company, Anaphase, Festival Theatre, Friday March 1

March 1. 5 pm. Check into our hotel. No greeting to speak of. A black felt board with the word "Welcome". Inside I replace the hotel soap with the one I've brought from home. Turn on the television.

6.00 pm Check into Room 1109 at the Hilton International. On the way here the taxi driver tells us nothing has changed in Adelaide since we were here last. Standing behind our fourth wall, a line in the carpet at the threshold of the room, we're in that no-zone of hotel rooms. Curtains drawn, this could be any time. Any city. Angels Margarit lies face down on the bed. The television leaks static. Welcome.

8.00 pm Seated in a row watching 20 seated bodies from the Batsheva Dance Company dressed as male in suits and hats pulse a flailing wave along a line, the pulse echoes in the song we suddenly realising they're singing. Dust flies. The voices sing louder. The action is repeated. Like a blow ricocheting through a line of bodies. Two contradict the pattern. One jumps backwards onto his chair, another falls to the floor. The movement is repeated until for me it transforms to film memories of bodies thrown into open graves, double-images of bodies falling backwards in ecstasy or laughter then back to Martha Graham's contraction. Life and death. End of sequence. Welcome.

6.02 pm Angels Margarit slides from her bed. She has already made her marks on the room, removed the cover from the bed and angled it to the wall. A few possessions are strewn on the floor. Her shoes, Adelaide Festival postcards (cf Meg Stuart finding the festival brochure in a pocket). She is here but definitely not at home.

8.15. The Batsheva dancers' hats all fly off in one movement. Coats next, shirts, shoes, revealing the bodies they will wear from now on (and the first of the Festival's many shaved heads) rag-strapped, stripped to essentials for crouching, back arching, bum thrusting, grinding dance with driving percussion. This is a virtuosic company. They sing complex liturgical music, play percussion (at one point making the utmost of plastic water dispensers for an apocalyptic slow march). One of the dancers has a beautiful counter-tenor voice.

6.05 Angels Margarit switches the television to surveillance. Victoria Square. Pedestrians. A man leans against a tree. Segue to closed circuit. The hotel room. In-house movie. Lee Remick watches television in a hotel room.

8.30 A line of repeated movements breaks in two, three and four places, then reassembles or fragments. This is a very musical choreography but without the complexity of William Forsyth, the 1994 Festival hit. This is a more discursive and more obviously theatrical dance relying on a more compacted energy. It oscillates between thundering apocalyptic sequences and small moments, sudden rushes of intimacy - a duet to a mournful Leonard Cohen style love song (sung by choreographer Ohan Naharin, a strong onstage presence in red dress), a solo dancer caught in projected film images. Then back to the grim massed march of time passing, sudden rushes of suited flailing bodies. All darkly lit to reveal the body in parts.

6.10 Angels spins across the floor in a pattern that might convey torment, boredom, frustration, anger or just alone-ness. Her foot scores a line in the grey velvet carpet. She throws herself into a chair, hangs her head. She has that hotel room languor down to a fine art. This alone-ness of hotel rooms is familiar but there is no expression on her face to read and thankfully, no drama.

8.45 Anaphase. A cute dance in big pants is starting to irritate me when the houselights go up. Sprung! The dancers move into the auditorium. They choose about 15 women and lead them to the stage. It's a mesmerising moment, the women in their pleated skirts shuffle dancing, caught in the light as dancers lift them into the air, fall beside them. The atmosphere is momentarily broken by laughter as dancers slide under the women's skirts. Flashback to yet another festival, Perth, when La La La Human Steps danced to the amplified heartbeat of a man in the front row. Who says nothing changes? Festivals change a city - especially this one.

6.10 To prove it Angels Margarit in one simple movement changes everything. The generic hotel room is replaced by the immediate and real world of this city. Suddenly the site is specific. The sounds of air conditioners and water pipes are replaced by the sounds of voices and traffic outside the building, electric lamps fade in the soft 6.10 sunlight on the Adelaide Hills. Welcome home.

Real Time

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RealTime

9.30 90 minutes has passed. In the light the bodies finally reveal themselves in full. A standing ovation. An audience of hundreds fragments into twos and threes and fours. We shuffle dance around each other. So what did you think? Well, I thought it would be more coherent. Great dancers. One of the best things I've ever seen. Those thighs! Definitely yoga. Too many theatrical tricks for my liking. Inconsistent. Virtuoso but I'm wondering why it didn't move me. Good in bits. What a great way to open a festival. What a great company. A hit. And from one of the women in the audience who made it to the stage. What was it like up there? You looked so tranquil. Well, they gave lots of instructions like, "I'm going to dance with you now. Put your arms on my shoulders. I'm going to lift you now."

6.15 Angels Margarit moves back to her bed, back to the beginning. The door opens and we are ushered out of the room. 1109. 10 other people take our places. In the lift we break the silence. Can I ask you what you thought? Woman in coloured skirt: "Well, I wondered what she was doing playing some kind of poor Spanish girl stuck in the Hilton Hotel". Girl in pink satin: Great! I'd like to come back in a week and see what's happened to her. Man in black: I was absorbed in it, watchful and detached. That hotel room experience had definite resonances for me. And it made me nostalgic. The anonymity of that room contrasting with that very specific sense of the Adelaide hills glowing in the sunlight. Maybe it had something to do with the height of the view but I hadn't looked at the hills that way since I was a child. The performance opened out something for me. Woman in black. Wonderful. Intimate and epic. I wonder why she didn't make more of the photographs and personal objects. Did you know Sophie Calle got herself a job as a hotel maid so she could take pictures of the way people inhabit hotel rooms. This reminded me of that idea, brought it home. What a great start to the festival. 15 minutes has passed.

Virginia Baxter

Kronos Quartet, Thebarton Theatre, 2 March 1996

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, *Mugam Sayagi*; Lee Hyla, *Howl*; Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*; with special guest artist Wu Man, pipa soloist.

Some years ago, at a previous Adelaide festival, I took much pleasure in hearing Ginsberg recite part of his poem *Howl* and outrage many in the audience with his mantric version of a line from Blake's *Songs of Innocence* whilst accompanying himself, cross-legged on the stage, on the Indian equivalent of a piano accordion. I was therefore excited at the prospect of listening to Hyla Lee's work which featured Ginsberg's recorded voice plus string quartet, especially in a milieu which has seen renewed interest in the work of Ginsberg and others from his era, such as William Burroughs. The music emphasised the desperate ecstasy of the poem rather than its dark humour and biting wit. The two forms - music and poem - seemed to wrestle with each other, each contesting to be heard. Last night the Thebarton Town Hall was about three quarters full. Unlike the previous "appearance" by Ginsberg some decade and a half ago, this time very few walked out and at the end of the challenging evening the Kronos Quartet received a deservedly tremendous ovation. Nevertheless, I was left with a certain unease.

Alongside a mood of celebration, we are used to complex, subtle and contentious debates about 'World Music' when it occurs in popular music, but far less is heard about the phenomenon in classical music. Dun Tan's *Ghost Opera*, for example, deploys innovative pastiche which includes Bach, Shakespeare and Chinese folksong. String quartet vies with Chinese pipa, Tibetan percussion, watergong basins, stones and paper, plus monk-inspired vocalisation. These are heard against a backdrop of simple hanging white sheets, all integrated by careful stage lighting. There were moments of great beauty, haunting subtlety and fascinating complexity. The pipa effortlessly wove itself into the sound of the traditional quartet, although significantly was never included spatially into the quartet but remained at a distance. For a group which extensively draws upon the language of visual performance such things are surely important.

Stage ritual is always difficult, with pretension, cliché and banality a constant threat, especially around spiritual themes. The Kronos Quartet are superb musicians but I'm less convinced about their other performance skills. I personally found the vocalisations banal and if I come across another reference to shamanism in a program note, I'll scream. With the "East" once again being set up to signify the other-worldly and the "West" as the rational, I couldn't help feeling that old dualisms were, unthinkingly, being wheeled out. In the current political/cultural climate how can we understand, for example, the brief quotation of Tibetan music in a piece composed by someone born and raised in China but now working extensively in the West? Surely even the postmodern, post MacLuhan, postcolonial, global milieu still demands we consider such questions of cultural appropriation and what they mean to western audiences?

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh's "*Mugam Sayagi*" which opened the program was an exquisite piece which effectively integrated western classical forms and traditional Arabic ones drawn from her home of Azerbaijan. Stylishly performed and sensitively interpreted it was a gentle and profound way of introducing us to the rest of the evening.

We have come to expect the unexpected from the Kronos Quartet and this program was certainly that, played with consummate artistry.

Peter Bishop

Gaudeamus, The Maly Theatre of St. Petersburg, Saturday March 2 8.00pm

More shaved heads, more boots, more astonishingly multi-skilled performers, more ecstasy, more of the radical otherness that a good festival poses. Already it's Saturday night. Already, and it's only day two, you collide with festival familiars, eyes unfocused, steps uncertain, not sure if they're up to the Maly Theatre because they haven't recovered from, fully absorbed, quietly and alone reflected on Meg Stuart's *no longer ready made*, it's still in our bodies, and we don't want to let it go. (A businessman flew in, went straight to Stuart, tense, tetchy, restless... within fifteen minutes the dis-ease flowed out of him as if absorbed into the dancer with the shaved head his face moving in a blur atop a stable signalling body). Even dinner's not an issue, perhaps a stiff drink, but do you really want to talk now? A drink? ...but you don't want to drift off in the middle of the next show; it's too easy to drift away in works where the pulse is ecstatic, the mood reverie.

Already there's a festival totality, flaming hills hoists, alien but familiar beacons, pegs attached to everything, pegs illuminated, peg brooches, pegs projected. I almost expected the clothes washing scene in Maly's *Gaudeamus*—one of its several haunting, sometimes comic courtships—to use pegs but the clothes were slapped on to their line (a lowered lighting bar) with a brute sexual passion. I suddenly recall (prompted too by revelling in the perpetual rough and tumble of Image Aigue's *Nits*) swinging in wild circles on the Hills Hoist before we were too big to do it any damage. The totality of images of the everyday (Hills Hoist) is turned surreal, even apocalyptic—children's play as life and death drives in a scarcity economy in *Nits*, the oscillating line between ecstatic (and questionable) mass life-force and individual pop-song love lament (made epic à la Nick Cave and Leonard Cohen) in Batsheva's *Anaphase*, the out of sync couples in Meg Stuart, obsessive compulsive, dystrophied, (drug-)shuddering but

compassionate, dancing with the floor to an unforgiving gravity and the mess of everyday detritus, half pain half pleasure; all of these performers in all of these companies pushing the physical limits of endurance—in Meg Stuart you can hear the pained breathing like music—in all of them bodies are tossed and propelled by interior forces, external spirits, mutual tensions and hostilities.

This is the body culture of the late twentieth century, of 'get fit', of AIDS, implants, new dreams of immortality, TV news slaughter and dismemberment, of frantic highly articulated dance and serene meditative whirling. In this festival we watch—our body empathy pushed and interrogated as we sit in theatre seats. I stood for the Whirling Dervishes, I got giddy, but I couldn't sit.

The Maly Theatre's *Gaudeamus* is not a conventional play, it's built from improvisations on a Russian novel about the torments of military conscription, and it's a big performance work, tightly choreographed, musical and magical, rooted in the social and the political but slipping recurrently into the surreal—a strong tradition in Russian literature and at its most familiar and disturbing in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. The steeply raked stage is a snow field that immediately swallows men, yields water, brass instruments, balloons. A parade ground manual of military nonsense is transformed in to the poetry of 'hoarfrost on the wire'. Young conscript bodies are crippled comically and painfully by formations and 'at attention' poses. Nothing fits, everything is other—the biggest gap is language, many of the conscripts coming from the outer reaches of the Soviet empire, without Russian, turned into clowns by linguistic trial and terror. There are Jews and Gypsies. A frustrated would-be liberal argues: "You Jews incite an anti-semitism that is utterly foreign in us". There are women whom the soldiers court and are astonished by in scenes of naive attraction, near rape, role reversal. A hair-washing scene which resolves into a physical dance struggle with the soldier pulling at the woman's long, wet rolled hair, she resisting with great (neck) strength—almost violent and all the more disturbing for being only that. Romantic visions draw on Tchaikovsky's opera of doomed love and death by duel, *Eugene Onegin*: soldier and lover duet atop a flying grand piano.

The performance's surrealism is fatalistic at every level, despite it being magical, vigorously physical, astonishingly sung and played (the whole company transforms into an expert brass band briefly). It ends with a death, a body sprawled, a bloodied face looking up and out the audience: responsibility has to be taken. (A sudden synchronicity: the only moment that demands to be taken literally in Image Aigue's *Nits*, when the small boy could be assumed to be dead at that play's end, if we are willing to see the consequences of the deprivations we've witnessed. His body is almost in the identical downstage position as the dead man's in *Gaudeamus*).

This is a passionate work of jolly manic depression, small hopes go unrealised, love is thwarted, a life is lost. The forces that control these lives are distant, therefore seemingly surreal, fateful, uncontradictable. Innocence becomes potentially evil but never consciously so. The old humanist dogma of 'these people's suffering is appalling but their resilience, their humour, blah, blah, blah', is not going to get you through this evening unless you ignore what it's about. There are moments of ecstasy and transcendence but these are undercut by a pervasive fatalism. However, the seed of individual responsibility is sown, a crack in the amorphous facade of totalitarianism.

Gaudeamus can be hard work, the volume of performance sometimes outweighing the material, the recurrent rhythms tiring and the surtitles competing with the intensely visual action for your attention—but better to have them instead of that old nonsense of 'we don't need the text because the work is about the human condition and we all know it'. This is not any old human condition, this is about new state of mind held in dark check by an old empire.

K. G.

Art Zoyd, *Nosferatu*, Thebarton Theatre, Saturday March 2

Murnau's silent film classic still amazes, with its abrupt, brisk editing, its vertiginous camera angling, its melodramatic drive and complex villain. In the late 60s I watched a poor 16mm print at the WEA in the heyday of Adelaide's intense film festival culture under the direction of Eric Williams. Now here I am at the Thebarton Theatre where I danced to The Clash, sang along with Elvis Costello, and was changed by Pina Bausch's dance hall reverie *Kontakoff*. But before that, the Thebarton Town Hall was one of the circuit of cinemas my movie crazy family would attend in the 50s twice, sometimes three times a week (and I'd go to the Saturday matinees as well)—Woodville, Hindmarsh, Kilkenny, Croydon, the Port, Semaphore, Alberton, in theatres labelled Ozone, Odeon or Odeon Star, picture palaces of the old style or smooth late deco. For some reason my movie memory at Thebarton fixes on that strange western *Ride Vacquero* with Anthony Quinn as the baddy, his dirty feet filling the screen, Howard Keel as the man who can't be a hero and Robert Taylor at his campest, an ageing angel of death in blackest black, the hired gun in decline who at last flirts with his conscience. As with *Nosferatu* it's the complex villain who visually and narratively grabs you and into whom you read as much as you desire and as much as you are repelled by. Art Zoyd's live (much of it pre-programmed presumably) through-composed response to *Nosferatu* is in the tradition of popular French techno music—heavily synthesised and sometimes fretless bass driven, its themes rooted in ostinatos-as-motifs but with a minimalist insistence that was sometimes powerful.

On the other hand, there was a wearying literalness—sound effects, sweet themes for the heroine, conventional bursts of music for moments of horror, slow builds for suspense. These merely underlined what was already at work in the film and while well within the tradition of composition for film seemed less inventive than such a film would demand. At times the effect was enervating, that shift between a pulsing insistence, sometimes percussively ham-fisted, but at least interesting and working contrapuntally, and a dull literalism. (Philip Glass' account of Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* sounds predictable on CD but apparently works well live.) The audience response was enthusiastic. I suspect many of them hadn't seen the film before and clearly many of them liked the music's popular synthesizer drive (certainly superior to the fate of the revived *Metropolis*). One viewer said immediately after the screening, "Why did they bother to play it live? They might as well have whacked it on the sound track. It was all so pre-meditated. There was no sense of spontaneous interpretation, of improvising with their material to what they were seeing". Perhaps we'll have to look to Pierre Henry and Son Re for that this week at Her Majesty's. In the meantime, Art Zoyd are not to be underrated—the best moments came with cello, violin, some rare work with voice and when they didn't seem to be simply running with the narrative.

Kelth Gallasch

'no longer ready made', Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, The Space, March 2
Dancers: Florence Augendre, David Hernandez, Benoit Lachambre, Meg Stuart

Immediately, one's own body is called by the sound of the dancers in the dark taking their places. Such a small, ordinary, and necessary thing. But this is to be the entire 'work', this internal heat, to be the body for another, for oneself. To be another body for

me, say. To watch, and watch as it acts alone, always, even when together, being duo. To watch 'no longer ready made' is to watch an unfolding that is, no matter how intense (and wanted) the movement, is unfolding that goes on, relentlessly, as unfolding, not revelation. The physicality of unfolding though and its persistence in the body as a way, a method, is unbearably wishful, desirous, devastating. That is, the body wants to know something, wants to know how to go on, renew itself. Without end.

A man stands alone in a square of light, his head whipping violently side to side. Then his whole body shivering. As if convulsed, repulsed by a memory, a memory cutting loose perhaps, something I can't know. The other three dancers wait in the background, two women and a man. The single interfering logic, a logic in flux, is 'unreadiness', this is a logic of detail. The detail that can never be 'ready made', and is never 'no longer', but always present. That's the trouble, that's the image in the body, of a stillness that creeps out of the pores.

There are moments of extreme passion in this work, of the complete and known separateness of beings, as creatures. As when a couple battle each other. The man, his hands held behind his back, pushes and kicks, and blocks every move the woman makes, yet she will not succumb. The moves are precise. Each body knows just what the other will do, emotionally, I mean. It's the exhaustion of the body one hears. Then she's alone, with his coat on, going through the pockets transferring debris from one to the other, finding nothing much. But more desperate for that, emptying 'his' life onto the stage. Nothing at all soon, just her, with her clothes. What to do with a coat. How to be watched, to be in the presence of an 'audience', with 'nothing'. And to gradually expose oneself, until overexposed, until as awkward as a coat. Until just a thing to hang other things on.

'no longer ready made' is shaped by details, some so small and funny they are almost imperceptible. Sometimes so large it takes a while to see them. It's this attention to detail that keeps one watching, as 'work' happens everywhere at once (like on the street). In each life, details congregate, and wait, and return. In the end, one man walks slowly from the back of the stage to the front, over the debris, while the others throw themselves around him (in unison), he doesn't see them, they don't see him. Then, with nowhere to go, he falls into the arms of another man, who carries him for some time, in different ways. This is a moving segment, bleak and intimate. Soon he is alone again, shaking and shivering. He is his body. A space.

Somewhere here I've lost the sequence, I'm not sure if this is the last image, or this: the two men, each gently scratching on a 'door', a surface (the set is minimal, pragmatic and evocative). No urgency, but sound, the sound of a small part of the body (the finger nails) against a border, a kind of recovery, a starting point. And one's body is called - is remembered again - by the sound of bodies in 'places' unfolding.

Linda Marie Walker

Image Aigue, *Nits*, Royalty Theatre, Saturday March 2

I see *Nits* with performers Nikki Heywood and Clare Grant. Over a meal not long after we only gradually talk about the show. Perhaps that's because it's a late lunch and *Nits* is about life in a scarcity economy, a hungry society of children in an apparently north African setting with Australian resonances, where children literally and with marvellous dexterity steal the shirts of each other's backs in an opening flurry of play, the darker meanings soon amplified by battles over a meagre water supply, struggles for bread, begging (directed at the audience and then to an anonymous force in the skies), and power struggles, albeit played as children's games. It's Peter Brook's *Ik* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but gentler and more open-ended than the specificity of either of those, something children and adults can enjoy and question without fear or blame at having inherited a destructive primal sin.

NH I was irritated by the staging. I thought this is a really difficult stage and I know it's going to stay like that for a long time and I'm not comfortable with it but I grew to like it. I liked what they did with that back wall and the rise in the land.

CG I was hooked by the very first minute before the audience had settled, by the voice. It put me off guard.

NH But I thought why do we have this child's voice speaking a very adult, political concept.

KG An adult poem, a prayer for rain. Reminding us we live in a potential scarcity economy on the edge of desert.

NH That was what I finally returned to and by the end I thought, yes I'm with you and suddenly it became incredibly poignant to see these children doing what they did, to realise these were children behaving like adults behaving like children.

KG The dressing up as kings and queens was a parody of adult behaviour but at the same time, echoed it. For a while I thought the two older Arabic boys were sort of bully boys governing the scene but they started to take turns with the others playing with power predicated on different things like adoration and gift giving. It was never taken into that *Lord of the Flies* territory—here it's more metaphorical and the violence symbolic, more powerful as with the sudden appearance of the archers.

CG And the potential for real violence. Nothing more was made of it, it wasn't underlined. It landed us everywhere and nowhere and leapt into the same dimension as the poem.

NH The director was brave with a certain amount of tediousness. Because they are quite tedious, those games of power and ownership.

KG I have problems with works that claim to be universal because most cultures are so different but in this case I felt comfortable.

NH It definitely had a North African flavour, the colours, the way the performers were dressed, but because they were dealing with limited resources that are "universal", the whole idea of reducing us to that village, seemed a great way of incorporating all the cultures represented on stage.

KG Without forcing it.

CG It's open-ended. The key boy plays dead and then at the end he is dead - presumably. Or he may just as likely stand up and do the scene again.

NH There was that moment when the dark girl stood astride the red cloth and then it was taken from under her. She had been quite maternal with the boy so the scene certainly had resonances of motherhood but also of killing children, because she was an archer. It was so strong. I can't rationalise it and I like that.

CG How about that dangerous moment when the older boy was polishing the small boy's nipples and cleaning out his navel as they prepared him for his turn as king.

NH But it was done, as always, like children, playfully pushing the navel until it hurt. It was superior to the film *The City of Lost Children*, which tried to say and do too much.

We were all impressed by the ease and fluidity of the performance and wondered how the director had managed to elicit such commitment—through attention to detail or working from scenes as broad gestures (built from improvisation), considerable reliance on her regular European and African performers? Whatever, this is powerful, seductive and disturbing performance that makes you wonder, How?

Keith Gallasch