

# RealTime

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telstra adelaide festival

3-19 march 2000

14 March 2000



Telstra



Darren Siwes, *Stand (monument)*, 1999 courtesy of the artist, *Beyond the Pale*

Inferno  
Slow Love  
lets Op Bach  
Mas Distinguidas  
Giulio Cesare  
Ensemble 415  
The Last Child...Flight  
of the Swallows  
New Moves workshop  
Plenty Festival  
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Warm Filters  
Verve - the other writing  
98.4% dna  
Soviet and Beyond  
Biomachines  
Night and Dreams  
Light House

The Archer mega-festival rolls richly and inexorably on, peaking again after *Writing to Vermeer*, this time with Les Ballets C de la B's *Iets Op Bach* and now with greater audience unanimity as devotees from 1998's *La Tristeza Complice*, and the newly converted, embrace this remarkable hybrid of the 'high and low' arts in a work about community. Appropriately, at the same time, the relationship between community and art in Australia became the raw material for angry debate in a lunchtime forum (see Virginia Baxter, *Linking out*, page 2; Jeremy Eccles, *Plenty for everyone*, page 7) and elsewhere. Judging by the size of audiences and the faces you see over and over, people are, as Archer hoped they would be, trying out shows, taking a punt, relying on faith in Archer and a sense of adventure. *Giulio Cesare* opened to rapturous if astonished applause. On the second night, the audience booed. On the third, they were appreciative if bemused. As with *The Ecstatic Bible*, there were those who left when the adventure became too strange.

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My own impulse to exit is felt at the Elision new music ensemble's account of John Rodger's *Inferno*, beautifully staged in a huge wharf shed in Port Adelaide, the audience in a circle within the orchestra, as if in one of Dante's rings of Hell. The music isn't alien, in fact it is an utterly familiar language, but its sheer relentlessness and decibel power is simply overpowering. I stick it out and am rewarded with a sublime, long conclusion to the work, a descent into another ring of Hell (is it the Tenth Circle, the frozen lake of Cocytus holding the souls of Traitors?) where the flautist and oboist play instruments made from ice with incredible clarity, sustaining their notes until the last drip, the last break (and not Dante's two bodies frozen together, one gnawing the head of another). Unlike some other Elision installations, here the audience is put in concert mode. Rather than exit, I begin to think I'd like to have a beer, share a joint, wander about the massive space, get some distance...but that wouldn't be Hell, would it? A friend who comes with me loves the first half (though critical of Rodger's eclecticism) and finds the cooling down shapeless. That's what adventures are like, rarely the same for any two people, especially on such strange terrain. I wouldn't have missed *Inferno*, even though I find its theatricality too restrained.

Just before going to press, I managed to catch theaterMalpertuis and Mob Production's *Slow Love*, written by Richard Murphet. Close on the heels of *Writing to Vermeer*, here is another sophisticated multimedia venture. This classic Australian theatre work

from 1983 remains as innovative as ever with its onstage jump cuts, edits, action replays and rich cinematographic colourings. Stevie Wishart's live mix of song and sound is an impressive counter-text—as in a Godard movie it tells its own stories and cuts in and out of the action, sometimes providing unusual romantic movie soundtracks using her own voice, sometimes the alien otherness of a computer talking and electronic pulsings. There are narratives in *Slow Love*, many of them, generated by the 4 virtuosic performers as desire spreads like a virus, creating endlessly new permutations of the iconic romantic couple in flirtation, jealousy, copulation, violence, longing, loss and despair. Just as Bill Seaman, the media artist (*Red Dice* in *Verve*, Contemporary Art Centre SA), generates a world from 'recombinant poetics', so do Murphet and director Boris Kelly create a reverie of apparently endless combinations in a plexiglass apartment where transparent walls and screens heighten the sense of intimacy, invasion and romantic projection. More about *Slow Love* in RealTime#4.

In the meantime, the festival audience talks on into the night on the upper (The Club, massages, haircuts and the tiniest puppet show on earth) and lower plazas, celebrating and debating what they've seen and how it's all adding up, urgent to know what they should take a punt on. Over the last few festivals the quotient of talk seems to have increased exponentially into a giant talkfest in dialogue with some remarkable art. **KG**

## Linking out

### Virginia Baxter

Festival Forums: Politics and Art—inspirer, inhibitor or accelerator, March 9; Cutting Edge—where community art is taking us, March 10

*Essential Truths Readily to Hand*  
Festival Foyer

*Verve: the New Writing*  
Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, March 9

*Iets Op Bach*  
Les Ballets C de la B  
Festival Theatre, March 10

*Mas Distinguidas*  
La Ribot  
The Space, March 8

By all accounts, instead of a bunny some dusty roadkill was let out of the hat in the discussion of community art at the Festival Forum thanks to Scott Rankin (*Big hArt works*) and Malcolm McKinnon (*Essential Truths Readily to Hand*) taking a few blind punches at "arts wankers". This brought on

the depressingly tired argument about "elite" art versus the "art of the people." A paragraph from an essay on Bill Seaman's work was thrown to the crowd and duly savaged. To his credit, chair Michael Cathcart gave right of reply to Seaman who with customary courtesy and good sense made a simple plea for plurality. Harley Stumm from Urban Theatre Projects in Western Sydney urged more vehemently for community artists to embrace the new or lose touch altogether with their communities. Rumour has it that this speech earned Harley a post-forum hug from Peter Sellars.

I've seen no more affecting depiction of community than in the new work by Les Ballet C de la B, *Iets Op Bach*. On behalf of the artists Robyn Archer dedicated the opening night performance to the late Dame Roma Mitchell who had expressed a strong desire to see this work. This is the company who rattled and seduced us at the last festival with *La Tristeza Complice*. In *Iets Op Bach* we observe a community in all its poignancy and resilience. The work mixes contemporary dance, performance and circus tricks and by juxtaposition returns the music of Bach to "the people". The classical music is ignored, silently contemplated and occasionally blissfully danced to. It comforts and stirs. This work about people living on the edge of heaven

and hell, is in turn created from the observations and experiences of a close community of performers working with director Alain Platel. To discern the matter of this work we watch the body in its full stretch, length, see its capacity for endurance, balance, watchfulness, its peripheral consciousness. We observe edginess alongside indulgence, madness and serenity, an adolescent observer watches an adult exhibitionist. A small child wanders the stage and at one time or another is calmly attended to by all the cast.

Unlike the transient population of *La Tristeza*, in *Iets Op Bach* people who live in one place gather in communal space, the roof of their apartment block. Throughout this work we hear the burble of human talk, the little girl cries, women shout slogans, musicians chat between sets. An air-conditioning duct interrupts the action and the glorious renditions of Bach by musicians and singers. There are arguments, outbursts, groups synch into choreography, some mimic moves for a time, then abandon them. What slowly unfolds is the coherence that emerges despite difference and just as often because of it. There's no resolution and more catharsis than a fireworks night. In one sequence a girl dressed in white takes confidently to the stage and then discovers she's menstruating, there's blood all over her dress. At first she's embar-



rassed then defiant, then she wildly flaunts her condition. The others ignore her, a couple try to hide her, to help her remove the soiled clothes eventually torn from her while a man shouts "Dirty bitch." Like many other sequences in the work this one extends long past our sense of predictable stage time. It never really finishes; there's no line between that and the next when something equally captivating happens. This a sublime hybrid performance. "It was worth being alive to see it," said a friend.

As I watch La Ribot performing her *Mas Distinguidas*, I'm thinking about the 25 Years of Performance Art Conference at Sydney's Performance Space in 1995, in which Noel Sheridan and Mike Parr had hissy fits about the incursion into the pure form of performance art by people with more theatrical intentions. I suspect La Ribot would turn their ears pink. I've heard her referred to as (finally!) a performance artist with a sense of humour (yeh, yeh). But it's not that simple. Though she clearly knows her way around a port de bras (high art/classical dance) her pieces eschew expertise (postmodern performance) or obvious displays of artfulness (performance art). Performing naked with only a little dye for comfort (performance art) she sometimes looks like Buster Keaton (pop culture/high art) but without the virtuosity (performance art); one minute she's in an intimate relationship with the audience, timing us as we successfully achieve one minute of reflection, contemplation, meditation and silence in real time (contemporary performance). "Very well done" she says. Next she is a demonstration model attempting a set of difficult instructions in her see-through suit or a grunge angel with foam rubber wings running on the spot (theatre). La Ribot also casts aside purist notions of ephemerality. In a nifty model of artistic enterprise she has hit upon the idea of selling her distinguished performances (commercial artist). Peter Sellars says money is like sausage, you shouldn't spend too much time thinking about where it comes from, but for La Ribot her distinguished proprietors propel the work and are free to attend any performance anywhere in the world. In the end it's the brave presence of this artist shifting across a minefield of definitions that holds my attention during her performance. She reminds me of an exotic bird caught inside the confines of the Space looking for a way to get out.

Another day, another forum on community and Robyn Archer deflects a poison dart from Michael Cathcart about artists as people in black who only talk to each other and refer to



Bronwyn Wright, *Swamp Dynamics, Essential Truths Readily to Hand*

French theory. She believes in finding ways to take difficult or challenging work to the community. However, for her it is just as important for artists to talk to one another—it makes for more and maybe better art. The Adelaide Festival is, after all, a major meeting place for a community of artists. After the forum I talk to a performer/writer/community arts worker who tells me about the man who came up to her after a performance and told her he had a polaroid of her vagina on his notice board. She did vagina pieces for a while she said. He wanted her to autograph it: "To Eddie". This festival, she's signed up for a workshop at the Playwrights Conference. Next week she'll be

talking about working with kids at risk in her community project in Western Sydney.

Art is about "not knowing," says Howard Barker; about "living the new life," says Sue Thomas, who runs an online community writing project (trAce) at Nottingham University (Verve Forum). Bill Seaman "encourages us to think beyond what we know." For photographer Bronwyn Wright, (*Essential Truths Readily to Hand*) "Each mark is layed over by others. My marks cross bird tracks, marks made by water, the incised paw marks of my dogs and the bare footprints of Maningrida women who walk

beyond the lines of mangroves in search of crabs. Their marks will cross mine."

In the spirit of recombination I offer my own little contribution to community improvement. What say we re-program all the poker machines along the lines of Bill Seaman's world generator. Oranges and lemons will be replaced by small fragments from Mallarmé and Gregory Ulmer and cryptic DVD clips from Les Ballets C de la B. With all the time in the world punters become posers (pokie users) who set about mapping the patterns of human thought. Each machine will be linked to every other one in the room and jackpots will go to La Ribot to create more and more of her distinguished pieces.

## It all depends

**Maryanne Lynch**

*Mas Distinguidas*

(*Most Distinguished Pieces*)

La Ribot

Space Theatre, March 8

*Mas Distinguidas* is a series of leftover moments, those spaces before and after the main event. Like the Fluxus movement, Spanish performance artist La Ribot focuses on the incidental or the inconclusive but only to show us that it all depends. The language is feminist and so is the message; in the style of a 1960s happening.

We begin in the Space Theatre with lights up and fragments of a constructed female identity strewn around the floor. La Ribot herself lies naked, back to audience, rolling a circular mirror back and forth. We glimpse her breasts, her flame-red pudenda; we view her neutered bony flanks. (It all depends.) And so: she rolls the mirror away, just as she will fling, chuck, throw away each of these constructions once she has emptied them of what little meaning she allows them in the first place.

And so: La Ribot polaroids her sex and covers it up with the photos. And so: La Ribot dances a Latino dance, colouring herself in at the same time. And so: La Ribot follows the instructions on how to make a woman into a plastic suit, or the other way round. And so: La Ribot is the passive partner in an act of intercourse with a wooden fold-up chair. And so: La Ribot sets the stage with many entrances and exits in order to execute one great OH! And so: And so: And so? While some women in the audience have been very excited about the show, the two

women who were my companions and myself aren't so keen. Perhaps it's a case of seen-it-all-before, including work from the excellent Melbourne performance artist Linda Sproul (to take just one example); perhaps this work made up of lots of little pieces has lost something in the translation from what we suspected were its beginnings in a club or a gallery; perhaps we are just being feminist snobs. I don't know; but I had the same feeling watching *Skin* (Crying in Public Places)—the context seems 'wrong', but wrong can easily become edgy, here it seemed to simply falls flat. It all depends, I guess.

What I (and others) did find interesting is the program note about the basis of the work being "the visual projection of the idea prompting the body to move." On this reading the very flimsiness of each 'distinguished piece', against the grandeur of this title, mimics the flickering moment when meaning is constructed and simultaneously revealed as such. The violently casual discarding of each 'work' once completed by La Ribot amounts to a reminder that even as social constructs can be used against women, they are just that. A thumb on nose, fingers wriggling action. It all depends!

## Contemporary charm

**Diana Weekes**

Concert 3

Ensemble 415

Town Hall, March 11

Whether undecided about the merits of Ensemble 415 (perhaps especially in light of their association with the ASO) or simply lured by other events, those who stayed away in droves from the Swiss Contemporary Music concert may have unwittingly made an error of judgement. This turns out to be an intimate affair involving just 3 musicians: Chiara Banchini (violin), Kathy Gohl (baroque cello) and Conrad Steinmann (recorders). Kathy Gohl suggests that we should all move forward, because they intend to play "some very soft sounds". I'm glad I do, because it turns out to be a sort of sound circus and I am the kid in the front row.

The contemporary works are tastefully sandwiched between 2 pairs of movements from Mozart's *Divertimento III*, KV 439b arranged for "flageolet" (a classical recorder, in this case made by Fred Morgan), violin and cello. It is simply a mark of Mozart's magic, that, even in this spare and unusual scoring, the musical substance is completely satisfying.

From the outset there is a consensus on consistency of phrasing, articulation and interchange of voices; despite some slightly ragged moments they are performances in which risk-taking pays off.

In between come the real surprises. Two pieces by Roland Moser, one for alto recorder and one for subharmonic flute and cello, give us the first glimpse of Conrad Steinmann's phenomenal ability to produce sounds which totally bely the instruments on which he is performing (8 recorders for this concert). Microtonal (intentional, I mean) is difficult on a wind instrument, but microtonal as in perfect glissandi over major thirds and even fourths is really quite spectacular. Add to these pure flute sounds the pungent attack of percussive tonguing through an instrument built for resonance and tonal durations perfectly matched by the cello's finger-slapping staccato, and you have new dimensions.

Steinmann's own pieces are particularly impressive. *Netz* (1989) for subharmonic flute exploits the instrument's capacity to sound long, expressive notes unwavering in pitch in contrast to fleeting sounds of minute duration and less than minimal volume. In *SST* (from Buchstaben, 1998) the soprano recorder takes off on an expansive adventure with cello harmonics which leave us gaping at the precision of intonation, and a wide variety of fork fingering techniques account for as many different complex sonorities which nevertheless meld in intention. *Capital Letters FM* (a farewell to Frederick Morgan, 1999) for solo recorders—premiered at this concert—comprises 2 sections of completely different rhythmic texture, one a simple play on the fourth and tritone (C - F - B) in contrasting duration and emphasis, the other a florid exploration of the first 6 notes of the major scale using such rapid differentiation in dynamics to suggest that we are actually hearing 2 instruments at once.

In comparison, Mischa Käser's *5 Bagatellen* (1994) for violoncello (with surreptitious vocals) pales into insignificance. They appear as miniature surprise packages containing cheap trinkets of the 1970s avant-garde variety, whereas Steinmann's works reveal a forceful intensity of musical purpose, a commitment to large structures and organic aestheticism. I have always said that the best recorder playing I have ever heard was from Frederick Morgan, way back in 1975. This concert is a very fitting tribute to one of the world's greatest instrument makers from one of his most devoted fans.

## Oratory and suicide

Keith Gallasch

Giulio Cesare

Societas Raffaello Sanzio

Playhouse, March 9

This is a work of great beauty and ugliness, of simplicity and complexity at once. Like The Needcompany's *Snakesong Trilogy* in the 1998 Festival, it creates a theatre that repels some and embraces many with its mix of the literal and the mysterious, like the Duchamp and Magritte it admires. It is massively a work of visual art, and aural art, where one's attention is not always on the actor or what is to happen next, but on light, or sound, or a piece of ordinary furniture that suddenly behaves, or the art of the taxidermist. It can require the patience of the gallery-goer, it can make time stand almost still.

### Oratory

But it is still a play. A play about language and power, about Brutus and Cassius, the key plotters in the assassination of Julius Caesar whose tyranny threatened the democratic dimensions of the Republic of Rome. It is, as director Romeo Castellucci explains in his program note, a play about rhetoric and oratory, as is Shakespeare's, but here in other ways. When Brutus addresses the crowd, justifying the murder of Caesar, he places himself safely within a revolving sculpture. He has with him a gas bottle from which he pumps helium into his mouth yielding a high pitched voice. Each time the pitch drops he pumps more gas. He gives himself a voice that will grab attention, that will reach out to the crowd, but he is short on rhetoric, not convincing however true to his convictions. Soon he sounds like an angry Donald Duck. A loud duck soundtrack takes over and Brutus collapses; it is the beginning of the end for him.

Antonius (Mark Antony) enters. He is a man without a voice, but he does have rhetoric and determination. The performer (and Antonius) speaks through a perforation in his neck. We hear his speech, barely vocalised, we hear his breathing. Brutus inhales to speak. Antonius exhales. Antonius wins the day, his sustained speech demanding our attention, our curiosity, as he stands atop a marble plinth labelled ARS, as he comes to the forestage before the curtain, creating the space he needs, and the intimacy without ever raising his voice. Brutus cannot step outside of the revolving sculpture, all he does is raise his



Giovanni Rossetti, *Giulio Cesare*

voice until it becomes unintelligible duck rant.

### Subjectivity

This is a play about Brutus and Cassius, especially Brutus whose doubts about Caesar allow him to be prompted to murder by that 'lean and hungry man' Cassius. We watch the seduction, the sound of speeding trains rushing across the space (displacing us between Ancient Rome and when—the 1940s?), dogs barking, distant screams, and sudden, densely compacted bursts of crowd noise, like gunshots as Caesar is hailed by the populace. Our first look at Caesar is a shock—he's a little old man, no signs of power, only helplessness

and impotency, hardly the tyrant Brutus has conjured up.

Caesar holds a gun limply by his side. Brutus takes it gently from him, removes his red gown, bathes him with water from a small tub to the sound of flies buzzing as if over decaying meat. Caesar is naked and vulnerable, his hair is combed. Brutus holds a long wig to the side of his head, bends down, and, with no particular care, imitates Mary drying the feet of Jesus with her hair. The immobile dictator accepts this impassively. Can this be a tyrant? He croaks, 'Veni, vidi, vici.'

Brutus and Cassius murder Caesar. The way they do it evokes Swift's Lilliputians captur-



ing Gulliver. There is no resistance. They tie him with thin ropes, ease him gently almost lovingly, cushioning his head, as they bind him to the floor. Then the coup de grace: they sprinkle him with confetti. He is dead. They have acted honourably; this is not a matter of violence or blood spilled.

When Brutus knows he is failing, the sword he holds bleeds. Astonished, he wipes the blood across his face. The act has caught up with him. Later, before he leaves the crowd, Antonius finds Caesar's blood and with a sponge, wipes it across his face. He knows that Caesar's death is to his advantage, that he is quietly complicitous. He points to the word ARS as he leaves.

Act One is finished. I have not written yet about the battering ram that thrusts at the audience from behind the curtain, nor the stage/Rome as a giant translucent, golden box which comes apart—curtains ripped down—as the Republic begins to falter, nor Cicero the fat-man-oracle like something out of Fellini's *Satyricon*, or Caesar's arrival coloured like a Caravaggio...

#### Suicide

In Howard Barker's *The Ecstatic Bible*, Varilio tries to kill himself many times without success, at one point with an ugly device on which he has hung himself upside down. In *Giulio Cesare*, Act 2 is about Brutus and Cassius in defeat. The stage is a vast wreck of metal and mess and stuffed animals, and flickering oxy-acetylene and the sweep of searchlights, and the drone of war. Brutus and Cassius are now played by women, Cassius by someone who looks distinctly anorexic, lean and (not) hungry. Compared with Act 1 and its spare telling of the murder of Caesar and its immediate consequences, Act 2 is a long, visual reverie, initiated by the battering ram pointing down, crashing into the earth, off kilter.

In defeat, Cassius dies and Brutus tries to suicide. In Shakespeare's play Brutus has to ask a servant to hold the sword so that he can fall onto it. Here, the servant is unwilling. Another character enters, persuades the servant to do it, to him. The servant shoots this character, but then he runs away. Brutus is left alone, unable to kill himself. The end. Except that Cassius rises up, but as the actress, not as Cassius, and calls the actress playing Brutus away ("it's beautiful here")...they begin to exit. That's about something else (see Castelluci's program note), but what sticks is Brutus being unable to do the honourable thing, his defeat is total. He/she bows, follows 'Cassius', the play ends.

*Giulio Cesare* is an unforgettable experience, my simple readings of it the first stage of a continuing fascination, the stage images indelibly etched into my memory for instant retrieval. Someone said to me, "This is anti-theatre. I can take love-hate, but not hate-hate." For me, like *Jets Op Bach*, *Giulio Cesare* is a marvellous hybrid, demanding in very different ways, a challenge to theatre but unable to live without it.

## The theatre of the real body

### Suzanne Spinner

#### *Giulio Cesare*

#### Optima Playhouse

March 11

The strength and power of *Giulio Cesare* by Societas Raffaello Sanzio derives from its combination of visual wit and a repertoire of art quotations creating powerful and splendid visual tableaux. And then there are the performers—they seem quintessentially "Italian" or Baroquely Italianate in that Felliniesque way. They are not trained actors but local people from the area where Romeo Castelluci works. However, they have been schooled in performance and they bring an extraordinary quality of vivid connectedness with the audience and in their relation to the words, they speak. In actorly parlance the aim is always to be centred; in the moment and unbound by ego. Professional actors spend years learning this art. These people simply and poetically manifest the self—they are there, they connect with you and the words and they connect the words to you even though it's another language.

The epiphany for me in this performance is Mark Antony's absurdly familiar speech—"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." How can that speech ever rise above rhetoric? Well here it does. Not by deconstructing or fiddling with the text in any way but by casting a performer with a severely damaged voicebox whose desire to speak, to utter, is so strong—it must be, it has to overcome an enormous obstacle—that the meaning that derives from the speech is crystal clear. It made me think of babies learning to speak, when they make what linguists call pre-speech or babble. If you are attentive (and as a parent you are biologically wired to be), you know what they are saying—not even what they are trying to say, but really what they are expressing in all its richness of sound, emotion, inflection and intention.

This speech and its accompanying impediment is prefigured in the opening sequence when another performer inserts a tiny video camera down his throat and as he speaks we watch the image of his animated vocal chords on a large screen above him. Initially it seems merely a bizarrely intriguing thing to put on stage but it is absolutely essential in giving another perspective on speech and rhetoric—it begs the question of where speech comes from, and shows viscerally the meaning ever present and inseparable from the physical act of speaking.

There are other players whose performances are equally but differently emblematic and all are propelled by extremes of physicality that can be seen as particulars—the man without a voice, the man with too much body, the woman with too little body, the man with too little life left—yet they are not generic but utterly individual and affecting. Again, contemporary theatre "rhetoric" frequently speaks or the performing or performative body—these performers make that idea concrete rather than abstract. Their bodyness is the site that is totally present—no amount of "acting" can mask or transform it. If you don't or can't as an audience confront and see these bodies first, you cannot see anything. The body *is* the structure of the performance.

## Life in a nutshell

### Diana Weekes

#### *Writing to Vermeer*

Festival Theatre, March 2-7

#### *The Last Child...Flight of the Swallows*

#### Doppio Para//elo

The Cargo Club, March 9

*Writing to Vermeer* and *The Last Child* are events of an entirely different nature, one an \$11 million big-toys-for-big-boys operatic extravaganza, years in the making, the other a modest, small-scale performance installation in an intimate club setting. Nevertheless they share more than a few artistic features: texts functioning mainly as catalysts for visual or musical expansion, screened textual displays, sometimes doubled at floor level, dual scores combining amplified acoustic and electronic music, choreographed movement, pervasive natural elements (water, sand) and women in charge of the dramatic narrative.

*The Last Child* is loud, lusty, in-your-face but at the same time gentle, generous and above all honest. Linda Marie Walker's text, a "writing for the air", is language "released from imposed intention and determined meaning"; vulnerable, intimate and very, very personal. The meaning of life, impossible to capture in words ("nothing said is ever true") is here encapsulated in the raw energy and individual involvement of the vocal narrator, musicians and DJ, their intensely passionate desire to communicate knowledge, and their final realisation that truth is non-transferrable. ("You never remember, she begins to mumble, none of us carry the same kind of flower.")

Claudio Pompili's score is a compilation and layering of acid funk, solid baroque, high romanticism, Spanish and Latin modes, minimalist moments, folkly flavours and just jazz, all ardently adherent to (and simultaneously commenting on) the emotional content of the text. The performers, Deanna Djuric (keyboard), Julian Ferraretto and Belinda Gehlert (violins), Kory Horwood (bass), Thom Mann (percussion) and Dave Palmer (trombone) delivers the goods with the strict discipline of serious chamber music, the united abandon of good jazz and—towards the end—the intensity of tribal passion. Inspired improvisation, collaborative co-existence. The DJ's role is less accessible, but with performers wide-spread throughout the available space it is impossible to get a good perspective on everything. Life's like that. Richard Seidel provides subtle realization of the swallow as lyrical leit-motif, a role which he may well expand as the season continues.

In this mini-spectacular, 3 drawers suspended in mid-air centre stage become increasingly convincing as a receptacle of human experience—ours. At once symbolic of what is hidden away yet openly suggesting revisitation, they eventually take on a life of their own. Vocalist Libby Donovan intuitively deals out vibrant interpretations of both the narrative and her role as narrator, but unfortunately the text is not always audible, and it should be. With balance problems rectified and a more expansive use of personal space by individual performers, this could be one of the festival's more innovative creations. After all, what lies at the very heart of the matter cannot, of necessity, be very big.

## Tracking texts

### Gail Priest

#### *The Last Child...Flight of the Swallows*

#### Doppio Para//elo

#### The Cargo Club, March 9

If more concerts had this level of performance I would be overjoyed. Doppio have created an elegant style that falls between cabaret, performance and concert. The design is beautiful; a corridor of untouched sand, which leaves trails of evidence; 3 suspended drawers reminiscent of Dali; the musicians scattered around the space. As a performance, it lacks variation in colours and energy—the progression of the text being incomprehensible due to sound mixing difficulties. We get glimpses of poetic phrases and can see the dramatic intensity of the words. We know there is a journey yet we cannot seem to join it. Libby Donovan gives a performance so epic and engaging that I found it hard to pull my gaze away and watch the dancer. There are some beautiful moments where she purrs and growls the text however she is limited in the use of her range, choosing to stay in her comfort zone, improvising along similar themes for too long. These textures need to be expanded. The music, composed by Claudio Pompili, has an exotic and dramatic force, ever present but sometimes lying low, moving from chaotic structures to come together in hunks of electric energy. My biggest dilemma is the DJ Stephen Dissisto who is quite simply in a different performance. There is one moment where he provides some atmospherics that are in keeping with the piece but the rest of the time his beats are completely disconnected—I thought someone had forgotten to turn off a stereo. There is certainly a place for experimentation between acoustic and electro performers but I don't believe the place was made for him in this work. The performance is both bewildering and exciting. It is certainly an interesting form, but more needs to be done to define and balance the elements within it.

## Interdependents

### Erin Brannigan

#### *New Moves Australia*

#### Choreographic Laboratory

#### ADT Studios, March 9

Workshop facilitator Tedd Senmon Robinson (Canada) addresses the large crowd in the ADT foyer, attempting to dispel the

idea that something is going to be 'presented' to us. We should proceed in small numbers into the studio space and briefly observe the process that is, and has been, taking place for the past 2 weeks. Consequently the entire crowd squeezes in and gossips amongst themselves while the choreographers attempt to get on with their work. The lines between invitation, transgression and the sharing of knowledge are very problematic here.

Trying to hear above the 'audience' babble to gather clues as to what is going on, it becomes clear (as mud) that the crowd doesn't, as a whole, consider anything to be happening. When music is played to assist one of the 3 groups working in the space, there is silence and anticipation...now they are starting. Maybe, as someone said to me afterwards, there needed to be more of a response to the crowd's curiosity—we should've been taken through it by the participants. Robinson did creep through the crowd offering enlightenment to those within earshot. And perhaps the crowd's obvious interest did need to be addressed more directly. But it was made clear that we were meant to be 'invisible' guests and that was, to a certain extent, enough for me.

So what did I see? With a clue from Robinson I distinguished 3 groups working very differently. One group including Rosalind Crisp, Brian Lucas and John Utans take time to come together, finally working in twos, watching each other, commenting. The amount of talking going on is a good reminder of the importance of opportunities for so called 'independent' choreographers to become a little more inter-dependent. Sometimes the effort to communicate and negotiate becomes intensely physical, the choreographers using their very capable bodies to get their point across. So how do you talk about dance and movement, that which continually works against structured 'language'? What on earth are they saying? Why won't the crowd shut up and listen?

Within this group, the extremely tall Lucas and a small female dancer create something beautiful, and all the more so because it's probably a fleeting point of contact. She enters into what he has been doing for a while and his gasping, palpitating movements are directed elsewhere, encompassing another. She hugs his legs down low as he continues above. Crisp and Utans look great together, as though they've been dancing with each other for years.

Bernadette Walong's group in the centre,

which also includes Tuula Roppola, are getting somewhere, accumulating material in a way I didn't expect. I can't keep from watching Walong who is fascinating, reworking a sequence that reaches hesitatingly back behind her, and then Roppola falls in behind her like a pale shadow. Then Walong is off, flinging around with one of the Scottish dancers, a big bloke who she jumps on and who, in return, man-handles her. This looks like fun... Very close by Elizabeth Cameron Dalman and company work at an entirely different pace, worlds away from the other 2 groups. They caress, follow, engage and part, look like they are sleep-walking amidst all this racket. I slip out during a lull, as if it's interval.

## Plenty for everyone

*Jeremy Eccles*

Plenty Festival  
Streaky Bay, Eyre Peninsula  
March 4

I had cynically jumped to the conclusion that the sudden enthusiasm for diversifying Australia's main city festivals—Brisbane and Perth as well as Adelaide—was not unrelated to post-Hansonism and the way the country had turned on Jeff in Victoria. I'd also been doubtful whether it was desirable to diminish one whit the essential concentration of the urban events; or whether it was possible to drop a scrap of festival onto a country town without it feeling like tokenism anyway.

I'd reckoned without the combination of Robyn Archer—who genuinely wanted country participation—and the extraordinary organising capacity of Country Arts SA (which ought to be a model for other States' comparable bodies), and the people of Streaky Bay.

The Streakers were the second of 4 communities identified by Gay Bilson as places where her successful 1998 Festival *Loaves & Fishes* event could be transported and expanded. Penneshaw, Burra and Beachport were the others. Delicious food in hand thrown bowls was only the starting point—or rather the culmination of activities which included performances by main festival artists and a whole host of events the community wanted to do for itself. At noon, for instance, the town tots were on their bikes as pirates and mermaids, sharks and octopi—parading proudly through streets closed down for them.

By one, their elders were grasping champagne

glasses at the opening of the inaugural Blanchebald Portrait Prize (Streaky is part of the bigger Blanche Bay). Forty-one entries came from all round the Eyre Peninsula, an impressive debut for a tricky artform. Another hour and the more robust senior cits were strutting their stuff on the newly built Jetty Platform Stage wearing the bathing costumes of their youth. All the while, District Council CEO, David, was wandering benignly around his temporarily decorated town rubbing his hands at the full hotels and fun that resulted from persuading an estimated 500 visitors to "Take Another Day"—detouring from the Port Augusta/Ceduna road.

Sunset on Slidy Beach was another thing. A gorgeous silver and white procession brought 1500 bowl buyers ceremonially down to the westerling sand (yes—SA has a West coast, and Streaky has a North-facing pier!) to be greeted by flautist Conrad Steinman standing proud in a fair gale on the good (but beached) ship Valkyrie; by crab-cakes to die for, and slightly warmed Streaky Bay oysters. The main course was barbecued local lamb (with hommus and an acid drop of preserved lemon coulis) eaten in the salty dark with a hundred new friends to the complex but authentic strains of the Habibis from Little Athens, Victoria.

"Was it all necessary?" I speculated with Carla Hartog from Country Arts SA, as we tottered back up to town. We'd both been inspired by the Sellars nostrum the previous day. No, it wasn't art that was going to change the way the world thinks, we accepted. But it was a necessary event in terms of the drought-ridden Eyre Peninsula—helping it to play and feel good about life for a change; establishing the Artsup portraiture club and building the Jetty stage; encouraging the town kids and visiting Aboriginal kids from Ceduna in the idea that art and parties go together; and in hammering home the economic benefits of cultural tourism once again.

As well as managing the four Plenty events, a remote Pitjatjanjara Lands concert, tours by 6 festival groups and one art exhibition, Country Arts SA has a fascinating show in its Port Adelaide HQ. With work by regional artists from SA and Malaysia, catch yourself wondering which is which before it heads off to Kapunda, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu over the next 2 years. And also consider the words of Robyn Archer (again), prefacing last year's brilliant Waterworks project. "What was once cordoned off into a needy ghetto called

Community Arts has gradually started to become the stuff with which all artists are concerned. The stories at the fringes are the ones that seem most connected to the dynamics of a changing world."

## Got to be Black

*Suzanne Spinner*

*Beyond the Pale*  
Art Gallery of SA, March 4 - April 16

Unquestionably, Indigenous art occupies the prominent position in this festival. There are 3 core exhibitions centrestage and numerous other exhibitions. The opening of the Aboriginal Cultures Gallery at the SA Museum is the fulcrum and next door at the Art Gallery of SA, *Beyond the Pale* the Adelaide Biennial, is exclusively devoted to the work of contemporary Indigenous artists. To complement these two, *From Appreciation to Appropriation* at Flinders University Museum Gallery, fosters debate across the problematic use of Indigenous imagery and identity. Not only is Indigenous art foregrounded, it's also contextualised.

*Beyond the Pale* is the flash show. It has the big white space, the biggest catalogue and some of the best examples of Indigenous artists working now. Curated by Brenda L Croft, it is elegantly displayed, beautifully lit and well chosen with just enough space between one work and another, one artist and another, and considering there are 25 artists represented, sufficient examples of their work for an audience to get a fix on each of them.

In her excellent essay, "Beyond the Pale: empires built on the bones of the dispossessed," Croft quotes Hetti Perkins' comment about Indigenous artists as contemporary practitioners being "obliged to assume an homogenous identity which has assimilationist overtones in myriad ways."

Croft's essay places the history of Indigenous art in the context of colonialism and racism. Thorough accompanying notes on each artist combine artists' statements and short essays by a variety of informed and responsive writers. In addition there are full colour reproductions of the works, exhaustive artist biographies and an extensive biography of Indigenous art. It's well worth the cover price.

My concern is the long essay "2000's Got to be Black" by English artist/curator Eddie Chambers. It follows Croft's signature essay



and is about the same length. However, it is not referred to by Croft nor Ron Radford in his foreword. What is more surprising, perhaps strange even, is that Chambers himself makes no reference to the exhibition or to the work of any of the artists involved. Nor does his manifesto seem to connect with the germane issues raised by Croft. Chambers argues that black artists in Britain are in a perilous and marginalised position and that they get pushed further out when major British galleries and institutions import overseas Indigenous shows and somehow think they have fulfilled their obligations to black artists. He then goes on to argue that "black" or "indigenous" artists must be afforded "ultimate validation and acknowledgement in the form of solo exhibitions in major galleries" so that there is an opportunity "to look at the individuality of an artist's work." And furthermore, that black curators need "to advance to strategically important positions in the art establishment."

We would all agree with this—but nowhere in this catalogue do either Croft or Chambers acknowledge that the situation for Indigenous artists in Australia actually fulfils Chambers' desideratum. For evidence, you need only study the artists' biographies and the bibliography in which I recognised the names of a dozen important strategically positioned Indigenous curators who have been curating significant (frequently landmark and benchmark) national and international exhibitions over the last decade. Brenda L Croft has curated numerous exhibitions including (with Hetti Perkins) *fluent*, Australia's representative exhibition at the 1997 Venice Biennale which featured the work of 3 Indigenous women artists, 2 of whom (Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatrerie) are featured in *Beyond the Pale*.

Using the biographies provided as the basis, let's consider their tally on solo shows. There are 25 artists drawn from all over the country from communities and urban areas; some of them are extremely well known, some young, some older, some have been working as artists for a long time, others have recently begun exhibiting. Some employ traditional styles and media, others work in acquired media and with contemporary technologies.

Fifteen of the 25 have had significant solo shows and in addition, 2 (Koolmatrerie and Ken Thaiday Sr) have not had solo exhibitions but have featured prominently in national and international shows. Koolmatrerie figured in the Venice Biennale

and last year was a finalist (and the only Indigenous artist) in the Clemenger Award for Contemporary Australian artists. Thaiday featured in *Ilan Pasin: this is our way* and was one of the 8 Indigenous artists in *Eye of the Storm*, both exhibitions toured nationally and internationally.

Further, among those artists who have had solo shows, artists like Ginger Riley and Rosella Namok at opposite ends of the spectrum suggest that the individuality of Indigenous artists is well established. Riley has had a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria (albeit not curated by an Indigenous curator) becoming the first Indigenous artist to have a major retrospective in his lifetime—one of the few living Australian artists to be so chosen.

Rosella Namok is an artist at the beginning of her career, one of the few in *Beyond the Pale* whose work I had not seen before, and no wonder! Rosella is the youngest artist in the show (at 21 she has been exhibiting since 1996) and last year had her first solo show at Hogarth Galleries in Sydney. She is a bold and gifted painter and I was excited by her work. There are not many 21 year old artists anywhere in the world who could command this degree of attention and exposure.

*There'll be more on Beyond the Pale in RT4*

## On a hot afternoon, in the city

Chris Reid

Warm Filters

Elizabeth House, March 9

A building is an object, not a live being. No? It is also the sum of the beings within, past and present, their exhalations, their histories. A building is a shelter, a haven. It is also a crucible, potentially, in which those entering might be purified.

Elizabeth House is a 7-storey city building, decades old, regally named, gracious, occupied by doctors' surgeries, offices, and others who truck with the public. It is Thursday, after work.

In the foyer are Jacky Redgate's photographs, actually her mother's backyard family scenes in London and Australia, that Jacky has re-printed, re-located, bringing (her) family into the building.

In the first and second floor rear windows of the house are works by Melinda Harper and John Barbour. Melinda's geometrical abstractions challenge the severe brick and concrete of the street. John's photos, mounted on light boxes like medical X-rays, depict scenes of streets and interiors, perhaps of this building and precinct, illuminating them.

On the corner of Austin Street, the L-shaped lane behind the building, is a multi-storeyed carpark on the wall of which is a large painting by Annette Bezor, one of her series of paintings of computer manipulations of other paintings of women, telling of their representation in art and the media, of the politics of representation and art.

The viewers, the guests celebrating the exhibition, are summoned to Austin Street where visiting German artist Johannes S. Sistermanns' performance begins. His assistants poke objects through windows, tape them in place, protruding—dried-up palm fronds, a mattress and bedding, discarded clothing, newspapers, the perspex name plates of the buildings' occupants, unlit lamps, timber shelving and plywood, detritus.

There are ghetto blasters in the first and second floor windows where Johannes' assistants operate. They blast out recordings of found noises from inside and outside buildings, and other noises, voices, electronic sounds. Johannes then emerges from the rear door with a megaphone and slowly moves towards the crowd, vocalising. Cars, motorbikes, push-bikes and pedestrians make their way, aleatorically, down Austin Street, pushing through the guests, becoming part of the process of respiration, infiltration.

It is already dusk. To the west a building-site crane, festooned with lights, towers behind the carpark. To the east we see it again, reflected in the darkened windows of the insurance building partly occupied by the university.

The *Warm Filters* catalogue includes essays musing on buildings, architecture, space, their psychology, their phenomenology, the effect of painting on a building, of recording it, of the vitality and unpredictability of the street.

Whither the White Cube and its apparatchiks? Here is art in the street and the street becomes art.

## Text as wrapping paper

Kirsten Krauth

Shifting Ground

Verve forum

Ngapartji Multimedia Centre March 9

Robyn Archer appeared pleasantly surprised at the large turnout for the *Verve* forum, a talkfest dedicated to forms of writing other than the book, writing which sidesteps linear narrative—online, hypertext, chat, experimental film, CD-Rom—and the convergence of visual arts and text. When she conceived *Verve*, with Andrea Kleist and Teri Hoskin her aim, in keeping with the rest of the festival, was to highlight new developmental rather than “tried and true work”. The Adelaide Writer’s Festival is devoted entirely to books and authors who have been print published in English, or translated into English. This seems outdated in the current climate of online publishing and *Verve* is a starting point in addressing this imbalance.

Launching the proceedings Linda Marie Walker (in front of the audience, back turned) and Gregory Ulmer (via Florida) manufacture an “improvised conversation in cyberpidgin” cu-see-me style which means we can see their chat (and realvideo of the participants) as they construct a dialogue. Unfortunately this “contact across cultures” doesn’t quite come off. It certainly makes a cyberpidgin point, in that there is muddled conversation happening. LMW talks of cricket while GU shows us pictures of Florida. LMW attempts to get a poetics happening—“Is a flower the way to start?” but GU doesn’t appear to be listening. LMW types too long, GU types too fast, rarely answering her questions directly. It seems like he’s typing to himself; she can’t get a word in. The venue doesn’t help. Most of the audience can’t see the visuals. We understand the dynamics of being a virtual tourist but there’s a need for a choreography of language; perhaps ‘improvisation’ is the problem. Perhaps this is not the best intro to online writing, perhaps more effective after participants have had a go in a chat room themselves, perhaps an end of the day thing. LMW heads off for a “virtual cocktail” while GU has a “real merlot”.

Victoria Lynn (curator, Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of NSW) gives an excellent introduction to Bill Seaman, situating his work within a framework of artists, writers and musicians like Mallarmé and John Cage who work with chance encounters, Dice-Men who move in non linear sequences and play with

time and (il)logic. Seaman’s experimental videos (and Janet Merewether’s *Making Out in Japan* screened later) work hypertextually, Seaman’s *The Watch Detail* uses real time clips of stone, wood, clocks, airports (inspired by Rembrandt’s *The Night Watch*) to investigate how we measure time. Seaman, in his presentation, lets the “fragment stand in for the whole”, speaking on pattern poetry, virtual space, avatars, scientific data, invention, memory theatre and “new forms of addressing ideas”.

After Sue Thomas’ interesting reflections on trAce online writing community and how identities constructed via MOO can offer new cross-gender and cultural possibilities, the afternoon drifts with Adele Hann and Jyanni Steffensen’s highly theoretical pieces suited to more reflective media while the chatroom participants enjoy deconstructing those speaking, debating and bouncing off questions posed, even experiencing stagefright when our words are relayed onscreen above Steffensen’s head. I am in a chat typing to Sue Howard (who’s sitting next to me) after previously communicating across thousands of kilometres; a Leunig cartoon come to life.

Along with the forum, *Verve* at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, curated by Teri Hoskin encompasses a range of exhibitions exploring the “effects technologies have on the way we read, write and generate language” including Bill Seaman’s video installation *Red Dice*, an exhibition of artists’ books and graphic music scores, a collaboration between Dylan Everett and Peter Harding, videos by Janet Merewether, Bill Seaman talking about hieroglyphics and Japanese calligraphy, a round table on hypertext and small screen narratives, a series of performance texts, comics by Glenn Lumsden and David de Vries, and an online verveforum, accessible by email. Go to <http://www.vervewriting.org> for more details.

More on Verve in RT4

## Membranes of self

Gail Priest

98.4% dna—being human

desoxy Theatre

Odeon Theatre, March 8

There is a cellular glob centre stage. It breathes, it twitches, it bounces across the floor, unfolds and divides into 2 globes that writhe around each other. The performers

seem to be sheathed in membranes, like a newborn calf still in its caul. They drool into each other’s mouths and kiss with life-sucking force. It is impossible to see the delineation between each performer. Which one is male, which female, whose leg is that? Hang on is that a leg?

98.4% dna deals with the epic questions of what it is to be human. As we share 98.4 % dna with chimpanzees are we “absolutely human or relatively ape?” What is our cellular, psychological and emotional composition?

The text is poetic and dense. It crosses territory such as Adam & Eve, urban myths—the scuba diver found incinerated in a forest fire—scientific speculation and performance poetry. The performers are dwelling in the treacherous territory of melding movement and text and most of the time it works, particularly in the pieces where the voices are amplified and processed through filters.

There is perhaps a little too much text trying to cover too much ground, for example the piece which dips its toe into the whole area of female body image —“Do you like my breasts? Do you like my muff?”—which is entertaining but veers off into a whole other complex area.

The strength of 98.4% dna lies in the style that desoxy has created using acrobatics and dance that melds bodies into new and amazing shapes. They turn and slide and squeeze between and around each other, as if osmosing, slipping through each other’s cellular structure. Both Teresa Blake and Daniel Witton are remarkably strong and Blake’s size advantage means that they can break away from the standard sexual politics of lifts and balances as she hikes him up over her shoulder so he can walk along the back wall, parallel with the floor.

Surprisingly, it is the sound that I find most innovative and interesting. Using well disguised radio mikes, much of the soundscape is performed live by Blake and Witton with design and live effects by Darren Steffen. As the show begins we hear the rumbling of guts, gasps, whines, sucks, which combine to create a thick mucosal soundscape which you assume to be prerecorded. When we can see the performers more clearly it becomes obvious by the movement of their bodies and breath that they are creating the sound. Later Blake speaks and performs a vigorous movement routine to the percussion of her gasps.

Witton performs an achingly sweet counter tenor rendition of 'When I am laid to rest', which is reprised at the end by the 2 singing into each other's mouths while kissing. The effect is not just haunting, it seems to create a body empathy—you can sense the sound resonating in your organs.

Both Witton and Blake are accomplished musicians and there are some beautiful moments as Blake plays the cello, investigating its slides and scratches. There are also pieces that seem inspired by Laurie Anderson; a spoken word piece by Blake with pizzicato accompaniment on the nature of falling. As much as I like this section it doesn't stylistically seem to fit into the tone and structure of the show, especially as it is introduced very near to the end. There is also an Anderson-esque piece about dying and communicating with the chimpanzee ancestors that is spoken with voices alternating, affected by delay and pitch shift. The mediation of the voices heightens the text, and the overlay of the physical image of the performers hanging in counter-balanced plastic slings turning slowly is surreal and engaging.

*98.4% dna* is a visceral experience. The performers share an intimacy that is uncomfortably real. It is sensual and surprisingly seductive. As you watch you become aware of your own fluids, your cells multiplying and dying. Reminiscent of *Skin*, which questions the nature of being a woman, *98.4% dna* questions the very nature of being human.

## Lost civilisation

Chris Reid

### Soviet and Beyond

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Adelaide Town Hall, March 11

The impact of Stalinism on the USSR and the world is still being felt. This concert is the first of two concerned with composers in the USSR whose lives and work were blighted by that regime.

Mosolov's *Zavod* (Iron Foundry) is drawn from the ballet *Steel* (1926-8). Mosolov was a proponent of Socialist Realism and *Steel* emerged from the Constructivist era of art in post-revolutionary Russia. The brief, energetic work evokes the inside of a factory in relentless production; today it reminds us of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. This is an awesome curtain-raiser.

Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No 1 was written in 1947-8, in the aftermath of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, but the work was not premiered until after Stalin's death. The Violin Concerto is one of the finest musical works of the era. The work is demanding, the solo in the latter stages of the passacaglia, for example, is long for a concerto.

The concerto's first movement is dreamy, introverted, the violin delivering a melancholy soliloquy, while wiser voices (bassoons, tubas, basses) mutter philosophically. Conductor Hannu Lintu's restrained tempi in this movement require the soloist to give every note its fullest value. The first movement is followed by the Scherzo, evoking Russian folk dances, but tinged with mockery, the violin's voice now building the folk up to a frenzy. Again the conductor takes this slowly, the dances not quite reaching momentum.

In the third movement, the horns, tubas and basses return with a dark fanfare and then a dirge which heralds a dramatic statement of the concerto's main theme, a heart-rending lament, for the violin. Anastasia Khitruk is masterful in this vital passage. The long violin solo which follows the lament is an impassioned speech to a hushed crowd. The passacaglia suddenly segues into the fourth movement, the violin leading the folk in dancing, recapitulating ideas from the second movement but in jocular mood. This movement allows violin virtuosi to show off—Khitruk thrives.

The massive forces of the augmented ASO are generally well controlled by Lintu, although at times almost overwhelming Khitruk's excellent violin.

Shostakovich's Symphony No 10 completes the concert, a mighty work played with energy and flare. The first movement is a long and deeply reflective emotional outpouring, the ASO winds enunciating the ideas. This is followed by the violent, marching, short, second movement, evidently a portrait of the recently dead Stalin. Lintu's tempo is again a little slow in the dance passage which opens the third movement. The fourth commences with a return to reflective individual statements by the winds leading into the final rhythmic passage, whose momentum suggests a frightening inevitability. The ASO winds perform beautifully throughout, the orchestra is well balanced and each voice clearly articulated.

## Intelligent buildings

Suzanne Spinner

### Light House

Adelaide Festival Plaza

March 2 - 19

*The archetypal light/house sits alone somewhere in our endless wilderness! It is clearly a human object that has arrived in a wild place.*

Antony Radford, curator's notes.

*Light House* is a 2-part exhibition presented by the University of Adelaide and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, documenting 16 contemporary houses located along what Phillip Drew calls the verandah of Australia, the coastal edge, and the display home/light box, an open demountable fancy shed structure designed by Troppo Architects to present the exhibition. *The Light House* pavilion has been created to demonstrate in situ the principles behind the houses illustrated in the exhibition. It is a fully transportable flat pack construction which can be assembled by anyone anywhere. It can be contracted depending on requirements. In use it's maximally open right along its length and at night after hours it closes up like a big shoe box.

The Light Houses are all ideal spaces in ideal settings. Most have been ordered and built for pleasure as holiday houses, weekend retreats, bushwalking lodges, island cabanas even if pleasure is presented as the morally uplifting experience of communing with nature. They are not obviously luxurious or ostentatious; they do not flaunt themselves, they do not dominate their environment. However there is no question that the environment has been cleverly mastered in order for them to be built. The Bushwalker's Hut in remote Tasmania could only be made by helicoptering in 500 kg loads at \$1350 per hour for charter, and was built from materials that could be got there in 80 hours of flying time. For another house the owner firstly restored the rock ledge above by putting back 30 tons of dirt which the previous owner had removed!

Environmental sustainability is addressed in all these buildings and despite their visible ("legible" is the architect's word) lightness, many have been engineered to withstand cyclonic winds. So the notion of lightness is both qualified and paradoxical. These houses also look simple but they are highly thought out structures often dubbed "intelligent buildings".

They are all predicated on their exclusive position in an exquisite private setting in a



wilderness, a wild coast, or a coral island overlooking a pristine stretch of river. They sit alone, perfectly framed by their surroundings, like Zen shrines.

I find all of these houses profoundly engaging and intrinsically appealing—who would not want one of their very own? The game of choosing your favourite offers excesses of desire.

One house is described as having a smaller footprint than your average 3-car garage. I live in the inner suburbs in a house on a block not much bigger. The issue for me, as it is for many of us, is not about letting the environment in so much as creating an environment within of privacy, beauty and individuality despite the environment outside. I also have to find a parking spot in the street for the car.

## You're dead humanoid

Kirsten Krauth

*Biomachines*

Old Hart Mill

Port Adelaide, March 9

The Adelaide Festival has been interested in mutations: body/machine, animal/human, human/avatar, writer/visual artist. La Ribot, naked and witty, slips on a plastic suit in one of her *Mas Distinguidas* and reads an instruction manual for her own body, her intonation and perplexed calm perfectly evoking the strange state of learning how to operate new technology. In desoxy Theatre's 98.4% dna we get amoeba forms gasping and dribbling out of the swamp, evolving into and deconstructing what it is that makes us human: "this is my body of evidence." Robot-like she constructs her gender out of unformed limbs and skin: "Where are my feet? I must have them now." Bill Seaman, speaking at the *Verve* forum, describes *The Hybrid Invention Generator*, a long term project he's working on which aims to code and program inventions in a VR world so that users can build inventions, melding previous gadgets in new, and hopefully useful forms, or creating their own monsters. This will be a project worth hanging on for, offering a new imaginative world to play in. While Seaman's language can be challenging, his presentations are accessible and invigorating, using visuals and metaphors which allow everyone to grapple a way into his virtual worlds.

*Biomachines* starts off with a bang. We arrive via taxi (with Robyn Archer trying to encourage participation in the city's out-

skirts, a shuttle bus would have been handy) to complete darkness and an hour's wait due to a blown fuse. The hovercraft sits quietly outside like a World War 2 relic. When we finally burst into the old Mill, the warehouse is a whale belly of buzzing, booming, rotating spheres and cylinders, a textural landscape for touchy-feelies. Unfortunately we're told "not to climb on the installations unless invited." Gadgets and technology are spread throughout the space, soundscapes metallic like Adelaide water. A number of works aren't in action but will hopefully get up in the next few nights.

Anna Sabiel (in *Internalised Cities V.30*, a collaboration with Shane Fahey) attaches her body via a pole, which she can swing and rotate on, to a series of cables, linked by a pulley system carrying 44 gallon drums. She hovers above the ground, gradually falling as one drum releases water, and by moving her body she creates sounds, becoming part of a musical instrument, a metallic xylophone striking and plucking the audience as she sinks. In her second piece, she attaches herself to a set of weighted, linked ladders, monkey bars gone awry, as she lies under them, stroking with her miked feet, framing her strong body by twisting and falling within the bars. The jarring effect of the drum slamming into the ladder deals blows and both works are about tension, creating for the audience an unpredictable space where Sabiel's body is fragile, enclosed and fierce.

John Kenny's *The Devil Makes Work* creature only spins once when I'm around but continues the unsafe feeling, some of the gathering racing out of perceived harm's way as it spirals crankily to the roof. Kenny describes it as "a caricature of the human species and the apparent disregard for the natural world and its cycles." It greedily consumes the air, gnashing sharky teeth, and I would have had it whirling eternally. Matt Heckert's *Pulse* and Triclops' International's *Theory of Flight* also gobble air, the flight machine outside throwing dust into a crowd of faces as it bumps, burps and shudders off the ground. It goes higher, projected onto corrugated iron inside, part of a research project into Vertical Takeoff and Landing gear where the shifting body alters the centre of gravity. Matt Heckert's *Pulse*, "an interweaving of sonic pulses" involves sitting on a couch and pressing a button (cabled to a computer) to experience massaging rumbles gur-

gling from a series of steel cylinders, a cross between cannon and speaker, shooting out air streams. It's interesting when it's on. Unfortunately the artists are asked to turn their installations off when the incongruous *The Theatre of Hell* are performing which seems a frustratingly limited way to use the warehouse space.

In *RealTime* 35 (Feb/March), Alex Hutchinson wrote of emulation, "a mini-boom in software that is slower, graphically inferior and borderline obsolete", and this sense of 80s nostalgia is cleverly integrated into the mill's ambience. Loungeroom paraphernalia (lampshades and coffee tables) creates cosy spaces, with ancient computer games—Pacman, Space Invaders, and a stick figure shoot 'em up called Bezerker which says "You're dead humanoid" at the end of each game—duplicated large scale in my favourite piece, Time's Up's *pong*, a physical interface of the tennis game I used to spend whole holidays playing at my grandparents' house, two moving sticks and a ball, a game brilliantly brought to life in a recent video clip by French musicians Air, where the players control the real-life movements of 2 women in a pingpong tournament. Here though, competitors at each end stand on a seasaw, treading the boards in a dynamic dance, not quite as intuitive as they had hoped, the generation who now get off in Time Zone stamping in coin slot-dance games where you pay and play with your feet.

## Freud for beginners

Keith Gallasch

*Night & Dreams: The Death of Sigmund Freud*

The Opera Studio, March 8

Late that night after the show, over Gouger Street garfish and chips and next morning over a hot mobile, I have conversations with like-minded friends in which we re-shape the libretto for *Night & Dreams* (composer Andrew Ford, librettist Margaret Morgan, Music Theatre Sydney). We feel compelled. It's a good way of dealing with the frustration of experiencing a work with some potent images, ideas and sounds thwarted by a mundane libretto. In the work Freud asks his audience to be his analyst, sings (despite his stated lack of interest in music), reflects on his relationships with his erstwhile disciples Fliess and Jung, and his daughter Anna, and attempts to understand a dream that haunts

him of a silent woman pointing at a door. Famous people plays are a frightening genre; few work and even those that do have short lives. They are often doggedly literal, inclining to documentary construction, including chunks of the great person's utterances, letters, texts etc, and the appearance of other famous persons. Worse is the pedagogical impulse, a desire to outline and explain the life and ideas of the famous person. Sadly, *Night & Dreams*, music theatre with spoken and sung text and recorded music, is such a work. It seems to operate on the premise that the audience knows nothing of Freud. Where there should be poetry and insight, there is a string of neat episodes and explanations and, for the most part, emotional detachment and limited theatricality.

Why, you ask as you watch, does Freud in his dying hours bother to outline his theories, and in such a rudimentary fashion? Why is the conceit of having him declare himself the analysand and us his analyst never taken beyond the feeble joke of keeping us silent? Why is the other key conceit—Freud singing—not transformed into a potent motif? What is its function—a suggestion that somehow Freud is redeemed by turning to music in his last hours? Why is so little made of Freud's illness and imminent death—until the end of the work ("Of course, you know about my illness...")? Freud is a bit slow on the move, but looks pretty chipper; however, he expires dramatically with a ghastly suite of recorded gasps and burblings. Perhaps the authors wanted to focus on the psychological rather than physical condition of the man, avoiding, for example, the 'blood on the keys' scenarios of 50s and 60s biopics of Chopin and Eddy Duchin. Of course, the work is, in the end, about the denial of death—Freud keeps smoking his beloved cigars despite his advanced mouth cancer and his prosthetic palate, and he fails to interpret the obvious symbolism of his dream—as his whole life plods before him.

Even so I could have done with a bit of 'blood on the keys,' at least some signs of ill health, some discomfort, evidence of the very thing he is in denial about, shaped into the pattern of the performance, anything to lift the stakes for his need to talk to us. The framework of the performance is locked into a step by step account of his life; nothing bleeds into anything else, everything is compartmentalised at the very moment that the rationalist of the unconscious is experiencing shifts between past and present, conscious and unconscious. The episodes are

neatly interspersed with (1) holocaust anxiety attacks (replete with strident marching soundtrack, bland text and predictable slide projections of Nazis, though nicely distorted) and (2) recollection of the aforesaid dream as Freud moves towards understanding it—with no help from us. Murmurs of "Thanatos, you silly old coot," were heard here and there from the audience as Freud struggled for the name he'd been censoring. Poor dumbed-down Freud.

Yet even with this limited palette (sorry, a slip), Gerald English plays Freud well with unyielding pride (the accounts of Fliess and Jung are blindly unsympathetic), bursts of tetchiness and bewilderment, and a flow of warm quips (more jokes rather than situational humour would have been truer to the man and added another dimension). And he manages to look eerily like the real thing, especially in the opening vaseline-on-the-lens image where we see him listening to a Schubert lieder crackling out of the golden horn of an old record player. He also manages to elicit some sympathy despite the blandness of the material, partly through restraint, a certain stillness (accented by the pictorialising of the direction and the design) and a need to talk—a kind of secular confession which confesses little, but which is passionate and often righteous. If only the need was more explicit.

So how can *Night & Dreams* escape its earnestness, its desire to tell more than to show? How can it give more weight to the end of a man's life? This is a 'big ask' given the constraints of the material. The show needs some dynamics to generate the complexities of the situation and of the man. I've already suggested that his illness be made visible here and there throughout the work despite his denial. This could amplify his need to speak (as time flies) which now seems so functional, so theatre-in-educational. It can interrupt his neat delivery of life and theory—the rational voice broken by the ill body. Even better it could break into the very singing which he has only just discovered and which seems to have taken him over like some force rising from the unconscious (the libretto sets this up by having Freud declare a lack of interest in music, of all the arts, because he can't work out what motivates it, what lies behind it).

Despite his initial hesitation about music it's not long before Freud is slipping in and out of song as a matter of course, and sometimes movingly. But the fact of the singing ceases to be addressed, its source, its meaning. There is no surprise, save very

early on, at being possessed by song, a very particular kind of song too, rooted in lieder and its grievings—this should be as big a mystery for this scientist of the psyche as the dream woman pointing at the door.

The third dynamic should be rooted in Freud's relationship with his audience. At the moment it's terribly perfunctory, a convenient device, an incomplete idea, a cheap joke about the silence of analysts—but what about when they do speak? Imagine Freud in his final hours, addled by morphine (he is already planning euthanasia with his doctor), hallucinating an audience, uncertain of its existence, desperate to speak because he knows he is dying, his body telling him so even though his mind resists the truth. Is it a group of people, is it one person, is it sometimes Fliess, sometimes Jung (so that the pedestrian tellings can become re-lived moments, demands, accusations)? Is it an analyst? And the analyst asks Freud questions (we don't have to hear them—we know them from Freud's answers). While this is totally antithetical to *Night & Dreams*' coolness it nonetheless approaches the unaddressed issue of the performer-audience relationship, positing the audience more firmly as analyst and allowing the role to be played out. Perhaps, in the end, he realises that he has been talking to himself. Whatever, the possibilities seem richer than simply having Freud conduct his own self-analysis as a kind of display. Again, surprise at the encounter with this strange audience, an attempt to work out who or what or why it is, seems fundamental. He can engage with it chattily and comfortably, as he does now, but it can also instil fear, paranoia, it can haunt him, it can quiz him, and it can take some of this pedagogical, documentary Freud out of himself.

Take it or leave it, these flights of post-show fancy. In the end, they're about some other music theatre work, some other work about Freud dying that we've imagined. The music in *Night & Dreams* is often dramatically effective, except when it too is forced into being illustrative. The shifting spatial relations in the recorded piano and harp suggest some of the delirium missing from the libretto, and the interplay of speech and song yields an angular contemporary lieder style appropriate to Freud's 'confessions', and is more accessible than many a modernist music theatre work in the tradition to which *Night & Dreams* belongs. Eamon D'Arcy's set—transparent walls onto which images are projected—is richly suggestive, similar to Freud's notion

of the unconscious being like a child's magic writing pad, you peel the page away, the words disappear, but they're still there on the under layer. But not enough is made of the set (it does go a glorious red at an intensely critical moment); it is either historically illustrative or suggests vaguely some aspects of Freud's unconscious with Rorschach Test-like blot paintings and an intriguing drawing of a naked woman with something like faecal matter drifting out of her mouth. Unfortunately Freud is oblivious to these, directing his attention instead to the copy of the da Vinci statue of Moses on his desk for a precis of *Moses and Monotheism*. The relationships between composers and librettists have long been complex, the matching often not right. *Night & Dreams* needs either a different libretto or some ruthless dramaturgy before it can live up to the greatness and complexity of its subject or offer a bracing theatricality.

## The Devil's music

Drew Crawford

*Inferno*

Elision Contemporary

Music Ensemble

Wharf 10, Port Adelaide,

March 10

Immediately after the end of Elision's latest challenge, a woman in the carpark outside is heard to remark, "Well, that was a character-building experience." Testing the endurance of the audience as much as the performing musicians, *Inferno* is composer John Rodgers' newest exploration into the physicality of performance.

Theatrically staged without being a music-theatre piece, the audience is seated in a circle 3 rows deep around the conductor, mixing desk and electric guitarist. The other instrumentalists are on raised "desks", spaced around another circle outside the audience. Everyone is amplified, and sound designer Michael Hewes has done an excellent job of maintaining the integrity of the physical space in the three-dimensional sound mix. Suitably hellish red lighting glows from beneath each instrumentalist and streaks across the cavernous ceiling.

What proceeds for an hour and 20 minutes is Rodgers' "aural cartography" of Dante's vision. Murray Kane's substantial fiction-

essay Dante's 'Musical Offering' is printed in the program and gives clues to finding your way around the piece, but is too long to be fully digested before the performance—and I'm still not sure if the text inspired the piece or the piece inspired the text, or even if they are technically related at all (except in the density and opacity of their expression).

Either way, I am no closer to a deeper understanding of Dante's vision of hell (or Rodgers', for that matter) by the end of the piece. In that sense it truly is a map, or an illustration; perhaps program music but without narrative drive.

The instrumentalists contort themselves and their instruments to create what amounts to a virtual compendium of extended techniques, and watching them is where a lot of the enjoyment of this piece can be found (many times audience members actually block their ears). Conductor Carl Rosman seems reduced to a traffic warden (white gloves and all), directing entrances and beating a common time which bears little relation to any musical events.

Each performer represents a "denizen of hell" and each has his or her solo before other instruments come together in various textural densities, the ebb and flow of which becomes a little predictable. But as always the utter commitment of the ensemble to achieving the often outlandish requirements of the score is total. The violist plays the cello with his viola, Scott Tinkler dips his trumpet into a bucket of water mid-phrase, Paula Roe and Stephen Robinson plays a flute and oboe made of ice.

Peter Neville rubs a wet zucchini near a microphone (the effect of which is a little lost in the texture) when he isn't bowing crotales or the edge of a styrofoam box, or blowing through a detuned dog-whistle (never, ladies and gentleman, has a dog whistle been more annoying). Fellow percussionist Ken Eadie plays trash and the "Infernophone", a specially constructed metal console which he plays with wire brushes (the industrial kind), stones, and anything else he can find before finally trashing his instruments to close the piece.

This is just one of a number of rock-influenced ideas: Erkki Vertheim uses his teeth to play his viola (obviously not his good one), the electric guitar, even the ice instru-

ments melt enough to break up and smash under their own weight. And whilst these genuinely thrilling moments easily fit into the broader movement in modern music which explores the physicality of performance, Rodgers' work here seems to have led to a place where rock'n'roll went almost 40 years ago. But whereas the Who or Jimi Hendrix were subversive because their exploration of sound and noise was combined with elements of sexual and moral tension, these modern techniques in the context of *Inferno* are ironically colder, more cerebral. They lose their edge. Perhaps the performers need to go even further in this direction. After all, as we all know, rock'n'roll is the Devil's music.

## No neutrality

Erin Brannigan

*lets Op Bach (Something on Bach)*

Les Ballets C de la B/Ensemble

Explorations

Festival Theatre, March 10

It looks like Alain Platel has done it again—the Best of the Fest—and in more ways than one. This production deserves the Best All Round Performance medal as it includes some of the best live music, best drag, best mime, best slapstick, best rock performance and the most amazing physical feats of the entire festival. You can go and see it all in a blistering hour and 35 minutes and save save save.

So why is dance leading the way in over-riding disciplinary boundaries? What is it about dance that lets all this in, to co-exist with it? I recall Peter Sellars' comments on the omnipresence of dance—on the streets, in clubs, throughout all stratas of history. It is becoming apparent on all kinds of levels that dance, marginalised and under-theorised as it is, is perhaps just so due to the thing that places it in a privileged position—it's uncontainability. It offers an 'operating system' that, in essential and inherent ways, opposes structure, is open and fluid.

Well, Alain Platel clearly is the man with the plan in regard to all these developments. I laughed often, not necessarily at the details of the work some of which were definitely funny (as well as tragic, pathetic,





Les Ballets C de la B, *Iets Op Bach (Something on Bach)*

sublime), but the daring of the form as a whole; the rock concert/drag performance/video clip part really takes the cake. This party trick is completely audacious—I was just gob smacked at what we had arrived at. And how they got an Australian audience on their feet half-way through a show, let alone again at the end, was suspiciously like a miracle.

This particular moment brought Lucy Guerin's hip rhythms and La Ribot's salsa 'hand-ballet' to mind. A company that can find the groove in Bach, breaking into a funky disco swing at the end of one particular 'dance break', clearly has its finger on the pulse. This return within contemporary dance to the impulse to move to music makes outrageous sense. Waving my arms in the air like I just didn't care at the Festival Club later with the crew from *Cool Heat Urban Beat* onstage, I spy the awe-

some Rennie Harris whose body popping amazed me when I saw the show in London. How I ever got to a point where musicality in dance is a revelation, I'll never know.

Another novelty is seeing dance occur within a context that isn't a neutral nowhere-ville, an abstract light space. Philippe Decouflé has recently taken us back to the circus, vaudeville and the age of early cinema, Wim Vandekeybus to the realm of dreams. Platel is not so sentimental, dropping us into a (sub)urban landscape—a rooftop—where performers emerge from the general furore, addressing each other and us indiscriminately. There is a series of amazing feats, one involving heavy balls, and a lot of less explicit displays. An incredible male dancer has us captivated for ages in the beginning despite surrounding distractions, creating a quiet

bubble with his extraordinary skill. His fluidity keeps pulling my eye back during the later ensemble sections. In this shift from the personal to the group, the structure of the work is almost classical—characters are established and stories followed through. But instead of irrelevant fairytales, the drag queen gets her man, the poor menstruation-stained girl makes it through her nightmare, and the seedy Ring Master rides off into the sunset on all fours.



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