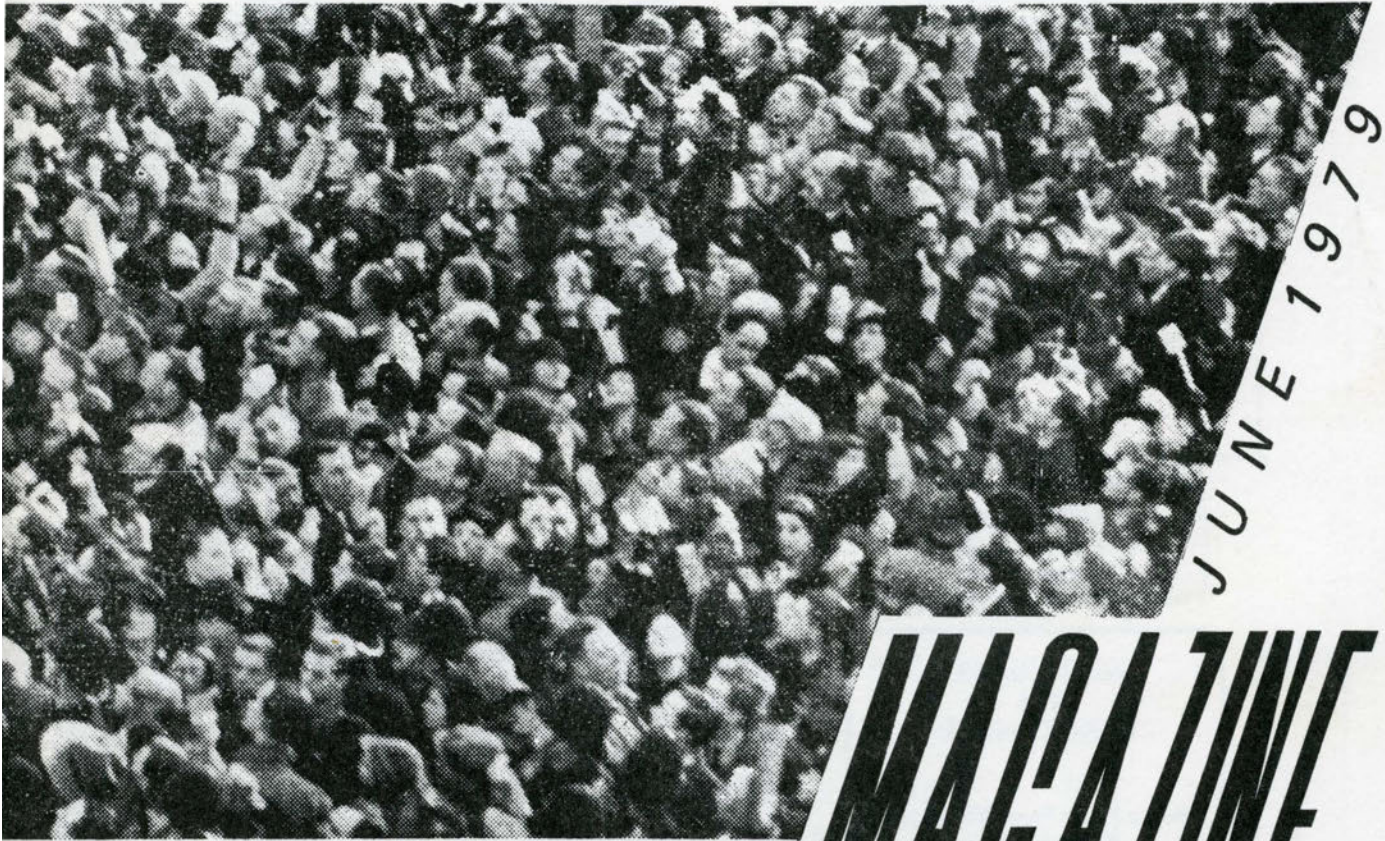


THE PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE



JUNE 1979

MAGAZINE

45p

*Welfare State Kipper Kids Heartache and Sorrow
Foco Novo Ken Campbell Phantom Captain
People Show Fearless Frank Comedy Store*

LOADING DOCK



THE jungle soothed her. Her retina had finally moved beyond monochrome (Honduras Complex), and she lay back in the hammock, eyes shining, weights lifting, electric light plugged into her aural auxiliaries. "Peru," she purred, "Peru." Concentrating more than she had in many a tropical day on the next step. Her latest safari fashions would be arriving on the riverboat any day now, if the predictions of the romantically sleazy Spaniard down at the dock could be believed. Dora quivered vaguely at the thought of the bias cut silk jacket with matching veste and culottes, handsewn by Gigette, last surviving seamstress of Chanel's original 'girls'. Gigette whom she had discovered on that last brief visit to Paris, when Paolo had been so disappointing after all his promises of 'zumzing completelee

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NINE YEARS IN A WINDTUNNEL

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Firbank Archive
(including Songs from the Asylum)

by

Max Blagg & Ken Tisa



ALOES BOOKS LONDON 1978

THE ONLY MAGAZINE BY, FOR, AND ABOUT DANCERS'

NEW
DANCE

THE PERFORMANCE

There are still some events worth stifling a yawn for..They are difficult to pin down.....to separate from the sludge of spectacle.....they consist of people doing odd things in front of others. They are performances. Anyone can do one but once money changes hands their value is under scrutiny. Sometimes they become theatre, and people sit down and get up and have drinks and sit down and clap and get up again. The performances we cover have been called Fringe Theatre, Performance Art, and Community Art. We are responding to, and adding to, a vastly increased interest in these things, but we will be critical in our approach. Please send your views to the Performance magazine. They will be published.



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MAGAZINE

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COD PIECE



Photo R. Harris

The Kipper Kids are a pair of loons. One is German and upper-crust, the other is working-class Geordie. The latter makes a living by gardening and bumming around, the former is a commodity broker. They both live in California. They also both look like rugby players between seasons, have curly hair, and spend a lot of their spare time doing performances like 'Up Yer Bum', recently at the Acme Gallery.

A notice on the gallery door indicated that the public was admitted at its own risk. The public foregathered in the downstairs gallery which was decorated with cheerful pink plywood cocks and balls, graffiti-style, hung from the ceiling. I had heard that the Kipper Kids were large and hairy and disgusting and thought they might burst into

the Acme opening night crowd and run amok with dildoes. You can never tell with performance art. As it was we were ushered to the upper gallery and waited.

All around was the Acme's usual pristine white. At the far end, a white podium backed by a white sheet. From the sheet and from the ceiling above the podium hung red, yellow, green, blue and pink balloons; to the sides beer bottles hung from strings which seemed to be connected to a system of threads running back above the audience's heads to the rear of the gallery, where there was another row of balloons. All the balloons contained small quantities of liquids or powders. It was decorative, but all of it was used later on.

The show had a lot to do with props and costumes. The Kipper Kids made their first entrance after a shower of marbles, wearing dirty macs covered in biro slogans, and had Tizer bottles strapped to their backs from which they nourished themselves via plastic tubes. After belching and farting their way through the opening, discarding their beards – one with the aid of a razor, the other by unclipping it – and giving the audience a quick flash of carrot cocks and tomato balls, they disappeared behind the screen where, silhouetted by flickering candle-light, belching and cursing nonchalantly, they stripped down to the jockstraps which, apart from a variety of rubber masks, plastic bath hats, metallic chins and noses, one-eyed specs and flying goggles, were all they wore for the rest of the performance. They didn't say much; you just watched to see what they'd do next and what they'd do it with.

The show managed to be both exhibitionistic and voyeuristic. It was as if two men living in an apartment, having discovered that someone in the block opposite was in the habit of spying on them through binoculars, decided to give the spectator a real eyeful without ever doing anything commonly kinky. Nothing goes up anyone's bum, but 'Up Yer Bum!' is the message. There is a brilliant scene where, after producing from a suitcase a telephone directory, a small silver tin, a spoon and a cheese knife, each of the Kippers meticulously smears the tips of the other's erect thumbs with cream cheese: one of them then jams his fist down round one of the other's thumbs, the other follows suit until the last free thumb is plunged downwards into the remaining fist, and they both start jerking away frantically, eyes glued to the telephone directory. Pausing briefly to turn over the page, they beat their way manically to a climax, at which point they break away and simultaneously smash eggs over each other's heads.

This and the final set piece are the high points of the show. Of the finale I'll say just that it involves the balloons, also firecrackers, spiky table tennis bats, coathangers and candles and results in a highly aesthetic mess.

Kipper Kids aficionados I spoke to at this show thought it wasn't one of their best evenings and said that on other occasions audiences had been reduced to hysteria. I could imagine. It didn't happen this time: maybe because it was the opening night the pace flagged a bit in the middle and had to be built up again after a longish busking section with ukelele which didn't seem to me to go anywhere. For all that the show was very funny, in a style all of its own. Catch the Kipper Kids, they're WEIRD.

Steve Thorne

The last time I saw a People Show was at the Hampstead Theatre Club. Frankly, the audience were foxed. Afterwards, four dazed old ladies, used to watching Quite Different Stuff, sat in the row next to me taking it in turns to say:

"Well! And what was all *that* about?"

I tried to sneak out past them, but spotting me as someone who was likely to know about such things (I was wearing my 'Women With Perms Against The Nazis' badge), they pinned me to my seat with a "Can you explain that to us?"

"No", I replied. (Playing safe)

They weren't going to let me past until I'd at least tried.

"Well, what did *you* think it was about?", I asked, dropping the ball firmly into their laps.

"Well", said one of them, fixing me with a stare, "I think that *this* is to *real* theatre what Picasso is to real painting!"

"That's it!", I said, and escaped over the back of my seat.

Now, I've stalked around and around that pronouncement and I know there's both a profound truth and a profound insult in it somewhere, but it still eludes me, as being able to say much about The People Show eludes me.

Critics usually start their reviews of The People Show with "The People Show defies definition . . ." and then spend their time defiantly defining. I thought I wouldn't do that.

This is to a real review what McDonald's is to real food.

The set was a whole lot of wooden uprights and ropes and pieces of corrugated iron with a chair lift in the middle. The whole area looked as if it had been a regular building site and at the end of the work the builders had taken down the building and left the scaffolding. Here and there about the site were bits and pieces of interest – here a gas meter, here an oil drum, there a woman hanging naked upside down from a pulley . . .

That is one of the things The People Show does to me – I *expect* building sites to be strewn with naked women!

The whole of the set, as always with The People Show, was pregnant with possibilities. The red jacket at one side of an oil drum the pile of earth, the dust-covered chandelier made out of old bottles . . .

That was just what one got as one walked in and sat down.

Then they added people.

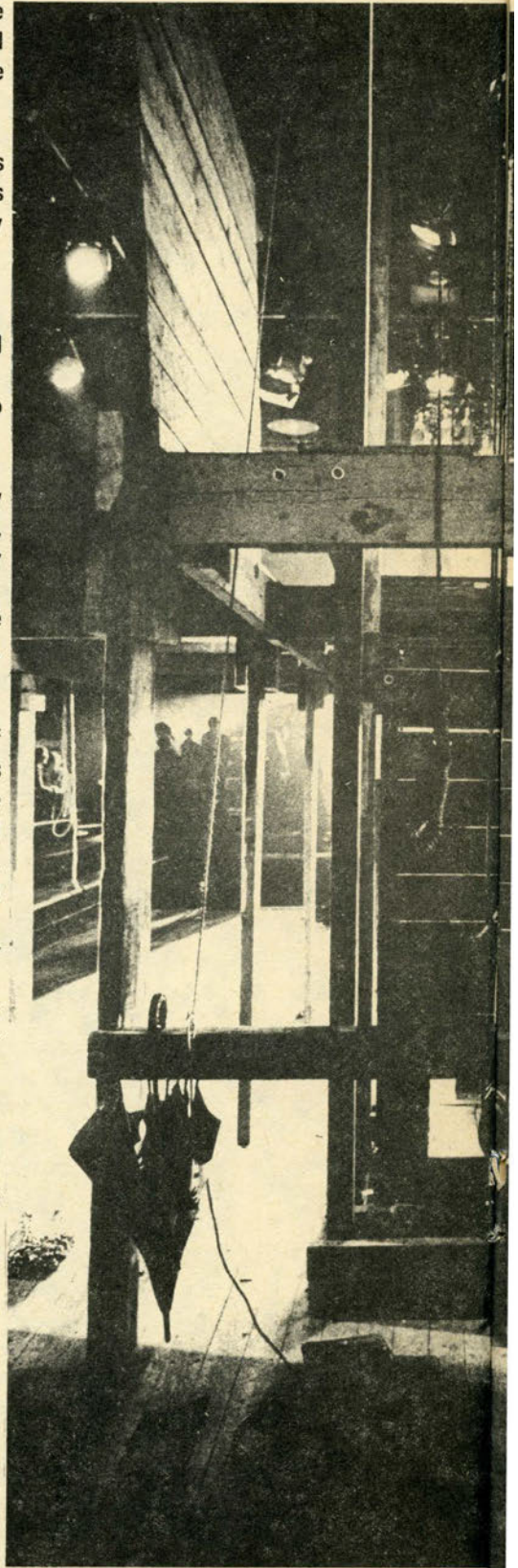
There were no words in it at all . . . apart from three songs – one of them in German . . . and yet, lurking in and out were plots, relationships, murders, affairs. In the calmest, stateliest way, The People Show let so much happen.

I just wanted to watch.

The bits I liked best.

A man came in carrying a stack of planks, a chair and a table. He got the audience to help him build a platform on which he could sit.

The same man tried to see over a corrugated iron wall. The smell and the sound of frying bacon wafted over to him and to us. As he went round the back to see who was behind the wall, the walls crashed down and there was an extraordinary domestic scene: the earlier hung woman was now making bacon sandwiches for a table-full of men, one in a party hat, one in a tuxedo reading the Daily Mirror, and one in very



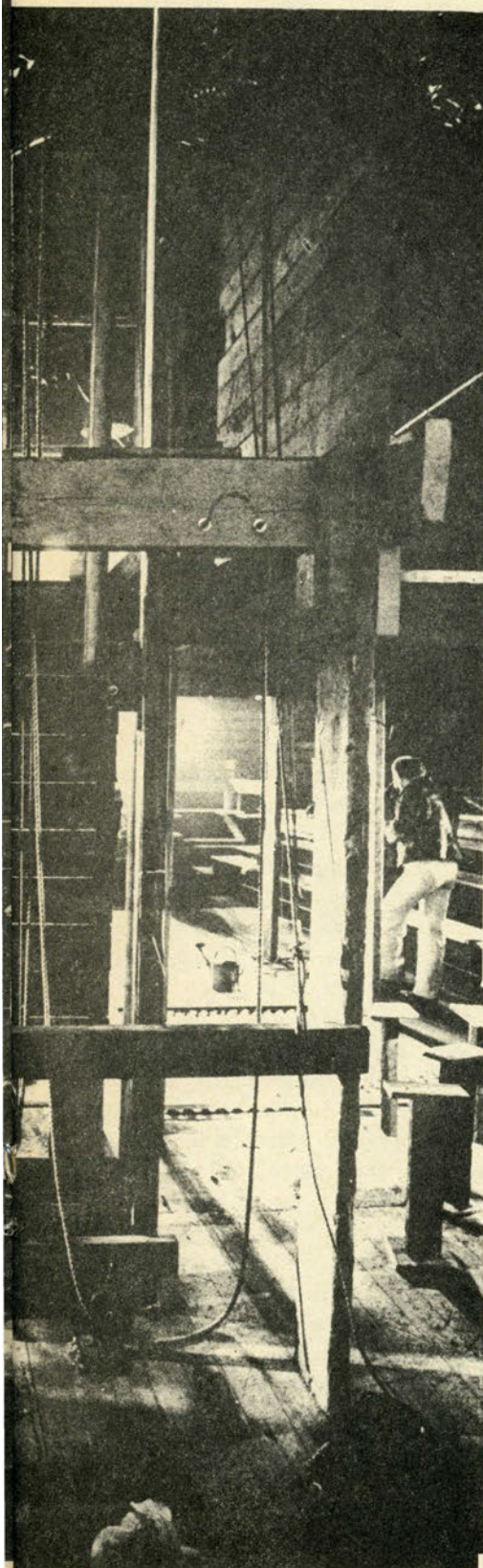


Photo Tadeusz Rolke

THEN ADD PEOPLE

large boots. Also sitting at the table was a human glitter ball. Half-way through the bacon sandwich, 'Heart of Glass' by Blondie flooded the auditorium . . . slowly the glitter ball got up, came forward and revolved. Slowly the tired old men danced round her. The music faded. They sat down again. Two-thirds through the bacon sandwiches, the music started up again. Slowly they all got up and danced again.

That's how I feel about enjoying myself sometimes . . . At one point the lights went out. The lights of small torches appeared. They congregated around the gas meter. Someone put some money in the meter. The lights came on again. And of course, somewhere else on the set, something dreadful had occurred . . .

Someone died. Three people stood round the grave — one simply staring at the grave, another staring at another mourner, while the third told a long, long story which we couldn't hear. Up above them, someone provided rain with a watering can.

Of course, when you describe it, it sounds so bizarre, so ridiculous. How could it have made sense?

Except that I enjoyed it so much.

It made me laugh so much.

In the parts where everyone else was laughing and in the parts where no-one else was laughing.

I wanted to watch every second of it.

I wanted it to go on much much longer.

I didn't want to review it.

I just wanted to say, "You should see it".



From Wet Magazine

"IN THE FUTURE everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes," said Andy what's-his-name a long time ago. Well, it is the future now, and some people are starting to take his dictum to heart.

Kathy Frasca, for instance. Last year she unveiled the International Kathy Fan Club, dedicated to celebrating the triumphs and tribulations of young Kathy's turbulent life. For a measly \$3 annual fee members of the fan club are sent bimonthly newsletters, photos, inside gossip, contests and special bonus treats concerning Kathy's latest adventures in the world at large. Discount prices on Kathy paraphernalia are also available.

Kathy goes to movies, listens to contemporary rock and roll, watches television news, and doesn't read: she's a very modern person. She offers "14 Secret Ways to Meet Kathy" ("6. Become famous and she'll ask to meet you."). She helps you understand your inner feelings with "Kathy's Love Test — Can You Pass It?" She helps you vent your unfocused creative urges with a Kathy connect-the-dots portrait. She offers hope: "Here's Your Chance To Win Your Phone Call From Kathy."

Dramas in Kathy's life unfold before your very eyes. "KATHY BREAKS HER ANKLE!" screams one of her newsletters, and "KATHY GETS HER CAST OFF!" notes an update. A most interesting newsletter details, in Kathy's own words, how she helped in the birth of Alexandra Kathleen Mothersbaugh: "I couldn't stop crying! I don't know exactly why, but when the baby was born and they laid her on Maria's abdomen I started crying. The doctors started staring at me too, but I couldn't stop. It was so beautiful I don't think I've ever been moved by anything before. And I'm not even the one who had it. I can imagine what a mess I'll be when its me on that table!"

Why does Kathy go to the trouble of maintaining a fan club? "To have fun with my personality," she says. She is assisted in all matters by club secretary Laurel Sylvanus, who makes things run smoothly and promotes publicity.

Inquiries should be directed to International Kathy Fan Club, 11730 Gilmore, N. Hollywood, CA 91606, USA.

Bryony Lavery

OBTUSE

The interval, as we have come to learn, can be far more than a break in a play. Apart from offering the audience relief (in more senses than one), it offers a skilled director the opportunity to change the emphasis of a script. Foco Novo and the Half Moon Theatre's new co-production, *Landscape of Exile*, attempts to take the process one step further by presenting two one-act plays, divided by an interval, that are supposedly on the same subject. Indeed the writer, David Zane Mairowitz, unfortunately seemed to expect that we would accept these two one-act plays as parts of the same work.

Mr. Mairowitz would have us believe that he has written a major overview of the life and times of Friedrich Engels, covering an expanse of twelve years from the death of Karl Marx to Engels' own death in 1895, *en route* charting the rise and fall of the British labour movement. Engels had collaborated with Marx on *The Communist Manifesto*, certainly the most significant political document of the nineteenth century, and had been Marx's source of financial support for many years. The importance of these twelve years is that this was the time at which Engels was entrusted with the task of editing bundles of Marx's unintelligible notes into an unintelligible mass called *Das Kapital*. From Mr. Engels' first exclamation in the play, "Das Kapital – more of it!", to the final scene (when you could be excused for expecting the last bundle to fall from aloft to flatten the ailing Engels), he is seen working on this task in splendid isolation from the campaigns and activities of the communist movement. In opposition to Engels' self-imposed exile are Marx's daughter Eleanor and the motley bunch that broke away from the theory of revolutionary demands to form the Independent Labour Party. Mr. Mairowitz would like to convince us that both Engels and the ILP in their different ways sold Marx's ideal short.

This is what Mr. Mairowitz would like us to see, but then he would like us to swallow quite a lot. What in fact he gives us is two plays, *Landscape* and *Exile*. *Landscape* is a paste-up of every significant moment in the rise of the British labour movement. It is populated by a group of stereotyped characters babbling theory and half-baked nonsense at each other until long after the cows have come home. It begins with a charade of a meeting trying to decide what kind of tombstone should be put on top of the dead Marx, and continues in much the same vein, employing every gaffe Mairowitz could think up to try to make some interest out of a long string of topics that include (to mention but a few) picketing, unemployment, feminism and wife battering. This is an epic view, and it takes place on a suitably cumbersome set, but it lacks what it intends to achieve, namely, relevance. The writing stumbles into clichés like a hippopotamus into water and the garbled mess is relieved only by a few interludes of comedy.

Exile is a very different matter. It is dominated by the figures of Engels and Ms. Marx, and the stature of both themselves and their ideas are given ample room to make impact. *Exile* deals with the realisation



ENGELS

of Engels' separation from the situation he helped to create, and Ms. Marx's attempts to involve him in action. Mr. Mairowitz is writing about people and this is clearly where his talent lies. We have an Engels who has his own vision of the future, characterised by his fascination with that devilish new invention, the telephone, and a man whose subjugation of himself to the figure of Marx is painted in subtle and moving tones. Eleanor Marx's criticism of Engels is not political but personal: "You give us less than you are because you believe yourself less than you are". In this atmosphere the characters have an opportunity to flourish. Edward Aveling (Eleanor Marx's husband), who in *Landscape* is presented merely as a preposterous fool, becomes in *Exile* a forthright and vital personality whose voice goes unheeded amidst accusations of him embezzling the movement's funds. As we see him travelling towards historical obscurity we see his vision of a true communist state going with him.

At the centre of the piece is Eleanor Marx herself. Once free from *Landscape* and the role of heroic fighting feminist, it is not just her views but also what she is that becomes prominent. And she is a truly formidable character. As her father's vision crumbles it becomes apparent that she alone has the presence to make it work, and this despite the burden of enormous personal and political setbacks. Mr. Mairowitz asks us to compare her bids to reunite the various factions of the labour movement with Engels' interminable work on *Das Kapital*, and we are left with little doubt as to which of them achieved most towards implementing Karl Marx's dream. Mr. Mairowitz achieves in *Exile* a coherent historical and political argument.

The task facing the performers in trying to unite these two separate plays was tremendous. And it took its toll. John Phillips (Engels) and Frances de la Tour (Eleanor Marx) are amongst the best we have, and it is frustrating to see their talents wasted on trying to make something out of nothing. Or rather, one thing out of two. Only in the final scenes were they far enough into home territory to give us a glimpse of how they would have performed, given the right material. Frances de la Tour succeeded in giving an uncluttered and direct portrayal of Eleanor Marx, while John Phillips chose his own pace and carved his performance from whatever he had on hand, managing to infuse his part with a surprising amount of wit and intelligence. But the sparkle we might have expected from these two was missing.

Coming shortly to the Half Moon Theatre is a good example of how history and relevance *can* be united. Gay Sweatshop's *The Dear Love of Comrades* by Drew Griffiths and Noel Greig is based on the life of the radical thinker Edward Carpenter. Edward who? Well, that's exactly the reason you should see it. Griffiths and Greig's recent BBC2 play, *Only Consent*, was merely a primer to the range of issues that they cover in *The Dear Love of Comrades*.

Pete Shelton



Ken Campbell

In the ICA foyer, the world is at an end. The earth has been rudely blasted apart by a Vogon Destructor Fleet and the surviving inhabitants have been ushered into an airborne auditorium to be shown 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'. Rob La Frenais sat among the ruins talking to the principal cause, Ken Campbell.

Rob La Frenais: Are you a cult?

Ken Campbell: I don't know. Am I? Would you say so?

RL: Let me put it this way. Do you attract a cult following?

KC: Well, a cult means not very many people, actually.

RL: Is there a certain sort of person that comes to your shows?

KC: Yeah. (Pause) They look a bit different . . . from the others. I don't know . . . these are funny questions. Yeah, I don't know, they may or may not be; since I don't go to other people's shows much, I don't know how I'm meant to compare. I mean, compared with what? Not with the National Theatre, we've played there. I don't know. Yeah, we do get a different audience. We get a science fiction audience in ours, and other people don't get a science fiction audience, except maybe sometimes they do. That's the answer.

RL: Why did you go into science fiction?

KC: Because of the conspiracy against imagination . . . begun in 1939.

RL: Where in 1939?

KC: Britain.

RL: What, at the start of the Second World War?

KC: Yeah, that's right, the war started then as well. Now there you are. Right, if you take H.G. Wells. Tell me some novels by H.G. Wells.

RL: Well, my favourites are the short stories.

KC: No, tell me some novels, I'm not asking you for your favourite ones.

RL: The Time Machine, Mr. . . . ah. (Voice off, repeated by KC)

KC: History of Mr. Polly. A prompt from over there. Right. The interesting thing about H.G. Wells was that he could be a great writer by writing 'The History of Mr. Polly', the second one you nearly remembered, one week, and 'The Time Machine' another. Right. What the conspiracy against the imagination will tell you, after 1939 you either wrote the so-called serious novel which must know how things work, must not predict how things will go. Otherwise, after 1939 it'll be placed in a lurid-cover SF death-camp and be sold on the railway stations and reviewed on the wrong pages of the Sunday papers. See what I mean?

Other person at table: Does this imply a conspiracy?

KC: I don't know. But there's clearly been one.

RL: Did you read Wells' last essay in which he predicted the end of the human race?

KC: I don't think so, no.

RL: It was a desperate last essay in which . . .

KC: *He was writing in a time when imagination was applauded. We're talking about a time when imagination is denigrated. He wrote that before '39, I expect. I mean, they'd let H.G. Wells write what he fucking wanted because you know, there he was.*

RL: His point was that we would soon be superseded by something else, like ants for example, that this was the end. This may be a common thing before someone dies, but . . .

KC: *That surely was a great idea and should be given as much space as 'Lucky Jim' or 'Look Back in Anger'. So now you understand that why to run a Science Fiction Theatre is to battle the conspiracy against the imagination begun in 1939.*

RL: It's interesting, in the fifties there was the paranoid stuff about invasions, in the films . . .

KC: *Where would those things be reviewed in a cinema review? Where would that have compared with an arty French film or 'A Kind of Loving'? They would have been considered far superior to 'Invasion of the Bodysnatchers'. Talking about Proper thought, the conspiracy comes from Proper thinking, and all government monies, like Arts Council subsidies comes in an anti-imaginative direction since they're part of the whole Proper vision of stunting the imagination, which began in 1939. When the Arts Council closed down weekly reps, that was to stunt the actor's art, I would think, wouldn't you?*

RL: Were you thinking this sort of thing when you were doing 'Pilk's Madhouse'?

KC: *I wasn't thinking precisely that because Brian Aldiss hadn't pointed out that the conspiracy against the imagination began in 1939 at the time I was doing 'Pilk's Madhouse'. I suppose I was training my mind to receive Aldiss's words. I guess he might have told it to a few people. Perhaps he chooses who he tells it to.*

RL: Back to 'The Warp'. You said it was "going to make everything else in theatre look like bollocks". Did it?

KC: *Yeah, I think . . . thought so. Yeah. Yes. Clearly. That was a visionary statement, that was before it, wasn't it?*

RL: Yes.

KC: *As far as I'm concerned it did. I mean, it makes this [Hitch-hiker's Guide] look like bollocks, The Warp.*

RL: This is an attempt to get something that is very 'Radio Four' on to the stage. Everyone knows it's from a radio play, but I think there's a certain atmosphere that comes across on Radio Four. The attempt to get this over, how much do you think that was successful?

KC: *Don't know. It didn't get put on for those reasons.*

RL: I heard the Hitch-hiker's Guide and . . .

KC: *I didn't hear it. I was impressed with the enthusiasm of Jerry Webb, who's a . . . man who builds rockets. Not fireworks, the ones that go into space. He was very keen about it. He went and got me the tapes. I thought the tapes were rather good, but I really did it because Jerry Webb was so keen.*

RL: Are you the sort of person who has a lot of positive influences, or do you have your detractors and enjoy proving them wrong? I mean, some people, like artists, get great things done because they have a lot of people believing in them. The moment they listen to much criticism,

continued on page 14



Photo Christopher Malski

One About Sex and Foreigners Please and Can You Wrap Up the Bad Ones...?

The Comedy Store, newly incorporated into the Nell Gwynne/Gargoyle Club complex at 69 Dean Street, is a club where anyone can stand up and tell jokes. It's the first of its kind in London, the idea comes from America. I guess on that basis it's possible that, just as the skateboard boom led to the rediscovery of roller skates, the Comedy Store and its future imitators may end up making Speakers' Corner so vogueish they'll have to start charging admission there to keep the crowds down. But in the meantime the club looks like emulating the success of its Los Angeles and New York prototypes: the audience, even on the night of the England-Scotland match, was of a healthy size.

You sit at tables lit by candles burning in red and green glasses. It costs £3 to get in, which also buys your first drink. After that you can continue sampling the cocktails, or failing that, buy a pint (80p) and sip it slowly. Either way, the guy who brings the drinks is pleasant.

Up front is a low stage with piano and microphone, and backed by glittery hangings. The house compere, on this occasion a dark, heavy-eyed man called Alex who gave the impression he'd give any comic a concrete overcoat as soon as look at him, announced the first act as if it were his own bereavement, and we were away. A succession of comics recruited mainly through ads in *Private Eye* and *The Stage* came on and had five minutes apiece to do their stuff: more if it went well, less if they baled out.

Some are would-be comics, others rather more practised. Of the sample I saw, three were indifferent, two were good value and one was brilliant. Alex the compere also chipped in with a spot to keep things bubbling, and that was good too, but then he's a pro.

One of the evening's successes was Tom Tickell, taking a break from the economics page of *The Guardian*. He brought a studied approach to the business of comedy, helped by good mimicry, a natural flair for telling stories, and immaculate microphone technique. He also had some stories no-one had heard before. When he told one they *had* heard, he took no chances: in the one about the newly-landed Martian who demands of a petrol pump: "Take me to your leader!", the Martian's final impatient "And take your finger out of your ear when I'm talking to you" became "... cock out of your ear ..." There's nothing like making sure.

David English was good value too. Earlier on one of the less successful comics, having had several of his standard gags fall flat, had said: "I know — it's too clean for you, isn't it! That's the trouble. I know what YOU want — you want me to give you the dirty stuff, don't you!" "If you can't tell the clean stuff" drawled someone quietly in the audience, "you might as well". David English didn't bullshit about the dirty stuff: he just breezed on and told it in a relaxed but energetic

style, after nonchalantly dispensing with the microphone.

Superstar of the evening was Bob Flag: hardly an amateur, he's been performing with Ian Dury lately. In five anarchic minutes he went through a jumble sale's-worth of shattered costumes and props, gave a quick blast on the saxophone, imposed his seedy and manically strung-out dignity on the whole scene, and made mincemeat of the audience's chief heckler. The latter, a genially boiled elderly gentleman with a sinister black glove on one hand, was almost too good to be true: I thought at first he must be a paid stooge. Goaded by his incessant talking, Flag first loosed off a capgun at him, then got him to take the microphone, into which the gentleman sang in a soprano voice before departing, genial as ever, to the Nell Gwynne club upstairs where he seemed to think he'd been all along.

The comics who failed did so largely by trying to behave like comics: in other words, mechanically, not responding to the audience; either by rushing on insistently over non-existent laughter: "... no, but listen to this, listen to this ... are you listening lady? Well, *that's* something ...", or by leaving long pauses, under the impression that this constitutes timing, and thus letting the steam out of their act. Too many of the clean jokes were about foreigners and too many of the dirty ones about sex and foreigners; and you'd have to be a breath-takingly good mimic to get a laugh impersonating Steptoe and Son in 1979.

For all that, I'd as soon hear a bad joke badly told by an amateur as by Max Bygraves on TV, and there must be many worse places to die the death than the Comedy Store. The atmosphere was pleasant: it was all new, and the audience was neither inhibited nor out for blood. I enjoyed it.

My one reservation was that since a place called the Comedy Store is committed to delivering an acceptable percentage of good comedy, the process of ensuring this could lead to a more extreme polarisation of good and bad: in other words, a gladiatorial contest between pros and suckers, a Mastermind-type sadism. It's not like that now, maybe it will never be.

Peter Rosengard, who runs the place, hopes it will be a proving ground for new talent, citing the guy who stars in 'Mork and Mindy' as an LA Comedy Store discovery who's become the hottest property on TV. If anyone gets discovered in the London club I'd wish them better things than the lead in a dross sitcom, though if that's their dream, good luck. The kind of people I'd hope to see flourishing at the Comedy Store would be the kind of people who wouldn't be allowed on TV, for a few years at least.

Steve Thorne

WELFARE STATE

MERINGUE HAIRDO WOWS WELWYN

Curiosity led me to forsake my usual table in the Henry VIII eaterie in the Shakespeare Tavern (where the jester performs entirely in dumb show to the benefit of a mainly foreign clientele) to see what John and Shirley Fox were providing at When The Pie Was Opened, a brief restaurant in what was formerly Digswell House in lovely Welwyn Garden City.

What a night we had of it! Pretzels filled with mushroom and garlic pate and smoked eggs, lemon and lentil soup with onions and carrots, individual turkey pies served in gargoyle-mask bowl holders, spare ribs speared on the masts of little wooden caiques like sails, and finishing up with cream meringues a la deesse du ble and choice of Greek or Turkish coffee.

All this, plus real ale and entertainment, for the knock-down price of £2.50 a head. A far cry from the pate, soup, chicken pie, ribs of beef and wine at the Shakespeare Tavern for £13 apiece. Admittedly Henry and Elizabeth weren't there at Digswell, but there were kings and queens aplenty on the bamboo candelabrum and in the divertissement between courses, indulging in internecine puppet warfare while marauding blackbirds attacked their maid with increasing violence as the evening wore on. Instead of jesters grimacing encouragingly at Japanese and German tourists we had dumb shows of small shadow puppets on islands catching large monsters, or a small boy with feathers on his hat singing a song about a dandelion clock while two-thirds of the Johnny Rondo Trio hid in a corner and practised four-and-twenty variations on 'Sing A Song Of Sixpence'. I suspect there were more than twenty-four, but I was keeping the running total on a paper napkin which was put to more pressing use at the end of the spare ribs course. It is always good to hear Lol Coxhill when he refrains from doing his imitations of selected vintage motor horns. The service, incidentally, was superb, even though some of the surprises were a little spoilt by having the tent kitchen just outside the dining-room windows (one could, for instance, see the near-panic as they hurried to load the giant pie crust from which the turkey pies and obligatory blackbirds were to appear). The appearance of the sweet course was a triumph, as a corn goddess in full sixteenth century court dress appeared to heal the ransacked maid – and dispense the clusters of meringues that made up her towering coiffure and adorned her statuesque person.

After the meat, there was some talk about 'giving people a good night out' and 'making performance art accessible'. However, in spite of all the differences from the Shakespeare Tavern, I had an odd feeling that here, too, one was catering for people who didn't speak the language; in spite of the enthusiasm and the bargain prices, we were (in some mysterious artistic way) being taken for a ride.

Bon Voyeur



Photo Tom Castle

they're finished. Are you in that category?

KC: *I can't remember which one I might be in or might not be, but . . . yeah, I don't find the words of critics helpful. Not much at all. Except when they praise. If people say they don't like it, I don't find that helpful at all. So I only want enthusiasts, right? I tend to do shows that the only right response is . . . being grateful. I mean, we didn't have to put on the longest play in the world. Nobody asked us to.*

RL: How would you feel if everyone surrounding you said you were mad?

KC: *Wonderful . . . I only said that because it was the most surprising answer that could possibly have come into my mind. How would you feel if everyone was dancing around you saying you're mad . . . compared to being surrounded by a load of enthusiasts? If there isn't a potential for enthusiasm, I don't think there's a potential for much fun. I haven't got the . . . boldness to push misery.*

RL: How did you get to Liverpool?

KC: *On the tr . . . what do you mean?*

RL: Go on, say it. On the train. OK. Why Liverpool?

KC: *Because it's the wittiest city. So therefore it's the most critical.*

RL: You mean it presents a challenge, the way they carry on, like on buses.

KC: *Yeah, I mean Liverpool doesn't only consist of people you might have overheard on buses. That's idiotic. What about the people that drive around in cars? There's a load of people who never leave the sauna; a lot of people who don't go by bus. I think I mainly went because of them, actually. I mean, it's OK on buses as well. There's all the fun and those people on buses, yeah. No, actually I think I'm going to Leeds, because of the people on the buses there. Buswise, they might have the edge. (Laughter)*

RL: All right. What happened when the ferrets started eating babies, then?

KC: *Eating babies? Ferrets are always eating babies. That's why it's fucking dangerous to stick them down your trousers. They eat your knob, fool. They're dear little things that you put down your trousers, so leave them out with the baby. I mean, the whole thing was like . . .*

RL: Did you get any reaction with the ferret-eating-baby case?

KC: *No. Do you want a beer?*

RL: What have you always wanted to do but have never managed?

KC: *I've never not done anything that I've really wanted to do. What do you mean, like fuck Brigitte Bardot on the moon, or something like that . . . I've never done that. I can tell you some things, a good idea or something, but that's not the same. I never knew I wanted to do the longest play in the world until the day we decided to do it, then I really didn't want to do anything else.*

RL: One thing you might do in the future?

KC: (Long pause) *The Fermi Paradox.*

RL: What is the Fermi Paradox?

KC: *Nuclear physicist, isn't he? Enrico Fermi. When they were explaining at this conference that there were umpteen million billion planets that would house life forms possibly almost identical to ours, he stopped the whole meeting in its tracks . . . You see, the meeting was the All-Round Cleverness Meeting on how easy it is, actually, rocketry;*

what a piece of . . . falling off a log it all is, fuck-all to it, going off into the outer galaxies, you just need the money, technology is all there . . . so Enrico says, since there's umpteen billion million of 'em like us, where are they? That was Enrico's question. So where are they? Daniken and Velikovsky, so far as the scientists are concerned, that's all utter bunkum. All these people who got served fried eggs by aliens, fucked by aliens, all that. Not in front of a scientist. I mean, what about that airplane that disappeared? Don't mean anything to a scientist. Sorting out how to blow things up, move out into the outer galaxies, all those strange, hairy reports which are never proved mean bugger-all. Now Fermi says, now where are they, then? There are only three official answers to the Fermi Paradox. One is, when a civilisation gets so clever that it can blast off to the outer galaxies where it might meet the others, it also gets so clever that it blows itself up, and it can't resist blowing itself up first. Sort of Tom and Jerry. Number two is the zoo theory: yes, they are all out there, but they're keeping us in ignorance until the right time, till never, or they're breeding us for some reason. Yes, this is Proper dinkum thinking. The third one is that there's no-one at all. If there's absolutely nobody, then our movement now, out to the moon and stars, is actually then, the fish putting its first fin on to the land. And that's the one I'm interested in.

Heartache and Sorrow

This feminist cabaret recently packed them out at Action Space, brilliantly exposed the poignant truth behind the Bombastic Broads of Broadway, cracked open beach barbeques, pyjama parties and clearasil, and spiked the summer of love. They spill all to Julie Parker.

Julie Parker: First, do you see yourselves as a feminist company?
Rhonda Liss. It started more with, I think, the play that we wanted to do, actually a booking for a play that we hadn't written yet, and Cathy and I got together and started . . . writing it . . . er, it didn't start out being the feminist cabaret that it has become, but the more we did it, the more we realised that we could say something very important through it, and that got us very excited because we weren't only performing, and the standard of performance is very important to us, but we were all making an important statement that we believed in, and when the other shows came out of the first 'Heartache and Sorrow Show', there was always an idea that we wanted to make a certain statement about women. I think that it's certainly not hard-line feminism, I'm not sure if I know what that means; there's certainly a tremendous love for all women . . . in this group, particularly for some of the women who get . . . misplaced in the feminist movement.

JP: What do you mean by misplaced?

RL: Well, I mean the non-hard-line feminists are the women who aren't feminists yet, the women who are thinking about it, the housewives, er . . .

Cathy Downes: The ones who are trapped, the ones who are really trapped within images that society says they should adhere to, and that's one of the themes of all of Heartache and Sorrow company productions to date, including 'Katherine Mansfield'.

JP: Yes. Where do you see it going to from here, the company? I mean, do you see this line continuing, or . . .

CD: I'd like it to continue, as long as I'm part of it.

Steph: What you said makes clearer the one show that I've seen you do, the 'Heartache and Sorrow Show', because you do use very conventional stereotypes of the thirties, the women that you're portraying are very stereotypical of that sort of era and the things that they're saying, and yet the way you send the show, with the two women coming together and being strong and realising that they can actually be happy with each other and don't have to get hung up about men all the time . . . I'm just wondering why there's nothing before that to suggest this? It's not really following through, and it's quite a shock, that's what I'm saying.

RL: But what we're doing is giving examples, we're standing outside the show, and we're giving two examples, two eras, the thirties, which were terribly influenced by the movie star image, you know, the kind of woman one should be, and yet the very women who are playing this image are in fact terribly strong women, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, all those women were not exactly, ah, flimsy . . . women. In the fifties I think that . . . but what I want to get back to is that we're showing friendship, we're showing how women work with each other, how they communicate to each other through friendship, and what happens to them when things go wrong. One gets the man, one wants something the other can't get.

CD: Yeah, why things go wrong, and what we're pointing out is why things go wrong so often is because of the medium of . . . how the woman should be. And that's the strong feeling in the 'Heartache and Sorrow Show', and in 'Sweetcorn' too, it's that a relationship that could be quite an honest, positive relationship between the women gets distorted because both women are so hung up about what they're supposed to be after in life, they're destroying themselves and their friendship, you see. At the end of the show we come out and we make that obvious. But the point of the show is really, look how kids were stereotyped in the fifties, look what a mess they were, and is it any different now? That's the real point of the show. We give it a happy ending, just like Brecht gives 'Threepenny Opera' a happy ending.

JP: What's been happening over the last eighteen months, coming out of Hollywood, have been watered-down feminist movies, they've cottoned on to the feminist . . . women's bandwagon, I won't call it feminist . . . they've realised that it's box office. How do you feel about that? That the media has suddenly cottoned on to the fact that they have a guaranteed audience, if they put on something that is meant to be women being strong, and then do it their way. How do you feel about that?

RL: I think that if Hollywood could take all its money and they use it



in the feminist cause . . . it's terrific!

CD: It's ironic, though, that our whole show is about the influence of the media, and yet it's the media we are doing it through . . .

JP: I wasn't actually suggesting that the 'Heartache and Sorrow Show' was doing that. It's like all of a sudden in London, where before there were two theatres where you could always get women's shows seen, all the others are now interested, because they know they're going to have an audience with them. How do you feel about that?

CD: Well, I think that there's the same kind of danger that you get into with labelling anything, and this is part of my reluctance to call ourselves a feminist company. I see it more as theatre . . . for anybody who wants to see theatre, regardless of tagging it with a label that . . . I think that's dangerous, actually, because it gets into an area of other people's expectations . . .

JP: At the same time, that label's been responsible for a lot of the audience.

RL: Precisely. That is show business. Unfortunately, I think, because all the time it's an effort to find . . . a way of attracting an audience. And this is just another way of getting bums on seats, in a sense.

CD: Certainly we didn't set out to create feminist . . . [unintelligible] . . . bums on seats.

Steph: What's happening in the audience is that women are identifying with you on stage because of the things you're saying about the things the media ignores, the true friendships women can have together.

JP: What I'm saying is that the media aren't ignoring it any more, they've suddenly seen it as something they can make money out of. With Vanessa Redgrave and Jane Fonda in a movie together and it's about women, then they're packing out the cinemas, whether it's a lousy movie or not.

RL: *That's one of the bad aspects of it. One of the good aspects of it is that if you look at the list of women who are in these women's films, there are a helluva lot of very strong and honest women who believe in the movement. People like Shirley Maclaine and Fonda have really worked hard, and a movie like 'Girlfriends' would have had a chance in hell a few years ago. Men too are going to see films like that. That's important. I think it's about time that real heroines, who are also heroes . . .*

JP: That's a good title, Heroines and Heroes.

RL: *Remember that, Cathy.*

CD: *I think that inherently there's a danger in the entertainment business . . . and in what we're doing . . . that somebody's going to capitalise on it, there's money going to be made out of it if it's going to attract people for some reason, that . . . perhaps it's offering them something that hasn't been offered before.*

RL: *But you know something, what is the purpose of the fringe, what was the purpose of the left in the sixties . . . in the beginning it was a small group of people who said, 'Look, what's going on in Vietnam is nowhere', and they kept talking and talking and making enough noise, so that those people who were not at all involved started saying, 'Hey, maybe what's going on in Vietnam is nowhere'. And if the women, who've started out like, people saying, 'Aw, feminism what do you women want?' and this, that and the other, if that fringe group start becoming publicised, they can't be pushed aside into a corner any more. Because more women are going to be affected by it, and more women are going to gain from it. If they steal from you, it shows that you really knew what was happening in the first place!*

CD: *The important thing is, we don't cop out to what is popular. OK, so we're becoming popular, so someone expects us to write another show that is equally popular . . . but the plays that we do are plays that we believe in, whether it's a hard-line or soft-line feminist statement, or another kind of social statement, or no statement at all. It's something we want to do, because we want to do it.*

Steph: There must be some motivation behind the fact that you are here now working together, devising your own shows. It's obviously a statement in itself that you've actually arrived at this point, rather than being in a Hollywood movie or something.

RL: *Did you ever say you didn't wanna be in a Hollywood movie?*
(General laughter)

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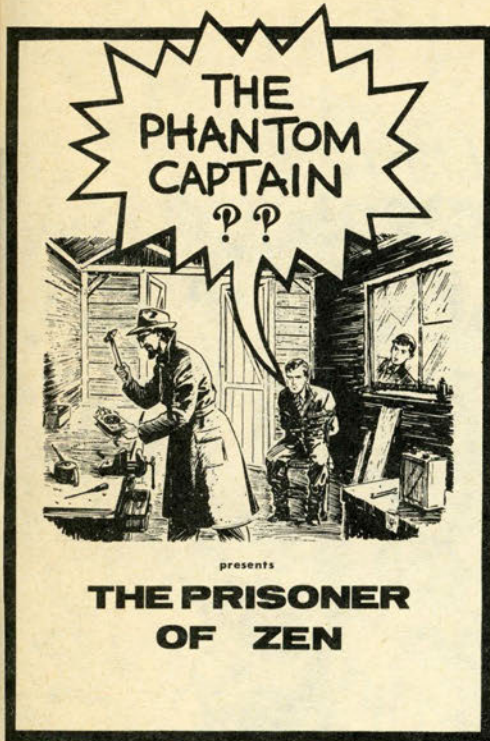
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Rob La Frenais went to Jackson's Lane for a Ruritanian romp.



A traveller turns up at a hotel 'somewhere in Central Europe', is mistaken for a king, the hotel's really a palace, he's really a spy for the British foreign office; the real king's a slob, he (the slob) gets kidnapped by power-crazy Mad Cousin Michael ("Those of us not afraid to soil our hands will look after the abattoir"); the spy, instead of getting chucked down the well, has to double for the king, which is OK as he turns out to be the real king after all, but of course, as the old king's retainer, Zapt, intones, "In essence you are a frog" and he gets to marry the froglike . . . wait a moment. Are we not in Ruritania? Is this not that Christmas afternoon perennial 'Prisoner of Zenda' recycled with a touch of the old Phantom Captain drawing-room paradox, knowing glances and accompanying paradox, knowing glances and accompanying mumbo-jumbo? Indeed it is. To the Phantom Captain, "The elements which make up the classic tale of intrigue – the identical double, the conflict of duty and desire, the daring rescue, the duel between expert swordsmen – take on new meaning in this surreal version of an old story, *The Prisoner of Zen*". Needless to say, there is no rescue.

Brian Lipson plays the double role of the looney melancholic king plagued by spies and obsessed with being 'modern' and the twitchy foreign office spy; Julia Hills, a fairly ordinary but froggy queen; and Matthew Green, coming through the window one moment as Mad Cousin Michael, the next appearing at the foot of the audience, coming on with the sub-Shakespearean routine about the play being no less real than the events outside. Lastly, Peter Godfrey, aka Deman, writer and director (the sole member of the original company) plays the retainer, Zapt. It is all well performed and very funny but it is clearly within the group's established territory, however new the cast.

One may well ask at this point what in fact the Phantom Captain is up to. Then again, one may not. Pursuing the former, it can be noted that the artistic director Neil Hornick is still on his 'sabbatical', and in his absence the group are attempting some departures. Their last production, 'The Narcissus Complex', was their first crack at the subject of sex, albeit auto-erotic. This was also notable in that for once the significant performances were by women. Degradation and despair were present, guilt and perversion hovered in a most un-nautical fashion. The captain's buttons had lost their shine.

The new production has retreated to the usual smattering of cautionary tales, Zen anecdotes, and the usual manifesto from a quasi-religious/political grouping, in this case *The Ruritanian Government in Exile*. The principal source of wisdom, 'The Old King's Will', is scattered around the palace like so many Gideon bibles and there is always a copy to be picked up and quoted from. Riddles about geese in bottles and people curing hiccups by setting their nightshirts on fire spring effortlessly from its pages.

If I did not suspect that experimental groups of this kind have to live their work, build up a larger-than-life identity that goes beyond theatre and create a genre for themselves, I would say that the Phantom Captain should take advantage of Neil Hornick's absence to admit to themselves that they have a strong, successful source of healthy satire. Leave the homilies at home, feed the Zen to the dog, swallow the formula and start taking risks. I suppose they know what they're doing though . . .



The Prisoner of Zen, by the Phantom Captain, is on at the Edinburgh Festival, and is returning to London in the Autumn.

Frank Harris was a bog Irishman, Doctor of Law, cowpuncher, rake, literary editor, wit, friend and confidant of Great Men, member of the Cafe Royal clique, and compulsive talker and writer. He refers to himself at one point in the play as 'the Galileo of Sex', although Vasco da Gama would be a closer analogy. We know all this from an unimpeachable source: he tells us so himself in *My Life and Loves*, which, on account of its sexual frankness, was banned in Britain for some forty years.

Fearless Frank gives us a representative sample of events in his life, as introduced by Harris in his old age, sitting in a Paris cafe dictating his autobiography to a pretty 'secretary'. The scenes are played out by the company in a broadly-caricatured revue style with comic songs and dance routines.

Any production of this sort must stand or fall by the strength of the central character; Harris was a monomaniac who rarely bothered to conceal his emotions and whose love of himself found expression in the use of words...epigrams, bon mots, headlines, and above all, stories...about himself, his friends, the great and the famous. Bill Stewart plays Harris with boyish enthusiasm and a suggestively drooping lower lip, but tries to portray the range of emotions; passion, anger, frustration; mainly by fiddling with the volume control. He didn't seem to be involved with the words themselves and often told the stories more like a manic newsreader than a blarney-gifted storyteller. Mind you, there weren't many opportunities to just stand up there and tell us the tale...and it is in this that the main fault with the production lies. For a subject who pioneered a form of conversational writing in a pretty stuffy literary atmosphere, the play hangs on to some very conventional ideas of staging.

It has two levels of approach. Firstly, a sort of fussy naturalism in the 'real' cafe scenes, complete with waiter, drinks, and the unintentional bathos called up by the tragic portrayal of a 'man who'd fired his last shot'. Secondly, a mixed bag of sketches and caricatures, some funny, some inept, most of them gayed or camp and some of them just dull, interspersed with simple dance routines and innocuous songs which try to amuse with a sort of Mel Brooks humour. In the cowboy sequence, for instance, we learn that:

The coyote's howls
Play havoc with your bowels
On the long and lonesome trail.

(An exception to the above, however, is the mighty Olivier Pierre whose mobility and sense of the ridiculous kept many of the scenes afloat.) Bill Stewart steps nimbly between the two styles, but seems unable to break free from either....he maintains the convention that he is talking to his secretary even when he has his back to her and is standing downstage staring at the audience. He never seems to be talking to us. I can't imagine the real Frank Harris passing up such an opportunity.

Also, unfortunately, he was unable to avoid falling a little flat in some of the songs, particularly the duet with Carol Cleveland, who plays all the women Harris really loved. Best among the voices were Nichola McAuliffe as all the old and/or married women, whose aim is true and powerful even if the words get somewhat blurred in the process; and Mandy More playing all the parts such as maid, shoeshine boy, newsboy, New Woman etc. with a suitably pert and cocky self-confidence. Stereotyping was a problem for all the women. Mary Chilton too played a series of prim girls of different ages. It could have been deliberate.....Harris has a moment of horror near the end when all he can remember of his conquests is an amorphous crowd of nameless face and bodies.....but since it was not always easy to work out who was who in the first place, the confusion seemed quite natural and nothing to get worked up about..

Costumes too, were erratic, varying from full period dress for the men to a mixture of dresses and leotards for the women.

Generally there seemed to be a lack of awareness among the cast and in the production. An example would be the Cafe Royal scene with a boorish camp Whistler using his handkerchief as if he were a Morris Dancer, and the lack of perspective that assumes that juxtaposing male smoking-room humour and prim female ignorance

Feeling Harrissed

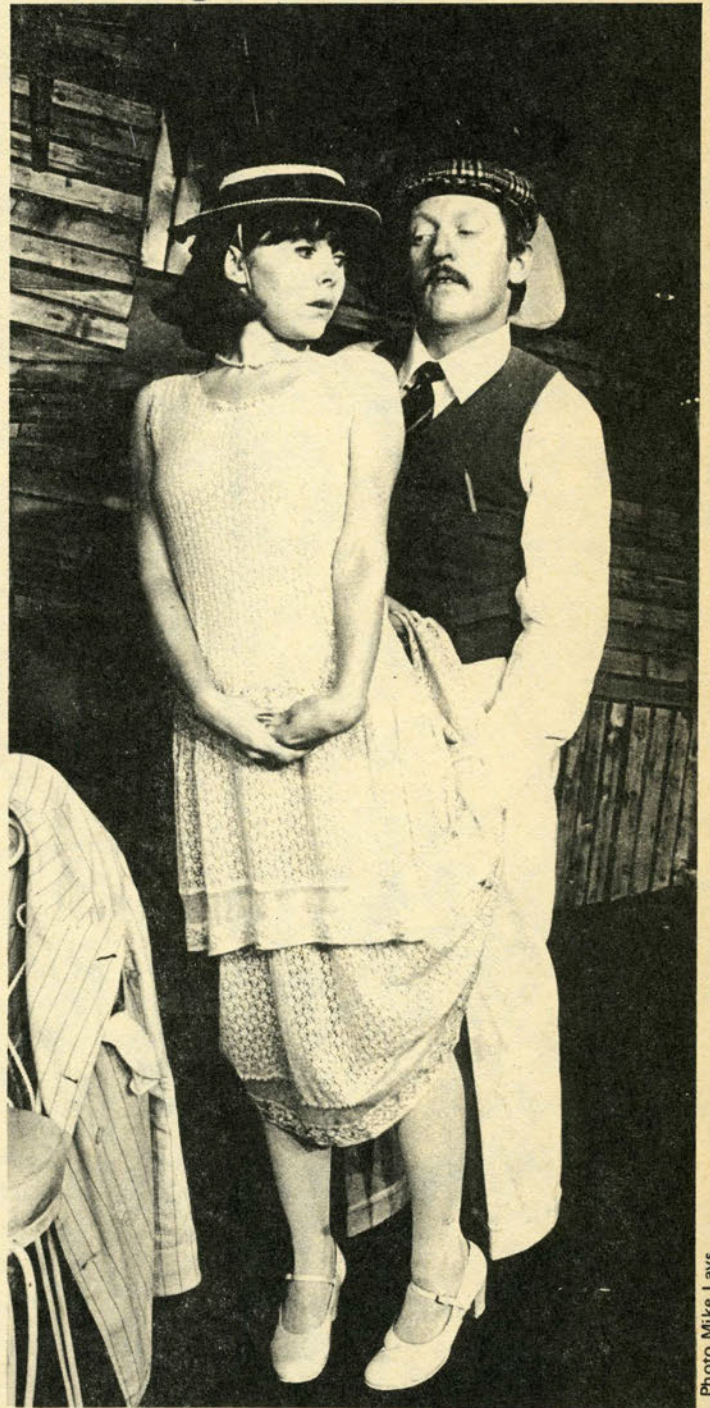
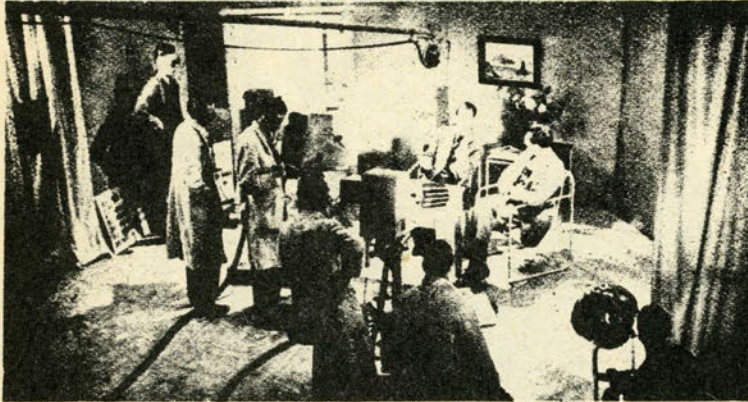


Photo Mike Lays

is a recipe for laughter. There's the germ of a good play here.... I'd like to see what *Shared Experience*, for instance, would make of it. This production, however, despite all the energy and a few comic moments, impressed me only as a jog-trot sort of index or chronology of the life of a fascinatingly obsessive man. Go and see it for yourself, at the Kings Head, Upper Street, Islington. Dinner at 7.00, Performance at 8.00.



Micros in Mall

From *Cybernetic Serendipity* to *Microprocessor Merriment*.. The chips are coming to the I.C.A. and not with the quiche either. (Hereby the last tired 'chip' wordplay, Britain's Had Enough.) The Exploding Chip, the microprocessor season at the I.C.A. in October, will be their first incursion into high technology since *Cybernetic Serendipity* nearly ten years ago. The chip is going to do such Significant Artistic Things as conduct entire symphony orchestras. There are even rumours that it will control an entire fringe theatre production, the electronic wizardry devising satires about it's own effects, directing the roles of displaced worker, ruthless technologist, conscience-ridden scientist..

Something Rather Nasty

Walkout Events by women's groups at sexist shows are sweeping London again, causing the *Islington Gazette* to thunder SUPERDUD! SEXY FRANK SPARKS PLAY WALK-OUT of such an event at the Kings Head opening of Fearless Frank (see review.) Meanwhile, we have it on good authority that 'something rather nasty' is going to happen at the Allen Jones exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery. Wish they could do 'something rather nasty' to the videotape of the oleaginous Bragg and co. attempting to justify the Freeman Hardy and Willis fetishists 'odd' view of his girlfriend Evelyn. The tape is shown in the gallery every day at five.

Concern Over Fringe Form.

Two highly probing questionnaires sent to fringe companies are causing anger and amazement in some circles. They are issued by the Arts and Leisure Research Unit of the Polytechnic of Central London, but it is well known that they are sponsored by the Arts Council, who might naturally be expected to glance at the results..Felt to be part of a general tightening up of the Council's knowledge of it's client's affairs, questions are asked on 'disciplinary and grievance procedures' and other 'personnel issues'. The companies are asked to state whether negotiations on pay are 'open and friendly', or 'acrimonious, resulting in continued ill-feeling'. This is not exactly the sort of information one would feel rabidly enthusiastic to issue, if the destination were one's funding body. The other questionnaire makes the classic researchers 'mistake' of informing the subject that their answers are confidential, then going on to ask age, sex, name of company, position held, etc..Any one with any knowledge of the fringe could 'perceive you had recently visited Afganistan' as Sherlock Holmes put it.

Life Under the Tories Part One.....

Frank Dobson M.P.

You might say that the Tory approach to the arts falls into two extremes. On the one side there is a commitment to high elitist art, always has been, with rich patrons. The other aspect, with modern Toryism anyway, is a thundering and distinct philistinism. These two are in conflict with one another, and neither of them is particularly likely to be sympathetic to the development of what is now known as 'community arts'; the arts in community centres and community stuff in arts centres.

Neither of these Tory traditions are likely to help there. How ever, having St. John Stevas in the Cabinet should be a help because I do believe he's quite committed to funding and promotion of the arts, and though he tends to be on the elitist side, he has made references to 'trying to get outside the boundaries of what is normally known as art'.

But if you consider what's happened with local authorities that were previously Labour-controlled that have been taken over by Tories, for instance in the London area, there does seem to be quite a bit of evidence of an initial clampdown on community arts in a big way. A clampdown on expenditure and an attempt to control what's done. There could be problems nationally on the same lines, except that I do get the impression that some of the new authorities contain a larger proportion of 'philistine' Tories than 'elitist', 'high art' Tories. It's these 'philistine' views that come to the fore in smashing the community arts, whereas the 'elitists' are quite happy for them to exist as long as they don't eat up all the money which they'd rather spend on Covent Garden or something like that.

The telling phrases in the Conservative election manifesto were something on the lines of 'the country would have to make do with the expenditure on the arts that it could afford'. That could mean anything. I think there would be pressure to cut down the arts budget, or at least stop it expanding in line with inflation, which in effect would mean a cut. Given the elitist tendencies of the Tories, if they have to reduce anything it won't be the prestigious things like the Opera and the Royal Ballet which are seen as symbols of 'national excellence'. What will be cut is the unseen, unlauded work of people beavering away trying to interest children and young people in the arts, trying to interest people who've been deprived of artistic expression over the years. This unsung work is what may well suffer. It is true, I'm sure, that at certain local arts centres money is wasted by people who are just poncing off the system and not providing anything for anyone else except their own self-indulgence. This sort of thing, which does happen from time to time, will be provided as an excuse for chopping away at arts centres.

There is one general point of impact with Tory policies, and that is, for ordinary people, most of the arts which are presented to them or which they have any opportunity to participate in, which are from some sort of publicly funded organisation. The new government is committed to cutting down on public expenditure, be it on housing, education or social services, and if they're going to cut that they're going to cut the arts, which are always seen to be on the periphery anyway. It won't have so much impact on their own well-off voters who can get their arts input by paying for it.

VYMURA THE VICTORIA LINE

Note. Shortly before publication, the editor was in a certain North London pub 'looking for sources'. He met an employee of Islington Council who offered to 'get something on Demolition Decorators', the notoriously uncontactable situationist performance group. Being slightly overtired at the time, he forgot the incident immediately. Imagine his surprise when, a few days later, there burst into his residence the would-be correspondent under a heavy guard of Decorators. It transpired that he had entered their company posing as an acolyte, but had been forced to attend one of their 'workshops'. As a result, the final copy he now presented resulted in the following . . . a 'review', swiftly descending to brainwashed polemic. The outpourings of the unfortunate Islington employee we reproduce in full.

"True Theatre has always seemed to me the exercise of a dangerous and terrible act." (Artaud)

Performances are usually held in the street. Demolition Decorators are around seventeen people existing in and around Finsbury Park and Hackney areas. Areas which though lacking the sixties spin-off glamour of West London have come to constitute a milieu for young artists engaged in fringe activities – Counteract and Persons Unknown being most prominent. However, the hard-edged polemic and Dada-music hall of the above are only obliquely related to the Decos' 'We plant ourselves – not bombs' brand of activism.

Despite 23 arrests and numerous court appearances, the Decos are not out to make overt political statements. Steve: "We don't aim to be subversive, more to communicate a sense of play, having a good time, you know . . ." Unlike some, they don't court martyrdom and Time Out hagiography; and anyway, the modus operandi precludes that sort of po-faced social realism but ironically increases the chances of a brush with the Bill.

Much of the Decos' material appeals to children in that they refuse to be an audience more readily than other people. An inverted 'George and the Dragon' tableau was performed in Meanwhile Gardens with the dragon triumphant. At the National Children's Exhibition at Alexandra Palace an infiltration was achieved, with some of the more subversive of our future adult population incited to declare in less than muted tones: "This is a rip-off!" in massed chorus amongst the toy stands and army recruitment attempts.

"On the terrain of the possible, character is the principal obstacle to autonomy." (Nadine Bloch)

On one level, street theatre, even unsanctioned, is tolerated, encouraged as part of the colourful backdrop of 'swinging London'. But when it gets beyond Punch and Judy shows in Camden Lock and into that situationist twilight zone where once stalked Jeff Nuttall's 'Australian Dancers', Otto Muhl, and the Yippies before Rubin, it's a different league . . . strictly heavy manners. This being so, the Decos are concerned in rehearsal with the relaxation of mind/body rather than the strict formation of proto-public routines. Thus events like the notorious 'squat' of the Ideal Home Exhibition can 'de-tourne' the situation and give everyone a laugh rather than deliberately creating hostility for the 'alienated artist' to vamp off and reinforce their elite standing.

Over tea and albanian biscuits the real Demolition Decorators speak out. Demolition Decorators is the continuation of Deputy Dawg's brave attempt at justice. It's the ephemeral dysfunction between reality/myth/reality coalesced in the great melting pot of putrescent puke. I want nothing to do with this awful trash that derides the responsibilities of our society to the jockstrap of eternity; they threw away the key, then they threw away the walls; every word has been taken down in evidence and completely forgotten just go ha ha ha hee hee ha ha hee puffaw! And are fantasies not like going everywhere but getting nowhere? See what you need and then do what you want otherwise your feet will never touch the ground. Long live live theatre. Demolition Decorators are the smelling salts of society, or alternatively a heap of shit. Drum, Drum Drum, Drum.

Paul Todd plus 'contributions' by Demolition Decorators



FRINGE SUMMER SCHOOL

From the 2nd to the 22nd of July the Half Moon Theatre and the City of London Poly are running a unique and exciting project for students, teachers, theatre people and theatre enthusiasts. A three-week comprehensive course covering many aspects of fringe theatre in a theoretical and practical way.

Throughout the course the kind of issues they expect to explore are: what is meant by the term 'socialist theatre'; the implications of having a permanent building; subsidy and the fringe; the fringe and the press; the importance of an artistic policy; who are the audience?

Although it is difficult at this stage of specific about every detail, the following people have said that they will participate: Robert Walker (Director – Half Moon), Simon Callow (Actor), James Redmond (English Department, Westfield College, University of London) David Fisher (Designer), Steve Grant and Michael Billington (Critics), Dan Crawford (Manager – King's Head), and Sam Walters (Director – Orange Tree).

The whole course costs £50 (tuition) and £25 (theatre tickets and visits). It may be possible for you to attend selected parts of the course if you have a problem finding the money or the time to do it all. If you are interested in joining in, write NOW for details and an application form to: Fringe Theatre Summer School, City of London Polytechnic, Calcutta House, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT.



Photo Frank Bren

HINCHLIFFE LASHES OUT

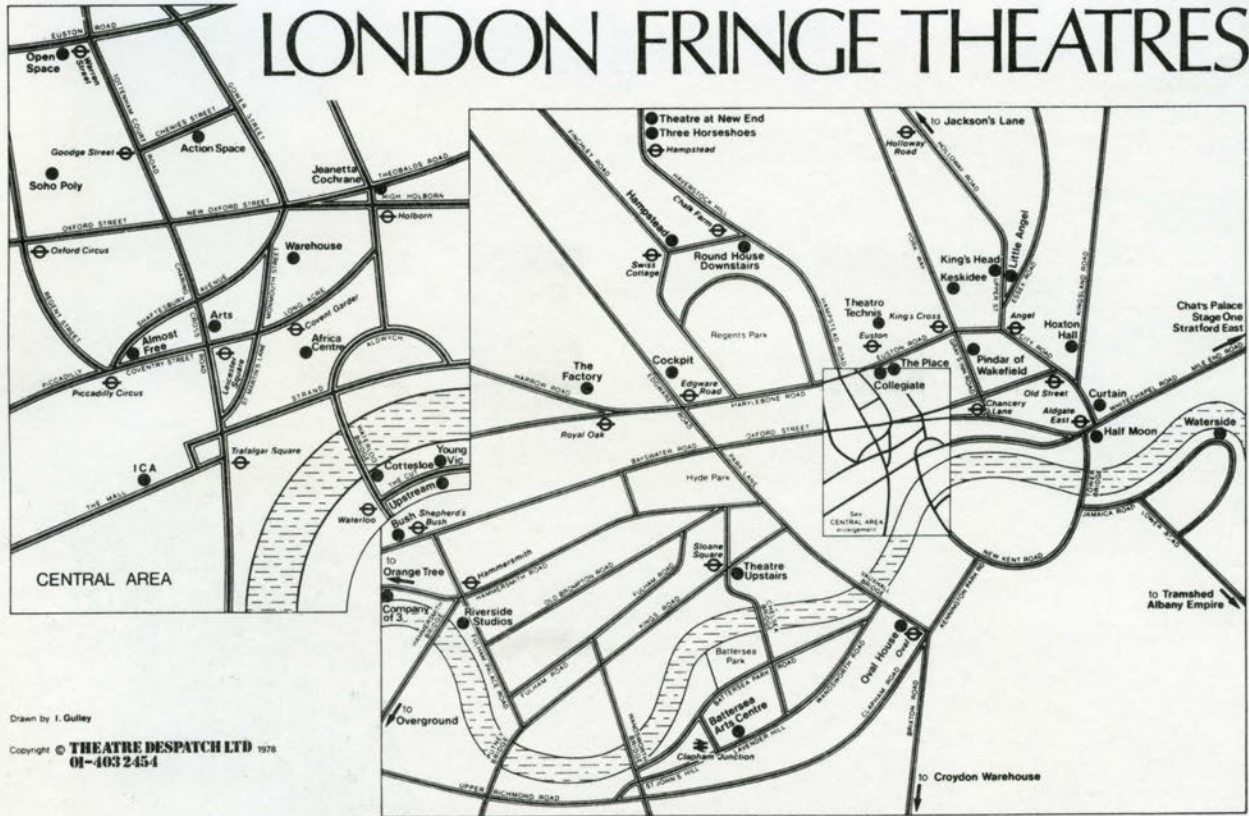
What's going on at the moment? Can't seem to put a foot right without some badge-bedecked Hampstead crack-head leaning in and giving me the ultimatum as regards what sex I am and how I should stop complimenting the fairer sex about the equipment that the Lord has blessed upon them. The complainant is usually one of the same fair sex with the fortunate or unfortunate deviations of compatibility. Our creative manifest has now become a gagglery of fist-waving fliberties who seem to have too much money to spend on silly stickers claiming that this or that abuses something or another. Next in the procession comes the bearded, beaded, philosophising goof who insists that you read his answer to world problems at 10p a go. His attire usually smells of a 60s joss stick factory, and his clothing, for some reason, is of a sickly orange hue. Time seems to have stopped. The wind has ceased and we are all becalmed in a sea of none activity. Come back Penguin Ponk!

Penguin Ponk? Who the fuck is Penguin Ponk? He got no further than choosing to laugh behind a locked door in the upper room of a pub somewhere in Yorkshire. Clackety slap of tin guitar. Hair worn calves of boppety legs worn to bristle by vibrating drain-pipes. Layers of lady love skirts and fat buttocky meat roll flushing over sheer nylon stocking tops. Clench a fist to clobber and bring rife donkey anarchy back to its old sanity. It's time for a new design in uniform. Flush out these dogs who take the cream for ligging back and musing with Dicky – bird telephones. Their concession to you, the punter, is a plate of rip-off brown rice prepared by the lethargy brigade of zombies who could no more clean a shithouse than fry an egg. Bring back the cat to mark his territory and let not the burble brigade snip off your equipment. Damn dead spaces, black list none-repliers, flagellate the pretenders, mulicrush the dogs. Play-on Art and banish the pansy politics that slobber in your path. I've got an idea, we'll all dress up as Hylda Baker and dance the night away in bubbling hot chip fat . . . then we'll see who sinks and who swims!

Ian Hinchliffe

What exactly is your problem, Hinchliffe? -- JP.

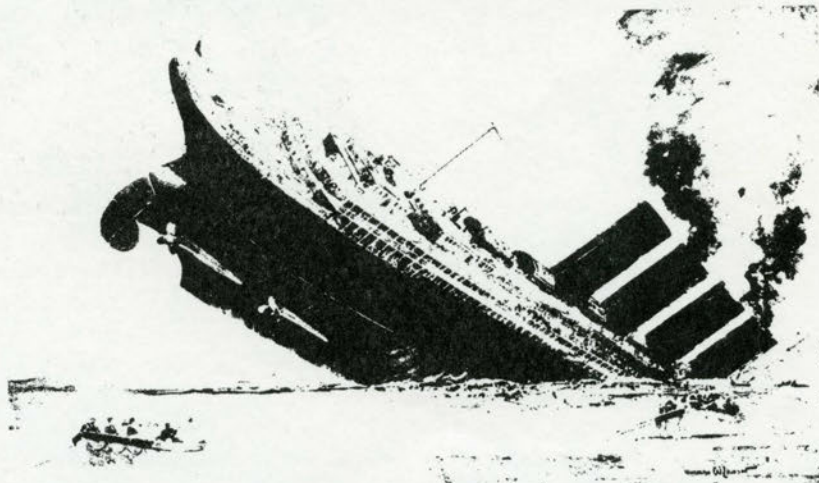
LONDON FRINGE THEATRES



Drawn by I. Gully

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