



"9/10" ... says Sue Spinner
 Theatre Critic of
 The Melb. Times

**OH WELL
 NOBODY'S PERFECT !!!**

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SPUNNER DRINKS TARAX LEMONADE

I AM writing in reference to Suzanne Spinner's review of the Flying Trapeze Cafe in last week's *TMT*.

I refer specifically to her comments about the food ('while the servings are ample the menu is uninspired, the presentation mundane and the menu hasn't changed in months').

While other critics (who could be argued to be more qualified to comment on restaurant cuisine disagree with Ms Spinner and while she is entitled to a certain amount of 'subjective judgment' I would have thought the credo of accurate reportage in journalism would have precluded her making these comments.

As the person who served Ms Spinner her four course complimentary meal (accompanied by Tarax lemonade) I feel motivated to offer some sort of defence.

The Flying Trapeze offers a four course a-la-carte menu — involving choice of two soups, four entrees, four main courses and two desserts.

There has been one item in each course changed in the six weeks the FTC has been open since Ms Spinner's last visit.

Notwithstanding this simple multiplication reveals that there are in fact 64 different four course possibilities (including four course vegetarian and four course cold summer menu).

To my knowledge this represents a greater variety than can be found in any other theatre restaurant in Melbourne.

TIM WOODS,
 The Flying Trapeze Cafe,
 Brunswick St.,
 Fitzroy.

Spinner obtuse and insulting

IT IS certainly Sue Spinner's prerogative to take a personal dislike to any play she might happen to see. We consider, however, that in her tirade against *A Mad World My Masters* (TMT 8.2.78) she should have had more care of her public role as a drama critic.

So damning a judgment depends for its validity on an adequate critical assessment, but this your critic does not provide. Ironically enough, she refers to the actual content of the play only to cite those two elements which did meet with her approval.

The play deals satirically with a class society based on greed and exploitation. The humor is sardonic and bitter. To represent the ills of a capitalist society on stage, however, is not necessarily to endorse them — a distinction which apparently eludes your critic.

It is not Sue Spinner's brief to judge a play by airing her repertoire of abusive labels. We found her review both obtuse and insulting.

WILFRED LAST,
on behalf of "a large cast of experienced APG actors renowned for their comic talents who should have known better".

letters to the editor

APG PLAY CHARMING

A WORD of appreciation to the director and cast of *A Mad World My Masters* from one member of a large audience who enjoyed some mirth. Charming was the art with

According to our fearless theatre critic, Suzanne Spinner, the new Australian play "Breaker Morant" is the best production ever put on by the Melbourne Theatre Co. Read all about it on page 9.

which the play subtly described the expose of society; through the medium of emphatic mime, captioned dialogue, visually captivating "panto" style costuming and "reduction to the absurd" comedy.

NOELLE LARGE,
Garden Ave,
E. Melbourne.

Spinner's parting shots

by JUDY CROZIER

Sue Spinner, 26, *TMT's* no-holds-barred theatre reviewer for the past two years, leaves on an overseas trip in mid-August.

She took some time off from hectic packing this week to talk to *TMT* about her reviewing career — and to make some cogent remarks about Melbourne's alternative theatre scene.

Some remarks were cutting ... but others indicated a real optimism for the city's theatrical future.

Sue's finger of scorn was pointed mainly at the Melbourne Theatre Company, as her regular readers would no doubt have expected.

"The MTC has an extreme public responsibility ... but mostly all I can see is a squandering of money and talent. So little the company does is ever a challenge to the audience," she said.

Sue said that her reviews are always based on the context of the show and whoever is putting it on — she'll always criticise in the production's own terms.

In other words, companies like the MTC are not doing what they're capable of.

What of places like the Pram Factory? Sue thinks that, in terms of its own often-expressed ideology, the Pram doesn't always live up to its own criteria either.

Criticism of places like the Pram doesn't mean criticism of its ideology, she explained. It simply means that she will criticise in terms of the expectations she's been led to have of the place; that there will be Australian plays produced there, some of the best of overseas experimental theatre (notwithstanding the difficulties in getting rights), that there

should be a high standard of professionalism and a strong 'political' content.

"Often my strongest criticism of the Pram will be in terms of politics", she said.

For living up to its own aims, Sue gives high marks to La Mama.

"I think the theatre is always an exciting and good place to be in and I've always received extensive cooperation from the people there", she said.

Where is theatre in Melbourne headed? Sue said that if she'd been asked the question eight or nine months ago, she would have given a pretty gloomy answer.



But with Hoopla's play readings, new low-budget material coming forward in great quantity, and the growth of semi-autonomous groups within the Pram Factory, Sue has high hopes for the future.

It's all very cheering, especially since Sue regards the last few years as a sort of Renaissance period for Australian theatre, most of it centred in Melbourne.

Sue believes that her enthusiasm for theatre comes from being brought up in cultural deprivation on a farm in Rosebud. She came to the city nine years ago and immediately developed an obsession with all forms of theatre, something she's never quite recovered from.

As Sue is not only a fanatic in the arts, but also a staunch feminist, it's not surprising that she was one of the prime movers behind the feminist arts magazine, *Lip*, two years ago.

Lip was born, as a sort of ideas and resource magazine for women in the visual arts. Until now, it was all paid for out of the



TMT's retiring theatre critic, Sue Spinner

magazine producers' own pockets, or out of donations or benefits held for it.

But, at last, the Arts Board has come to the party with a \$5000 grant — which may or may not fund the whole magazine, depending on how big it will be. The next *Lip* is due out at the end of the year.

One of the things Sue will be doing overseas will be to arrange improved distribution over there as well. *Lip* has already had some good reactions from London, New York and San Francisco.

She'll be away in England for about eight months at the Open Un-

iversity, about 50 miles from London.

Sue will be coordinating a course in art and environment — leaning heavily on the feminist side of things, of course — and will probably be working in closely with the women's department there.

And how's the *TMT* experience been? Well, it's been a disaster for Sue's social life, since friends lose their enthusiasm for accompanying her to shows week after week.

But, otherwise: "Who else would have given an untried writer such an opportunity, and given me a context where I knew who I was writing for".

the arts

Williamson misses the mark

THEATRE

SUZANNE SPUNNER

King Lear
Alexander Theatre
Company Alexander
Theatre, Monash.

Somewhere inside David Williamson's *King Lear* 'after Shakespeare' there was a good play trying desperately to get out.

Williamson's 'adaption' virtually a line by line prose translation was a victim of spurious popularism, fallacious relevance and an unfortunate reminder that the cultural cringe is still kicking.

Only a writer with grand delusions and a patronising attitude to Australian audiences could think that he could improve upon the original, or that it needed simplifying in order to appeal to local audiences.

Had the adaption addressed itself to the interpretive and narrative problems of the play there would have been some value in altering the original text. But, it was naive on the part of Williamson and director Peter Oysten to think the poetry could be removed without degutting the meaning and the not inconsiderable power and beauty of the rest.

If anything is a paradigm of the unity of form and meaning, Shakespearean blank verse is just that. This trend toward banality and gracelessness was further compounded by indifferent direction, miscasting and a design reminiscent of futurism 1957.

Polystyrene Druid stones and toned vegetable dyed Elizabethan costumes carried comparable symbolic clout and worked as well as the design for MTC's *Richard III*.

As I said then, it is not as if it is presumptuous of local directors to tackle Shakespeare — they have and with considerable success, to wit John Bell's *Hamlet*, Rex Cramphorne's *Tempest*, John Jacob's *Othello* and David Kendall and Peter King's student production of *Richard III*.

The problem with tampering with the poetry

of *Lear* is that the interest of the play even more than other Shakespearean works not only resides in the narrative action which can be told without to great a loss in prose, but in the central philosophical questions about madness which are raised in the interchanges between Lear, the Fool and Poor Tom. These scenes devoid of the poetry complex and closely textured poetry are reduced to distempered raving.

In this context it would be unfair to lay the blame for the production on the actors however it would be equally unfair not to mention Reg Evans impressive performance as Lear. Evans had genuine majesty and presence. He seemed to feel what he was being and could communicate it.

Robbie McGregor as Edgar, and particularly as Poor Tom, had also found an emotional depth for his lines whereas a good actor like Ros Horin was trammelled by the lines she was given and the pedestrian direction.

Theatre critic

This is Suzanne Spinner's last theatre review for TMT. Suzanne is off overseas and we wish her bon voyage. We are looking for a theatre critic and invite contributions.

letter

Shakespeare simply is very inaccessible, even to the most intelligent, perceptive and educated audience. Spinner herself, faced a week earlier with the infrequently read and performed *Troilus and Cressida*, failed to make much sense of it, despite great clarity in the acting and directing, precisely because she has not been exposed to it as much as *King Lear*.

It is not that Australian audiences are so stupid that they need simplified Shakespeare, but that the other possible choices faced by any prospective audience member untrained in Shakespeare are either considerable preparation in terms of reading texts and commentaries, or only partial comprehension. All that Williamson and director Peter Oysten seem to be arguing is that simplification is one valid alternative.

Sue Spinner's review is irresponsible because she was not willing to approach the production in its own terms, but only in terms of her own preconceptions and prejudices.

It is significant that of all the people I have spoken to about the production, most of those who had been initiated into the original text disliked the translation, while those who were unfamiliar with the original got a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from the performance of the translation.

No-one would demand that Spinner renounce her personal preference for unadulterated Shakespeare, but the job of the critic is to transcend personal preference, and in this case to be able to see that the Williamson/Oysten *King Lear* at least makes something of Shakespeare accessible to those who have not had the advantage of English Literature courses.

Or, does Sue Spinner believe that Shakespeare should remain a mystery to the main preserve of G.P., the protected province of a small sect who have gone through that strange initiation ritual known as Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Literature, Part III B?

IAN ROBINSON
John Street,
Fitzroy.

NOW IN 4th WEEK

KING LEAR

David Williamson's translation of Shakespeare



"An imaginative, Cohesive Lear"
Prof. G. Manton, Monash Reporter

"Reg Evans impressive as Lear"
Melb. Times 5/8/78

"Those yet to discover Shakespeare, this could be an excellent baptism"
Sun 3/7/78

"Intense, gutsy & intriguing"
Herald 27/6/78

"One of the most daring ventures in Australian Theatre History"
Age

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SPUNNER UNFAIR

ONE can only suppose that all the excitement of packing for her imminent overseas trip has thrown your late critic, Suzanne Spinner, somewhat off-balance. How else can one account for her unfair and irresponsible treatment of David Williamson's translation of *King Lear* in the July 5 issue of *The Melbourne Times*?

Her review is unfair because it makes a series of wild accusations about Williamson and the production which have not been and cannot be substantiated.

Williamson, according to Spinner, is suffering from 'cultural cringe.' One would have thought that daring to tamper with Shakespeare was more cheeky than obsequious.

Spinner's Williamson deludes himself that he can improve on the original. I can find nowhere where Williamson's Williamson makes such a claim.

Spinner accuses Williamson of a patronising attitude to Australian audiences in thinking that *King Lear* needs simplifying. Here Spinner is really kidding herself.

Spinner, an honors graduate in literature, is obviously very familiar with *King Lear* and could perhaps get a great deal out of a good production in the original language, but without that kind of study that language of