

A sense of our history

Australia's heritage from 1910 to the 50s set to music (and dance) is what *Back To Bourke Street* is all about according to one of its performers, Sue Ingleton.

Back to Bourke Street is currently performing at the Pram Factory (see What's On section), and *TMT* has been told it's more than another musical.

"We find that younger people can get a sense of Australia's heritage they never knew existed," Sue said.

Patrons enter a 'Coles cafeteria' which kicks off the show.

"We ask them to bring a plate, lamingtons or something which they can devour at interval, and the noise gets gradually louder until you hear a violin playing the *New Tivoli Waltz*."

"You are then led through time up to the 1950s."

Sue said the statement about the 50s was that it was the age of the media takeover.

"People began watching television and the piano was sold."

Back to Bourke Street has its own piano player—Elizabeth Drake who plays *Miss Temperence*.

The show had its beginnings at the Pram Factory and was a hit at the Adelaide Festival.

"We've been back two weeks, and have included more material; in fact, this is the fourth version of the show," Sue said.



Sue Ingleton from *Back to Bourke St*

She said they only used about an eighth of all the material gathered in research.

"We have names like Mr Stanley and Mr Arthur and Miss Daisy — I play Coral Moon.

"All the songs are a social statement, even from the opening number, *The Kangaroo Hop*."

"They tell of the Depression, the wars, and of course, many of them are naive. Some of them are derivative from overseas and follow social trends of the day.

"We don't parody the tunes, because we think we'd be in hot water, but in some ways we have attitudes to the songs."

Sue said though the cast obviously interprets the material from this time.

"We think the humor comes through too.

"For instance, we think

Johnny O'Keefe was the only Australian who got it together in terms of Rock'n'Roll in this country and we have a segment devoted to him, with songs like *She's My Baby* and *Shout*.

"We also do Johnny Devlin's *How Would Ya Be?*"

Sue insists *Back to Bourke Street* isn't necessarily for people who can remember the city just after the turn of the century.

"Some people will remember the songs, but we've found the young people who see the show can't believe it — they find themselves relating to Australian terms or places, and they get a real sense of our musical and social heritage.

The cast includes Robert Meldrum, Tony Taylor, Evelyn Krape and Clair Dobbin.

Back to Bourke Street:
Front Theatre, Pram
Factory.

If you failed to catch *Back To Bourke Street* in the Back Theatre or in its original form or in the vamped up version at *The Last Laugh* see it now.

It is the basic show pruned back to its best numbers with the addition of new J O'K and Bands-tand material which brings it with a resounding flurry into the fifties.

The performances of Rob Meldrum, Sue Ingleton, Claire Dobbin, Evelyn Krape and Tony Taylor are tighter and slicker than ever and none of the original verve and ironical celebration ow what would otherwise be a largely lost musical heritage is lost. *Back To Bourke Street* is easily the best and most genuinely popular theatre entertainment to have come out of the Pram Factory in the last two lean years.

Makassar Reef: Russell Street.

Alex Buzo's latest piece is a continuation of the Coralie Lansdown - Martello Towers strain in his writing: dispensable trendism; bright characters and strings of witty lines but without the substance of earlier more modest offerings like *Norm and Ahmed*.

Makassar Reef falls uneasily between being an Austral sendup of *Casablanca* and a witty expose of the ugly Australian in South East Asia barely retrieved by its inbuilt cynicism and a superb Peter Lorre style performance by Max Cullen.

Bourke fun at the Pram

THEATRE

SUZANNE SPUNNER

You come away from it with some good lines and no further insights into the character's psyches or your own, but I wouldn't blame you if you don't last the distance.

Men's Business: La Mama.

Franz Xavier Kroetz is a young German playwright whose writing has affinities with the bleak super realism of some of Fassbinder.

Nightshift did another of his plays, *Michi's Blood*, in their season last year and if you didn't like that you'll be hard-pressed to stick this one out.

They are both totally compelling, sparse to the point of being mean. Life and feeling are stripped to the least attractive essentials and profoundly disturbing pieces of writing.

You need a strong stomach and a tough mind, but the rewards are there as well — taut, high-tension drama and excellent performances by two young actors, Iris Walshe and Garry McKechnie.

THE TROJAN WOMEN:
COMPANY 78, Grant Street.

Company 78 are the third year students at the Victorian College of the Arts who will be the first group to graduate at the end of this year and their current season at Grant Street alternates *The Trojan Women* with *Medea*. The aims of the Greek Play Project were to experience a play with heart, soul mysteries and passion and for the students to work with an 'outside' director from the theatre, film or television industry.

In the case of *The Trojan Women*, the director is Malcolm Robertson and there is a sense of commitment and seriousness about the whole project, however, it lacks dynamism and imaginative energy.

Overall the performances of the women were strong and consistent even when they were not exciting and they work in a collective ensemble manner, whereas the men were distinctly less mature and up stagey in their approach.

The set and acrid smoke effects were also distract-

ingly stagey; it would have been more satisfying if the atmosphere had emerged from the language, lighting and movement of the work.

Reg Giagalas' Hecuba demanded a lot from a young actor if it is not to be hysterical melodrama but her performance is a bit too restrained and would have been better if it had gone closer to the edge and taken more risks than it did.

The key performance was left to Penelope Stewart as Cassandra, the prophetess of doom who is seized by Agamemnon in the after aftermath of the war.

Each of the Trojan women — Hecuba, Cassandra and Andromache are taken as the spoils of war by the conquering Greeks and reduced to a tragic and ironical distortion of their former selves.

So their performances must register the sense of their free selves and the meaning of that loss. Only Cassandra's gave us both and showed the transition from Apollo's vestal virgin to Agamemnon's concubine to be tragically and necessarily related, as well as the outcome of the contingency of the preceding war.