

An entrance, fine satire, mime art and a spectacular swing

Canned Peaches and Tin Sailors, The Last Laugh

The new show at the Last Laugh consists of a series of self-contained cabaret style acts featuring Henry Maas alias Hymie, Peaches Le Creme singing and playing the piano and mime artist Jean Paul Bell.

Freed from the pressure of maintaining a story line, *Canned Peaches and Tin Sailors* is a showcase for individual talents.

In the case of Peaches and Henry you get the best of what they have done previously at the Last Laugh plus some new material so the format is still the same but the presentation smoother and more confident.

Peaches has written a couple of new bluesy songs and does a stunning rendition of a kitsch 50s rock n'roll number. She also makes a show-stopping entrance draped in ocelet and sings Gershwin's *The Man I Love* even better than before.

Henry's New York Blues are wearing thin but his Jewish punk rock star holed up in The Hilton was fine satire. Sydney mime artist Jean Paul Bell was an adept professional who combined wit and artistry with only a moderate dose of mimetic cliché.

The absent-minded heart surgeon and the hapless TV addict were his best pieces.

As a down at heels flea circus proprietor he introduced the star turn and extra surprise: Los Sandalos, the flying sandals-a-trapeze duo from the Circus royale who shinned up to the dizzy heights of the silver star spangled roof and swung above the tables of dazed diners.

While their act wont have Michael Edgely wringing his hands, in the comparatively homely atmosphere of T.L.L. it was spectacularly picturesque. Unfortunately they are not yet a regular feature, but knowing Mr Pinder's Big Top fantasies, it shouldn't be long before they are.

Maybe we wont live long enough to see a zoo in Smith St, but we may yet see a circus.



by SUZANNE SPUNNER

Yesterday's News: Back Theatre, Pram Factory, till June 5, Tues-Sun, 8.30.

Jeremy Seabrook and The Joint Stock Theatre Group first presented *Yesterday's News* at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

It was created from extensive interviews with mercenaries and the men who recruited them to fight for the anti-communist forces of the FNLA in Angola.

Seven people — a small "l" liberal stockbroker, a rapacious lady reporter, a hardened mercenary entrepreneur, two experienced mercenaries fresh from other theatres of war, a callow and culpably naive recruit and his innocent but perceptive girl-friend — recount their stories in a series of intersecting monologues.

Wilfred Last who brought the play from London directs it as unadulterated documentary theatre. The actors sit in a row of chairs facing the audience. The focus moves from person to person as each tells their story, the effect is a tv documentary — a succession of talking head shots.

The audience is both the viewer and the interviewer. The connecting theme is the effect of recruit Keith Jones' decision to go to Angola.

The other characters provide the different 'angles' from which his choice can be seen, but within the play there is no actual interaction between any of the characters except for the mutual

egging on of the two tried killers. It is largely up to the audience to draw out of the play the way the characters relate to one another.

Although ostensibly about mercenaries, the play is more about class and attitudes to war and imperialism in contemporary Britain.

In many ways it feels like the first act of a political play in which the protagonists and the issue are set up. The succeeding acts will then demonstrate the politicization. The strengths and weaknesses of *Yesterday's News* emanate directly from its refusal to adopt any truly political stance.

Notwithstanding these criticisms which perhaps ask it to be the polemic it is not, this production is admirably executed and Wilfred Last gets some fine, felt performances from his actors.

In particular Claire Dobbin as the journalist with pretensions to self-awareness, and Carole Porter as the young girl with no delusions and a remarkable amount of insight, stand out.

As the cool witty stockbroker whose politics are firmly entrenched in his hip pocket, Richard Murphett gave his best performance to date.

The Painted Devil: Melb. Union Theatre.

Local writer Colin Ryan has written a

courageous, inventive play which is indubitably powerful. However, I found its final effect confused and confusing.

The works of 15th century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch are the theme of the play which takes the form of a medieval morality play. A painter, Nicholas Rost, stands in for Bosch himself and journeys between heaven and hell on this earth.

Edwin Batt's direction was assured and intelligent if not 'flamboyant' and designer Barbara Ciszewska utilised the cavernous stage of the Union Theatre to create a very hell.

Taken in isolation, if that is possible, the writing and acting were extremely good, but for me the play did not hang together. While all the characters or images were clear and perceptively presented, Rost was not. I did not fathom what he was on about or who he was.

Ryan is certainly a promising playwright, but I hope that if his next work invests as much as *The Painted Devil* did, in on-character, that the nature of that investment will be clearer.

A stunning piece of cabaret

EZPPEZZO BONGO

by Suzanne Spinner/State Rep.

Ezpezzo Bongo — The Busby Berkleys, The Last Laugh Piano Bar, Melbourne, Vic. Opened January 27, 1981.

Written and designed by **The Busby Berkleys**. Produced by **John Pinder** and **Roger Evans**; Technical Director, **Laural Frank**.

The Busby Berkleys: **The Broad**, **Peaches La Creme**; **Max**, **Henry Maas**; **Bongo**, **Sam Angelico**; **Mizzter Stilleto**, **Noel Busby**.
(Professional)

In the beginning The Busby Berkleys were a duo who performed Noel Coward late night milk and whisky numbers at The Flying Trapeze. In 1976 they were the stars of *The WunderKind Rocketship Show* — the opening production of The Last Laugh. By then Noel Busby and Henry Maas had added a very young and very brilliant singer and pianiste, Peaches La Creme to their line up. Their follow-up show, *Savoy Crackers at the Ritz* was a sell-out and established each of their unique talents and considerable style — Noel was naughty and thirties; Henry told extraordinarily long and very funny stories

and sang great bluesy songs and Peaches always played superbly and sang huskily while hiding behind her piano. At the crest of their success here, they left for Europe. Now, four years later, in triumphal progress they have returned to the Last Laugh with a new show *Ezpezzo Bongo* and a new member — former magician Sam Angelico.

Ezpezzo Bongo is a stunning piece of cabaret that vindicates the promise of four years ago, though to phrase it in that way is patronising; they were exceptional and original then, and they are even more so now. It should go without saying that each of them has become a more polished and versatile performer and the show as a whole in concept and style is denser and tighter than their earlier work. Audiences who were familiar with their earlier shows will have the added satisfaction and delight in recognising elements, then mere suggestions, and now fully developed, while newbies may think it all happened immaculately OS in the cabaret hothouses of Munich and New York.

Ezpezzo Bongo is full on retro punk, the white tie and tails of five years ago have gone and Peaches La Creme no longer hides behind a baby grand but is out front, up front and she's even speaking. Their previous acts utilised fifties nostalgia and rock and roll but now it's mainstream New Wave with a cutting edge of parody that

impales every rock culture cliché of the last thirty years. The show opens with an elegant shadow play behind the Luxaflex blinds which are tastefully flanked by flats padded and upholstered in vynex to resemble a dismantled cocktail bar. Bongo (Sam Angelico) and Max (Henry Maas) all grease and spiv, in two tone shoes do a little routine with oversize lime green plastic combs recalling the inimitable Ed "Cookie" Burns which introduces The Broad (Peaches La Creme). She totters on looking like an even more crazed Bette Midler and dishes up a couple of outrageously sexy songs climaxing in one "dedicated to the boys" about meat and sweet meats, an epithalamion to fellatio if ever there was one. In the first half the music is cool, smooth New Wave but with each number the pace increased until the title song "Ezpezzo Bongo/Everybody's So Hip" explodes and soon the whole audience is clicking their fingers and tapping their feet.

After nearly an hour and a half of unflagging freneticism the show ends with a stunning version of "Blue Suede Shoes" and an orgy of destruction that would make The Who look reserved.

If Circus Oz was a circus but also extended the range of experiences available in one, then The Busby Berkleys are the nearest thing to contemporary clowns you are likely to see.



Laughing all the way



by
SUZANNE SPUNNER

Crackers at the Savoy: The Last Laugh Theatre restaurant.

With a 3am liquor licence commencing soon, bookings filling up, and a very smooth show on stage; Mr Pinder is looking pleased and Mr Evans eager.

Crackers with Noel Busby, Henry Maas, Peaches La Creme and Avril Bell (though on the night I was there Alistair Jones filled in) is certainly one out of the box.

Which brings me to Peter Corrigan's lovely set, made from artfully arranged tomato boxes containing a melange of unusual objects: from tennis rackets and Mateus bottles to Great Western magnums.

Noel opens the evening

with a suggestive little number *Let's do it* in consummate Cowardian style. Peaches follows with some superb bluesy songs she wrote herself delivered with panache and sensitivity.

Since *The Wunderkind* show her stage presence has matured measurably and she is clearly more at ease; but we are still aware of a young artist with a lot in reserve.

None of her renditions are lightly tossed off; so hearing them in rapid succession in the context of a fast moving show dissipates their uniqueness — I'd like to hear more of her more often.

This show is light on funny stories but Henry Maas has the drollest — the oft told and ever improved fable: *The Spider's*

Shtrategy by the Bertolucci of the borscht-belt.

Henry then teams up with Noel for *Jeepers Creepers*, a candle-lit *Hernando's Hide-Away*, *Makin' Whoopee* and *Blackbird Bye Bye* and an original lullaby *There's an American Flag on the Moon Tonight*.

Snappy Alistair Jones played a mean piano and sang *As Time Goes by*, *Blueberry Hill* and a host of past blasts like *I call your name*, *Mercedes Benz*, *Lazy Sunday afternoon* ... finishing with *Ain't Misbehavin*.

Crackers is much smoother and more sophisticated than *The Wunderkind* with a late night club feel.

THE FOOD: the gado-gado style Chinese platter of vegies with diverse

sauses was an improvement on last time, the pea soup without peas in limbo between asparagus and celery was par for the course. Of the main courses the pork was apparently marvellous but I had the fish which was not; being drowned as it was in a red sea of sauce (blessedly not entirely tomato). The chicken was really 'duck a l'orange' made with chicken and was nice, and because of pleasant past associations we chose cheesecake again and were not disappointed.

Overall performance. *** *Guide Melbourne*. In the vain hope that I am not as grossly misquoted as last time.

Script and food let down performers

Kabaratz: The Flying Trapeze Cafe, Brunswick St, Fitzroy.

The Flying Trapeze is a theatre restaurant in the sense that, a four course meal is served and sometime before the dessert a show is staged.

However it is different from other theatre restaurants in that its avowed policy is to provide a space for new, untried performers to test their talents and capabilities before an often demanding if, somewhat alcohol-dazed audience.

The new show which opened last week is in that vein. The four performers, two men and two women, are tried — all having been formerly members of *Tribe*, known for their unusual plays and performances in the early 70s.

Last year in the Back Theatre of the Pram Factory they put on a startlingly beautiful performance of Pablo Picasso's painterly and



by
SUZANNE SPUNNER

poetic play *Four Little Girls*. However a self-generated cabaret musical show is a departure from their earlier work.

Kabaratz, while indubitably glossy and at times original and stylish, suffers for the lack of a writer and a director. Hence the good pieces in the show stand out from the chaos of the rest.

The group are all vocally talented and many of the songs sparkle. Similarly they are confident, competent performers so there is no amateurish embarrassment.

The costume and stage design is also professional, but all of these 'good points' cannot entirely

compensate for an inchoate and obscure script and format.

Had they relied on an interesting selection of songs, originally arranged and cut the flat gags and the phoney excuse for a plot, the show would have had the polish and flow it lacked.

Certainly their humor such as it was, was too sophisticated and bizarre for the audience who seemed fairly baffled by it all.

Considering that the price is comparable with other theatre restaurants, the food leaves a lot to be desired. While the servings are ample the menu is uninspired, the presentation mundane and the menu hasn't changed in months — save for the concession to the season, a cold beef salad.

Currently the APG are on tour, appearing at the Festival of Perth, where they are premiering a new Australian play by new Melbourne writer Stephen

Mastare: *Phar Lap — It's Cingalese for Lightning, Y'Know*.

The season finishes in Perth on March 5 and the play will then return to the Pram Factory on March 10 through till April 17.

The APG will then have three productions in performance in different states in early 1977.

Following the highly successful season of Max Gillies in Jack Hibberd's *Stretch of the Imagination*, negotiations are underway for a Sydney Canberra Adelaide Hobart tour.

Other good news on the APG front is that the group who put on the scintillating productions of *Sylvia Plath* and *The Young Peer Gynt* last year, have finally been recognised as an autonomous group within the Pram and will receive adequate financial assistance from the APG. They are currently working on a production of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Does Carlton approve? Who cares!

EZPREZZO BONGO
The Busby Berkleys
Last Laugh (Upstairs)

Notwithstanding Helen Garner's trip in *The National Times*, and slaver-ing acclaim in the dailies, *Mommas* is not every-body's cup of capuccino. So the question on everyone's lips is whether Carlton approves. *Ezprezzo Bongo*, the Busby Berkley's new show in the Piano Bar at The Last Laugh. Speak-ing only for myself, in a word yes.

Ezprezzo Bongo is a stunning piece of cabaret that vindicates the Busbies promise of four years ago, though to phrase it in that way is patronising; they were exceptional and original then, and they are even more so now.

It should go without saying that each of them has become a more polished and versatile performer, and the show as a whole in concept and style is tighter than their earlier work.

Audiences who were familiar with their shows, at the Last Laugh, downstairs — *The Wunderkind Rocket-ship* and *Savoy Crackers at The Ritz* — will have the added satisfaction and delight in recognising elements, then mere suggestions and now fully developed; while newies may think it all happened immaculately O.S. in the cabaret hothouses of Munich and New York.

Ezprezzo Bongo is full on retro-punk, the white tie, tails and Noel Coward

Theatre

Suzanne Spinner

numbers of five years ago have gone as have Henry Mass' circuitous Jewish stories and Peaches La Creme no longer hides behind a baby grand but is out front, up front, and she's even speaking. The group has added former magician Sam Angelico to the line up and he now provides the foil for Henry as Noel Busby used to, while Busby has developed a solo style.

Their previous acts utilised fifties nostalgia and rock and roll but now its mainstream New Wave with a cutting edge of parody that leaves no rock and roll image unscathed.

The show opens with an elegant shadow play behind Luxaflex blinds, which are tastefully flanked by flats padded and upholstered in vynex to resemble a dis-mantled cocktail bar. Bongo (Sam Angelico) and Max (Henry Maas), all grease and spiv in two tone shoes do a little routine with oversize lime green plastic combs recalling the inimitable Ed 'Cookie' Burns which introduces The Broad (Peaches La Creme).

She totters on looking like an even more crazed Bette Midler, and sings a couple of outrageously sexy songs climaxing in one 'dedicated to the boys' about meat and sweet meats, an epithalamion to fellatio if ever there was one.

In the first half the music is

cool, smooth rock New Wave but with each number the pace increases until the title song '*Ezprezzo Bongo Everybody's So Hip*' explodes and soon the whole audience is 'clicking their fingers and tapping their feet'.

After more than an hour

and a half of unflagging freneticism the show ends with a stunning version of Blue Suede Shoes and an orgy of destruction that would make The Who look reserved. Don't miss it — I shudder to think at what they'll be doing in another five years.

The Melbourne Times — 4 February, 1981 — Page 9

The arts

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The Busby Berkeleys and the popular Peaches La Creme (above) are back from packed audiences in Europe to haul the crowds into the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant when their show starts in a couple of weeks.