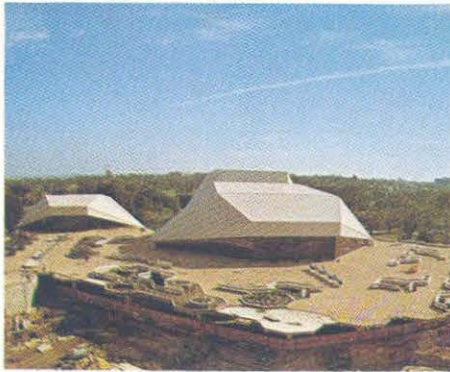


# TABS

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The cover reproduces a cartoon by Bruce Petty for the 1976 Adelaide Festival of the Arts and is reproduced by courtesy of the organisers. This design made a striking poster for Australia's leading International Arts Festival which was founded in 1960 and has been held every two years since then. Many of the Festival's major events are now housed in the recently completed Adelaide Festival Centre (pictured above) where the performance spaces are not only architecturally impressive but technologically practical. The 2,000 seat Festival Theatre, and the 600 seat Playhouse, together with Studio Theatre and outdoor amphitheatre, house round-the-year performances on a scale which must arouse envy around the world in cities of much larger population.

Editor: Francis Reid

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## Alive and Well and Living Down Under

Those who read magazines backwards—and many TABS readers have been observed so to do—will have discovered that *Tabulus* (or should it be *Pomulus*) has been down under. Does a three week visit to any country, let alone such a vast country, justify the making of generalisations? No! But will that stop such generalising? No!

Theatre in Australia is alive and well. Very alive. Very well. Much healthier than many Australian theatre people appear to believe. Perhaps geographical isolation inhibits development of confidence. Broadway grass seems greener and Shaftesbury is the avenue to valhalla.

Not that there is any harm in self-criticism. Evolution in the Arts is dependent upon nagging introspection: get the questions right and there is some possibility of digging out the constructive answers that spell progress.

Australia, you are asking the right questions but in assessing the answers you sometimes seem to lack the final spurt of confidence to trust your theatrical intuition. Have courage—your intuition is pretty good. In a world full of emerging nations, you are no longer a young country. You already have a considerable mature theatre heritage: keep a critical eye on the rest of the world but *do your own thing*.

... pausing momentarily for an "aside"—is not *do your own thing* a message for every nation everywhere? Simpler communication is resulting in welcome cross-fertilisation. Fine. Provided the process is informal. Formal cross-fertilisation could propagate the deadening hand of international standardisation whereas vital theatre usually stems from intuitive departures from the orthodox

... but back to the plot.  
Theatre Buildings are the catalyst in the Audience ⇌ Actor communication and the new Australian theatres are *Beaut*. All the world knows Sydney Opera House: indeed it is probably no exaggeration to say that Sydney is now the most well-known opera house in the world. It is an architectural

marvel and an audience delight. But—and there is no point in avoiding the naked truth—the backstage technology of the drama and opera theatres demonstrates miscalculation and misconception on a scale that can only be called grandly operatic. That fine performances are presented is a tribute to the excellence of the Sydney scenographers and technicians. They cope brilliantly, but—one wonders and dare not ask—at what cost in human frustration, to say nothing of dollars.

But there are other new theatres in Sydney. The *Royal* and *Her Majesty's* may not have been labelled as international architectural landmarks but they are comfortable, workable, and cost-effective; the *Seymour Centre* could be recommended as a reference point for anyone contemplating a Thrust (and take a look at the *Nimrod* on the way).\*

And if the Good Fairy were to ask "Tabulus, which of the world's twentieth century opera houses would you like to have at the bottom of your garden?", the reply would certainly be "Adelaide, please!". And that goes for both watching and working. Ask the same question in two or three years however and the answer might possibly have changed to Melbourne because there is every indication that the Victorian Arts Centre building team have got the recipe brilliantly right.

But theatres are nothing without actors, and actors are nothing without scenographers. (*an aside*—even if the performance is of the "plank and passion" school, the plank has to be designed, constructed and lit.) And the whole thing is nothing, but absolutely nothing, without an involved audience. In all this the situation is definitely looking good.

Australia, is the message clear? You no longer need to look elsewhere. The time has come for elsewhere to look to you.

\* Her Majesty's Theatre was featured in TABS for Spring 1975 and our next issue will illustrate the Theatre Royal and the Seymour Centre.