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Mixed Reaction to New Production

Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Her Majesty’s Theatre
29 February – 8 March

Tim Supple’s production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream looked fantastic. I and my more visual sister loved the set design, and the fairies’ dancing, acrobatics and colour was great to watch. The use of a vertical set, and cast members that hovered and darted about in the air, terrifically expanded the performance space, and added to the sense of magic in Oberon and Titania’s domains.

For the most part, too, the cast didn’t count the iambic pentameter as they spoke, and delivered performances that challenged and developed preconceived interpretations of the characters and their relationships. Even Bottom and the mechanicals, customarily played solely for laughs, were represented more sympathetically.

For most of the audience, however (as evidenced by interval eavesdropping), there was one make-or-break element: the language. Drawing its cast from multi-lingual India, the production mixed Shakespeare’s original dialogue with translations into Tamil, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Sanskrit. Interesting theory. If nothing else, it neatly demonstrated the complete lack of connection (outside magic) between Helena (Shanaya Rafaat, my pick for best in cast) and Demetrius, as they never held a conversation in the same tongue.

Other than that, however, I was left with the big question of “Why?” Sifting out the poetry to isolate lines relevant to plot development? Well, unfortunately, I like the poetry. And the comedy; some very good lines were lost in the translation. Verbally conveying the exotic, magical other world in which the mortals suddenly find themselves? Fine, except that it was also used in the opening ‘real world’, where all is mortal if not exactly tickety-boo.

Other reviewers have loved the wordplay; perhaps if you’ve seen enough productions to know the script, you can appreciate the freshness, without feeling like you’re being left out of the conversation. For mortals, however, the production... through introduce leaves you with the sense that the ‘offending shadows’ are as much the lines left in the dark, as the sprites themselves.

Font of Success

Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Festival Theatre
29 February, 2 & 4 March

Easily the most anticipated classical music selection offered up by this year’s Adelaide Festival, the Festival opera once again proved to be relevant, yet accessible. Osvaldo Golijov’s Grammy Award-winning Ainadamar was as impressive as the hype surrounding the work in the lead-up to the opening.

The music itself was powerful and rhythmic yet delicately approachable. An abundance of drumming belied Golijov’s roots, sending percussionists back and forth on a constant basis. The vocal lines were hauntingly beautiful, perfectly suiting the rather ghostly story. The tension created by the swirling flamenco-style music and constant drumming was palpable; the music also seemed to include snippets of Jewish temple music.

Reading the synopsis made one expect that following such a complex plot would be impossible, yet the music and the simplicity of the production made comprehension easy. Sung in Spanish, the dying actress Margarita Xirgu tells the story of her meeting and liaison with the famous revolutionary poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. The three “images”, rather than acts, are each flashbacks to situations in which the couple find themselves.

Jessica Rivera made her name singing the part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part of Margarita Xirgu, and her wonderfully clear soprano negotiated the difficult part.

Other reviewers have had much to say about other roles being adequately filled, but the character Xirgu balanced counterpart to Xirgu. The other roles were adequately filled with local talent. Import conductor Giancarlo Guerrero did a fantastic job directing the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

The production was directed by Graham Murphy, and the sensual physicality of his usual ballet direction shone through. Described as a semi-staged production, the sets were sparse, consisting merely of 4 or 5 movable white concave and convex "office dividers", for want of a better description. These were moved around creating different environments, often aided by lighting effects and digital projection.

Edward Joyner & Edward Ananian-Cooper

On Dit 76.4

Pining for Paris

Pascal Roge
International Piano Series
Elder Hall
April 8

Once again, the International Piano Series has brought a world-class artist to Adelaide, and, once again, the artist has delivered an exceptional performance. Pascal Roge has long been regarded as a master of French piano music, and for his first recital in Adelaide in almost twenty years he selected a program that gave him every opportunity to show why he has this reputation

Right from the beginning, Roge’s extraordinary concentration was apparent in Faure’s Nocturne No. 1. Op. 33, as he leaned over the keyboard with eyes firmly fixed upon it, a position from which he barely moved all evening. The perennial favourite, Satie’s Gymnopédie No. 1, followed, and though familiarity can sometimes breed contempt, one could only ease back into the seat and enjoy the pure simplicity of the pianist’s playing in this ‘short and sweet’ offering. After Gnosiliones Nos 3 & 5 by the same composer came the classical-inspired Sonatine by Ravel. In contrast to the Satie works, this provided some flourishes, and led nicely into the even more virtuosic Trois Pieces by Poulenc. The striking aspect of Roge’s performance of this was the clarity of the melodic lines over the myriad of notes that provided the characteristic harmonic colour.

Book 1 of Debussy’s Preludes formed the second half of the program. From the serenity of Voiles to the nimble playing in Les collines d’Anacapri to the raucous Ce qu’a vu le vent d’ouest, this was a performance to savour. La fille aux cheveux de lin was enjoyable in much the same way as the Gymnopédie in the first half: a simple piece that is very beautiful, but which was played with such extraordinarily careful phrasing that a new experience was created for the listener. The majesty of La cathédrale engloutie was something to behold and Roge brought the playfulness of La danse de Puck fully to life. The humorous final prelude, Minstrels, was followed by two encores, the first of which, Clair de lune, was described by the pianist as his favourite piece. At the conclusion of the performance, the audience could understand why, and the recital-goers might well have left pining for Paris.

Benedict Coxon
There’s nothing quite like hearing the music of Verdi at full tilt. Anyone seeking this extraordinary experience will be served well by Opera Australia’s presentation of the Italian master’s Un Ballo in Maschera (‘A Masked Ball’), in which Dennis O’Neill as Gustav and Nicole Youl as Amelia use their substantial vocal power to stamp their authority on John Cox’s 1985 production.

O’Neill occasionally seemed short of stamina but when it counted was able to soar over the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and switched moods between jovial and passionate with ease. Youl powered through her role as the woman who comes between the two main protagonists, the second of whom, Michael Lewis, is an at first gallant and later dark, Anckarstroem. The darkness is present both in Lewis’ voice and in his gestures and facial expressions, bringing credibility to the character’s transformation from ‘goodie’ to ‘baddie’.

Richard Anderson and Richard Alexander as Counts Ribbing and Horn respectively earn praise with their solid performances and Bernadette Cullen as the fortune-teller is another strong voice added to the mix. The chorus is equally capable of singing up a storm, and conductor Andrea Licata extracts every ounce of drama from the score, handled marvellously by the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra.

Cox’s production looks a little of its time, especially John Gunter’s sets, but costume designer Michael Stennett’s aim of emulating the Swedish court dress of the late eighteenth century is an effective nod towards historical accuracy. In the end, it’s the music that is most effective in telling the story and the fine principal singers, along with the rousing sounds of the chorus, are more than qualified to do it justice.

Benedict Coxon
“A republic may be a logical form of state organization; but it would be a wanton act to destroy an institution which is woven into the history of the country without being very sure that the alternative would make for greater unity and cohesion” - Geoffrey Kirk.

“People who feel their lives need a vicarious glamour from the monarchy will still be able to read about Queen Elizabeth in the Women’s Weekly” - Donald Horne.

The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 (Imp), a British Act of Parliament, creates Australia as a constitutional monarchy. This means that the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, with the Prime Minister as the head of government.

Lately the republican debate has resurfaced after nine years of hiding. A republic is a state in which sovereignty is derived from the people. With the passing of the Australia Act 1986 (Imp), British power to legislate for Australia formally came to an end. It also saw the High Court and not the (British) Privy Council become the final and highest court of appeal “in the land”. For constitutional and legal purposes the United Kingdom is now considered a foreign power and has no legal power over Australia. This was made clear by the High Court in Sue v Hill (1999) 199 CLR 462. Technically speaking then, Australia is a republic - it is a fully independent, sovereign nation. Australians govern themselves through elected officials and can only change the constitution via referendum. However Australia retains the Queen as the head of state (not the Governor-General, who is the Queen’s representative) and republicans argue that Australia should remove the monarch as the head of state and replace the position with an Australian President.

Further to this, some argue that republicanism should encompass more than just replacing the monarch, the so-called ‘minimalist’ view. There exists debate that Australia should adopt a U.S. style President and combine the head of government and head of state in one person. This would involve a drastic overhaul of government in Australia. Some have also argued that Australia cannot be a republic unless and until the constitution is re-enacted as an Australian Act. The constitution needs to be re-enacted as an “autochthonous” constitution which has force through its own native authority, not because it was enacted by the UK Parliament. However the popular movement seems to be to simply replace the monarch with a President.

This is the issue that went to referendum on 6 November 1999. Two questions were asked:

1. To alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic with the Queen and the Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament; and
2. To alter the Constitution to insert a new preamble.

Both questions failed nationally and in all States and Territories, except the ACT who voted yes for question one. Under this model Australians would nominate a President, the votes would be short-listed by the Prime Minister and Parliament would then elect the President. Many reasons were put forward as to why the referendum failed. Largely though, many were unimpressed with the appointment process of the President. And of course, others wanted the monarch to remain. Of the appointment models devised, the one put to the people for referendum was arguably the most unpopular, as it removed the people from having a direct say in who became the President.

With a republican back on the agenda, the issue of appointment will need to be considered, as this is arguably the most controversial point. Determining the most popular way to appoint is difficult. The Prime Minister, the Parliament and the people all have the capacity to appoint the President. If the Prime Minister appoints the President it is essentially the same now with the Governor-General. Appointment by Parliament is said to be democratic because elected officials appoint the head of state, but will ultimately result in a political appointment by the government of the day - a puppet President. Others want the people themselves to appoint the head of state. This is said to be entirely democratic and allows the people a voice in the process, but can see ‘interest groups’ with resources and power mounting wide political campaigns for their candidate of choice. Each has its advantages, each has its flaws.

Many people support (and continue to support) the status quo and do not want a republic. Many arguments are put forward by monarchists for retaining the monarch as the head of state, including “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”; that the status quo works fine; that immigrants from shattered republics came to Australia, a constitutional monarchy, for its stability; that if you abolish the rules of the Crown which bind the Governor-General, you may have an ‘activist’ or ‘political’ President; that Australia’s political stability under the current system was the envy of many other countries; and that the Governor-General was “effectively” Australia’s head of state.

Republican arguments include building nationhood; recognising Australia was developed from various cultures; that the Crown is a symbol of oppression for Aboriginal Australians; the current system is outdated; a hereditary office is un-Australian; and that the head of state should be someone who epitomises what Australia has become - a strong, robust and proud country.

Peter Bosco
1. Steamboat
Steamboat is a dish originating in China that involves cooking ingredients at the table in a communal pot of boiling broth. It has the magical ability to not only keep one entertained for hours but also provide a delicious and healthy meal. See my review of Bazu restaurant below for more details.

2. Vietnamese cold rolls
Get some round rice paper wrappers from your local Asian grocer. Finely slice up some cooked meat and veggies, pick some fresh mint and coriander, peel some prawns and then wrap a bit of everything up together with some chopped peanuts and rice vermicelli. Use hoisin as a dipping sauce. They're fresh and nutritious, although it takes some practice to roll them up without mini disasters occurring. You’re also going to want to learn how to dip the rice paper in hot water for just the right amount of time so they neither crack nor disintegrate when you roll them up.

3. Crustaceans
There's nothing quite as satisfying as peeling a fat fresh prawn, or cracking a juicy crab claw open. When I lived in Barcelona I would regularly visit the famous La Boqueria food market to choose live seafood off counters lined a foot deep with crushed ice. Massive crabs and lobsters still waving their arms never made it home with me to my student budget but the prawns got their revenge in what I can only describe as 'the accident' one night at a restaurant at the Port. In Adelaide, head to the Central Market to find yourself some nice ones and don’t forget to buy a lemon.

4. Fondue
Be it chocolate or cheese, it’s the same principle. You're going to melt it down, add some booze and then dip things into it, all at the table. For the cheese fondue, get a couple of different kinds of cheese (the traditional ones are raclette and gruyere), some white wine, a splash of cherry brandy (Kirsch) and some garlic. Rub the garlic around the inside of the fondue pot, then melt down the grated cheese and the alcohol. You can add spices such as nutmeg too, then serve it up with a couple of crusty French sticks. Chocolate fondue is simpler - just add liqueur, cream or both to your fondue pot along with the grated chocolate and make sure there’s plenty of fruit, nuts or biscuits to dip. Skewers are a necessary evil for both.

5. Toasted marshmallows
Hot coals, stick, marshmallows. No further explanation needed. Not strictly only for campfires, either. One night at the Grace Emily Hotel I had gotten through quite a few Frangelicos when I suddenly ran round the corner to the servo, returning with a large bag of Pascalls and a couple of sticks cracked off a nearby tree. I spent the rest of the night happily taking orders from patrons for marshmallows toasted to their desired crispiness. I believe the fun ended when we ran out of marshmallows and I tried to toast a beer instead. Try it in your fireplace, over the barbeque, or on the beach. Not during fire ban season though.

Past reviews

monbezhou's melbourne sb, north adelaide
Meh. Okay if you like the same ten or so ingredients recombined fifty different ways. Standard stuff including tacos, nachos and chilli con carne but also some wacky entries like the dubious sounding garlic prawn nachos. There are better places to eat round there.

curry chongs food court, central market, adelaide
Still doing the best damn chicken curry in this town, and at a ridiculously cheap price. You can eat in the food court and sympathize with fellow Chong customers as your stomach slowly fills to bursting point as a result of being given a platter sized portion of delicious rice, curry and veggies from only $6.50. The Laksa House two stalls down also rates a mention here, as does the Vietnamese stall near the entrance with their made to order cold rolls, and the ever popular Ricky's Chicken Rice. Not sure what it's in that green sauce they serve but damn, it's good.

goodlife organic pizza hubb sb, adelaide
If you haven’t been here yet, do it. I went to a birthday dinner here the other day and our ‘private function room’ was the garden shed, whitewashed and complete with tealights and music from speakers on the walls. Now that’s atmosphere. Not only do they serve my favourite wine, the hard-to-find Rockford Alicante Bouchet, but the swiss brown mushroom pizza with garlic aioli ($14.50/21.90) is bloody amazing. Everything is organic and local and there is just no comparison. How people should eat.

wild thyme organic market & cafe melbourne sb, north adelaide
The way the world is heading. These guys have the right idea with their cafe shop front and organic supermarket out the back, where you can buy all the ingredients of the quinoa salad or organic chicken caesar wrap you just ate. That said, it’s surprising to see so many brands and products there that I already buy, so clearly everyone’s jumping on this bandwagon into the organic, free range, free trade products. You can take away or eat in, and they also do awesome coffee. Like a younger, more environmentally and socially conscious version of The Store. Lots of young trendies spotted here recently.

bazu gouger sb, adelaide
Fuck yes, hot pot! Get excited because this Szechuan restaurant serves one of the world’s greatest interactive meals. The hot pot involves cooking your own food, morsel by morsel, right at your table in a steaming vat of aromatic broth. Take the checklist and choose between paper thin slices of lamb or beef, pork dumplings, fresh tofu, Chinese spinach, bean vermicelli and seafood. Get some sesame garlic sauce for the side and you’re ready for action. Chuck in anything or everything and wait for the magic to happen. Then, as each spinach leaf is steamed, dumpling steved and tofu slice tender, it’s your job to locate the ladle (which has often slipped unnoticed to the bottom of the broth, thereby requiring excellent chopstick skills to retrieve it) and remove the morsels as they become ready and whack em in your chops. You’ll find Bazu upstairs between the Buddha Bar and Cibo. I’ll probably be there too.
come all ye faithful

The UniBar has been reborn this year amid controversy, uncertainty and death threats. But who's actually running the joint now, and more importantly, where are the PAs? Hannah Frank reports.

Last year before the Adelaide University Union handed its commercial operations over to the University, the President at the time, David Wilkins, began receiving threatening anonymous phone calls, warning him that there would be trouble if the Board of Directors were to give up the UniBar.

Fast forward a few months and the doors still open every day at 12pm sharp; beer is still $4.50 a pint and there are familiar faces pouring them. Meanwhile, the Adelaide University Union is getting on with its core mission of promoting student life on campus without the threat of bankruptcy.

The new owner of the UniBar is actually the University itself, and they’re also running the Mayo and other campus cafes through the catering department of the National Wine Centre. Steering the ship is new bar manager Alan, and the bar supervisor Ash, whose controlled chaos approach so far seems to be winning over suspicious student groups and regulars who have cautiously begun returning to see what the deal is with the relaunched venue - but not everyone is happy with the changes. There are hate groups on Facebook denouncing the new bar, and everything, from the salad to the setup to the brands of beer, has come under fire. So what are the new managers going to do with our bar?

“We’re here to make sure students are happy,” says Alan. “We want them to feel that this is their bar.” The UniBar has already sponsored ten clubs and societies on campus this year, giving them drink specials and discounts in order to encourage them to come in after meetings and for special events. The biggest so far has been the AUES pub crawl, which packed out the venue with yellow-clad engineers clamoring to claim their free tequila shot, paid for by the bar. But there are bigger plans, too. “We want to bring things to the UniBar no one has ever seen before,” says Ash. “We’re going to have rodeo nights where you can ride a bull.”

It’s but one of many plans to make the UniBar bigger and better and more inclusive than ever - others include the Clubs Association Cup, a year-long tournament of ten competitions culminating in a karaoke grand final, as well as a newly installed cocktail bar, novelty drinks, a wider selection of wine and imported beers, and ongoing pool competitions. But while this all sounds great in planning, do these two have the skills to pull it off? Only time will tell.

Hospitality background aside, there is a certain comic disparity between the two. Alan likes pubs; Ash likes clubs. Alan would rather listen to a live band while Ash would cut up the dance floor with a DJ. Alan smokes; Ash doesn’t. For all their differences though, it seems to work in the anarchic environment. Alan prefers early mornings and works during the day, while Ash prefers late nights and takes the late shift every night. Ash is keen to get more live DJs into the UniBar, while Alan wants to make sure local talent has a place to do their fledging gigs. There is one thing they have in common though; having worked in hospitality for years, it is safe to assume that these boys like a drink. Alan says his usual drinks of choice are Coopers Pale, a good glass of wine or a ‘Russian Monk’, which is made of vodka, Frangelico, milk and cream with a dash of cinnamon or nutmeg on top. “Believe it or not,” confesses Ash when I ask him about his favourites, “for me, it’s scotch, scotch and more scotch.”

Realising that this perhaps doesn’t quite add up with his cocktail obsession, he offers, “For me, the enjoyment in making cocktails is seeing the person smile when they take a sip. Believe it or not, there are actually more ingredients you can use to make a cocktail than a chef could use to cook.” I don’t believe him, but at the same time, I’ve tasted his drinks and they are pretty damn good. We’re just waiting on some more equipment, he says, before a fully equipped cocktail section is operation in the UniBar.

Throughout the interview, there have been constant interruptions: suppliers calling about the next promotion, student groups wanting to know what their drinks specials are, and bar staff needing to go on breaks. At about the seventh knock of the door I see the usually calm Ash snap; the place he ordered lunch from got his order wrong. He throws the bag down on the desk, with an exasperated look. “Can’t they get anything right?” Getting it right is what it’s all about, and the new managers are acutely aware of the need to widen the appeal of the UniBar from recent years. “We’re trying to bring the reputation back to the UniBar as a live venue and to make it a place where people can go for a good night out, not just a place to go for a drink after a lecture,” Alan explains.

So now comes the test of the UniBar fanatic: what do Alan and Ash think of The Guru? “You mean the dude out there?” asks Ash, and I nod. “Yeah, it’s like a culture sort of thing.” Well, yes. The Guru, for those who haven’t heard the legend, is a portrait of a man sitting partly submerged in a deck chair, encased in a wife beater, with a few stubbie cans floating about. Its removal a few years ago prompted an engineer called Bill Fuller to run a “Save the Guru” pub crawl and the painting was reinstated to its place on the back wall. “I like the Guru,” says Alan. “In fact, after six weeks I couldn’t imagine not having him here. When I come in the morning at 9am I grab a coffee, light up a cigarette - outside - and on my way I walk past The Guru. I look up at him, he looks down at me and together we get ready for a big day.”

Touching as this newly formed friendship is, I am keen to point out that the most pressing issue is still unresolved. Repeating my demand for answers, Alan leans back in his chair and pauses for a moment. “The wedges,” he says “are in planning. When we got here the kitchen wasn’t what we considered standard for this sort of food, so for now we’re just waiting to see how things go. Baby steps.”

Wrapping up the interview, I ask them if there is anything else they want to add. “I suppose we just want people to know that we’re young – well, Ash is young - and that we want it to be a fun place to be. We’re willing to take ideas and turn this into a place where everybody on campus can go.”

The UniBar is open from 12pm weekdays, and is located on Level 5, Union House on the North Terrace Campus of the University of Adelaide.

Disclosure: The author was a Board Director of the AUU in 2007. Minutes of meetings held are available from AUU Reception.
In Adelaide for Writers’ Week, with a new book out On Births, Deaths and Marriages, Georgia Blain sat down with me in between giving talks to chat about her new book and talk about Adelaide and the movie coming out based on one of her novels.

In your new book, you write about your family, was it difficult to remember things?

In terms of remembering, no, it’s not that difficult and obviously memories are pretty blunt instruments and we all remember things very differently. That wasn’t really the challenge in the book, to recall stuff. I think the challenge of writing a book like that is dealing with what you reveal and what you don’t reveal, knowing that in telling your own story you’re telling other people’s stories as well and how you tread around that.

Did they have any problems with any parts of the book?

There weren’t any major problems but there was kind of a discussion of various parts. I mean, they both work in telling stories in different ways so they both knew what the process was and believed very much in letting me do what I needed to do which certainly made it easier.

Was this latest book a conscious decision to write your memoirs or did it just sort of eventuate?

It wasn’t so much that I wanted to write my autobiography, it was more that I wanted to write a whole series of separate stories on how I saw the world. I suppose what I was doing was looking from the perspective of being bang in the middle of my life and finding myself as both a parent and a child and a sibling, having all those different relationships and feeling that I wanted to look at what those relationships were actually like in reality. Not the stories that we hear about relationships, but what they’re like.

Now one of your books, Closed For Winter has been adapted for the screen and was being filmed in Adelaide recently, how do you feel about that?

I haven’t seen a thing as yet, so I don’t know what it’s like. I’m looking forward to seeing it. I think it’s fabulous because it gives the book a new life and I think it’s interesting to see how somebody visualises your work.

Have you been visiting any old haunts while being back in Adelaide?

I’ve caught up with friends which is always nice and it’s always that kind of strange thing where I know the town well and I’ve been giving writers tips on where to go. It’s been nice.

Alicia Moraw

BOOK REVIEW

On the Smell of an Oily Rag by Ouyang Yu
Wakefield Press

Ever thought you were so completely awesome and right you needed to write a book containing drifting prose about loosely connected ideas punctuated by comments about how right you are about everything? Well, you really should read this book because it will give you some great tips on how to write your own self-indulgent dribble.

From reading the title I thought that this book would be a novel expressing the author’s life and times as an immigrant in Australia. After reading the first few paragraphs I redrew my expectation of the book to be an essay of Chinese language and culture differences, a book which someone with an interest in linguistics could adore. Sadly its comments are simply not as avant-garde as the author assumes. Those of you who don’t know that languages do not translate directly will be shocked but I wasn’t inspired by the author’s revelations. The book begins explaining how the Chinese use double expressions in their language. After explaining the subtlety of the translation of a few phrases from Chinese to English I was expecting a definitive point to be made. This was not the case; instead the text wanders from conclusions with no direction or point. The author then goes onto explaining how the English language is nowhere near as expressive as Chinese and how much better Chinese poetry is than English poetry. After several wry snipes at how dull English is compared to Chinese the chapter ends and the next equally irrelevant idea is addressed.

The book does evolve from here, but not very far. The book is cut up into chapters which are loosely based on a topic about the language differences, for example chapter 11 is about the concept of face. These chapters do not have clear messages or arguments in which the author is trying to present an idea to, or educate, the reader. The chapters are simply rambling prose, which the author takes where ever his fancy takes him. This directionless dribble is broken up by constant sniping at the English language and at English writers in general. The author simply cannot help himself from breaking his own witless ramble to give some anecdote about how his friends from some university think he is completely awesome. While there are some very decent perspectives about the nature of cultural exchange between China and Australia to find them you need to wade through too much crap for it to be worth it.

If you are a Chinese speaking student who is a little pissed off that you chose English to study then this book will probably suit you. I think everyone else will find it completely irrelevant, tactless and stupid. Why would you write a book like this? I have no idea. All I know is that this book was a complete waste of my time. Please don’t bother with it.

Hayden
Two Things:
1. For no good reason, Alicia and I decided to make this issue of the lit section travel-themed, even though you can't actually go travelling for at least another month and a half because you have to finish your exams first! Haha! We are total bastards!
2. I have been asked to help pimp out the Barr Smith Library's Facebook group. To join, just go to www.adelaide.edu.au/library, click on the Facebook link and join the party. If you join the group then you automatically get updates about Barr Smith-related things. Also, if you join then all of the photos people have posted of you will automatically become a little more attractive! It's true!

LEAD ME, GUIDE ME
Finding a travel guidebook that will treat you right

If you are heading overseas, pretty much the most important decision to make is which guidebook to bring along with you. Because, let's face it, if you accidentally forget to pack your skinny-legs or your toothbrush, you can easily buy replacements at your destination no problem, but if you pick the wrong guidebook, your whole holiday is basically fucked from the outset. A guidebook should be your most trusted travel companion, so if you pick a bad one, it will be like spending thirty days straight with that ex-girlfriend you broke up with four years ago who still hates you. (By that I just mean that you will have a really shit time).

Part 1: Tips to finding a good guidebook

Here are some things to think about when evaluating guidebooks. These three things are important:

1. Euphemisms
There are a lot of things that can make a guidebook bad. The main thing to look out for is guidebooks where the authors use a shit-load of euphemisms. Most guidebooks use euphemisms purely because they don't want to get sued for libel. So instead of saying, "This area is a hideous housing estate suburb with flaring ethno-religious tensions and race riots", they will instead say something like, "This area is lively and spirited", and expect you to be able to 'read between the lines.' How fucking frustrating. One guidebook I used while backpacking through Europe said that Venice was "like a chocolate cake with jam filling". I still don't know what that was supposed to allude to, but I became convinced that jam filling referred to human blood, and ended up feeling uneasy the whole time I was there.

2. Pretentious bullshit
The other thing to look out for and avoid is guidebooks that are in any way pretentious. You can tell a guidebook is pretentious if it says on the front cover something like, "Designed for travellers, not tourists" or "Discover the real [wherever]". These claims about 'authenticity' are all bullshit, and will set you up for disappointment. You will read in your guidebook about some really cool "underground" club, and you will think that it is the place that all the cool local people go to, but as soon as you get there, you will find out that every single other person in the club is a tourist just like you, and they all found out about the club from the exact same guidebook that you did. Lame. Best just to go for a guidebook that says, "We show you the same old tourist shit that all the other guidebooks do." At least then you won't have high expectations, so you won't be able to be disappointed.

3. Personality
Different brands of guidebooks are pitched at different sectors of the traveller market. The main article on the Fodor's internet site when I last checked was about the top 15 savoury steak-houses around the globe. The main article on LonelyPlanet.com was about Sydney transvestite strippers. Not a lot of overlap there.

Part 2: A-Town Showdown

It seems to me that the only way to weigh up the relative merits of the different brands of guidebook is to test-drive them in a well-known environment. So I bought four different brands of guidebooks about Australia and flicked to page 720, which is for some reason the place where Adelaide is located in nearly every guide. Weird.

Lonely Planet
Lonely Planet is the guidebook that uses the most annoying euphemistic language, which can be funny when you get the real meaning, but less than funny when you miss their innuendo. So when they say that the Exeter has a "touch of grunge", I know that what they really mean (they mean that it is an endearing shithole). But when they say that HQ is like "nectar for clubbers" with "dazzling sound and light", I'm confused. Did I miss the joke? Are they actually encouraging travellers to go to HQ? WTF?

Frommer's
This guidebook confused me. According to Frommer's, the best pub in Adelaide is the British Hotel because you can "cook your own steak". Who goes to a pub to cook their own steak? What's so fun about cooking your own steak? Isn't the point of going on holiday not to have to cook your dinner? Also, the Frommer's said something about how lap dancing is one of the premier nightlife attractions in Adelaide. If you are the person who thinks the ideal night involves the cooking of steak followed by a full body massage, this guide is for you, I guess.

Rough Guides
This guidebook was pretty good, because it had a whole section about Unley, which is near where I live. It also had sections on Norwood and Port Adelaide. Making Adelaide's suburbs seem like world-class tourist attractions deserves some serious props. This was also the only guide that included Supermilk, and not only that, they called it "one of the best clubs in town". Ace. And they included Sarah's at Port Adelaide in their picks for the best vegetarian restaurants. Also, I learnt something new about Adelaide from this guide apparently, there is one restaurant in Adelaide per thirty people. I'm going to pull that little factoid out at my next dinner party and impress everybody with my knowledge! Thanks, Rough Guides!

Dorling-Kindersley Eyewitness Guides
This guidebook is much better suited to places which have a lot of tourist attractions, because the main selling point is that it has full-colour pictures. So if you are going to Egypt to see the Valley of the Kings, this guide is helpful. But for Adelaide, there is basically no point. There is a full-page colour diagram of Ayers House, but what sort of person wants to know that much about an old house?

The Verdict
I guess you are now expecting me to tell you which guide to buy. No way! If I tell you which guide to buy, and then you go out and buy that guide, and your holiday is shit, then you are going to blame me for your shitty time. Make up your own bloody mind.

(PS Don't buy the Frommer's though, it's complete and utter tosh).

Connor

On Dit 76.4
The book is a strange and eclectic mix of different experiences in a variety of different styles and prose. In this way the book lacks the cohesion of a firmly polished novel but it draws an innocence from the knowledge that these are real stories by people not so different from yourself.

My first impression of this book was that it would be an equivalent of chicken soup for the soul for travellers [Lit Ed: who...?]. I thought, a book which gives you a warm fuzzy feeling but really contains no substance [Ed: oh, fair enough]. It has all the hallmarks, even a preface by the Dalai Lama I mean, what is going to make you feel warm and fuzzy if not a few words from the Dalai Lama?

The individual stories themselves are fairly short and have no real connection to each other, which I found broke up the atmosphere of the book. Despite this, I found myself drawn into each of these people's experiences. Most of the stories are of the sort of mundane problems that people have all the time, except that when you're in a foreign place they can become extraordinarily distressing. In one of the essays except a Canadian girl who didn't understand Spanish. After some more yelling she got on the ground with the rest of us.

After overcoming pure fear and losing hope that the Canadian would be our human sacrifice, I evaluated the scenario. I realised that the guy was not armed and found it strange that he wasn't paying attention to the guy behind the counter, who could have quite possibly had a gun. (Just got a better view of the nun, eyebrows need a wax. Still on green though).

What I found utterly bizarre was when the screaming unarmed assailant began to count as he jumped up and down screaming. “Cinco, cinco yo hay cinco”, (“five, five I have five”) Then he stopped jumping and ran off into the street.

Those of us on the floor were perplexed as to what happened. The room was now silent and confused. I went back to my email. Four people entered the room and began apologising and attempting to explain what happened. There was crying and screaming, and none of the women in there took it too well either. I thought it was an advertising ploy and turned around in disgust. Turns out it was the Chilean version of candid camera. Yep. Better still it is broadcast over Spanish speaking Latin America. So, half a billion people are going to see the exact moment that I thought my Mum would never see me again. It goes out in April and apparently it will be on YouTube, so I will put the URL in the next “letter”.

Apparently jokes with guns are considered gold here. Next week they are going to tell a father that his daughter has been raped...comic genius.

The nun walks away and I finish off with dirty thoughts that don't require habit...zing.

Jordan King
Whoever said crime doesn’t pay obviously hasn’t ever spoken to a writer of literature. Writers such as John Banville (who write crime novels under the pseudonym Benjamin Black) have taken to writing in the crime genre to pay the bills, as although they may win literary prizes, they may not always sell the most books. Crime readers are easy going bunch, they will read anything recommended at least once. The popularity of the genre shows this as fans of one particular crime author is always welcome and willing to try someone that is new and emerging as crime fiction readers are a voracious bunch impatiently waiting for the next book, so they are willing to try new things to kill (pardon the pun) a little time.

So from one crime reader to another, and lets face it, everyone has read a little crime, whether it’s the original father of crime Edgar Allen Poe (I know you wouldn’t normally associate Poe as a mystery writer, but it’s true) to classics such as Sherlock Holmes mysteries or even literature classics such as To Kill a Mockingbird, let me introduce Denise Mina. Denise is a rising star in the crime genre, with her Garnet Hill trilogy and her latest heroine, Paddy Meehan. You may not have heard of her before, but if you were around Writers’ Week this year, you should have. Since Writers’ Week I know I have increasingly become aware of more and more people reading and recommending her novels. I see people reading them on the bus, waiting for the bus and killing time on benches in the city. There has been an increase in sales of her books, not to mention they have become extremely popular at my local library – I’ve actually had to put myself on the waiting list...I’m tenth in line!

Actually I think the reason for this is because Denise is such a lovely person who speaks with such enthusiasm about her books and the crime genre in general. Not to mention, is willing to talk and swap book recommendations during an interview with me. Her novels also are a drawing point. Her characters are realistic (flaws and all) and intriguing. Her plots are thoughtful and interesting. They are the kind of crime novels for the highbrow reader and the reader who wants something that is so good that they can’t put it down.

Talking to Denise in the Hilton Hotel lobby area was a delight. She candidly admitted that she probably wouldn’t have the patience to continue to submit manuscript after manuscript to publishers/agents upon rejection. In fact she says that it was just luck that on her first try she landed herself an agent. She freely tells me that she would never have carried on if she had been rejected. Luck for us her talent was recognised otherwise we may have missed out on a great writer.

A Lawrence Block fan, Denise also admires Richard Stark. She admires the fact their writing style is so pared down. She really admires writers who can take themselves out and just tell the story. This is impossible for Denise, who readily says that she’s too opinionated to do this herself. Originally an academic feminist, she wanted to change people’s lives, so to do so she decided to first apply to the UK equivalent of That’s Life, to make a difference through writing for a popular female magazine, however they didn’t want her. So she changed directions and thought that she would use a different type of medium to help change people’s lives. At the time she wasn’t happy with crime fiction that she was reading at the time. “A lot of the print fiction I was reading was very right wing and although there were female protagonists, they were all tall, thin, athletic...basically men – with tits...They didn’t have a mum they had to explain everything to, they didn’t have children depending on them – or if they did it was always a niece or someone they could give back. It was the concept of a female, not a real woman.”

Denise’s books are never the mainstream crime novels; rather, she takes a different spin on things and approaches topics which are often not covered due to the fact that they are too controversial or sensitive. For example, her first novel is about a mentally ill character who then uses rational deduction to solve the mystery. This was to challenge common assumption that if you were mentally ill, you could never be rational.

With crime being more than just about murder these days, I asked Denise how she copes with the more gritty side to crime writing. She tells me that that her partner is a forensic psychologist, so if she needs help or wants to find out more, she goes to him and picks his brain. It was at this point of the interview I learnt something interesting from Denise which she learnt while researching one of her stories. “While most people would be aware of the surroundings around us, you know, you’re over here and the man over there is moving — your attention will be drawn, but psychopaths see somebody and they have a pin point vision. They only see one thing and that’s what lions do.”

Not only does Denise write crime novels, she is also a writer for the comic Hellblazer. After doing thirteen episodes, she was then asked if she wanted to do her own graphic novel, so that’s coming out soon. She was telling me that she puts all her friends into the comic, as when they draw the pictures of the characters, the writer has to send pictures for the artist to base their drawings on, so she sends pictures of her friends. She also uses her friends’ names. In her first book she uses a friend’s name as a baddie, and Denise doesn’t think that her friend has ever really forgiven her for that. But she was quite shocked to learn that people seem to think that the bad characters are the ones who are based upon them when in reality the good characters are based on them. But Denise thinks that the reason is “…people are quite leery of being represented, and unless you’re a nut case, you’re never going to think ‘if I was in a book I’d be fabulous.’ They’re always going to think, ‘oh God, she’s going to put my faults in’.”

At the end of the interview, Denise was planning on heading to the beach with her cousin who was down from Canberra. We parted after she promised to check out my crime recommendation, An Interpretation of Murder by Jed Ruenefeld. One thing that stuck me by Denise was her genuine willingness to talk about crime readers being one of her main motivations. She really means it that the readers are the important thing to her, not just the sales of books.

Alicia Moraw
There is something exciting about secrecy. It is such a typical human quality to quest for the Great Unknown, regardless of what we may eventually find at the end of that dark, mysterious tunnel. There has become a sort of fanaticism in unveiling so-called ‘historical secrets’. I admit that I am one of the few people left that has not yet read Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code. And to tell the truth, I was so confused just trying to figure out which version and which author was the ‘authentic’ one I decided that the many shrouds of secrecy withheld by the book would surely slip straight over my head.

Besides, if Da Vinci was part of a secret order, would I see his work differently? And, if so, is that a good thing anyhow? Sometimes I wonder whether the secret is better than the truth, regardless of how many fanatics may be born trying to find it. Perhaps there is truth in wanting stigma over dogma, and perhaps the secret can be more effective than the truth anyhow.

Take, for example, one of the most widely known of the secret societies (oxymoron, no?), of whom members still walk amongst us - the Freemasons. What an interesting society it is to display Christian symbolism, Egyptian hieroglyphs and Pythagorean principles in equal stead, and to revel in the secrecy which, ironically, is the key to its popularity.

For some, the closest exploration of the Freemasons is in the film National Treasure (2004), wherein Benjamin Franklin is the inventor of special code-reading glasses and, as National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets (2007) describes, matching secret codes are guarded by the Queen and the President of the United States (the treasure, by the way, is hidden in Mount Rushmore. There, I just saved you two long boobless hours).

However, for those wanting more of an honest look inside the halls of the fraternal organisation, I can recommend the online exhibition, Oft Unseen: art from the Lodge and other secret societies, by the Halsey Gallery Online, Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art. The flash-based site takes a look inside a Grand Lodge, describes over 50 commonly used symbols, initiation ceremonies, rituals and regalia. Of particularly bizarre interest are late 19th century catalogue advertisements for ‘initiation goats’ and ‘assorted hoodwinks’. The initiation goat, by the way, is advertised as a “Ferris Wheel”-like contraption wherein the new initiate is blindfolded and strapped to a wooden goat. The wheel is then coasted along until the initiate rolls right over onto his head. A blank cartridge is fired to “add to the consenation” and “a ba-a-a attachment also makes this goat more goaty”. A fountain attachment can be purchased at extra cost, which produces a spray of water from the back of the goat where the candidate sits.

DeMoulins’ Patent Hoodwink, on the other hand, is advertised as “superior to all others”, displaying three interchangeable visibility disks, with “no springs, eyelets or buckles [...] no other has such light, positive action”. The hoodwink (or blindfold) is, according to the gallery, a powerful symbol of secrecy. It would be opened at brief times during the initiation ritual, thus “heightening the drama of the experience” for the candidate.

Such mysterious phenomena, however, are not limited to online viewing. Indeed, the Port Adelaide Masonic Centre is ripe with symbolism and mythology. Drawing heavily upon Egyptian stylistic and symbolic attributes, the building itself is architecturally designed to imitate the hieroglyph for ‘temple’. This architectural symbolism is repeated regularly across the buildings façade, with hieroglyphs for ‘heaven’, symbols of the Tree of Life and the Sacred Waters of Nun bracing frescos and flush wall details. The entrance is flanked with a carved depiction of the Winged Disk, combining the sun, a double-headed cobra and eagle or vulture wings. The engraving contains several other symbols, all of which combine to create an overarching narrative. The symbols that flank the buildings exterior are fascinating in that they reflect not only mythological narratives but also describe mathematical and astrological phenomena. For full descriptions of these symbols, visit Audrey Fletcher’s Freemasonry: The Legacy of the Ancient Egyptians, as cited below.

Although attitudes towards Freemasonry were initially marked by disapproval within the developing Australian community, the organisation has grown to be accepted and officially supported within Australian society. However, there seems to be a growing indifference toward the Order, with membership declining since the advent of television and changing attitudes toward gender equality and community involvement. According to Freemasonry Australia, over 50% of the present membership is now aged 70 years or older.

At the time of researching this article, I methodically finish off this article with an open-ended question, that the Freemasons truly are secretive, and the facts that we so fanaticly search for can never be truly grasped. I am not disappointed, however, for the secret is well worth the search.

Information on the Port Adelaide Masonic Centre can be viewed online at:
http://www.cofc.edu/halseygallery/exhibitions/spring_04/02_offt/offt_flash.pge.htm

Information on Freemasonry in Australia can be viewed online at:

Lauren Sutter
A very Frank interview
with Clara Sankey

As I arrived at the little unit at Novar Gardens, I genuinely had no idea what to expect. My mum had described Frank as very sweet and a hard worker. Inside the unit no wall was left bare. One was covered in Women’s Weekly posters from the early nineties, others with Van Gogh reproductions, and spliced in between were the works of Frank, well known at UniSA and TAFE for being a part time artist and full time artist. My mum has been one of the few lucky people to receive regular envelopes bursting with new drawings from Frank.

So what inspires Frank? Often he will have found something that interests him in books and on T.V. When I meet Frank on a gloomy Anzac Day he has already created a handful of lovely pieces since dawn, mainly focusing on Egypt. He proudly shows me the yellowing books he has been reading about Tutankhamun etc.

When I looked up fanatic in the dictionary I found that it is often described as a person’s enthusiasm towards politics or religion. But it is also described as someone who is marked by excessive enthusiasm to a cause or idea. This brought Frank to mind immediately, if not just for his extensive portfolio of work. Growing up in Adelaide as an orphan, Frank has seen the harder side of life - living on the streets for five years. He has worked as a tram driver in three different states.

Frank has always been interested in art, but it was only fifteen years ago that he picked up a texta and began to draw. Apart from the workout it gives his hands (he is beginning to get arthritis) Frank said he just likes it. Without any formal training Frank’s style is incredibly unique with a particular emphasis on colour. He also writes poetry and many of his works involve text, sometimes stating facts about the art he is drawing and other times retelling parts of his life.

His drawings are often on envelopes, and when I asked Frank about this he explained that he began to do it because he often made them for friends when he was sending them letters. With so many works that Frank has given to friends (he generously offered me several pieces while I was there) I asked him if there were any pieces he would never give away. He said he’s thought about it, and had one book that he thought he’d keep, but ended up giving that one away too.

Frank’s favourite artists are Van Gogh and Toulouse Lautrec - he has made hundreds of drawings inspired by their works and his dream is to visit the artists’ haunts and watering holes in Paris. When he was starving on the streets as a young person at one point he was forced to eat snails and grass. He would like to try some French snails one day.

Keep an eye out for Frank’s work in the next SALA week and hopefully you too will be drawn into Frank’s colourful world of drawing.

What’s on...

Two new galleries have opened in the last month which are definitely worth checking out. Felt Gallery, which can be found on Compton Street - an artist-run space perpendicular to the trendy Chinatown area of Gouger Street. Five ex-Honours students (Monte Masl, Rayleen Forester, Logan MacDonald, Brigid Noone and Annika Evans) have teamed up to create a space, where up and coming new artists can get their work to the public. Their opening in early April had a massive response with hundreds trying to squeeze through the little doorway to see the work. The next show, opening up on May 7th will feature Adelaide artists Nick Thompson and Jenzo.

Gallery 139 (Magill Road, Stepney) run by Tony Bond had a similarly spectacular opening in April. The grand space containing two rooms and a creepy looking basement is currently filled with the works of more Adelaidians, including Ian McFarland, Erik Meeuwissen, Talia Wignall, Thom Buchanan, Driller and Darren McDonald. Definitely worth a visit if you have any interest in contemporary art.

And of course there are plenty of other galleries to keep your eyes on. The new Samstag Gallery on North Terrace showcases plenty of exciting national and international artists. Also check out The Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia on Porter Street - currently showing the video work of ex-skateboarder and Venice Biennale exhibitor, Scott Redford (beware of the last room if you’re a squeamish, some seriously painful stacks are caught in slow motion-ouch!)
Ever since I found out a few months ago that the Smashing Pumpkins were coming to Adelaide, I could hardly believe it. After their split in 2000, I never thought I would have the chance to see this amazing band live. Needless to say, I went off to the gig with big expectations and uncontrollable excitement.

I rocked up to the Entertainment Centre as soon as the doors opened, as I was definitely not going to miss this support act; Queens of the Stone Age. Interestingly enough, the QOTSA's set received mixed responses. As a strong supporter, but not an avid fan, I was really impressed by the Stone Age, although a few other people I talked to were a tad disappointed by their set. The lack of enthusiasm by the crowd was perhaps one of the reasons why the QOTSA did not rock out as much as some people had expected. In fact, the crowd found itself at the brunt of criticism from the night's subsequent events...

When the Smashing Pumpkins first took the stage, I thought for a moment that this could possibly be the best gig that I’d ever experienced. They opened their set with a few awesome tracks, including the beautiful ‘Tonight Tonight’, and Billy Corgan sounded just as amazing as ever. Playing on stage in what appeared to be a silver pleated skirt and a tight long sleeve licra-looking top, Billy’s strong projection of his amazingly unique voice reminded me of why I fell in love with this band back in the 90s.

The first half of the show was brilliant, with the Pumpkins playing a set which successfully integrated the old hits with new songs from the band’s latest album Zeitgeist. The Pumpkins were belting out a sound that was absolutely huge, and the atmosphere onstage was electric. However the mood of the night seemed to turn sour once Billy asked the crowd if we liked his old songs better than his new songs. The answer, was of course ‘yes’, and Billy seemed to be insulted by this response. The old hits suddenly vanished from the set and soon the band launched into a 25-minute jam session and then walked off the stage. This jam was interesting for the first five or so minutes, but soon became very tedious, as you could tell that the crowd was hanging out to hear some of the Pumpkins’ old songs that they know and love.

When the band left the stage the crowd looked shell-shocked, and needless to say, the encouragement for an encore was quite pathetic. I was actually surprised that Billy even came on for an encore, and I was hoping so much that he was going to play ‘Disarm’. However I was left disappointed as Billy strummed out an unfamiliar acoustic song and then left the stage for good.

The vibe from the crowd as we walked out of the Entertainment Centre was low, very low. A lot of people said that it was Adelaide’s own fault that the show ended up the way it did, that once again the crowd’s lack of excitement and enthusiasm is the reason why another band will probably not return to this city. Others said that if you want to hear the band’s old songs, then go ahead and give Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness a whirl in your stereo. However, I have to say that although I enjoyed hearing the band’s new songs (and I do own Zeitgeist and listen to it often), I was longing to hear some of the old tunes that have made the Pumpkins the amazing band that they are. You cannot expect after reforming a band, and going on tour after a decade, that nobody is going to want to hear your old songs. And if you don’t want to play your old classics, then why not reform the band under a different name?

I respect that the Pumpkins are moving in a new direction, and we cannot live in the past, however it is not much to ask a band to finish their set with a song that will leave the crowd feeling good. All in all, I found the concert disappointing. And I don’t think that the crowd in Adelaide should cop all the blame, as after reading comments online I found out that the band has done exactly the same thing in other cities. The sad thing for me is that I think perhaps I should have never gone to see the Pumpkins, as I could’ve allowed my amazing memories of the band to live on, instead of walking away feeling empty and disappointed.

Amelia

My top five at the moment are:

1. ‘Just Dropped In’ (to see what condition my condition was in) by First
2. ‘Edition Under the Milky Way’ by The Church
3. ‘Hold the Line’ by Toto
4. ‘50 Ways to Leave your Lover’ by Paul Simon
5. ‘Great Southern Land’ by Icehouse

Music
The fans, the bands, the reviews and more!
Read on...
Something on Broadway are an Adelaide five piece just starting out on the local scene. I spoke to drummer, founding member and songwriter Jeremy Goldring, (hereafter Jez) about how the group got together, what they've achieved and where they want to go. The band is the brainchild of Jez and his brother Ray. The two have been writing songs since they were teenagers and playing in bands around Adelaide on and off since the late nineties. Having amassed a hundreds of songs they decided to demo 50 or 60 and seek out the best musicians they could find. "We always wanted to set ourselves up with better musicians" the drummer tells me "musicians who bring something to the songs." The two auditioned at least ten guitarists, ten singers and several bass players before deciding on the right line up. The final product is Jez on drums, his brother Ray on piano, frontman Adam Barnett-Pierce, Brett Benham on bass and multi-instrumentalist, and incidentally all round Australian hero, Ryan Sanders who struggles to restrict himself to guitar duties.

As the conversation continues Jez's determination to make something of his current group becomes more apparent. "We really wanted to set ourselves up to get somewhere. I mean what a dream to be doing what you love and what you love to be music." I couldn't agree more. Although Jez admits the band have taken a slightly different approach. "Traditionally what a band does is they get together, play a few shows, start building up a bit of a fan base and then head into the studio and record a few tracks." Sure, that sounds like the way it's done, I say. "Well, we've kinda done it in the reverse order". On the insistence of lead singer Adam, the group decided to head into the studio first and fund their own record, effectively becoming partners in the band. Now the band has a 13 track album in the pipeline with at least half of those mixed and the other half scheduled to be ready for a July-August release. From the tracks that have already popped up on MySpace and Triple J Unearthed, it's clear the band made the right decision.

Doing things differently already appears to be the way Something on Broadway prefer to operate. When the band first got together and tried to find common musical ground, only Billy Joel and Queen were common to all of them. Consequently their sound defies definition. "We have a hard time explaining our sound to other people. But if we ever got compared to Queen we'd be really happy."

More than just a musician, Jez is also music fan. When I asked him what he was listening to at the moment, he rattles off the names of some local Adelaide groups like We Grow Up, The Battery Kids, The Finishing School and Brother Sister. Local music also forms an important part of Something on Broadway's plan for world domination in the form of a local music night called Popsicle. Read on...

Mitch Waters
"We always look forward to playing Adelaide," confides Nasrine Rahmani, percussionist and one ninth of Melbourne based Salsa act San Lazaro. "It's no wonder they feel this way. Last time the group was here it was part of WOMADelaide 2007, where the crowd lapped up their energetic brand of Latin beats which combines 'South American, Afro-Cuban and Caribbean folkloric rhythms' with 'funk, rock, reggae and hip-hop.' The result is refreshingly unique, as demonstrated by their latest release Mestizos Urbanos. But for San Lazaro, playing live is what it's all about. "It's difficult to capture the vibe of a big band like us in the studio."

Being in a group with nine members also presents other challenges. Every decision the group makes is put to a vote. Nasrine admits it would be easier to have one person calling all the shots but at the end of the day "it's better this way." In contrast to the South American nations from which the group draws some of its members, the democratic process appears alive and well in San Lazaro. Political and social commentary actually does form a large part of the band's lyrical subject matter. Nasrine tells me that through the lyrics of Chilean vocalist Fransesco Viron, the group try to be a "voice for people who don't have one right now." Heavy within the group's lyrics are references to Chilean history and politics while even the title of the group's latest refers to the urban mixed races of South America's larger cities who often the subject of discrimination.

Apart from the lyrical content, the song writing process within the group is generally more spontaneous and organic, with instrumental sections created almost entirely in the practice space. The success of the group can also be attributed to the stability of the line-up. Since the group became a nine piece in 2005 the line-up has remained constant. The story of the group, however, stretches back a little further:

Something in the Beer

The 11th of April saw the beginnings of the Papers Scissors/Bluejuice national tour. The 'Less Talk, More Problems' tour began in Adelaide at the Jive Bar. As I spoke to Jai Payne from the Paper Scissors, he had nothing but good things to say about Adelaide. Apparently, their last gig in Adelaide was one of their best, whether it was the water, beer or atmosphere, Adelaide was awesome for the Paper Scissors. The 'Less Talk, More Problems' tour is their first lengthy tour they've done, with previous tours only being along the East Coast, with Adelaide thrown in. However when I spoke to Jai just before they started their tour he was really enthusiastic and excited, raring to begin.

For those of you who have no idea who the Paper Scissors are, I'll introduce them to you. Based in Sydney, the Paper Scissors can be described as a 'post-indie/soul four piece' band. It's difficult to describe really. I love 'Tipped Hat' for its dancing beat, it reminds me of a Sneaky Sound System album, but 'The Bandit' and 'Yamanoite Line' are more folky, Sunday arvo songs meant to be played while cooking or entertaining. When asked to describe the Paper Scissors sound, Jai wants the listeners to make their own decisions, rather he feels that he is a bit too close to the music sometimes to describe it properly. They formed around three years ago, with Jai describing it as all rather a blur. They have changed the line up around a bit though with their new drummer Ivan joining the band last October. Their first EP was released in 2006 with the track 'We Don't Walk', which was picked up by Triple J and Rage. Last year they released their first album Less Talk... which was an instant success.

The founding members met while studying music in Melbourne. Drawn together by a desire to play Latin music, the group began gigging as a four piece. Nasrine was working at a music store in Melbourne which sold lots of Latin American percussion instruments and studying at the VCA. It was during this time that she met the members of the group and they started jamming. For Nasrine, though, joining San Lazaro was only the most recent step in her musical development. From an early age she had a love of music, learning to play the drums and guitar at school. An early infatuation with dance music led to an appreciation of salsa and particularly its percussive elements. Although I initially struggled to make the connection, Nasrine assured me that making the move from the infatuation with South American beats to playing the timbale was no quantum leap. "You can't really dissociate the timbale from Latin American music. It was just a natural progression.'

I asked Nasrine if there had been any career highlights or moments which made her stop and realise if things were really starting to happen. "WOMAD was almost like the end of the beginning. It was amazing but probably not the best show we've played." Nasrine highlights the band's set at the Woodford folk festival as particularly memorable. "We got there the day before the show and saw so many bands, that by the time we hit the stage we were pumped." Playing after Paul Kelly at Queenscliff also makes the grade as a career highlight. Nasrine tells me that the band is still trying to find "the secret recipe that makes a great show." According to the percussionist "the size of the crowd is not important. As long as we're all working together that's the main thing." It's something I look forward to seeing for myself.

Mitch Waters

The band are influenced by David Bowie, Talking Heads and The Rolling Stones, not to mention more contemporary artists, such as hip hop acts Mad Lib and J Diller and rock acts like the Strokes and Vampire Weekend. Jai talks enthusiastically about Arcade Fire being one of his favourites, mentioning that he saw them in January.

This tour has been the result of lots of hard work and persistence. While the Sydney music scene is very supportive, it also is a lot of hard work. Several pieces of advice that Jai can give to up and coming musicians who are looking for a starting point are:

1. You are going to have to play for free for a while… but not for too long know your value.
2. Hound people. You have to be out there meeting people and other bands. If there's a band that's a bit bigger then you, hassle them and make them listen to your music.
3. Have fun and make sure that you have decent PR.

When asked, Jai admitted that he did actually go out and hassle bands. He went on to say that while it's a bit of an annoying thing, it is important to do as you can't get your music out to people if you don't go and promote it. Obviously it has worked for Paper Scissors, with their first national tour taking place at the moment.

The tour title comes as a combination of the two bands' album titles. Piggybacking each other, Jai hopes that this tour is not only going to be a crossover of bands, but they may bring their music to a whole new lot of fans, not to mention introduce Bluejuice to their own fans if they haven't already heard them. While you may have missed their Adelaide gig, you can still check their music out on their MySpace page: www.myspace.com/thepaperscissors or you can grab their songs off iTune.

To check out their touring partner, see their MySpace page www.myspace.com/bluejuice.

Alicia Moraw