

Mad about Coward

“Theatrically speaking, it was Coward who took sophistication out of the refrigerator and put it on the hob.”

Kenneth Tynan

By SARAH McNEILL

It is 1929 and Noel Coward has become the highest paid theatre worker in the world.

Following the extraordinary success of his 1924 play, *The Vortex*, which turned him from a “mildly entertaining actor, playwright and composer to being the hottest theatrical property in town” (Sheridan Morley), he produces the operetta *Bitter Sweet*.

The worldwide acclaim he receives sends him running to Singapore for rest and recuperation.

There, Coward writes some of his best known work – the play *Private Lives* and songs *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, *Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage* Mrs Worthington and the intriguing *Mad About The Boy*.

This period of self-indulgence, creativity and game-playing forms the basis of *Imperial Façade*, John Aitken's new musical play, opening in Perth this week.

Since the early '90s, Aitken and John Michael Swinbank, a Coward exponent, have been collaborating on the comedy, which was originally commissioned for the defunct State Theatre Company.

John Michael (JM) has been obsessed with Noel Coward since he first played Eliot in

Private Lives at the tender age of 16.

“It all went to my head,” the perennially suave JM said. “I thought it was the most dazzling material I'd ever read. My friends were all into [Harold] Pinter and [John] Osborne. I loved Coward and I was impossibly passé!”

Pushed by well-meaning friends, cabaret artist JM began to develop a Coward cabaret that he bravely toured throughout the North-West, to RSL Clubs and mining camps and “which sometimes sent them into paroxysms of rage”.

He tells of one North-West town where the theatre manager demanded to know exactly what Mr Coward was planning on doing in the show.

Too polite to say “he's dead”, JM said: “He's playing the harp with St Peter's orchestra.”

The manager replied: “Nah, sorry mate, we don't have room for an orchestra up here,” and the phone went dead.

In 1990, JM was invited to emulate his idol and fire the noonday gun in Hong Kong and the following year he scooped the gig

of the decade, performing his Coward Cabaret at the grand re-opening of the Raffles Hotel in Singapore.

According to the South China Morning Post, it was a show for his “800 personal friends including heads of state, playboy tycoons and a fantastic and lurid assortment of bright young and old things”.

The famous Raffles Hotel is the setting for the play, *Imperial Façade*, where, behind its grand façade lie the secrets of the very gay Coward, pretending to be a voracious lady-killer as he prepares to join a down-at-heel theatre company to perform in a production of *Journey's End*.

There he meets actor/theatre manager Jimmy Grant Anderson, Simon Makepeace, matinee idol or rent-boy, and Wing Lee who claims to be a princess from Peking.

Sparkling comedy, musical and mystery rolled into one, *Imperial Façade* also features the talents of Edgar Metcalf, Maggie Ankatell, Igor Sas, Peter Web, Ethan Tomas, Gerard van der Tang, Craig Fong and pianist Mark Coughlan.

Imperial Façade is on at the Rechabites Hall, in William Street, Northbridge, from September 27 to October 15. Bookings are through BOCS.



John Michael Swinbank is Noel Coward. Picture: Paul McGovern

Take note This week you can...

... catch the last week of an exhibition of photographs by Norbert Schäfer.

The German artist explores new ways of representing movement and time in one photograph, resulting in painterly, abstracted pictures. His exhibition, *Light and Insight* Perth, has moved from the city to Monart Studio and Gallery, Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith.

Norbert's photo-art goes beyond capturing a moment to capturing scenes and atmospheres.

The exhibition is showing at Monart until September 30.



... travel around the world cabaret style.

Yellow Glass Theatre will present one performance of the popular cabaret titled *My Friends Went Overseas And All They Brought Me Back Was This Lousy Cabaret Act!*

Ali Bodycoat, Simon Holt, Chris Kabay, Rhoda Lopez and Jarrad West perform a kaleidoscope of songs named after or relating to other countries: *Leaving On a Jet Plane*, Kate Bush's *Egypt*, Jacques Brel's *Amsterdam*, Cole Porter's *I Love Paris* – think of a song title with a place name in it and it's probably in this cabaret.



The show will be at MosArt's Camelot Theatre, Lochee Street, Mosman Park, on Sunday, September 25, at 3pm. Tickets are available at the door for \$15.

... find out what the butler saw in the Graduate Dramatic Society's latest production.

Joe Orton's brutal farce, *What the Butler Saw*, was written just before Orton's own brutal death in 1967. Balancing madness with social satire, wit with violence, GRADS performs the rarely seen play at the Dolphin Theatre, UWA, on September 23 and 24, 28 and 30 and October 1, and 5 to 8. To book ring 9443 4223.

... hear British pianist Steven Osborne in his Australian debut with the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

For his first Australian tour, Steven will perform the early works of Mozart and Britten.

The program – Mozart's *Adagio and Fugue*, and Benjamin Britten's radiant *Young Apollo* and a tribute to his tutor with *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* – reflects the exuberance of the two composers at a time when they were most influenced by their teachers.

The Australian Chamber Orchestra and Steve Osborne perform at the Perth Concert Hall on September 27 at 8pm. Tickets can be booked through BOCS.

... book friends and art lovers for an Art Discovery Tour of the Swan Valley.

Led by art consultant Joy Flower and run by Retirees WA Arts Club, retirees can enjoy a guided tour of studios and galleries with morning tea and lunch included. The next tour is October 19. For bookings and details ring 9323 3144.

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Forced to spend his summer vacation alone, Max and his two imaginary friends, Shark Boy and Lava Girl, embark on a mission to prove to the world that all it takes is a dream to make anything a reality.
Taylor Lautner Taylor Dooley Cayden Boyd
SHARKBOY AND LAVAGIRL 3D
PG
Sorry, No Free List/Passes
Sat, Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed: 10.40, 12.45, 2.45

Wallace and his loyal dog, Gromit, set out to discover the mystery behind the garden sabotage that plagues their village and threatens the annual giant vegetable growing contest.
Wallace & Gromit THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT
Voices: Peter Sallis, Ralph Fiennes, Helena Bonham Carter
PG
Sorry, No Free List/Passes
Sat, Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed: 10.30, 12.35, 2.40, 4.45, 6.50, 8.50

Set in a world where superheroes are commonly known and accepted, the son of Commander Stronghold and Jetstream, tries to find a balance between being a normal teenager and an extraordinary being.
Kurt Russell Kelly Preston
SPY
PG
Sat, Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed: 11.00, 1.30, 4.00, 6.40

Charlie CHOCOLATE FACTORY PG
Johnny Depp
Sat, Sun, Tue, Wed: 10.45, 1.15, 3.50, 6.30, 9.10
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Holiday gigs for kids



Wednesday and Moondog forge an unlikely friendship in the tree house.

BARKING GECKO THEATRE
Scarborough
Community Centre
September 28 to October 8:
11am and 1pm daily
Bookings through BOCS.

Wendy is really mad! Her Mum has broken one of her own golden rules and has had a car accident while answering her mobile phone. In a fury, Wendy changes her name to Wednesday and moves out of the family home and into her tree house.

There she forges an unlikely and adventurous friendship with her neighbour, Moondog, who is wheelchair-bound because of a car accident.

Written by Grahame Gavin, The Tree House was commissioned by the RAC as part of its centenary celebrations to take the message about road safety to the young community in an entertaining way.

Grahame said: "I think that places like tree houses are sacred for children, a place away from adults, where they

can go and sort out issues and let life's lessons filter through."

Performed by Sean Walsh and circus-trained Sarah Borg, The Tree House performs twice daily through the school holidays.

☆☆☆
BUZZ DANCE THEATRE
Rabbit

Playhouse Theatre
September 28 to October 1:
11am and 1pm.

At the age of six, Melanie Robinson could be found on the floor of her apartment, straining to hear the sounds of a cello in the



Classical musician Melanie Robinson. Photo: Jon Green

in the flat below.

Some 20 years later, Melanie, who now lives in Mosman Park, is a renowned cellist, singer and songwriter whose aim has always been to break down the barriers that relegate the cello to a purely classical role.

"I love playing classical music, but the most exciting thing for me is to cross those [musical] boundaries," Melanie said.

Buzz Dance Theatre is also renowned for crossing the boundaries between dance and theatre and for its next school holiday show, Rabbit, Buzz will break away from synthesised music and use Melanie's special talents.

Rabbit is inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. The quirky, comically absurd dance work sees four unusual rabbits testing the Alice-ability of Susan - an Alice wannabe who has fallen into a DIY Wonderland.

"Writing for dancers is very different to writing for myself," said Melanie, who improvised with the dancers to create the final score.

"It's very beat oriented, but the cello has a very theatrical 'voice' and it's really exciting to see people move to the sounds I've created."

Buzz Dance Theatre bounds into the Playhouse Theatre in Perth with a quirky wonderland created by a team of five designers. Adults can enjoy this family show at children's prices. Bookings are through BOCS.

☆☆☆
FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE
Finnerty Street, Fremantle

The Fremantle Arts Centre has an entertaining exhibition of moving pictures that will amuse and entertain the children while you can enjoy lunch at the art centre's café.

Moving Pictures is a collection of mixed media paintings by cabinetmak-



er, craftsman and artist Raimo Kuparinen that use clockworks so that parts of the painting move: a shark swims past a jetty, a golf cart zips across the course or a sun moves across the sky. The delightful works are on show until October 9.

☆☆☆
SPARE PARTS PUPPET THEATRE
1 Short Street, Fremantle
September 24 to October 8: 11am and 2pm

Blueback completes Spare Parts' successful trilogy of Tim Winton's works adapted for the stage, following on from The Deep and The Bugalugs Bum Thief.

Blueback was originally adapted by Peta Murray (Wallflowering, Salt) for Tasmania's Terrapin Puppet Theatre.

One of Winton's most personal and quintessentially WA stories, Blueback is about a young boy, Abel, and his mother, and their desire to protect and preserve the natural habitat of the place they, and an old fish called Blueback, call home.

With a menagerie of beautifully crafted puppets of fish, crabs, eels, abalone and coral, puppeteers Michael Barlow and Karen Hethy bring Blueback's underwater garden to life.

Directed by Spare Parts artistic director, Philip Mitchell said: "This is a visual and an emotional journey through a stunning landscape, a fable for all ages that reminds us of why we live in one of the most beautiful places in the world."

For bookings, phone Spare Parts on 9335 5044.



Above: Dancer Paul Blackman in Buzz Dance Theatre's show, Rabbit.
Photo: Jon Green

Right: Spare Parts explores the underwater world.

Merengue to the movies

MAD HOT BALLROOM (PG)
Starts September 29 at Luna Leederville
Film review by David Cohen

For those who thought the merengue was a crumbly confectionery, sit down and hang on.

It is a ballroom dance from Haiti and Dominica. A bunch of New York City 11-year-olds has to learn the merengue, along with the foxtrot, the rumba, the tango, and swing.

The public school kids are from the poorer sides

of the tracks: here white faces stand out from the rest. They're not used to referring to each other as "ladies" and "gentlemen", but that's what you do in the world of competitive ballroom dancing.

Mad Hot Ballroom follows students from three schools as they practise and prepare for a climactic competition. They get 10 weeks only to practise, and at the start you wonder if any of them will cut the mustard.

This is where the teachers come in. They drill, cajole and encourage. The expert dancers who get the kids going are brilliant, too.

We see the murder on the dance floor, the kids chatting in the playground and at home, and surprising unscheduled moments. If you shake it you make it, if you don't want to tango you're a drongo.

There's a sashaying finale to Sinatra and Glenn Miller where the kids excel and look like the real thing. The winners take home a trophy that's bigger than most of them.

Mad Hot Ballroom reminds us that kids can do anything, practice makes perfect, dancing is good for the soul and public school teachers deserve a pay rise of 100% and medals for the job they do.

☆☆☆

Win!

POST Newspapers and Luna Leederville have eight double in-season passes to give away for Mad Hot Ballroom.

If you want to merengue your way to the movies between September 29 and October 9, send in an envelope with your name, address and daytime phone number on the back, to: "Ballroom", Post Impressions, 276 Onslow Road, Shenton Park 6008.

Post dates

CLASSES

SINGING FOR NEW SINGERS - will commence on October 3 and run until November 7 from 5.30pm to 7pm. Singing for Slightly More Advanced New Singers (level II) is from 7.15pm to 8.45pm on the same dates. The venue is The Warehouse Cafe, 221 Onslow Rd, Shenton Park. Cost: \$225 Bookings: Ron Macqueen 9389 6890. Level I may be repeated at 1/2 price. Details: www.macqueenmusic.com.au

COURSES

HIDDEN PSYCHOLOGY OF CHAKRAS - Free course on Gnosis, the ancient tradition of inner knowing (8 weeks - Mondays). Topics: esoteric psychology (dealing with pain & suffering), stress management, mind study, visualisation, concentration, analytical meditation. Donations welcome. Public Introductory Lecture, Oct 3, Mon (7-9pm) Memorial Hall (Room: Gallery - 1st Floor), 10 Lochee St, Mosman Pk. Gnostic Association is non-profit. Bookings: 9438 1524 (Bicton branch). Also available in Subiaco.

EXHIBITIONS

JULIE BARBOUR RETROSPECTIVE - An exhibition of oils and watercolours by the late Julie Barbour at the Gallery Celeste - Upstairs - Galileo Book Shop, Avon Terrace, York. September 24th - October 9th. Free entry - 96 411 344.

NOW SHOWING AT THE FARQUHARSON GALLERY - U2/6 Gibbon St, Mosman Park - Paintings of Hong Kong until September 24 (opening then) Sat 2pm Abstract Symbolism, by Francis Farquharson. Gallery times Tuesday - Saturday 10am-2pm. It only costs \$4.40 a line (incl. GST) to advertise in Post Dates. Please contact Judy on 9381 3088 or judym@postnewspapers.com.au by Wednesday noon.

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Don't miss out on this ball



Sets from the Royal Ballet provide a regal setting for Cinderella and her Prince.

CINDERELLA
WA Ballet Company
 His Majesty's Theatre
Review by Sarah McNeill

Unlike his first score for Romeo and Juliet, which was pronounced "undanceable," Prokofiev's music for the ballet, Cinderella captures the essence of the fairytale with all its fun, drama, tears and romance. To this beautiful, dramatic score the WA Ballet Company's artistic di-

rector Simon Dow has choreographed a simple, classical ballet that will appeal to both ballet purists and newcomers to classical dance. It was a joy to see the theatre full of children at the 6.30pm performance and to hear their laughter at the antics of the ugly sisters and their cheers at the happy reunion of the Prince and Cinderella ("They'll have to get married now," declared one faintly disgusted youngster when the happy couple actually kissed.) This magical version of the story is

beautifully staged, with stunning sets originally created for the Royal Ballet in England and passed on to the WA Ballet by the Dutch National Ballet (run by former WAB artistic director Ted Bransden). Against this elegant backdrop unfolds the ageless story of a young, beautiful and kind-hearted girl who longs for love while forced to endure taunts and teasing from her two stepsisters. Tim O'Donnell and Sergey Pevnev are an absolute joy as the stepsisters, grisly Griselda and lumbering Lavina,

and get full marks for learning to dance en pointe. The two boys put heart and soul into their performances as they cavort in the kitchen, prostrate themselves in front of the prince, and dominate the ballroom dancing with two unfortunate cavaliers. Jacinta Ross-Ehlers is a lovely, tender-hearted Cinderella well matched by Nathan Coppen as the handsome Prince. The company's dancers have a well-earned reputation as actors as well as dancers. There are a few new mem-

bers of the company who have yet to fully develop character skills, but on the whole this classic fairytale is beautifully performed. It is a fitting finale to a successful year for the company and a real pleasure to see the company returning to its classical roots with some traditional ballet and gorgeous classical tutus. This is a ballet for the whole family to enjoy. If you haven't already booked - don't wait. An extra show has already been added to the season on Wednesday, September 28, at 2pm.

Classic Chekhov in the West Australian outback

UNCLE VANYA
Black Swan Theatre
 Octagon Theatre, UWA
Review by Sarah McNeill

Director Tom Gutteridge had originally planned a relatively simple rewrite of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, swapping Russian references for Australian ones. The playwright he commissioned, Reg Cribb, couldn't do that. Sitting in shearers' quarters south of Mt Magnet, Reg wrote his own adaptation. Set in regional WA in 1905, the work is so intrinsically Chekhovian it is impossible not to imagine Chekhov sitting in the middle of the Murchison,

swatting flies and longing for rain. On a vast but beautiful set (designed by Zoe Atkinson and strikingly lit by Andrew Lake) acres of sun-bleached floorboards pierced with growing grass highlight the inhabitants' physical and emotional isolation. Professor Serebryakov (George Shevtsov) has returned with his new young wife, Yelena, to his farm run by Vanya (Geoff Kelso). It is getting towards the end of a drought-ridden summer and Renee McIntosh as Yelena gives a charming performance as the beautiful, languid Yelena who has infected the household with her inactivity. Vanya, the professor's daughter Sonya (Hayley McElhinny) and the visiting doctor Astrof (Humphrey Bower) are trapped in their own in-

ferent infatuations. Geoff Kelso injects Vanya with the manic frustrations of unrequited love for Yelena, as well as desperation and anger as he wallows in self-loathing at a wasted life. Hayley gives a superb performance as

the plain Sonya whose spirit is infused with beauty, passion and unrequited love for the doctor. The excellent Humphrey Bower, whose wry humour as the environmentally aware doctor produces the most laughs in this tragi-comedy, pursues

Yelena. "This is not a happy house," says the long-time servant Marina, played with earthy good humour by Ningali Lawford-Wolf. It has a solid ensemble cast and is well directed by Tom Gutteridge.



A household filled with languid love and lugubrious humour.

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*Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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Albany artist wins Show double

Albany artist Judith Lambert has won the Open Art award at the Royal Show for the second year in a row.

Her work, *The Power of One*, shares first place with *Reflective Pool - UWA* by Karnup's Agnes (Ann) Hart. Judith Lambert also took out the Best Rural Artist award. She won both awards in 2004.

The awards were announced on Wednesday evening at a cocktail party in the Arthur Wilkinson Pavilion. The Open Art first prize of \$5000 will be shared between the two winners and Judith receives \$1500 for the Best Rural Artist.

The public choice award is given after Show visitors vote for their favourite piece of art. The winner will receive \$500.

The annual Open Art exhibition will be on show for the duration of the show in conjunction with the inaugural Hal Missingham Memorial Exhibition.

Perth-born artist and mentor Hal Missingham (1906-1994) became director of the Australian Gallery of NSW in 1945 and is credited with introducing new ideas for Australian art collecting, and organising international exhibitions that contributed to the country's art development.

For the inaugural exhibition in his honour, well-known artists from around the country were sent a blank 25mm by 33mm canvas. The result is an eclectic collection of styles and ideas from some of the country's finest artists including Cedric Baxter, Brendon Darby, George Haynes, Robert Juniper, Douglas Kirsop, Mary Jane Malet, Dan Mazzotti, Brian McKay, Gillian Peebles, Jules Sher, Lorraine Sutherland, Paul Trinidad, Elizabeth Ford and Ian De Souza. All the works are for sale.

The exhibitions are in the Arthur Wilkinson Pavilion. Entry is through Gate One.



Winning artworks at the Show... *Reflective pool - UWA* by Agnes Hart (above) and *The Power of One* by Judith Lambert (left).

Sip WA wine at the Show

More than 20 of WA's best wineries will be offering a selection of wine to taste at the Royal Show each day between 3 and 8pm.

The event is hosted by the Wine Industry Association and the wineries include Amberley, Barwick Estates, Beckett's Flat, Bellaramine, Brookhampton Estate, Cape Lavender, Castle Rock Estate, Chalice Bridge Fine Wines, Flinders Bay Wines, Faber Vineyard, Fonty's Pool, Gilbert Wines, Goundrey, Hay Shed Hill, Marri Wood Park, Merop Wines, Moss Brothers, Palandri Wines, Peel Estate Wines, Tassell Park Wines, The Growers, The Wine & Truffle Co, Three Drops,

Watershed Premium Wines and Wovenfield.

Margaret River Dairy Company will showcase a selection of quality cheeses.

For an entry fee of \$10, visitors will receive a tasting glass and 10 tasting vouchers.

Director talks pictures

Win!

POST Newspapers and Luna Leederville have five double passes to give away for a Talking Pictures event. A preview screening of the new Nick Cave film *The Proposition* will be followed by a talk by the film's director John Hillcoat.

Written by iconic musician Nick Cave, *The Proposition* is set in the wild west of the 1880s and opens in the middle of a frenzied gunfight between police and a gang of outlaws.

Talking Pictures with John Hillcoat is at Luna Leederville on Sunday, October 2, at 6.30pm.

To be in the running to win a double pass to the preview screening, send in an envelope with your name, address and daytime phone number on the back, to: "Talking Pictures" Post Impressions, 276 Onslow Road, Shenton Park 6008.

The competition closes on September 28 and winners will be notified by phone.

Gourmet directory post guide to restaurants

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