

Preserving Memories

A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

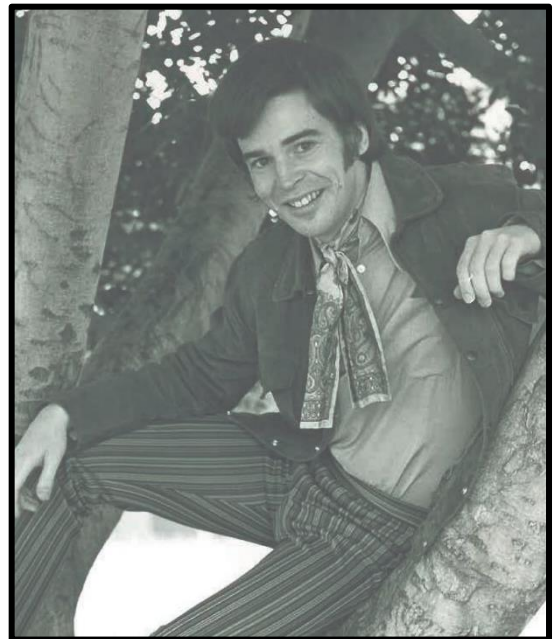
MALCOLM HARSLETT

‘WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I REALISED I WANTED TO BE A PERFORMER. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT, BUT I KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING INSIDE THAT HAD TO GET OUT.’

Malcolm has had a very successful career spanning 60 years in the entertainment industry from live theatre to Children's Television (*Here's Humphrey* between 1972-2002) and Adult TV in hundreds of programmes.

Currently Malcolm is the host of *Our Time* a National Television interview programme aimed at Baby Boomers and retirees, now in its 13th year on the Channel 44 Community network .

He is a writer, producer and director of TV and theatre. He has produced, written and starred in 55 productions over the last 30 years at his Star Theatres in Adelaide. Malcolm has also had a parallel career in Ice Skating shows in Australia and Asia and in theatrical set design.



Fan card photo [Channel 10 Adelaide]

Malcolm's company Mighty Good Productions also owns and operates the Mighty Good Talent School currently based at Star Theatres. The school specialises in teaching all performance subjects of acting, singing and dance and had enormous success with students over the last 45



years of operation in many diverse aspects of the entertainment industry and beyond. Over the last 30 years the school has also had 13 locations all over Australia.

Malcolm was also the Programme Manager for 'Out of the Square' for 10 years, a collaborative incentive of 8 suburban theatres who programme 24 different touring productions each year. Currently the programme is funded by local councils and the Department for the Ageing in South Australia.

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Early life and first performance

I was born in 1948, on March the 19th, and unfortunately my birth mother couldn't keep me. I was adopted to Alan and Jessie Harslett, who took me to their home in Longwood in the Adelaide Hills. Alan and Jessie became my parents, for which I'm extremely grateful. I wish more people were able to adopt children who were unable to stay with their birth parents.

Our family attended the small Aldgate Valley Church of Christ and, as part of church activities, everybody sang hymns. The children heard the hymns and went to Sunday school where they learnt simple songs that related to religious ideals.

My stage debut at the age of three was in the main church at Aldgate Valley. This church is now a private residence.



Aldgate Valley Church of Christ, now private residence, built by voluntary labour, opened Christmas 1888 [churchesofchrist-sa.org.au]



I recall very clearly standing between two bollards which were part of the, what I would now call stage, but was then called the platform.

I sang 'Little Mister Baggy Britches, I Love You', in a costume my mother made.

I remember quite clearly the nervous fear initially and then the pleasure when it was over.

That is my first performing memory.

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First television and radio appearances

I was about seven and my cousin Trevor and I, known as the Harslett Brothers at the church even though we were cousins, competed in the Christian Endeavour Eisteddfods.

I was the soprano and Trevor had an alto register. We didn't have a formal singing teacher, my Mum taught us, but we won all of the events we entered over about four or five years.



This led to making a Bakelite record, religious songs of course, for 5KA, to be played on the radio in their Sunday afternoon church programs.

When television broadcasts started, Trevor's mother said to him, "No, you can't do that anymore because you will be too busy starting high school". I continued to sing at church events alone.

Soon after the first television shows began there was a competition on the Channel Niners, run by Barry Hall, a radio DJ at the time. I've no idea how this happened, whether Mum wrote a letter, or maybe I pushed her to write a letter (because in those days we wrote letters) to request an audition to go on this talent quest.

I competed in the talent quest, but I didn't win it. Robyn Archer, she was Robyn Smith then, won it. At the time Barry Hall said, "If there was a prize for the runner up, it would have gone to you. But I would like you to come down once every couple of months and sing on the Channel Niners".

I dutifully did this from the age of 14 to almost 16.



Robyn Archer [IMDb.com]

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School years

I went to the Heathfield Primary School until I was 12, and in those days the nearest high school was Mount Barker High School. 'Arts' at the high school was discouraged. Being a country school, it was populated by farmer's children. The purpose of the school was to teach them how to till the land and look for the bugs underneath the cow pats and all that sort of stuff.

I remember in the first year of high school there was a drama performance, and I played a Shakespearean character. I don't remember what the play was. I just remember I had to wear tights for the first time and that they had lipstick embedded in the foot. I've never forgotten that.

I finished high school at year 11, fourth year, at Mount Barker High.

The Beatles!

I remember when I was 16, I happened to be in Adelaide the day the Beatles arrived in 1964. I have a photograph of my mum and I. You can barely see us in the crowd waving to the Beatles on the Adelaide Town Hall balcony. I was performing on TV that afternoon and fantasized they might see me and ask me to sing with them...the naivety of youth!



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A career of many stages

Starting at the Wonderland Ballroom, 1964

I was still at school when I started singing at The Wonderland.

One Monday afternoon there was a knock at the door. I was 16 then, and I was doing homework watching TV as we did in those days, probably watching the Channel Niners. Bob Christie was at the door. How he found our house at Longwood I have no idea, because there were no street numbers. We were just Longwood Road, Longwood.

Bob Christie owned the Wonderland Ballroom, which sadly has just been demolished. He said, "I'm looking for a male singer and Barry Hall has recommended you."



The Wonderland Ballroom, 126 Belair Rd, Hawthorne, 2021 [realcommercial.com.au/for-sale]

Well, at 16, I was very, very naive and had no idea what I was doing. I called Mum, and Bob Christie came in and explained that it was in a ballroom. If you remember, there used to be a joke "that "sex would lead to ballroom dancing!" It was considered that bad amongst the Hills church people.

This was a Monday night and so Dad had to go to the elders of the church to ask them if it was appropriate for me to perform in the ballroom. I wouldn't be dancing with the girlyies, just singing at them! I remember this quite clearly... they said, "Well, Alan, you know best the morals of your son. You do what you think is right."

Dad was very supportive, and on the Wednesday night of the same week, we went down for a so-called 'sing' over the PA so that Bob Christie could hear what I sounded like. He played the song Pearly Shells on the piano, completely out of time, for me to sing over the PA system. I had sung on television with a microphone, so it wasn't daunting, just the echo in the vast empty ballroom.

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*That was the Wednesday, and by that Friday afternoon, I got a telegram at school saying,
WE WANT YOU TO SING TONIGHT, AND YOU'LL BROADCAST ON RADIO ON 5DN.*

First of all, getting a telegram at school was pretty unusual and this all happened so quickly, it was extraordinarily unusual.

He'd asked me on Wednesday night what songs I knew, so on that first Friday those were the songs that I sung.

There were about 30 songs for the male singer in the dance program, so every week from then on, I had to learn 30 new songs. Quite a challenge, but wonderful discipline.



Those Magnificent men in their Flying Machines, on Rory Jays shoulders with Bob Christie (who built the ballroom, Jan (female singer) and Ken Taylor slightly hidden [circa 1966]

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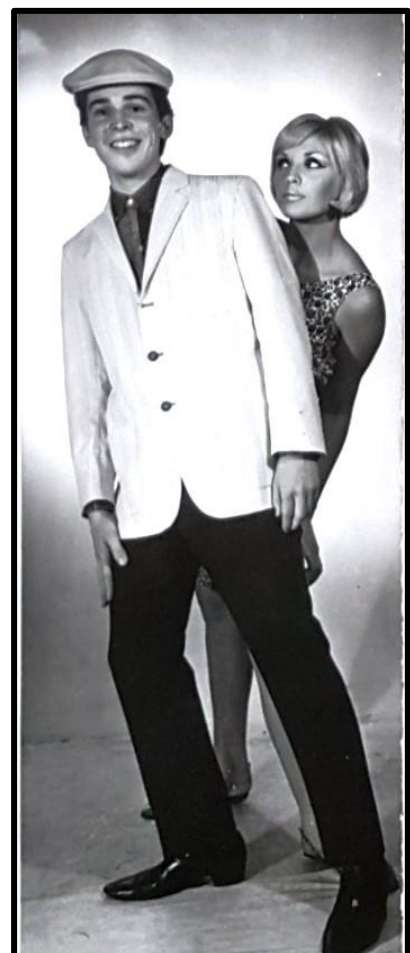
Myers

Bob said to me, (I never called him Bob to his face by the way), it was always Mr. Christie in those days because we had respect for our elders. He said, "So do you want to be a singer?" And I said, "Yes". I said "Yes", because I didn't understand how to get into the rest of the business.

He said, "If you want to be a singer, you have to know how to handle money, how to handle people and what the latest fashions are. I've arranged a job for you at the Myer Emporium." It turns out this was absolutely true!

The day after I left school, he took me into Myers. I was signed up and started the next day. We used pounds, shillings and pence then, and because I knew all of that, from learning it in the last year at school, I was the expert on the floor. The youngest member of the staff and the expert on the floor.

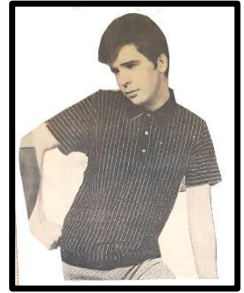
It's not a job I loved by any means and if there was any excuse to leave the floor where I was fitting men in pants and sports coats, I would.



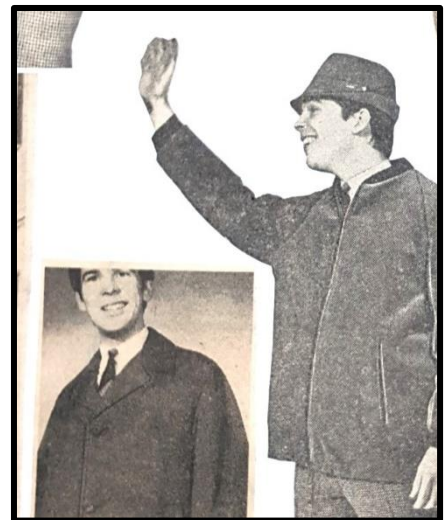
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A lady by the name of Phyl Skinner came along a few weeks later and said, "Would you like to do some photographic modelling?" I had no idea what that meant, but I said, "Yes" because it got me off the floor. Then a short time later, she said "Would you like to do some catwalk modeling?" That started a short modeling career; I still have some of the press cuttings my Mum kept.



At this point I was singing and modelling and working at Myers five and a half days a week, and I did this until I was 20.



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Discotheques vs the *Wonderland Ballroom*

In the wintertime at the Wonderland, we worked every night of the week, then in summertime we only worked Fridays and Saturdays.

The Wonderland suffered when discotheques began. Discos took away all of the younger people who had been coming to the Wonderland Ballroom. One was Big Daddy's in the city, and there were several other discos running in local pubs. Slowly the numbers of dancers started to fragment.

It was in the summertime and Bob was starting to worry about what was happening with the attendance at the ballroom. He thought, 'Maybe it's the singer, maybe I need another singer' and decided that I would do one night, and another guy would do the other night.

The *Beau Gestes*

In the meantime, the bass player in the band who owned the Twin Street Music Centre said, "There's a band looking for a male singer. Are you interested?" Well, in those days I said yes to everything. In fact, I still do, like this interview!



I was unhappy working with the band, playing to a mob of drunks who were pushing each other around on the dance floor every night at the Brighton Hotel. One day the lead guitarist saw an ad for drama classes at the Olde Kings Music Hall and said, "Well, why don't you do this? You're always saying you want to do more than just sing with the band."

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Olde Kings Music Hall

I'd been to the Olde Kings Music Hall and having seen the show, I said, "Yeah, but I don't want to learn to act like that, being melodramatic and all that over-the-top stuff."

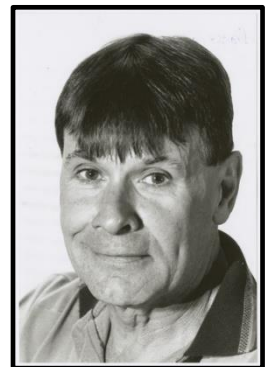
I also didn't dance, and the show clearly had people that danced in it. My only acting was in church plays with Christian Endeavour and the social nights at the Church of Christ. Those events were big with singing and plays...but no dancing.



King's Theatre opened in 1911 with seating for 1500 upholstered in blue velvet and closed in 1928. It was remodeled with two-stories, the bottom floor as a ballroom with rubber buffered floor. The main entrances were on King William Street (318-320) and Carrington Streets (2-10). It is now a City of Adelaide Local Heritage Place. [SLSA B1827]

I dutifully went along to the Olde Kings Music Hall on a Monday night for a drama class. It was a strange experience because there were a whole lot of people standing on stage doing 'weird' things with the teacher.

The teacher was Barry Egginton, who ran the Olde Kings Music Hall from 1967 to 1975. He was a Shakespearean actor trained at NIDA in Sydney, and that's what gave him the ability to be a teacher and also be the star of his own show.



Barry Egginton, [Messenger Press, SLSA B 70869/14709]

I joined the drama class and within a couple of weeks Barry said to me, "Would you like to be in one of our shows?" I was still working with the band two nights a week, earning \$10 a night. He was offering \$8 a show.

I knew I didn't want to stay on with the band, but I worked out that I could keep both jobs.

Barry was using some of the drama students as extras in one of the shows. It was a Western melodrama and so I worked there Wednesday and Thursday nights, and somebody else covered my role on a Friday and Saturday while I sang with the band.

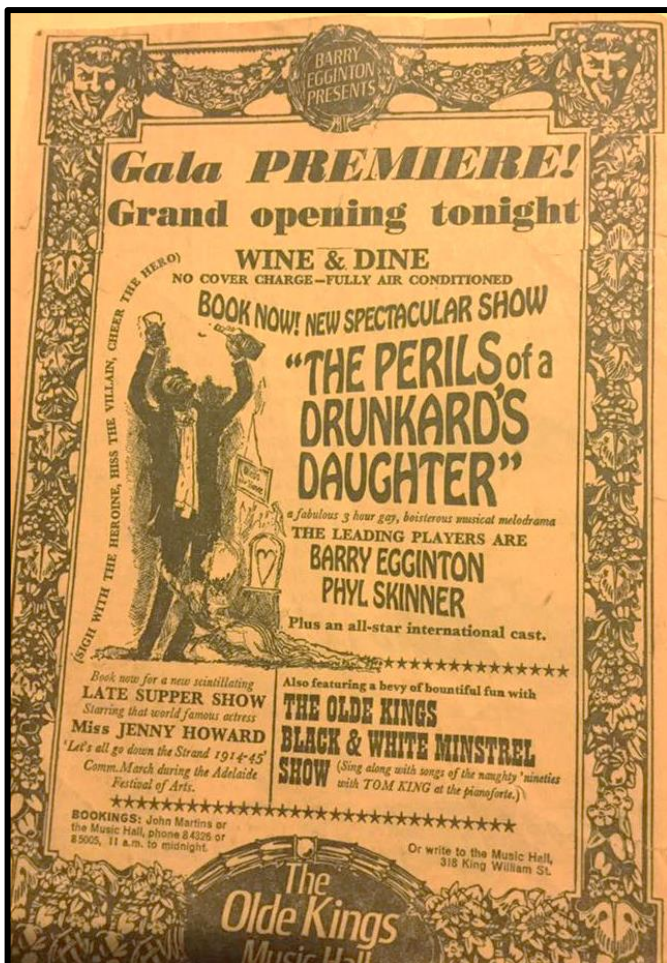
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I was also still working at Myers five and a half days a week. Well, I got sick, and the doctor said, "Oh, you're going to have to give up all this night work." And I thought, "No, no, I've got to give up all this day work."

Around this time Barry asked me if I would be interested in joining the cast of the show permanently. Permanently meant that we rehearsed all day Sunday, Monday nights, Tuesday nights, and we played Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The Olde Kings Music Hall was the first theatre restaurant in Adelaide that had an after-hours liquor licence.

I went into the show in the back line of the chorus. I had wisely started taking dance lessons, but classical ballet lessons of all things. I started doing that with the choreographer in the show and realised that I had an aptitude to pick up dance steps fairly quickly, like I did with words, songs and dialogue for that matter. I could always learn on the spot. The 30 new songs I had to learn each week had trained my brain well.



I gave up the Myers day job and started my seven years at the Olde Kings Music Hall. I was now a pro, so to speak, in other words I didn't have any other income. This meant that I was available to work at another job during the daytime.



Malcolm Harslett, Didi James, David and Sylvia Budgen,
Olde Kings Music Hall, 1970

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Deadly designs on a Damsels Dowry, Malcolm with Gordon Poole and Sylvia Budgen, Olde Kings Music Hall, 1971



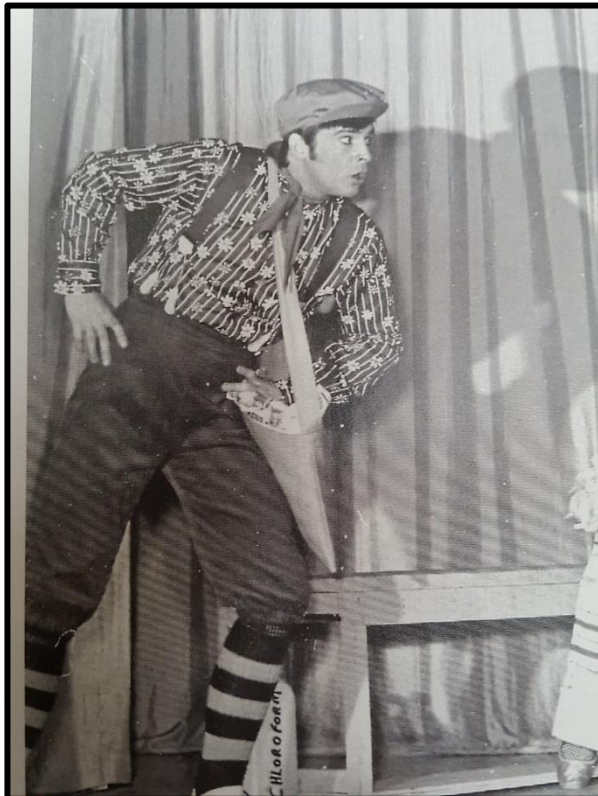
Frankie and Johnny, Malcolm with Anne Lavelle, at Olde Kings Music Hall, 1972

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Song and Dance man, Olde Kings Music Hall, 1972



*Squizzy Taylor in The Mystery of the
Hansom Cab, Olde Kings Music Hall, 1972*

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Bunyip Childrens Theatre and Channel Ten, early 1970s

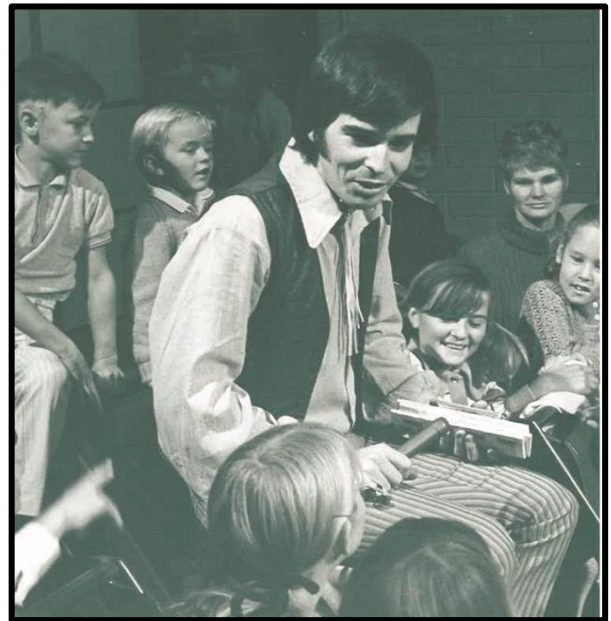
I started doing plays with the Bunyip Children's Theatre, touring schools and doing school holiday productions with them.

Olde Kings sent me for an audition at Channel Ten for Fat Cat. Whilst I didn't get that job, I was asked if I wanted to be the host of a Saturday morning live children's show on Channel Ten, which had the very, very exciting title of SAS Ten Kids.

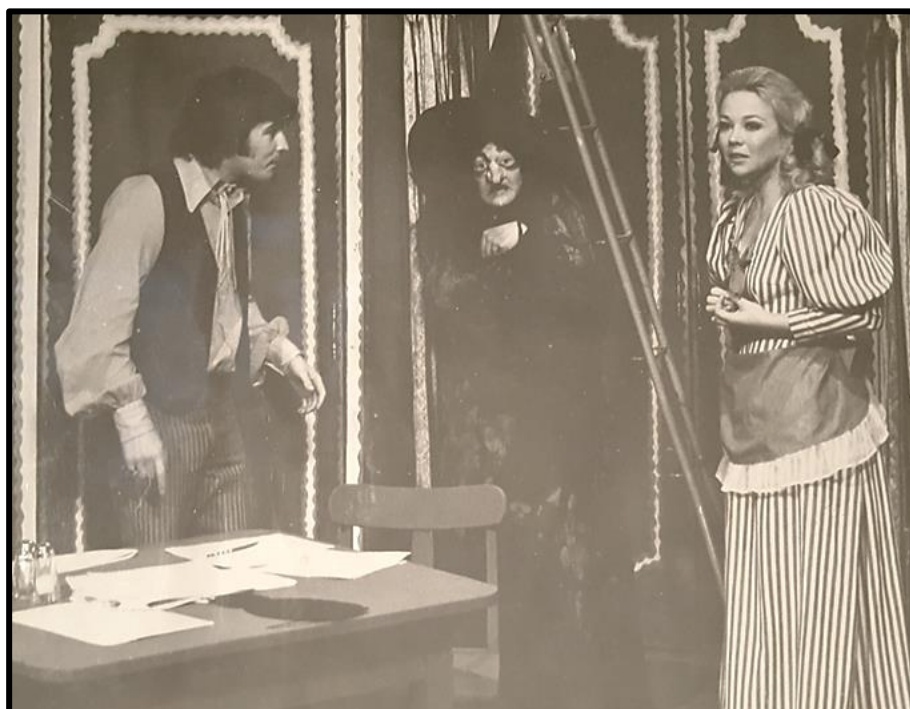
It was live-to-air between 9 and 11 in the morning and was a melodrama styled show with Veronica Overton as the children's host and Alistair McHaig playing the organ.

We made the whole thing up as we went along, which was extraordinary. We would arrive in the morning at 6am and work out what we were going to vaguely do, and then we did it! It was all improvisation. I love doing improvisation, it's great to keep the brain working.

It didn't last for all that long as Channel Ten was taken over by Channel Seven in Perth and they cancelled all local production.



First day on TV, reciting riddles with the audience



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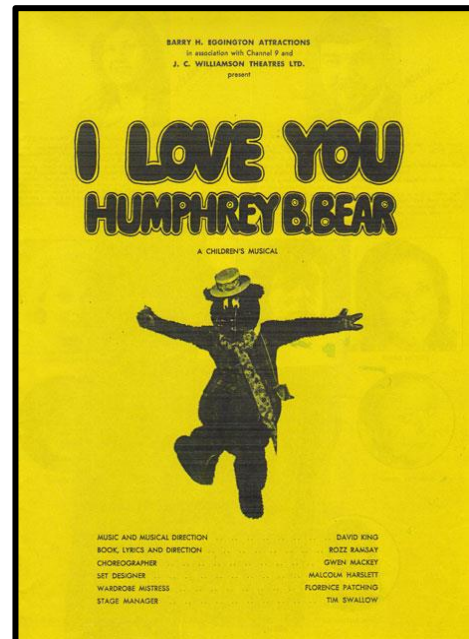
I Love you Humphrey B. Bear

Almost at the same time I started in a kids show called I Love You Humphrey B. Bear.

This was performed at the Royalty Theatre produced by the Olde Kings Company written by Roz Ramsay and David King. David has gone on to oversee the Music Theatre Course at WAAPA in Perth.

The show featured Humphrey Bear and a whole lot of other fantasy characters.

I went on to play five different characters in the show, including a Jack in the Box, the King of Bubbleland and the King of Colourland.



*a-z-of-australian-musicals
[theatreheritage.org.au]*

For the whole of the second half, I was a lonely circus clown.

We started at the Royalty Theatre in Adelaide and the show did very well. Then we took it to Perth where it was a sellout.

I had to paint new sets for the show when we took it to Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne. The only place they could find for me to paint the many huge sets was a regular height room, it was long, but it wasn't very high, so the sets couldn't be stood up. In those days I didn't know how to paint with long-handled brushes, which I've done ever since. I didn't see the whole thing together until it was set up in the theatre in Melbourne.



*Malcolm, 'star' (and the backdrop painter)
Olde Kings Music Hall [circa 1970s]*



*With Gretel Dunstan, wife of Premier
Don Dunstan, opening my first Art
Exhibition of paintings at the Olde
Kings Music Hall Foyer, 1970's*

Also at this time, I started painting all the scenery for the Olde Kings Music Hall in between everything else I was doing. I'd always painted; I had my first art exhibition there as well.

For seven years I was totally wrapped up with the Olde Kings Music Hall.

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1971 - Here's Humphrey

I worked with Penni-Ann Smith at Olde Kings. We had played boyfriend and girlfriend parts and I had married her a few times in shows. Penni called me up one day and she said, "They're looking for a boy for Here's Humphrey, you're too old, but I've told them you can do everything".

I had just turned 23 and just come back from Melbourne with the I Love You Humphrey B. Bear show. She said, "I've told him you've done all that and you know about Humphrey and blah, blah, blah'. All fabulous!"

I went in for an audition, but the audition was to be a glove puppet on the Humphrey show. I was sitting under a table talking in a funny voice because Ian Fairweather had done the voice before, and they wanted it to match. So, I talked like that, with my hand up a puppet of Humphrey.

I'd just done all that when Penni said, "Come just sit here for a minute. They're going to look at that upstairs".

I didn't know what that meant but we were chatting away, when Ian Fairweather came into the little studio at Channel 9. Ian asked, "Would you like to be one of the new performers on the new Here's Humphrey that we're about to launch? It's an hour's show for national and overseas distribution as well."



Well, of course, I said "Yes." Although initially they thought I would just be a hand puppet and a clown on the show, they realised that having a male on Humphrey was a benefit, not ever having had men on it before. They'd really been thinking of only females working with the bear.

I became known from that... I think I was on air for at least 11 years with Humphrey.

ABC has recognised the people who performed in Play School, but unfortunately, it's a real shame that the Nine Network which owned Humphrey at that time has never acknowledged the fact that we all really made Humphrey Bear - Humphrey Bear. I still feel passionately about the bear because we believed when we were working with him that he was a bear!

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We used to record on Saturdays, Sundays and/or Mondays, depending on if there was football on, and if they had a crew and enough cameras to shoot the show in the big studio.



I started when I was 23 and I finished with Humphrey when I was 36.

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Multiple Roles

Throughout my life I've always had things going on at the same time.

While I was at the Olde King's, I was doing school holiday productions with Bunyip Children's Theatre, and I was working on our layout for recording Humphrey.



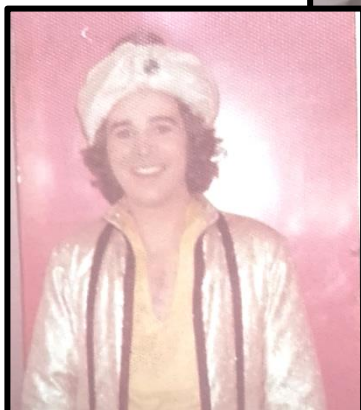
First season at Bunyip Children's Theatre. Company director Marie Tomasetti is second from the left then June Ball, Malcolm and Desi More. Malcolm played Pinga, Ponga and Pana, identical triplets.



In 1974, Sidney Sly, the classical villain character in Here's Humphrey, played by Malcolm, was deemed by the SA Council for Film and Television as too frightening for younger viewers and 'had to go'.



Some of the crafty things Malcolm made with John Farnham (who was playing Pippin' at the time). On People, a Channel 9 TV interview show hosted by Ian Fairweather.



Aladdin, Festival Theatre, 1975

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I appeared on television daily and funnily enough I ended up producing the Channel Niner's, the program I sang on at 14, when I was 27.

So, 11 years after I'd finished as a kid singing on it, I ended up the boss of it.



An early painting set with Debbie Brooks, Marion Shopping Centre, 1972



With Molly Sugden, who played Mrs. Slocombe in the TV show 'Are you being served?' 1974

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1975 - Bull and Bush Theatre Restaurant

From the age of 27, I started a ten-year season at the Bull and Bush Theatre Restaurant [Bull and Bush and Baron of Beef, at Hotel Enfield] with Wally Carr and Marie Fidock.

This was one of the happiest times of my life as a performer as we all got on so well.



*Left to right, Marie Fidock, Phyl Skinner and Wally Carr
[Messenger Press SLISA B 70869/14622]*



The show was a comedy show but we laughed more in the dressing room probably than the audience did out the front. It was just the most wonderful time working with really fantastic old show people that made life a joy.

Singing on Ice

I finished doing the daily shows with Humphrey, then went on tour around Australia with Humphrey in an ice show. I had to learn to skate, so this was the beginning of my skating career. I don't do tricks, but I could sing and talk on the ice, which is very rare. This skill has taken me all over the world. I was probably the only singer who at that time sang live while skating on ice.

We taught Humphrey to skate as well, and so he and I worked together, with all the comedy bits in between the ice-skating numbers, which gave the show a lot of variety. In Adelaide, in 1983, we had a very successful season called Summer Holidays on Ice at the Ice Rink.



Skating with Humphrey, 1983

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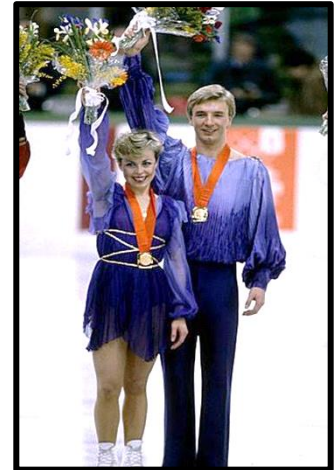
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1984 - The Ice Show Live Across Australia and Torvill & Dean

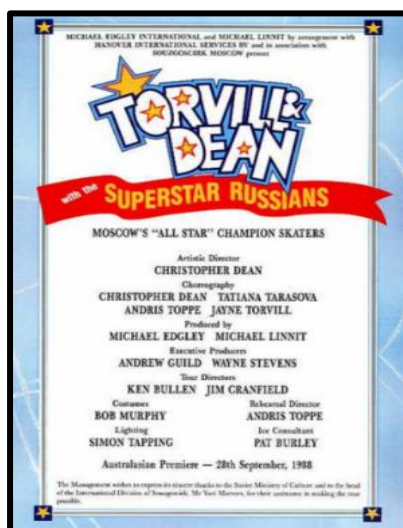
In 1984 we were in Canberra with a show called The Ice Show Live Across Australia, which was performed in a circus tent, as it was the only venue big enough to hold the ice floor. The tickets weren't selling so we had one of the guys from Edgley's come down from Sydney to have a look and see what we were doing wrong... why we couldn't put bums on seats. Nothing came of that, so we set a close date for the show and scheduled to return to Adelaide.

Just at the end of this season, English ice-skaters Torvill and Dean won the ice dance medal at the Sarajevo Winter Olympics. It was like people had discovered what ice skating was, and for the last three or four nights after they'd won, we started to fill the tent. It was too late then to know whether people would keep coming to see it or not, so we packed up. We had already been all around southern Australia in different country towns by that time.

A month or two later we got the word that Edgley's had bought the contracts of several Russian ice skaters including Torvill and Dean and were going to tour them around Australia.



Torvill and Dean, 1984 Olympics
[thenationalnews.com]



The show would be held at the ice rink here in Adelaide. The rink had a speed track around it, so the boys who owned it at the time, Neil and Peter Zwaans, put bleacher seating all the way around the rink so it would hold 4,000 people.

On the opening night, I went to the rink as I knew I'd get a free ticket. I was in the foyer when I was asked, "Will you go on the ice and tell people to pack up? We've measured all the seats. It definitely holds 4,000 people, but there's a thousand people waiting at the door and there's nowhere for them to sit." The people who had already arrived had put their bags and coats and thermos flasks and all sorts of stuff between them.

I was wearing warm clothes and just had Ugg boots on, but I went on the ice and chatted away to get people to pack up. I did a gag and there was great laughter and applause.

As I walked off past Jane Torvill and Christopher Dean and the Moscow people, they were looking at me like, 'Who are you to get that sort of reaction?'

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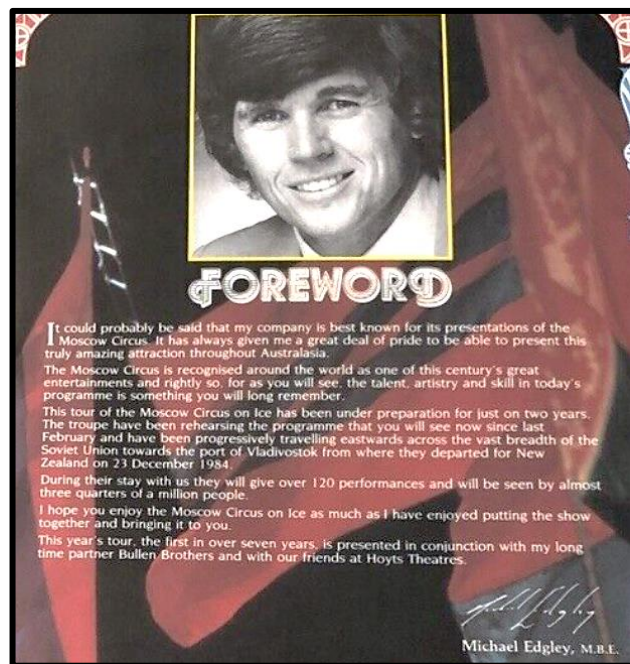
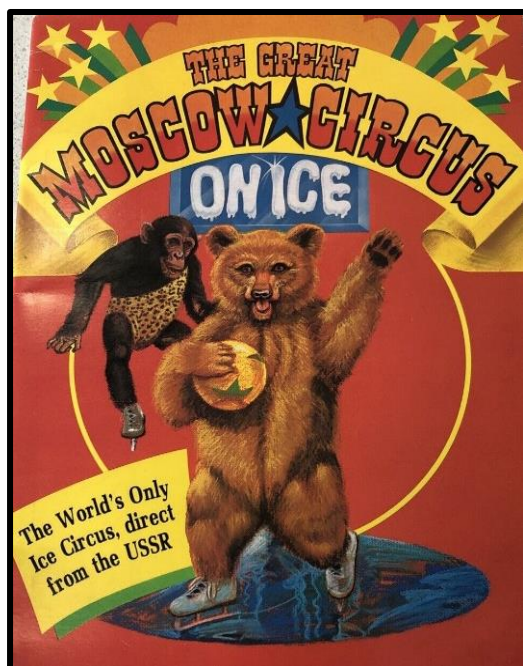
When I left the ice, the Edgley people said, "Will, you do that every night?" I said, "Providing I can wear skates because I feel ridiculous walking around in Ugg boots!" It was dangerous apart from anything else, because you just slip over. I went on to do it but wore a costume, so I looked like it was part of the show.

From that I got a booking to go to Sydney to be the compere for the Chinese Acrobat team. At the time it was a bit like what is currently happening in 2022, we're not all that friendly with China.

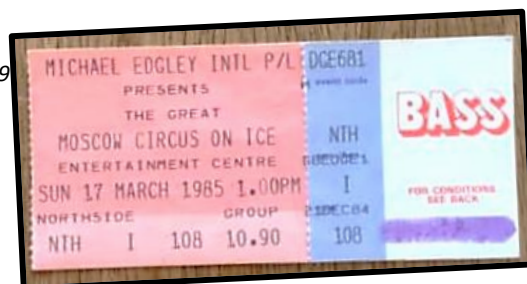
This would have been 1985 and when that was cancelled, I thought, "Oh, that's all over."

1985 - Moscow Circus on Ice

In Adelaide, we had just moved the Mighty Good Talent School to a city building and I was busy painting the rafters. My business partner came in and said, "Edgleys want you to be the ringmaster for the Moscow Circus on Ice." This was to be in January 1985, so off I went to Sydney.



[ebay.com.au/itm/223994060519](https://www.ebay.com.au/itm/223994060519)



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On the opening night I fell off the ice in front of 10,000 people. I was using a microphone with a cord, and it got wrapped around some rigging, so, when I skated into the middle of the ice to start the show with the big opening spiel, the mic cable tightened, and it ricocheted me off the ice floor.

I landed on the cement beside the ice floor, which was elevated to about table height. Somehow, I jumped from the cement floor with my ice skates on, back onto the ice, said my bit, and skated off.

Michael [Edgley] came down and said, "I saw exactly what happened. I'm so sorry. I'll have a radio mic for you tonight. You don't have to go on again." Of course, I did, because, you know, the show must go on, but I actually injured myself quite badly.



New Zealand with Torvill and Dean

Christopher Dean heard about my recovery and unbeknownst to me, had negotiated with Edgley's to take me into their show before the Moscow Circus had finished. I had already moved from Sydney to Melbourne, then suddenly I'm flying off to New Zealand to launch their world tour as their ice-skating compere.

The story goes that Christopher had been talking to Elton John, who said, "It would be lovely if your compere had a mask on that represented the numbers that you're doing." And I said to Chris, putting my hand over my face, "It's very hard to talk through a mask." "Oh, yes", he said, "I never thought of that."

I said, "I could wear white makeup, like a Marcel Marceau." "Oh, yes. That would be fantastic." So that's what I ended up doing, and nobody knew who the hell I was because I had a white face.



I worked with them for the next couple of months and they asked me if would I go with them, as they were moving from Australia to Russia and then back to Wembley in the UK. I felt that wasn't my career trajectory, so I declined and stayed in Australia. I'm glad I did for a lot of different reasons.

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Mighty Good Productions

In 1980 Ray Goldie and I formed Mighty Good Productions.

Mighty Good Productions is the father company that now owns Mighty Good Talent School and the Star Theatres. The company was producing shows for shopping malls, and had the contracts for Disney, for Warner Brothers, for Mattel, for Hanna-Barbera, to use all their characters.



In 1988, my partner Ray bought a franchise of the Johnny Young Talent School which had started here in South Australia in 1978.

Then in the 1990s I bought both him and Johnny Young out and changed the name of the school to Mighty Good Talent School, as by then people had forgotten the TV show Young Talent Time. [It ran from 1971 to 1988 and was hosted by musician Johnny Young and a changing team of young performers.]

In the late eighties, Sandy Verschoor, contracted us to do a show in the Victoria Square Hilton Hotel, with Humphrey Bear, called Humphrey and the Magic Lamp. It was a bit of a knock off of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp. Sandy later became Lord Mayor for the City of Adelaide. She was also key in promoting our first shows at Star Theatres.



Humphrey saves the forest, 1991

In 1991 I produced a show at the Arts Theatre called Humphrey Saves the Forest, which was an ecological story of Humphrey trying to protect his tree house in the forest.

When the war broke out in the Gulf, we had to close after a week.

The public were terrified and weren't going to kids shows in the city.

Preserving Memories

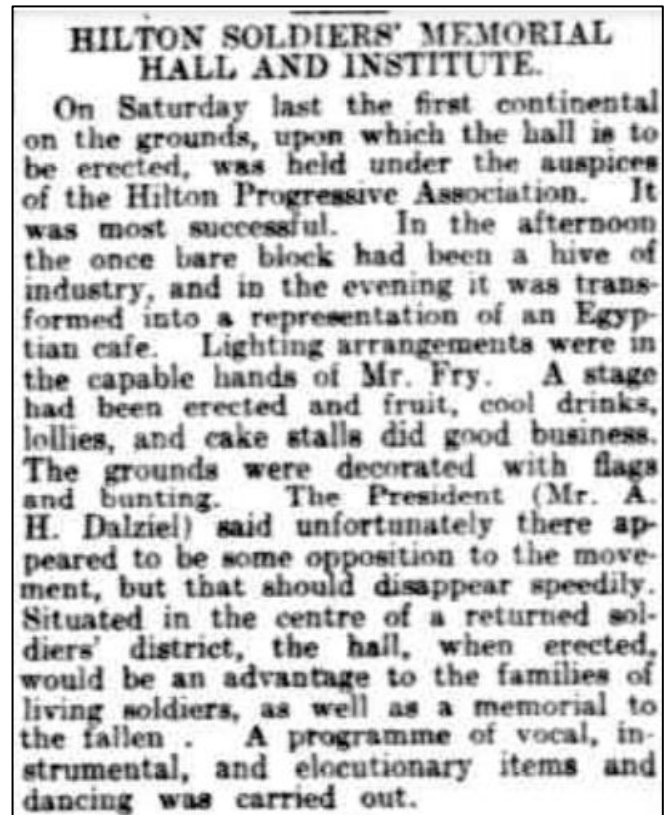
A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

Theatre 62, Hilton, a bit of history

The building history dates back to 1923, when the land was dedicated for the purpose of building a Soldiers Memorial Hall. The library was in a tin shed and held 300 books.



News, 23 October 1925, p5



Register, 25 January 1923, p8



Hilton soldiers Memorial Hall October 1928 [City of West Torrens A2501478]

The main hall was built with funds that were raised by the RSL and was opened in 1928. It began as a meeting hall and library for the returned soldiers.

A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

South Australia.

(CERTIFICATE OF TITLE.)

Register Book,
Vol. **1332** Folio **10**

Pursuant to Memorandum of Transfer No. 587659—


Harold Gordon Broadbent of West Adelaide, Oscar Binder of
Baby Manufacturing and Mathew George Markes retired gardeners both
of Adelaide are
the proprietors of an estate in the simple
subject nevertheless to such incumbrances liens and interests as are notified by memorial underwritten or endorsed hereon in
that piece of land situated in the HUNDRED of Adelaide COUNTY of South Australia
being the ALLOTMENTS 3 and 4 each containing twenty four perches or thereabouts of the
subdivision of Lot 23 and portion of Lot 26 of Section 49 laid out as follows

and bounded as appears in the plan in the margin hereof and therein colored green and in the plan deposited in the Lands Titles Registration
Office No. 3222 which said Section 23 delineated in the public map of the said Hundred deposited in the Lands and Survey Office at Adelaide.

In witness whereof I have hereunto signed my name and affixed my seal this nineteenth day of June 1924.

Signed the 19th day of June 1924 in the presence of W. H. Shaw

W. H. Shaw
Registrar-General.



Memorandum of Appointment
No. 5894325 Whereby the within land is
now held in Harold Gordon
Broadbent of Begot vacuum Wash
Machine Manufacturer near Adelaide
of Baby See Shirley Baby
Manufacturer and Mathew George
Markes of South Road Adelaide
retired Gardener by virtue of
memorial filed in the Supreme
Court under the provisions of
Public Library, Museum and Art
Galleries and Institutions Act 1909
passed and now in force for
the purpose of the day of June 1924
at 3 pm

W. H. Shaw by line

Memorandum of Appointment No. 5894325
Whereby the within land is now held in Harold Gordon
Broadbent of West Adelaide clothes press near Harold Blaine
of observable clock and Mathew George Markes of
Adelaide retired Gardener for an estate in fee simple by
virtue of Memorial filed with the Registrar of Companies
under the provisions of the Public Library, Museum
and Art Galleries and Institutions Act 1909
passed for registration the 15 day of January
1924 at 3 pm

CT 1332/10

June 1924 - transfer to Harold Gordon Broadbent, West Adelaide Storekeeper, Oscar Binder, Cake Manufacturer and Matthew George Marles, retired gardener of Hilton

January 1937 - transfer to Hurtle Harold Collins, clerk, Torrensville, Charles Thomas Clay Horsely, master butcher, Hilton, Ernest Thomas Selway, master butcher, Hilton.

Memorandum of Appointment No. 1227445
Whereby the within land is now vested in Beattie
David Collins of Townsville Clerk Charles Thomas
Ray Horsley of 31 Rindland Road Kitteren Beattie, Bulbin
and Ernest Thomas Selway of 94 Bank Road Kitteren
Beattie, Bulbin for an estate in fee simple by virtue
of Memorial filed with the Registrar of Companies
under the provisions of the Public Library, Museum,
and Art Gallery and Institutes Act 1909, produced
for registration the 12 day of January 1937 at
12.15 pm
G. Hentelow M. H. Guel
11/2 1227445

REGISTRATION No. 2149476 FROM Thyde Harold
Collins, Charles Thomas Ray Horsley
and Ernest Thomas Selway
TO THE COMMERCIAL BANK OF AUSTRALIA LIMITED.
PRODUCED 3. 9. 1953 AT 11am.
D. P. REG. GEN.

11/2 2286741 12286742

Potter Lot 3
THE WITHIN LAND IS DISCHARGED FROM MORTGAGE
No. 2149476 VISE No. 2286741 PRODUCED 6/6/1961 AT 11am.
LKD Anderson D. P. REG. GEN.

P/N 1275381 LKD Anderson DRS

TRANSFER No. 2286742
to HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH THE SECOND of Potter
Lot 3
OF THE WITHIN LAND PRODUCED 6/6/1961 AT 11am.
LKD Anderson D. P. REG. GEN.

CANCELLED THE SAID LAND BEING TRANSFERRED
No. 2286742 THE SAID LAND BEING HEREIN
ACQUIRED BY THE COMMONS FOR PUBLIC DEPOSIT.
LKD Anderson DEP. REG. GEN.

CANCELLED

Balance
ISSUED VICE
VOL. 2937 FOL 196
D. P. REG. GEN.

Preserving Memories

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In the early 1930s, as soon as cinemas were established, it was used for showing films. The door was at the front, but it was probably a couple of metres back from the footpath.

They built a bio box to house the projection equipment which is why the frontage of the building is slightly further out from the main building. The films were in those days projected onto a square screen.



Advertiser, 8 Apr 1937, p 18

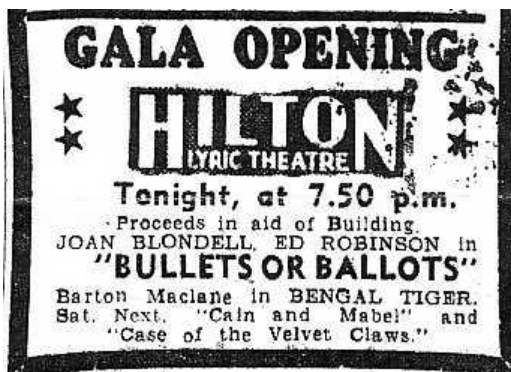
What used to be the stage for the films is now used as the dressing room area for the theatre.

For a short time, it was also a roller-skating rink. The roller skates in those days didn't have rubber on the wheels and it probably damaged the floor. In 1936 it was used for games of Electric Light Cricket.

An association was formed, and the Hilton RSL put down a concrete pitch on a block behind its hall on the corner of Talbot St and Rowland Rd (now Sir Donald Bradman Drive). This was "the first recorded place where Electric Light Cricket was played in public in Australia", says Mr. J.J. Foran in his 1996 article on the history of Electric Light Cricket. The game's rules were copyrighted on February 12, 1936.

[WTHS Historian Vol 1 # 3 Dec 2009]

As suburban film theatres became popular, in 1937 an entrance foyer, ladies retiring room and a projection room were added to show movies and the building became known as 'The Lyric Theatre' and then 'The Windsor ' when it was bought by the Windsor chain.



Hilton Lyric Theatre, 1937 [WTHS LH0828-06]



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[widescreenmuseum.com]

When Cinemascope came in around 1956 an addition was made to the back section of the building, which is slightly higher, and included a proscenium arch with a big wide screen.

However, movies were only shown on Saturday and the lease required the hall to be available to locals at all other times.

For a short period during this time the hall became known as 'Star Theatres'.

In 1959 when television was introduced and sets were bought for the home, cinema audiences started to fall away very quickly. There is a story that the projectionist who had the lease to show films supposedly committed suicide up in the bio box, as nobody had come for two nights. When he didn't come home, his wife came and found him. So, there is supposed to be a ghost here, who I've never seen so it may be a furphy. Or maybe the ghost is very happy with what we're doing. I'm not sure which. The Windsor chain relinquished its lease in 1961.

English actor John Edmond had come out here for a tour with John McCallum and Googie Withers. They liked Adelaide and decided to stay and form a theatre group. They were looking for somewhere to play and found this place, which had been derelict for a while.

In 1962 John Edmund and Donald Grey took the lease.



John Edmund and Rita Street,
[Messenger Press, SLA B 70869/14705]

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South Australia (CERTIFICATE OF TITLE)

No. 12

Register Book,
Vol. 2937 Folio 196

Balance Certificate of Title from Vol. 1332 Folio 10

HURTLE HAROLD COLLINS of 6 Hughes Street Mile End Retired **CHARLES THOMAS CLAY HORSLEY** of 36 Rowland Road Hilton and **ERNEST THOMAS SELWAY** of 11 Orchard Avenue Everard Park both Out of Business

(BY VIRTUE OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE
(PUBLIC LIBRARY MUSEUM AND ART
(GALLERY AND INSTITUTES ACT 1909
(AND ACT 1632 OF 1924

are the proprietor s of an estate in fee simple

subject nevertheless to such encumbrances liens and interests as are notified by memorial underwritten or endorsed hereon in

THAT piece of land situate in the HUNDRED of **ADELAIDE** COUNTY of **ADELAIDE**

being the **ALLOTMENT 4 and PORTION OF ALLOTMENT 3** of the subdivision of portion of Section 49 laid out as **HILTON** and more particularly delineated and bounded as appears in the plan in the margin hereof and therein colored green WHICH said Allotments are

bounded as appears in the plan deposited in the Lands Titles Registration Office No. 3002 Which said Section is delineated in the public map of the said Hundred deposited in the Land Office at Adelaide.

In witness whereof I have hereunto signed my name and affixed my seal this fifteenth day of June 19 61

Signed the 15th day of June 19 61, in the presence of W. J. Butcher

[Signature]
Registrar-General.

[Signature]
Reg. Genl.

Mortgage No. 2149476 To The Commercial Bank of Australia Limited Produced 3.9.1959 at 11 a.m.

[Signature]
Reg. Genl.

PIA 2370/35. *[Signature]* DRG.

DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE No. 2149 BY ENDORSEMENT THEREON. PRODUCED 21.3.66 AT 4.16

[Signature]
Dep. Reg. Genl.

MORTGAGE No. 2709884

TO THE COMMERCIAL BANK OF AUSTRALIA LIMITED

PRODUCED 21.3.66 AT 10.50 am

[Signature] • DEP. REG. GEN.

DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE No. 2709884 BY ENDORSEMENT THEREON. PRODUCED 2.2.1970 AT 10.50 am

[Signature] DRG.

[Signature] DEP. REG. GEN.

1976-1981 Leased to Minister of Education

1981-1988 Leased to Carlew Arts Centre

CT 2934/ 196

July 1970 - transfer to John Alexander Houston, Driver, Marleston, Ronald Frank Cox, storeman, West Richmond and Jack Herbert Johnston, merchant, Cowandilla

Dec 1970 – transfer City of West Torrens

113122377
to be transferred to C of West Torrens
Vide Docket 2438/1970

Appraisal No. 3122377
Whereby the within land is now vested in
John Alexander Houston of 13 South St.
Marleston Driver and Ronald Frank Cox
of 23 Passmore St. West Richmond Storeman
and Jack Herbert Johnston of 75 Cowandilla
Rd. Cowandilla Merchant by virtue of
Memorial filed with the Registrar of Companies
under the provisions of the Libraries and
Institutes Act 1939-1967

Produced 27.7.1970 at 12.35 am
L9960622
Dep. Reg. Gen.
73106222

TRANSFER No. 3160622 To
The Corporation of the City of
West Torrens 5033 Rowland Road
Hilton 5033
OF THE WITHIN LAND. PRODUCED 11/12/1970 AT 1.25 PM
[Signature] DEP. REG. GEN.

TRANSFER No. 3160622 From Minister of
Education pursuant to section 106(4)(g)
of the Libraries and Institutes Act 1939-1967
To the Corporation of The City of West
Torrens of Rowland Road Hilton
5033
OF THE WITHIN LAND. PRODUCED 11/12/1970 AT 1.25 PM
[Signature] DEP. REG. GEN.

k4132228

LEASE No. 4138328
Minister of Education
Portional together with right of way
of the within land, term of twenty years from
1.7.1976
PRODUCED 6.1.1978 AT 11.35 am

FL 4680555

TRANSFER No. 4680555 To
Carlew Arts Centre Incorporated, of 11
Jeffcoat Street North Adelaide 5006
OF THE WITHIN LAND. PRODUCED 52.1981 at 2.40 pm.
Lease 4138328
[Signature] DEP. REG. GEN.

SURRENDER OF LEASE No. 4138328
VIDE No. 6492900 PRODUCED 8.3.1983 AT 14.00
[Signature]

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It was not in good condition. I've got photos of what it looked like. It was pretty wrecked.



They painted the walls and tried to make it look respectable. In New York, theatre in the round had become quite popular. They put seats on rostrums, on the stage end of the theatre to facilitate this. The public would come in through the foyer and upstairs to the bleachers to sit to watch the show.

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THEATRE IN THE MAKING

A hammer strikes metallicly on nails, a saw eats its way through a piece of two-by-four, from an improvised kitchen there's a smell of freshly-ground coffee beans percolating . . .

Young actors in turtle-neck sweaters and slacks go through their lines, undisturbed by the noises off-stage.

This is the sound picture of theatre in the making and the making of a theatre.

This is Theatre 62—an ambitious project which will give Adelaide its first full-time semi-professional and experimental theatre.

It is the old Windsor cinema on Rowland road, Filton, a 10-minute bus ride from the heart of the city.

Until two months ago the building was an empty husk gathering a trail of rusty cobwebs and living lightly with its memories of gun-slinging Western heroes and curvaceous Hollywood blondes.

But, in the past few weeks, it has begun to pulse with life again—it is gradually being transformed into a live theatre where Shakespeare, Marlowe and the moderns will play their part.

Theatre 62 will be launched in its new guise as Theatre - In - The - Round with a production of Charles Dickens's "Great Expectations" on May 31.

The Windsor, taken on a five-year lease, has cost £3,000 to re-clothe for its new role. However, its directors, English actor John Edmund and economics graduate Donald Gray, have had enough faith in the project to provide the money from their own pockets.

These are groups can be introduced to theatre as an entertainment as well as an art.

Create an appeal for higher but sophisticated entertainment through the medium of intimate opera, club nights and supper revues.

Theatre 62 is an arena-type theatre which will present drama-in-the-round, now recognised as a permanent part of the theatrical scene in Melbourne and Sydney.

Adelaide has already seen three productions of theatre-in-the-round ("Volpone," "View From The Bridge" and "A Taste of Honey") in which the action is performed on a stage in the centre of the theatre with tiered seating on four sides.

It creates an intimate atmosphere which draws the audience into closer contact with the actors, and builds up a sympathy with the emotions and reactions of the characters.

This type of theatre requires the imagination of an intelligent audience which will allow itself to be drawn into the play, yet remain as a spectator.

The first problem in deciding to turn the old Windsor into theatre-in-the-round was to create an intimate setting for drama without involving too much expense.

Two young Adelaide architects sat in consultations, and plans were eventually drawn up for a compact theatre with seating accommodation for 300 people.

Economy was exercised in terms of space as well as money.

The stage area behind the proscenium arch is being converted into dressing rooms, the old apron has been dismantled and will be used to store "props."

Sound and lighting equipment will be housed in the cinema's bio-box.

Ripped Out

The front of the box will be ripped out and replaced by one-way glass, behind which the producer, stage and lighting managers will sit masked from the audience, but in full command of the acting area.

Seating, which it was thought might be one of the biggest expenses on a "shootring" budget, was a problem which was solved by a lucky coincidence.

During recent renovations, the Regent Theatre disposed of 300 of its "volante" seats from the stalls to Theatre 62 for £1 each.

A further problem, peculiar to theatre-in-the-round, also had to be solved — acoustics. Dialogue spoken from the centre stage has to move clearly out to the audience. It must not reverberate, get lost in the vastness of the ceiling or bounce off the walls.

One thousand yards of natural-color burlap supported under cherry-color pediments will be hung from both sides of the theatre to hold the sound.

The canopy over the stage, where spotlights and special sound equipment will be mounted, will also help in the control of sound bouncing.

To help to sustain an atmosphere within the theatre, the ceiling will be painted battleship grey to give an impression of infinity.

Most of the work of re-modelling and renovating the old Windsor has been done by volunteers—young Adelaide actors dedicated to the cause of theatre in their home town.

They have been taking over from one another in shifts so that the theatre will be ready for its opening on May 31.

And, while they hammer away to build the naked seats for the auditorium, and saw the timber for the 22 ft. by 20 ft. elevated stage, they keep their eyes fixed on the day when they can down the tools and don their grasshopper hats.

The Advertiser, Saturday, April 14, 1962—Page 17

REHEARSAL AT THEATRE 62.—The stage in its incomplete state can be seen in the foreground with seats for the audience behind. There are seats on all sides of the acting area, a reversion to the theatre-in-the-round of earlier days.

By Pat Griffith

GROUND PLAN of the new theatre

Advertiser, 14 April 1962, p17

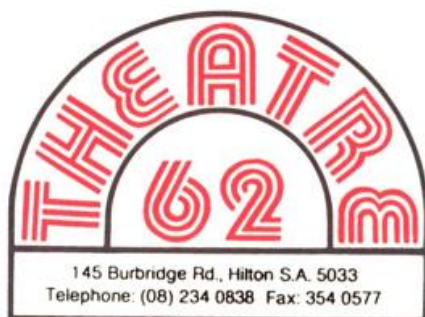


I remember coming here when it was called Theatre 62. The library was in the small foyer out the front. It had about four lounge chairs and a couple of rows of bookshelves. The library remained part of the theatre as The Soldiers Memorial Institute and was moved in 1970. [In December 1970, after the formal dissolution of the Hilton Soldiers' Memorial Institute, ownership of the former hall-cinema was transferred to the West Torrens Council; the council had purchased the former Baptist Church in January 1981].

There was only a dirt footpath out front in those days as well.

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The State Theatre Company started here as the South Australian Theatre Company (SATC) established in 1965 under the Artistic Direction of John Tasker. It set the State Theatre Company in motion. Don Dunstan was in a play here, and then in 1974, the SATC became the resident theatre company of the newly built Adelaide Festival Centre.

The Theatre 62 continued but was losing money. The guy who ran the restaurant across the street and John Edmund were partners in the business. John went away on tour and when he came back, the company had been basically ransacked and there was nothing left.

As a side note, it was called Theatre 62 because when the actors company formulated it in 1962,

Mail MAGAZINE

ROWLAND ROAD DILEMMA

More than a decade has passed since Theatre 62 opened its doors with a production prophetically titled "Great Expectations."

In 1973 its expectations are still high, its ambitions are vaulting, and its future is indecisive. South Australia's second regional theatre faces 1973 with a \$32,500 subsidy, stiff competition, and a responsibility it appears temporarily incapable of handling.

This small theatre starts the year with big ideas. However, it is short on talent and audiences.

In 10 years, despite some excellent productions, it has failed to achieve any identity within the community.

It has not built up a consistent following or standard of performance. It has not acquired a wardrobe or sets. Its public relations is non-existent and its policy is not yet operating.

Theatre 62 wears its title as the State's second regional theatre with a frightened earnestness. Intimidated by the affluence of the newly formed State Theatre company it sometimes clutches desperately at artistic straws.

These comments may seem cruel to a company that has struggled

and fought so valiantly to keep its doors open against desperate odds.

They are meant to be — because Theatre 62 will not survive the year unless it takes a long, critical look at itself, and its role in the community and acts now.

The company exists in Rowland road, Hilton. There is no communication between the people or the actors. The people at the corner delicatessen don't even know the names of the actors. Surely it is a sad indictment of the company.

Something has to be done.

I suggest the company starts by getting itself an additional director. The director should be young — it is cheaper. He or she should be tough, clear thinking and above all practical.

The director should be capable of inspiring actors and should gather around him a small cast of ensemble players. Hopefully the players will also have writing, dancing, or musical skill.

Having acquired the cast, the company should then allocate duties and

start seeing how it can serve the community.

Theatre 62 realises it should take stock of its facilities which include an excellent theatre and a fine hall which is suitable for theatre experiment.

The company is now trying to redefine its policy. It wants to mount an active campaign to involve people. It believes personal contact between actors and the community is essential.

and also Australian and local writings.

The company is keen to work with Flinders University. The university starts a performance school this year and will benefit with working contact with 62.

Not only could the students put forward creative ideas but they could learn the practicalities of running a theatre.

Perhaps they could be assigned for six weeks to the theatre to do a variety of jobs.

Maybe their work could be assessed for their examination.

Theatre 62 knows it has to rethink its attitude to school education and wants a greater exchange between other local companies.

It would like its actors to attend training classes by George Ogilvie and hope SATC's trainee directors can work occasionally at their theatre.

There are infinite possibilities for Theatre 62. The change in emphasis will take some time.

But time is running out. This company which has given Adelaide some fine productions over the years has to start acting now.

**HELEN
COVERNTON
on the
theatre**

The company intends to approach institutions, social clubs and factories.

It is looking into street theatre and agrees there is a need for more slapstick and satire in the community. It wants to use its newly acquired hall for workshops and classes.

It sees its function as being the non-establishment theatre and wants to try out obscure plays

the articles of association says that when the year changed, with the show that played on New

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Year's Eve, they would rename the theatre to the next year so that it was an always up to date theatre. Theatre 63 ... 64. So, this year 2024, it would have been called Theatre 24.

The name "Theatre 62" will be changed at the end of each old year. This will take place at a small ceremony and party after the performance on New Year's Eve.
May we take this opportunity of thanking you for being our guests.

— The Directors.

However, they realised how difficult that was going to be to change in those days; all the letterhead on the printed material, the signage out the front and so on, and that's why it stayed Theatre 62.

It is also at 145 [Burbridge Road/Sir Donald Bradman Drive], so it was very confusing.

1970s and 80s

The Theatre 62 company was dissolved, and the theatre sat empty for a while. Flinders University took it over for a period of time with their acting course and probably performances and then Carclew Arts Centre.

It was not looked after and there was a lot of damage like broken mirrors and holes in the walls.



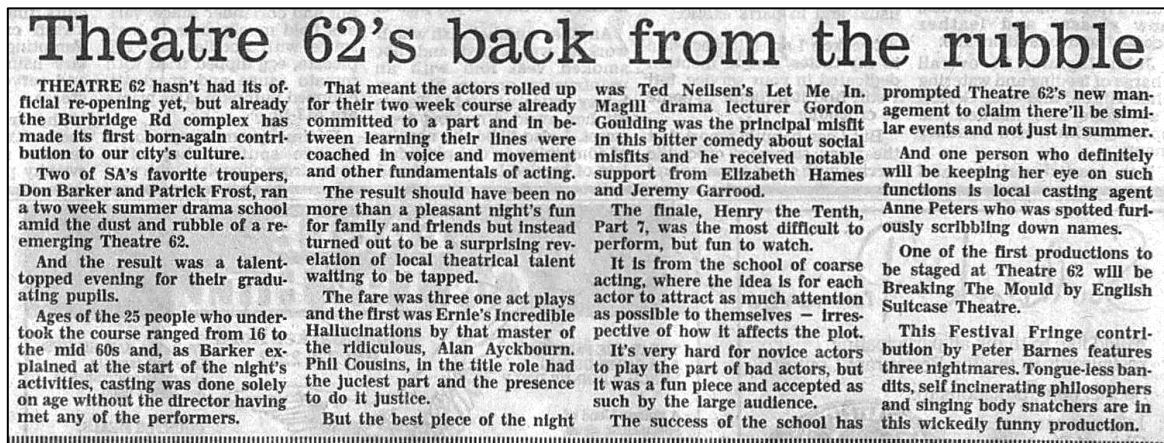
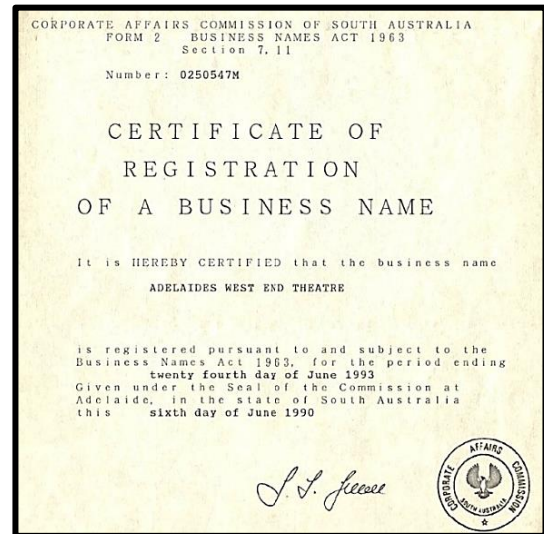
The 1898-built Baptist church chapel adjacent to the theatre was purchased by the council in 1981 and joined via a foyer to the main Theatre. The chapel still has its foundation stone out the front. The complex became known as 'Theatre 62 and The Chapel' and was used as a youth centre by 'Carclew'.

Preserving Memories

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Initially the council didn't want it because they thought it would have a debt. It had no debt, there was £200 in the bank.

In 1985 the West Torrens Council refurbished the venue and in the same year, Barb Messenger and Rob George took over the lease of the building. Bob Lott had had it for a short time, and called it West End Theatres. The new lease holders decided to keep the Theatre 62 name and did some refurbishing. I think they used the old grey chairs from the Norwood concert hall.



Sunday Mail, 24 January 1988, p129

For the next few years, they ran it, but at a loss because either they couldn't get enough people in the audience or perhaps the plays they were doing were not commercial successes.

Launching Star Theatres

Mighty Good was doing school holiday productions and shopping malls and after producing the Humphrey shows at the Hilton Hotel and Arts Theatre, I felt confident that we could do bigger shows. In 1992 I was directing a show for high rollers of the Adelaide Casino and the guy who had written the script for it asked if I was interested in buying into Theatre 62.

I was interested because taking on the Theatre meant that we would be able to produce Theatre Restaurant and pantomime type shows.

I had a look over the facility with writer Allan Line, and we were to meet Rob and Barb. Barb wasn't available at the time, so I asked Rob why he wanted to sell.

Preserving Memories

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Rob said, "I need to sell my portion of the lease because I've lost a lot of money on a TV production that I've done called All the Rivers Run."

Rob had to leave, and we were sitting out in the front office when Barb turned up. I asked her why she wanted to sell. She said, "Well, actually I don't." I suggested to Allan that the three of us form a trio partnership. Allan and I bought Rob out.

After about three years we weren't making much money here, not enough to pay the bills. We were personally putting money in to keep the place going. Allan decided he couldn't afford to keep going and asked if I would buy him out. Barb and I bought him out, then in 1999, Barb was offered the job of managing the Arts Theatre in the city, so I bought her out.



Theatre Two

My company, Mighty Good Productions has a star as its logo, so we bought the name Star Theatres. We used the plural as there are two theatres and the confusion of Theatre 62 and the chapel was too great for the general public, so it was renamed as Star Theatres One and Two.

The building itself is special to the local residents and to the South Australian theatre community. The venues are quite intimate. The chapel, which we now call Theatre Two holds 72 people.

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It's recently had a makeover to make it more accessible for wheelchairs. If we put in all the seats the main theatre holds 368 people.

The intimacy here is fantastic for local company plays and Interstate groups. With the demise of the Bakehouse Theatre, we are a perfect size for the type of shows that were presented there.

Many of the ideas and aspirations I have had, have been very successfully introduced and this has extended the capability of the building.

We're putting in a lot of extra lighting and new equipment and this makes it more inviting for others to be able to use it.

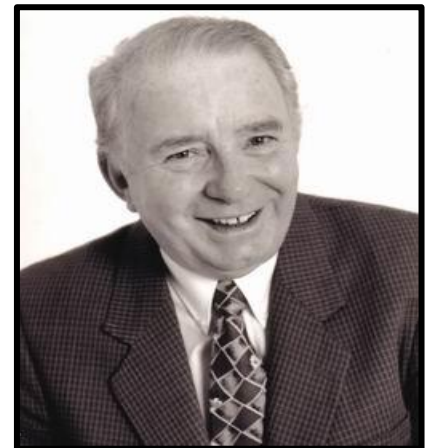


Theatre One

In 2017 we held Walter (Wally) Carr's funeral here.

Wally started entertaining in 1941 at 14, singing three nights a week with the Jack Barter Band at the Astoria Ballroom on the corner of Waymouth and Young streets, Adelaide. He toured the major variety theatres, including a London Palladium appearance and tour with Howard Keel and an 18-week tour with actress Diana Dors.

His band also backed Harry Secombe, Eartha Kitt, Cliff Richard and Des O'Connor. After 11 years in England, he returned to Adelaide to ABC radio and television, worked for five years in cabaret at the Paprika nightclub in Hindley Street.



Wally Carr [musicfinder.online]

Over the years he helped to produce shows at Olde Kings Music Hall and nightspots like the Trocadero, Lido, Tivoli, Paprika and the Adelaide Casino.

Every year now we have in excess of 80,000 people, even during COVID, we were still performing but with reduced audiences.

The use of the building is phenomenal. Imagine if the council had felt that it was time to demolish the building!

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First Shows

We started to produce shows over the summer period of 1993 and began with Jack and the Beanstalk. I designed and painted the set backdrops and wrote the show and the songs.

We built the stage for Jack and the Beanstalk, and we built that every time we did a show, 4 to 5 shows a year. Then we had to pull everything down so that it was a flat floor, 220 seat theatre again. It was a massive job with twenty people taking all night to pull it down and pack away.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears and Sleeping Beauty and many other shows followed.



Malcolm as Mrs Talkalot in Jack and the Beanstalk, c 1994

The Olde King's Returns Theatre Restaurant

We did a tribute to the Olde Kings Music Hall, called The Olde King's Returns. One of the lovely things was that I was able to have four of us from the original Old King shows.

Phyl Skinner, Didi James, Gordon Paul and myself were in the original cast.

We played for two Christmas seasons and converted the whole theatre into a Theatre Restaurant.



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The Olde King's Returns, 1994

Phyl Skinner

I had seen Phyl Skinner perform Aladdin when I was four years old at the Old Theatre Royal in Hindley Street. I remember that I was bewildered why Aladdin would wear mesh tights and high heels.

When I was working at Myers, she had been the one who found me and got me modelling in photos and on the catwalk.

In the Olde Kings shows she was one of the producers and I performed with her many times playing the hero. One of her famous routines was to grab the hero's head and dive it into her cleavage, which always got a big laugh in the past, and she did it again in these shows.

She became like a show business mother to me. I was with her when she died at the age of 98, that's how close we were.



Phyl Skinner, 2020 [ABC Adelaide]

FIRST SHOW AT ROYALTY

The first show to be presented by Borry Egginton in the new Royalty Theatre will be the Black and White Minstrel Follies of 1972 which will open tonight.

Olde Kings Theatres Pty. Ltd. has acquired the Australia Hall which will be converted to a top-class commercial theatre to be known as the Royalty.

The Black and White Minstrel Follies will star Jenny Howard, original UK minstrel personality, Alistair McHarg, TV and stage performer, Ross Ramsay, Joan Clements, David Clifford, Alan Hudson and exotic dancer and Royal Command performer Domino Renee (the Duchess of Peel).

The Minstrel formula is pure honest-to-goodness straight-forward entertainment without any pretensions.

The old Royalty has been transformed at a cost of \$30,000.

Decor is gold and burgundy and the new raked stalls and dress circle will seat 800 people. A special lighting console has been imported from New York.

Other improvements planned include air conditioning and a patrons' bar.

Managements in other

States have confirmed that they will use the theatre in conjunction with the Olde Kings Theatres to present shows in SA.

Later, productions for children will include Shakespearean plays set for study in SA schools.

The Olde Kings Shakespeare Company will open its first two classical productions in September, 1972, when top interstate and overseas professional artists will lead the casts. Interstate producers Tom Brown and John Tasker have been approached with a view to directing future plays.

Negotiations are under way for the hit musical "Anything Goes," which is playing to capacity houses in Sydney, to be presented.

Phyl Skinner, star of many Olde Kings shows.

Advertiser 2 March 1972

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Other Shows

The other adult shows we did in the nineties was Up Your Toga with Anne Wills playing Cleopatra, and I played the long lost, rightful ruler of Rome.

We did Diamond Lill's Golden Nugget Saloon in 1999 turning the whole place into a western saloon with food.

In 2000, we did Up Your Brontosaurus, Rex. That was the last Theatre Restaurant show we did as the market was changing and the concept of cabaret was becoming more popular than dining and seeing a show.



Up Yer Toga, with Anne Wills and George Hill, 1998

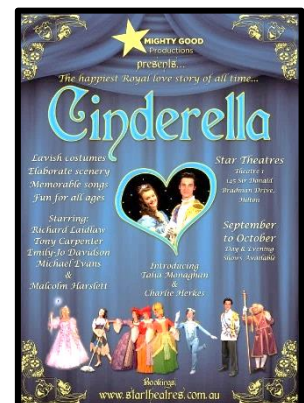


Up your Brontosaurus, Rex, cast 2000

All up, for this theatre I've written 22 different shows, including all the songs.

I painted the sets, designed the costumes, and I've been in them all, apart from two Hip Hop shows.

In 2021 we did Cinderella for the fifth time.



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Artists

Artists who started with us are now working all over the world.

Luke O'Loughlin was one of our students in our performance team. He starred in the 1999 TV series Chuck Finn set on the river Murray and then in 2001 in Escape of the Artful Dodger.



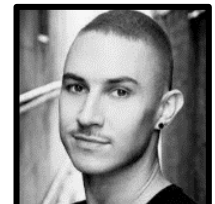
Wesley (Wes Dean) Carr was the winner of the 2008 season of the television talent show Australian Idol. He is now living and working in America. He was taking classes here in the 1990s. He signed a record deal with Sony Music Australia and released his debut single You which peaked at number 1 on the ARIA Singles Chart.



Jordan Tomljenovic has been in quite a lot of my shows. He is performing currently in 9 to 5, The Musical in the role of Josh. [He has also been cast as Pepper in the 2023 production of Mamma Mia, The Musical.]



Rhys Bobridge was the runner up in So You Think You Can Dance in 2008 and he now has a very successful singing and dancing career in Sydney. He just recently choreographed all of the dance show at the Royal Show.



Sally Polihronas auditioned in the Australian reality Television series Popstars and in 1999 was selected as a member of Australian girl group Bardot.



Since 1978, we estimate that well over 33,000 kids have gone through the school.

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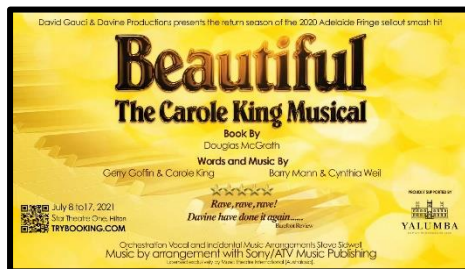
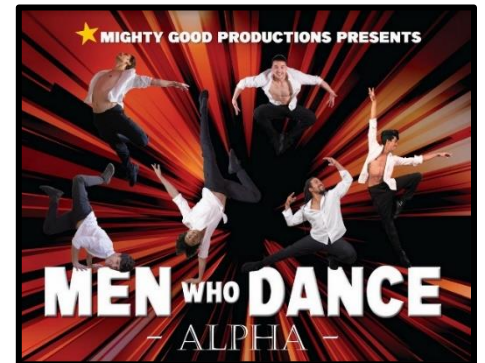
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Facility Use

Coming up there is an ice show on the main stage and at the moment the National Pole Dance Championships are rehearsing. Currently two Russian plays rehearse here twice a week and last month a couple of Indian companies performed here.

The facility is used during the Fringe for plays. In 2021 we had 17 different shows. For the 2023 event there will be about 20 shows.

We've just produced the show Men Who Dance which won a Fringe award. The popularity meant the season was extended. The group is touring, and it will be part of the Fringe this coming year.



David Gauci is a local producer, and he has done some very successful seasons.

He did the show Beautiful a couple of years ago and did two seasons, one as part of the Fringe and then one after. It played to full houses for every show.

In 2019 Yamato the Drummers of Japan performed and they were amazing.

Nowadays there's nothing like these theatres that are purpose-built venues or that have become venues for this purpose. Most of the councils have got a venue, but they're not necessarily a proper theatre. They are a venue with seats in them with a portable stage.



Yamato Drummer [towertheatre.org]

The City of West Torrens has been a big support and I'm very, very grateful for that. I think it is forward thinking for a younger council to understand that these sorts of entertainment facilities are so vital for the area and that this is a unique place.

The only other place that's similar to this is Holden Street Theatres. We are on a different level in the look and the type of shows that come through here, mainly because we've got the facilities to house them.

@HoldenStreetTheatres [Instagram]



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The Mighty Good Talent School

The school now runs out of the theatre. There's the main theatre space, a small theatre space and a dance studio space.



At the front, the old foyer is the singing studio and we've also got the stage of the main theatre to use as a learning area.

Classes run during the week, almost every morning, including for pre-school children. It is a training ground for a new generation to come into the business.

Like football players who start playing in school, a few become famous or well-known for a period of time, but very few get to that higher echelon. It's much the same for performers. You start in a school and can be taught acting, singing and dancing as a concept that makes a performer.

Many performers go on, but don't become household names. We teach appreciation of the art form, but it's also about building self-confidence for kids and having fun.

They perform annual shows, up to eight shows a year for the students. That is a lot of work for the school staff to prepare and present.



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2010 - Our Time on Channel 44 Community TV

For the last 14 years I've been hosting Our Time, a show on community television and I began producing it after the founder John Gall's death.

Our Time is a collaboration between Channel 44 and UniSA Creative Industries, and it is produced by TV and film students in-studio at UniSA's Magill campus.

As a host from Episode 39 I have interviewed, and consequently we have recorded the fascinating stories of many South Australian people.



Celebrating the 'Our Time' 500th episode at Channel 44, June 2022



In 2023 Malcolm won the Outstanding Personality in a Seniors Program at the Community Television Antenna Awards.

Time doesn't slow for small channel's big hit

THE champagne corks will be popping at community broadcaster Channel 44 this week with one of its longest-running shows, *Our Time*, preparing for its 200th episode.

The baby boomer-aimed show is hosted by **Malcolm Harslett** and **Janice Baker**, right, along with **Sue Cardwell**, **Ken Dickin** and **Peter Sellen**, and aims to provide

advice, support, information, music and entertainment.

The show, which has been running for 4½ years, is filmed and made at the Magill campus of UniSA.

The special episode airs tomorrow at 7.30pm and will feature performances from singers **Rachael Leahcar** and the **Foenander Brothers** as well as vibraphone player **Nick Parnell**.

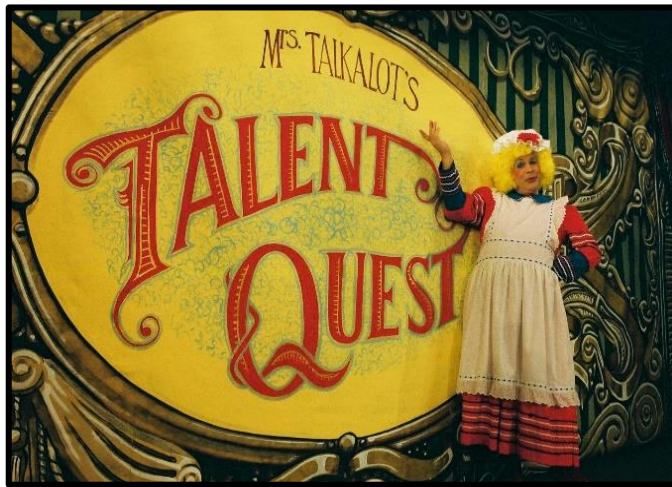


2015 [supplied]

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Personal Highlights



Malcolm as Mrs Talkalot

There are things I'm recognised for, which I find really quite amusing.

Being with Humphrey on television and my panto Dame character Mrs Talkalot. There were several Mrs Talkalots depending on the show. They've all got different names and they all look different with different coloured hair and costumes.

I often get asked, "Were you Mrs Talkalot?"

The other character that I really love playing is Cyril the Servant, a dotty 93-year-old man. In Cinderella last year, I learnt to ride a hoverboard because it was funny to see a 93-year-old man on a hoverboard.

Cyril's been on roller skates, and he worked in Brunei for the Sultan, in a roller-skating show... of all crazy things I've done in my life.



The other joy for me, longer term on a personal level is, believe it or not, playing Santa, which I've done a lot of, and that has taken me all over the world.

With Rachel Leahcar, Dec 2019

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What's next?

I don't look forward to any retirement at all and have no intention of moving down that path.

My whole life I've been creating shows and making shows, and I hope to continue to do that.

Currently, we're expanding the show Men Who Dance. It has been extremely successful, and it makes a very valid point that real men actually can dance. It's an exciting piece of theatre and was extremely well received this year. We've just been given a Fringe grant to extend and to tour it.

We used to have our own big set painting building, but we're not doing that to the extent that we used to. I'm probably getting a bit too old to be climbing up ladders to check painting, but I would still paint scenery if I had reason to.

I don't know what else is on the cards for the future, but the future will take care of that, no doubt.

When you talk about preserving memories, one thing I think that most people don't really grasp is the need to continue live theatre, and this type of live theatre. When you go and see a movie, you watch it and walk out of the cinema. You are entertained for a period of time, but it was only a movie and it never looked real.

As a contrast, when you watch a live show with performers showcasing their skills, you breathe the same air, you're in the same space. I can honestly say I remember all the live shows I've seen in my life because they have such a profound effect. You are there and share that moment in time that will never, ever be the same again.

I often work over the bar here at the theatre because it's a great way to meet people and talk to them about what they enjoyed and what they want to see.

The council has spent a lot of money preserving the theatre buildings for the future. It has been used for live theatre since 1962 and my hope is live theatre continues here in the future.



If councils going forward continue with that concept, it'll be here for another 50 to 100 years, which will be brilliant.

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The Vision Fulfilled

When I was a child, I realised I wanted to be a performer. I didn't know what that meant, but I knew there was something inside that had to get out.

When television started, I knew I wanted to work in television. When I started the theatre, I knew I wanted a theatre.

I believe I have been successful because I went out to make this happen.



Adelaide performers, part of the 'You don't say' and 'Don't say a word' TV game show at Channel 10, Malcolm on right, 1982

I am currently writing a book; it's not finished yet. I'd forgotten how many things I've done in my life. When I started to write, I didn't really realise just how many lives I've had. There's been so many things I've done that have been parallel. Most people have one job. I've never ever only had one job.

I've had probably six or eight different jobs, within the business mostly, but they've been quite different. Building and painting scenery is not the same as performing. Running a venue is not the same as being a teacher. They're quite diverse and I think it's lucky I never married because I wouldn't have had time to do all this.

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Most people outside of the theatre business have no comprehension of how hard it is for a theatre producer to make a living and to ensure that everyone gets paid. I've probably lost about \$1,000,000 since I've been here at the theatre.

From the outside they see a lot of people going through the place, but we're a venue for hire. We don't get to keep the ticket money. We only get to keep the money that they pay us to hire the venue, so we're not rolling in money by any means. We run from week to week, so it's not a big money-making concern. For anyone who wants to go into show business, don't think you're going to make a fortune, it's an American dream, not an Australian reality.

What I have achieved though I've never seen it as anything special. I've never thought of my life as affecting anybody else, because it's just what I do, it's just what I've always done. It's not a grandstanding position at all.

2019 - Richard Flynn Award

Malcolm was honoured in 2019 with the Adelaide Theatre Guide's *The Richard Flynn Award* for Sustained Excellence and Contribution to Theatre in South Australia.



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The *Preserving Memories* project aim is to interview people who have lived in or had connections to the West Torrens area. The West Torrens Historical Society in conjunction with the City of West Torrens invite them to share their memories and talk about the events and experiences which helped to make up their life's history. It allows us all the chance to reflect on the past and to preserve those memories into the future.

This interview was conducted on 8th October 2022 by Graham Parry, member of the West Torrens Historical Society. We are committed to publishing biography works of quality and integrity. In this spirit, this document therefore reflects the experiences, views and opinions of the participant and are not necessarily the views and opinions of the interviewer, the West Torrens Historical Society, nor the City of West Torrens Council, and therefore neither the Society nor Council accepts responsibility for any comments or opinions expressed by the person being interviewed. (*Malcolm's words in italics*).

South Australians and in the broader sense, everyone else should all be very grateful for what you've brought to this community. Live theatre has brought happiness and fulfilment to you, and subsequently happiness and fulfilment to the community and benefited from your endeavours. Malcolm, congratulations on succeeding.

Thank you for sharing your story and some insights into the history of the Star Theatres and preceding businesses.

Resources

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