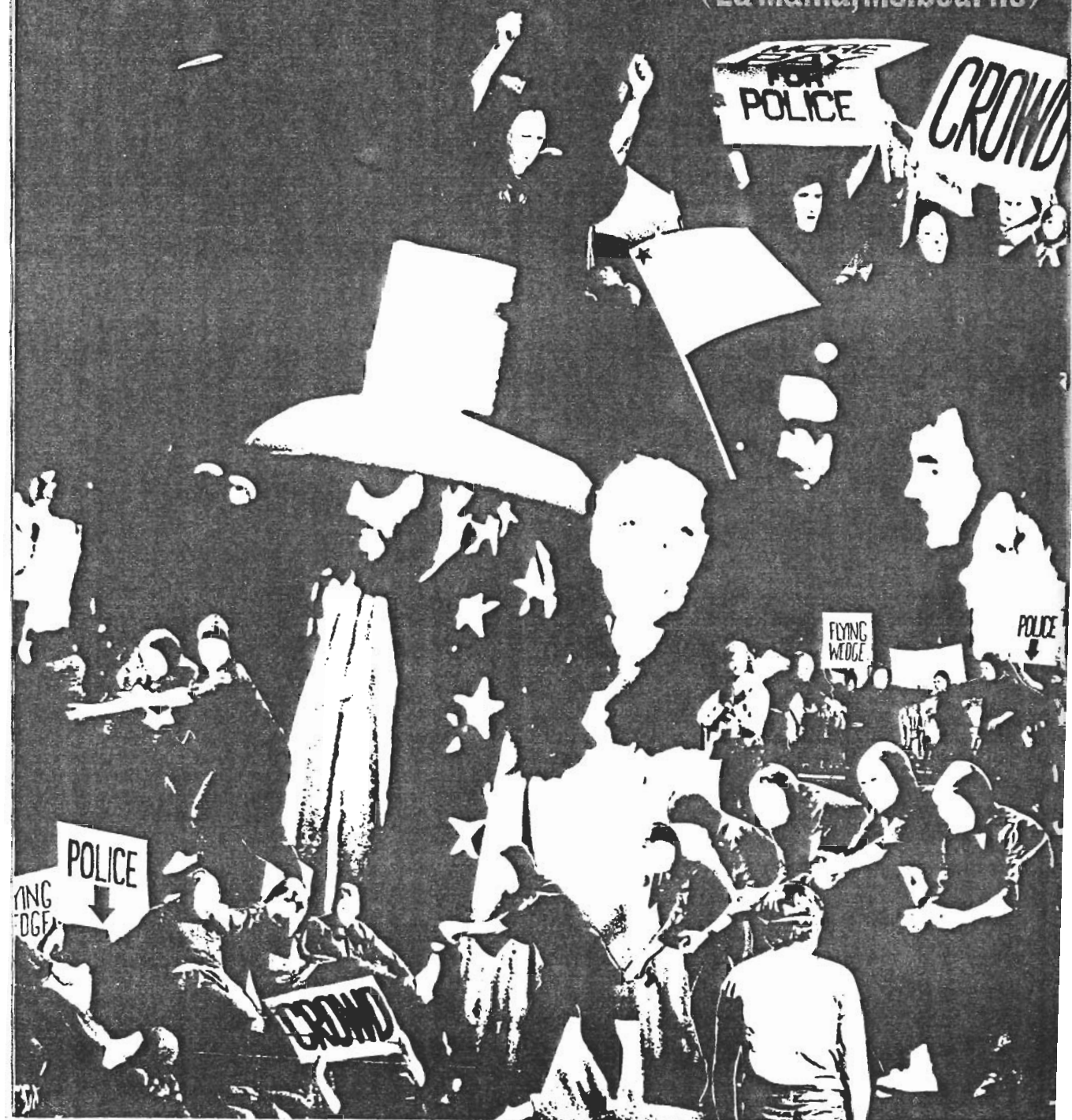


# AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP

(La Mama, Melbourne)



# Australian Performing Group

The AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP is a co-operative group venture designed to provide a foundation for experiment in the performing arts and is concerned with developing a uniquely Australian form of theatre.

For the past year the Performing Group has been the permanent performing company at Melbourne's famous La Mama — the one-time shirt factory in Faraday St., Carlton, which has become the centre of experimentation in the Australian theatre. More than a dozen Australian writers have had their plays performed there.

The young actors and directors of the Australian Performing Group work together at La Mama in a studio and performing workshop. The group's workshops provide a focus where actors can work together improvisationally and provide an opportunity for playwrights to work with them and form theatre pieces from the group's exercises and improvisations. Before La Mama was established there was nowhere in Australia where an unknown playwright, with a few unconventional plays could go to see his work performed sympathetically, to say nothing of a place where experiments could be carried out with actors and directors.

The AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP has presented the plays of Jack Hibberd ("one of Australia's most promising playwrights, with a brilliant ear for the vernacular", Laurie Lanray, *The Listener-In*) and the works of Barry Oakley, the well-known novelist.



The group is also responsible for productions of plays by Alex Buzo, the author of the notorious *NORM AND AHMED*. ("Australia is fortunate to have this sort of talent; we should nurture it and cultivate it before it is forced to find a more understanding climate", Virginia Gerett, *The Canberra Times*.) The work of the group has attracted the financial patronage of The Australian Council for the Arts, The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, The Perth Festival Committee and the National Union of University Students.

The group has also taken theatre out into the streets, in the attempt to make theatre reach a larger audience and force the actors into a new, fresh confrontation with the theatre's origins and roots in the community. They have participated in MAY DAY, 1969, where they presented lightning sketches along the march and a ceremonial political play, *Mr. BIG, THE BIG, BIG PIG*, the July 4 demonstration and the Prahran Council election.

The AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP'S main aim is to provide a genuine alternative to the conventional, conservative and commercial theatre in Australia — a theatre that has failed to attract young audiences, is dominated by committees, plagued with amateurs and dabblers and split by infighting and faced with dead ends. The crying out for subsidy, the constant courting of the Establishment by the commercial and professional theatres in Australia only serves to bring into the open the fact that where these theatres once served a real purpose in the community they have now lost their real function and are now in need of a subsidy to keep them in a tenable position. They dish up mainly "overseas successes", rarely works by Australians for Australians.

The aim of the AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING COMPANY is to provide a theatre radically opposed to the facile myths of conventional Australian entertainment.

# Some External Opinions

## 1. THE GROUP

### (i) Leonard Radic: *The Age*, July, 1969

"La Mama is a rarity in Australian theatre — a non-establishment centre, where new ideas and new ways of expression can be tried out and where there is complete freedom of expression. Half a dozen more La Mamas and a couple more repertory companies to provide a balance and Melbourne might be an interesting city theatrically".

### (ii) *Catalyst*

Although accredited as being the bastion of experimental theatre in Melbourne La Mama does not confine itself exclusively to this role. Their performances (*The APG*) at "La Mama" in Carlton, are original and exciting, their unorthodox techniques can be quite devastating to an uninitiated audience.

### (iii) *The Bulletin*: May 3, 1969, Denis O'Brien

Keeping theatre from moribundity by keeping it relevant for successive generations — in fact, for all of them at once — now depends more than ever on the workshop experiment which has nothing to do with calculating commercialism. In Australia, where theatre is sustained by theatre from abroad, the workshop is a vital necessity if our theatre is ever to have any of its own hairs on its chest. Yet in the entire nation there are only two shops of any consequence for the working of theatrical experiments — La Mama in Melbourne, uncompromisingly determined with an ensemble company now almost constantly working with original scripts, and a policy which drives through the dead ends of conventionality by ignoring them . . . La Mama is dedicated to the belief that theatre in Australia will stay boring and dull, and will continue to lose audiences, while resources are stuffed into productions which were good overseas.

## 2. THE WRITERS AND THEIR PLAYS

### (i) Phil Adams: *Vogue*, 1968

" . . . local writers can try out their experimental work with the help of young professional actors who donate their services. It was at La Mama that I first saw the work of Jack Hibberd, a writer of sinister Pinteresque persuasion and potentially a great talent.

### (ii) H. G. Kippax: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16.8.69

" . . . Somewhere in the forests of M. Buzo's theatrical imagination there is a tiger, here felt rather than glimpsed in the snarl of an occasional line and the swipe of a paw in a confrontation, and I refuse to believe it a paper tiger".

## 3. A.P.G. IN THE STREET

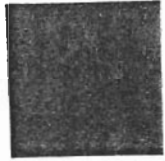
### (i) *The Sun*: May 5, 1969, Keith Dunstan

Yesterday MAYDAY was a well-organised affair, and for the first time in 30 years, it had a touch of class. The fascinating new wrinkle in the protest business was the "Street Theatre" and unquestionably we will be seeing much more of this. It was staged by LA MAMA CARLTON THEATRE. There were, perhaps, 15 players in white masks, black cowls and black pyjama suits, plus strolling players with clarinet and drums. As the march proceeded, they sprinted from corner to corner giving high-speed sketches.



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