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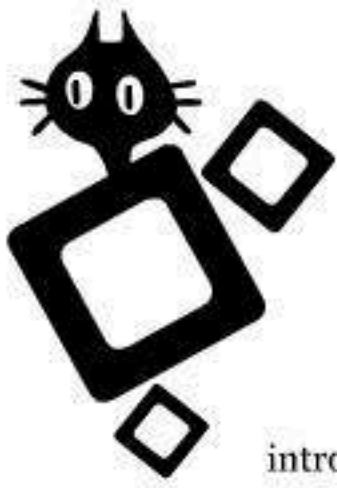
The Arena Story: Introduction

The Arena Story tracks the history of Arena Theatre Company from its modest beginnings in 1966 as an amateur drama group to its current incarnation as one of Australia's leading producers of performance for young audiences.

Meticulously researched by Professor Angela O'Brien from Melbourne University and based on archival material and candid interviews with past Artistic Directors, **The Arena Story** is a unique resource for students, teachers, artists, and anyone with an interest in the evolution of theatre in Australia.

Throughout the website, there are links to images and further information about Arena's past productions. Due to the nature of archival research, some details - e.g., cast members' names or exact tour dates - have been lost over the last 43 years. If you have any information that can help Arena fill in the gaps in our story, we'd love to hear from you: info@arenatheatre.com.au

Arena extends its heartfelt thanks to Peter Brundle at [Nice Device](#) for creating **The Arena Story** website, Project Officer Gemma Cavoli for her ongoing attention to detail, all Arena's past Artistic Directors who generously gave their time and shared stories and memories of Arena through the decades, and above all to Professor Angela O'Brien without whose passion and commitment, this project would never have been possible.

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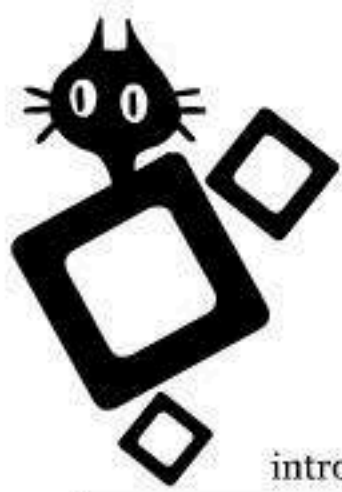
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Naomi Marks, the founder of Children's Arena Theatre, never lost the passion for the theatre she developed in her childhood.

As long as I can remember, I have been passionate about theatre. My grandmother used to read to me and I remember her reading from Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare the stories of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear* and (heaven knows why), *Timon of Athens*. At the age of five, I dragged my grandfather to the Regent's Park Theatre, which I had heard about. It wasn't *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but I didn't care. I sat there enthralled. At school I managed to get myself into any performance that was happening. Peter Leonard, the puppeteer, visited my school and in his audience participation *Peter Pan*, I was Peter. [1]

As a student at Melbourne University, Marks was actively involved in the Marlow society. The young mother of three joined the Toorak Players but her husband 'was not too happy about two or three evening rehearsals a week,' [2] so she looked for 'something else'. In summer holidays in 1963-4, she started the Toorak Junior Players, which culminated in a performance of The Pied Piper by Margaret Steen; in the following year she presented a group-devised version of Cinderella.

In May 1965, Marks went to Europe for three months. She recalls that Malcolm Walker, the president of Toorak Players, suggested that she should 'find out what was happening for children in the rest of the world.' [3] She spoke to Malcolm Robertson of the MTC, who provided her with contact information for the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ), and Michael Pugh of the British Children's Theatre Association. In Paris, she met with Madame Rosalie Moudoues of ASSITEJ, in Tel Aviv she went to the Cameri Theatre and in London she met Caryl Jenner of the Unicorn Theatre and Brian Way of the Theatre Centre. She remembers having a curry lunch with Michael Pugh who exhorted her to 'go back to Australia and start up children's theatre – form an Australian branch, an Australian CTA and become part of the International Association.' [4]

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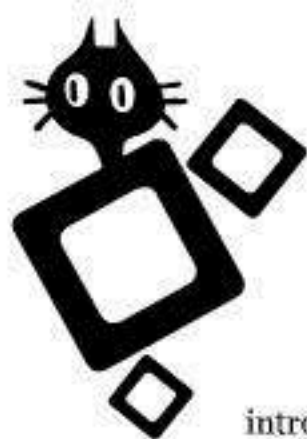
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When she returned to Australia she found there was nothing available for children. She spoke to Noel Ferrier who she remembers said: 'No, we're not doing pantomimes or anything. The award rates are horrific and you can't fly anybody, you know (as you need to) in Peter Pan, because of the insurance.' [5] She made the decision that she would start something herself – one wonders if the extra incentive was her memory of playing Peter Pan in Peter Leonard's school performance. In October, at her daughter's birthday party, three children came whose mothers had performed with Marks at school – Elaine Clark, Robin Ramsay and a cousin of Robin's. She called them together with another friend, Anne Sutherland, and proposed that they should put on a play, doing the acting themselves. [6] She chose *The Crossroads*, written by innovative children's theatre maker, Brian Way who was an advocate of audience involvement in children's theatre. The play was performed in the May school holidays with considerable success. *The Age* provided valuable pre-publicity material with a story about Marks' 'study of Children's Theatre in all the countries she visited' and a lengthy introduction to the play:

The Crossroads, like all the plays of the Theatre Centre is an arena play, or what we call in Australia 'theatre-in-the-round' with the audience almost encircling the stage. The cast for *The Crossroads* is an adult one but the play depends a great deal on audience participation... *The Crossroads* is the story of a tramp (Elaine Clark) who helps the Spirit of the Signpost to make peace between the four great Powers of the world, who all work against each other. [7]

The article gives an idea of the kind of 'audience participation' involved; 'In Act II of the play, each of the four Powers needs followers and children re chosen from the audience during the interval.' [8] The 'four mothers' in the play were supported by two 'professional actors', Peter Lacy and Ray O'Reilly. *The Age* could not resist noting that the Toorak Players had 21 children between them. *The Crossroads*, was performed in the Mackenzie Theatre attached to the Toorak Presbyterian Church on May 18 and May 21 and was toured to schools in the second term, including the Marathon Spastic Centre and Yooralla Hospital School for Crippled Children.

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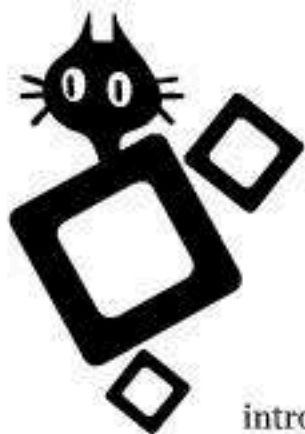
Their second production, The Astonishing Adventures of Pang, by Wilfred Harvey, was a Chinese fairytale about a beautiful Princess and three brothers who wish to marry her, performed on November 19 at the Blind Citizens Community Centre, Glenferrie Road, Kooyong and on December 3 at the Mackenzie Theatre, Toorak. [9] Terry Ward, Jill Sheahan, Judy Johnson and Denyse Johnstone joined the cast.

In December 1966, *The Age* announced that Toorak Players would run a 'do-it-yourself' theatre for children during the holidays, producing Brian Way's The Storytellers, with 'speaking parts for 32 children and room for many extras.' [10] *The Storytellers* was made up of three fairytales, 'The Shoemaker and the Elves', 'The Princess and the Pea' and 'Toyman and the Mirror Man'. Be Colchin, Sheila Fallow, Jill Temple-Watts and Patricia Rosegarten joined the seasoned Toorak women, Marks, Ramsey and Sutherland. It was first presented in the Toorak theatre on February 3 and 4, 1967 and subsequently toured to 'friendly schools'. Later that year, Marks entered an extract from their production of Way's *The Emperor and the Nightingale* [11] into the 1967 Victorian Drama League festival, and was awarded a special prize. Adjudicator Joan Harris awarded it 97% and described it as 'a charmingly conceived play for children of all ages' with 'a simple evocative set and beautiful costumes'. [12] Jill Temple Watts, a trained opera singer played the true nightingale and Naomi Marks performed the imitation nightingale.

Marks recorded that when they toured *The Storytellers* to schools, she:

saw the standard slipping and realised a professional company was needed. One that could perform five days a week. However great our enthusiasm, family commitments would not allow us to do that. [13]

On May 24, 1967 *The Age* announced that the Toorak Players Children's Theatre was assembling its first professional company to tour primary schools with a production of Brian Way's Pinocchio directed by Naomi Marks. The newly professional company became Children's Arena Theatre (CAT), indicating the group's debt to Way's Theatre Centre by always playing in the round. The Board consisted of producer Naomi Marks, business administrator Robin Ramsay, Elaine Clark and Be Colchin. Marks acknowledges that the name was registered because of Be Colchin's persistence with the Registrar of Business Names. The show began touring in June and held its only public performance in the Malvern Town Hall on July 6.



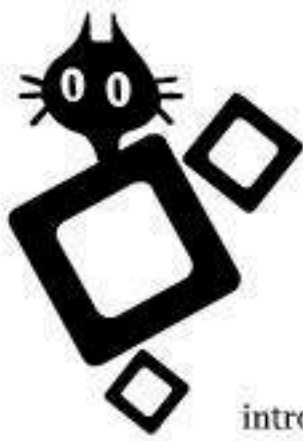
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It is worth pausing for a moment to put these early years of CAT in perspective. There is little doubt that Marks was both determined and inspirational. In his theatre column in *The Age*, Geoffrey Hutton notes that 3,000 children saw *The Crossroads* (1966). [15] By June 1968 CAT already had 80 school bookings for *Pinocchio*. Persuading the Education Department to agree to allow CAT to perform in schools is testimony to the confidence that Marks inspired in others. It is of interest to consider how and why she and her colleagues were able to so quickly build a company. Aspects of this history may seem paradoxical to twenty-first century readers and practitioners. Marks was able to attract a considerable amount of newspaper publicity for her work and, invariably, these articles emphasise that she and her colleagues are mothers, often suggesting their qualifications for and interest in the work are a kind of extension of their parenting. In several articles the company is described as Marks's 'baby'. When asked in interview why she and her associates had decided to produce the plays and act in them themselves, Marks downplayed the work involved in establishing the company:

Yes (laughter). In the early days my friends were good at it (acting) and they were marvellous with kids. And we used to rehearse at each other's houses and the kids would come in from school, and the whole thing was packed up by the time our husbands came home!

Looking at the earliest photos in the Arena scrapbook, there is both a sense of the 'homemade' and the sheer pleasure of working with children. A beautiful photo of a very youthful Elaine Clark in a clown nose shows her locked eye to eye in a play moment with a young audience member; another image shows Anne Sutherland totally engaged with a child who helps her put on make up. In these photos the costumes, particularly those in the Chinese themed plays, are quite exquisitely crafted. It would be easy to dismiss the early success of Arena as the 'hobby' of group of confident middle class women with time on their hands, helpful contacts and romantic notions about a theatre full of fairytales and moral stories. A number of the articles, however, reveal another agenda, that of the teacher [16] rather than the housewife and mother. In a 1967 article Marks is quoted as saying:

At first some head masters thought that, in these days of entertainment being so easily available to children, fairytale plays would be a waste of time. Our plays are far more than entertainment and teachers have got the message. We think that it is terribly important that they 'do' drama like they 'do' art and music. We get them to make their own decisions about the way the play will go. [17]

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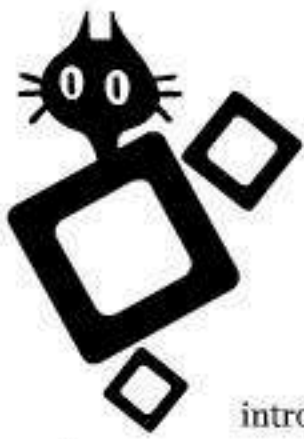
A year later she is even clearer about the educational agenda driving her work:

But I don't want the cast to go to the schools, leave after the performances, and then be forgotten. It should not be a wasted few hours and purely entertainment for the children. I want them to become involved. I want drama to become part of the junior school curriculum. Even if the children, with their teacher's help studied Italian history of the period when Pinocchio was set, or read the classic...anything. Just so long as they benefit from it.... Drama develops a child...drama can bring so much life to schooling. English and history lessons could be enriched by acting out the subject. [18]

In this article, Marks elaborates on her idea of how drama can develop the child, not only instrumentally but with their understanding and practice of drama:

We hope the children will realise they need only the minimum of props and costumes and that proper lighting and a raised stage are unnecessary. We will play among the children. They will sit on the floor of the classroom or school hall and we will perform around them. We want them to participate. The cast will talk to them and they can reply spontaneously... We want them to use their imaginations. [19]

This clear advocacy statement might have been written by Ron Danielson, at that time developing a drama department at Melbourne Teachers' College. Through their work with CAT, Marks and her colleagues were developing a philosophical approach to children's drama that paralleled the methods emerging in teacher education, where the child-centred approaches of Peter Slade and Brian Way were increasingly influential. Young teachers in schools welcomed CAT's approach to audience involvement. There were other early influences and support structures, not the least of which was support from the women's husbands. The Raynor sisters from the Australian Children's Theatre were helpful in sharing their card based filing system for school bookings. The Arena scrapbook contains the first clumsy child's sketch for CAT's logo and the final printed version – a stylised and stylish back cat looking somewhat stunned, no doubt by its sudden success.

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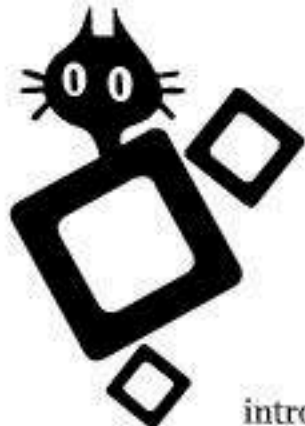
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Marks and her colleagues also demonstrated a surprising amount of business acumen in the early years. They estimated production costs over two weeks rehearsal and six weeks salary. Don Vincent, the ex-Manager of the Tivoli, went to Equity with Marks and the company was accepted but they had to place a week's wages with equity in trust, in case they folded. [20] The company received \$2000 investment from four 'closely related gentlemen' and a father-in-law, who were repaid at the end of the season. They realised the need to keep prices down and charged children twenty cents. As the treasurer, Elaine Clark would collect the money in a bag and count it at night; if it didn't work out she would 'throw in a few cents'. [21] The entrance fee rose to 40 cents for groups of audiences of 150-200. Actors were paid the equity minimum of \$44 week. The company would pre-sell the show for six weeks through the time consuming mechanism of cold calling before they employed actors. They toured two shows each day, using a truck hired for 6 weeks at a time. An actor, Gordon Malcolm, was paid an extra \$5 a week to drive the truck. [22] The letter sent to schools confirming performance bookings for *Pinocchio* offers further evidence of effective marketing in a changing educational climate. It suggested:

by having children co-operate themselves in the actual production, they learn – through active participation, response and interplay, to think independently and creatively, to impose emotional discipline and to cultivate the beginnings of a better moral code and cultural taste.... We aim also to assist teachers with a method of approach to Drama in Education. [23]

The professional ensemble for *Pinocchio* included eight actors; Jenny Craig (Pinocchio), George Olasz (Gepetto), Damien Jamieson, Peter Dyke, Colin Cameron, Lee Tholen and Jan Gunsberg. Twenty-two year old Richard Lowe, a final year student in the Swinburne Film and Television Design course, designed the sets and costumes. Di Britten joined the company as stage-manager. Reviews were generally positive: 'Costumes are colourful, the dances are delightful (mime is a little slipshod). Jenny Craig's Pinocchio was lively and appealing', though this reviewer thought the play was far too long. [24] The photographs of *Pinocchio* communicate a physical energy and child-centred approach with actors performing in and around the children. Marks recalls there were many challenges associated with the first year as a professional group, including a booking at Springvale Town Hall which attracted hundreds of students. Uncharacteristically, CAT played on the stage using microphones.

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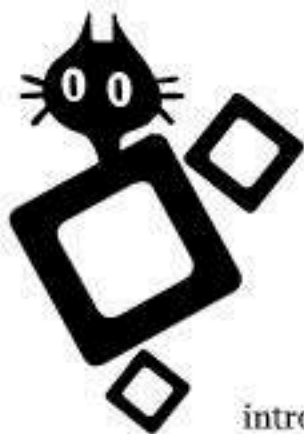
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At the end of 1968, Be Colchin left the company and was replaced by Philippa Metz. At around this time, Marks remembers that the company joined the Theatrical Proprietors and Entrepreneurs Association. In 1969, the CAT Board decided to employ a professional director, Stanley Page, to direct Brian Way's *The Key*, which had toured London schools in 1968. Page had worked as an actor and director in the UK, including four years with Way and he brought a group of actors with him who were associated with Company One, a company he founded in Melbourne. *The Key* explores the conflict between humanity and science, represented by 'the rivalry between a magician and a nutty professor.' [25] *The Key* opened on May 10 at Moore's Store in Prahran and played two shows a day until May 19 before beginning an eight-week tour of schools. The cast included Frank Bren (the Professor), Michael Howley (the Magician), Marion Heathfield (Magician's assistant) and Alison Bird (Penny). Richard Lowe designed the costumes. [26] Page's views were in line with those of the CAT directors: 'the function of the arts in education (is) to teach children to develop their imagination, conceptualise, impose emotional discipline and assimilate.' [27] He was a strong advocate for audience participation. The play was developed in two separate versions, one for prep to grade three and the other for grades four to six. CAT sent a booklet of follow up suggestions to each school following the visit.

During 1969, CAT attracted \$1000 in funding from the Elizabethan Trust. At the season close of *The Key*, CAT approached the newly founded Australia Council for a grant and was successful in obtaining \$1500. They were one of the first recipients of an arts grant in Australia. Marks remembers the working relationship between Robin Ramsay, Elaine Clarke, Philippa Metz and herself as productive, supportive and based on a shared philosophy:

Our experience as women and mothers had a strong influence on this philosophy. Working with children was, for us, an end in itself. We knew that most of our actors did not feel this way and were hoping that experience with CAT would lead to jobs in the real theatre. This did not matter to us as long as they embraced our philosophy while they were working for us and they all did. [28]

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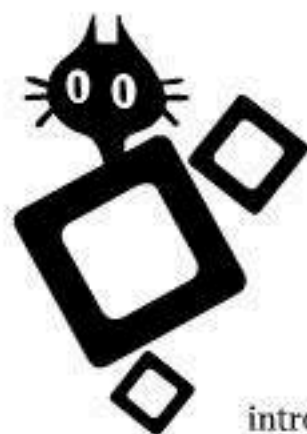
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'Administrative work was shared out. Elaine was the treasurer. Phillipa was the peacemaker and Robin was always given the job if someone had to be fired.' [29] Before the company could afford a stage manager, one of the four directors always travelled with the show, acting as stage manger, liaising with schools, collecting the money and often driving the truck. They learned that professional directors do not stay around after the show is in production, and so they also accepted the task of giving notes after the show and providing encouragement to the actors.

In December 1969, CAT announced it would be presenting a season of two plays in second term 1970. They were both by Brian Way; The Rainbow Makers was for prep to grade three and The Drought was written for grades four to six. By 1970, the four directors decided they needed an artistic director. After failing to find no one in Australia, with the permission of the Australia Council, they advertised in England. Twenty-five year old Roger Moulton, from Brian Way's Theatre Centre, applied for the position. He and his wife Ruth came out under the ten-pound scheme. Interviewed in *The Age*, he explained he had migrated to the country 'because of the exciting potential of children's theatre here.' [30] He suggests that children go to the theatre without really knowing the rules: 'They're unpredictable, spontaneous and delightful. This is why they are so much fun to work with'. [31] For Marks, Moulton was able to answer many questions about Way's work, particularly 'how to get commitment from children.' [32] With Roger Moulton as artistic director, CAT maintained its commitment to audience participation.

The Rainbow Makers previewed on May 30, 1970 at St John's in Toorak. In the play, the children help the Rainbow Queen to restore her faded colours. A companion piece for older children, The Drought, offers an elementary lesson in democratic processes, welfare state economics and the meaning of community by dividing the audience into families living in a society where the wells have run dry. The two plays were performed in Victorian schools for an eleven-week season and toured to South Australia. The cast included Marion Heathfield and Alan Walmesley.

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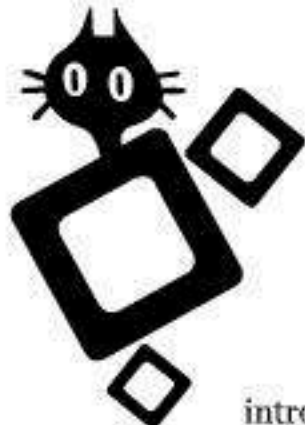
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In 1970, CAT undertook its first production for secondary schools, Brian Way's *The Discoverers* directed by Roger Moulton with Nano Nagle, Fiona MacLaine, Peter Hammond and Howard Eynon in the cast. Leonard Glickfield's Bulletin article was critical of *The Discoverers*:

It is with *The Discoverers* that there is room for much improvement. The kids and teachers are happy enough with it; the actors look like pop stars, the play is Christopher Columbus setting out for America and the added exploits of assorted inventors, facts without which no one could possibly live. There is even a premature attempt at dance-drama ... but along the way the opportunity is missed to turn the keen participation of children into an occasion when they can learn more about the nature of acting and production. [33]

Glickfield sounds further warnings, arguing that the company 'needs a reservoir of young actors, trained in drama school' and 'a firm professional administrative core'. [34] In November 1970, an article in *The Age* reiterated this concern, suggesting that CAT was in financial difficulties. CAT's membership of the newly formed Arts Council of Australia (Victorian Division) had extended its reach to country towns as far away as Mildura. The Arts Council [35] supported the tour of *The Discoverers* by assisting it to tour to Stawell, Wentworth, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Albury and Wangaratta. By now CAT had two companies – a primary company with four actors and a manager and a secondary company with six actors and a manager. [36]

In September 1970, the Council for the Arts held a conference in Canberra on Australian Theatre, bringing together theatre directors, practitioners and teacher educators from all over the country. Richard Courtney from the University of Calgary Drama Department was the keynote speaker. At the end of the conference, delegates divided into state groups and the Victorian Drama Association was created, led by Ron Danielson, the founding Head of the Drama Department at Melbourne State College. Danielson's work in training drama teachers, using child centred methods developed primarily by UK drama educators Peter Slade, Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote developed an audience for 'theatre in education' (TIE). [37]

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While this period saw considerable expansion for CAT, it was a difficult period financially. A series of articles the *The Age* towards the end of 1970 reported CAT as 'on top but no money'. The company employed ten actors and had played to 120 primary schools and eighty secondary schools during the year, but admission income was not providing enough to support an extensive touring program. [38] Naomi Marks advised *The Age*:

Our only income is from the 20 cents admission paid by the children and we don't take it from those who can't afford to pay. We need money to set up offices, storage space for costumes and props, and to employ our actors on a permanent basis. [39]

The Australian Council for the Arts, which had been supporting CAT through 'special project grants', advised that it could not provide ongoing financial support without State Government funding. Although the Australian Council for the Arts granted a \$6,000 grant for 1971, the State Government Cultural Development Fund turned down a request from CAT for funding. [40] Marks and her colleagues continued to lobby funding bodies and were very successful in attracting considerable publicity for their cause. A lengthy article in the *Herald Sun* used the debate about the Arts Centre spire to highlight the challenges facing CAT:

Sir Henry Bolte has told us that the second stage of the Arts Centre will go ahead. But that proposed soaring copper spire is overshadowed by a needy Cinderella. The Cinderella is the Children's Arena Theatre which gives Victoria an unhappy distinction in Australia. It is the only state which doesn't subsidise theatre for its schools. [41]

The article reports that the Arts Council rescued CAT with a 'gift' of \$4,000. [42]

In July 1971 CAT produced its first Australian written play, *The Incredible Journey of Jack Smith* by Helmut Bakaitis, directed by Shaun Gurton with a cast of five, Marion Heathfield, Alan Hardy, Jennifer Craig, Laurence Stroud and Damien Jameson. The play, for secondary school audiences, was described as a 'modern moral dilemma' and is about Australia's involvement with Asia and the Western world. Jack is sent by Australia to gather data on a vast mineral deposit in an imaginary country and finds himself competing with larger countries. In the act of trying to establish Australia's claim on the deposit, he inadvertently destroys its value. [43] In the second half of 1971, CAT produced two Brian Way plays for primary schools: *The Magic Hat* for prep to grade three, about a hat which could not be removed from the wearer's head, and *The Decision* for grades four to six, about the pros and cons of industrialisation. The primary touring cast was Helen O'Grady, Margaret Hibbert, Peter Hammond and Jeffrey Booth.

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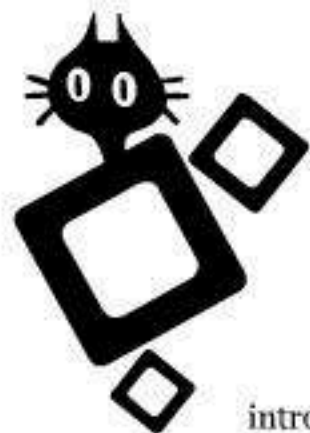
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During Roger Moulton's artistic directorship, his wife Ruth undertook much of the administrative work, supported by volunteers and Members of the Board. After the Moultons left the company, Marks employed Cynthia Mountstephen, the mother of her daughter's friend, on a part-time basis. Mountstephen became the full-time administrator in 1972 and remained in this position until her resignation in 1985, although she continued as a part-time bookkeeper for a further two years.

CAT's funding crises continued into 1972, with the Australian Council for the Arts grant reduced to \$5,000. In January the company made the decision to reduce the first-term country tour from ten weeks to six weeks. [44] The company actively lobbied for State funding and were successful in garnering considerable support from teachers and the media. [45] In April, the Victorian Government announced a grant of \$10,000, which was, according to Marks, because of the school and student lobby. The charge per student was raised to 50c with a minimum charge of \$75 per performance.

On September 12, 1972, CAT was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. Its offices were established in the Viaduct Theatre at 27A Cromwell Road, South Yarra, which was to be its home for the next two decades. The company was run by a Council of four directors – founders Elaine Clark, Naomi Marks, Phillipa Metz and Robin Ramsay. They were supported by a Board of Management that met monthly comprised of people who could provide advice with financial, legal, public relations and funding matters. The company prided itself on its office systems. The staff maintained a master list and file card index on every school in Victoria. Maps and wall charts were used for bookings and planning tours. They kept a log-book of performances and gave out questionnaires after every performance. The company joined The Theatrical Proprietors' and Entrepreneurs' Association (TPEA) and Naomi Marks became a member of the executive. With TPEA support she negotiated an agreement with Actors' Equity so that her performers could work outside the standard actors' contract. CAT's contract with actors allowed for fifteen performances of one hour each per week and performers could start travelling before 9 am. [46] In 1972, Marks and Cynthia Mountstephen attended the first Australia Arts Administration Conference and developed further contacts.

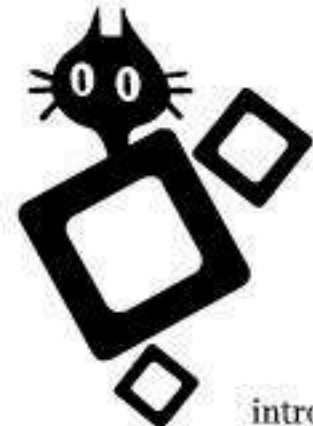
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Arena's first new production in 1972 was Brian Way's The Mirror Man (sometimes reported as The Mirrorman), directed by Michael Fisher with a cast consisting of television personality Max Bartlett, Rona McLeod, Peter Hammond and Marion Heathfield. *The Mirror Man* a special holiday program for primary school audiences, opened a three-week season at the Viaduct Theatre on 29 December, 1971. The play involved young audiences in Mirror Man's fight to save his magical book of mirrors from a wicked witch. Because of the 'star' casting the play received a considerable amount of pre-production publicity [47] and supportive reviews. Ann Gillison for *The Herald*, commended 'the lively vigorous group (CAT) for offering 'the best of holiday fare for the primary age children', and encouraging 'truly uninhibited and imaginative participation' with 'spirited improvisation' on the part of the actors. [48] CAT continued to develop new primary and secondary shows on the basis of assured funding. A remounted production of *The Incredible Journey of Jack Smith* toured in term one 1972, directed by Max Bartlett with performers Berrie Cameron-Allen, Peter Hammond, Alan Hardy, Marion Heathfield and musician Roger Corbett.

In 1972 CAT commissioned Sydney playwright Michael Boddy to write Boom! Bang! Bust!, a musical revue style show in which modern Australians meet characters from the past and question the value of 'progress' in relation to land use. Arena collaborated with the Australian Performing Group (APG) and the Australian Council for the Arts to bring Stanley Page out from England to direct the play. *Boom! Bang! Bust!* was composed by Patrick Flynn, and performed by Berrie Cameron-Allen, Neville Stonehouse, Patti Allen, Alan Wade, Alan Hardy and guitarist John Ardley. It began touring secondary schools on May 29. A public performance was held at the APG theatre, the Pram Factory in Drummond Street, Carlton on June 3. Reviewer Laurie Landry suggested Page's 'objectivity in performance had much in common with the Australian Performing Group' [49] while Katherine Brisbane described the production as an 'ironic account of two hundred years of progress in Australia with a very witty, sane and entertaining point of view... one of the most enjoyable things I have seen for children'. [50] The concurrent touring primary show, The Clown by Brian Way, was directed by Max Bartlett and presented in three versions for different age groups. *The Clown* was about a clown who lost his laugh and featured Peter Hammond in the title role, with Merlin Ivory, Berrie Cameron-Allen, Pamela Eagles and Alan Hardy. The show for older primary students was about life in a travelling circus and involved the children in erecting a big top in an unconventional manner.

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In August 1972, CAT began offering Saturday workshops (Catsplay) directed by Michael Wansborough with actors Marion Heathfield, Peter Hammond, Merlin Ivory and Michael Joshua. Michael Wansborough wrote and directed the next secondary play for CAT, enigmatically titled *?*, which toured from February 1973. Described as an 'adult- style children's play', *?* addressed pollution and other topical issues and was performed by Vanessa Bellety, Nanon Nagle, Neville Stonehouse and Damian Jameson.

During 1972 Naomi Marks undertook a world tour, visiting children's theatre companies in Japan, USSR, England, Canada and attended an international conference in Bordeaux. This was an important experience as TIE was at its height in the UK and she was able to experience the most recent developments. It was a French company's adaptation of the French classic *Pantagruel*, however, which inspired her first creative development. On her return to Australia she set about developing a play based on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* using the Prologue and four of the Tales. Marks collaborated with ABC radio performer, John Appleton, in developing the script for *The Calico Curtain*, which she also directed. Music was by Roger Corbett and Colin Stephens. The performance was in two parts. In part one, the cast of six explained medieval life to the audience and introduced them to the pilgrims. Actors played the Host, the Wife of Bath, the Nun's Priest, the Prioress, the Pardoner and the Knight and volunteer children played the other roles. In the second half, the cast performed two of the tales with audience involvement. The set was a calico curtain which pulled back to reveal a separate backcloth for each scene. The actors wore basic black with hats and tabards as required. *The Calico Curtain* opened on July 2, 1973 with Val Lehmann, Vivian Davies, Darrell Hilton, Clive Davies and Will Deumer, and toured for over a year. Gerard Mayhead described the play as: '...a spontaneous combustion more evident than in the musical *Canterbury Tales* with infectious music linking the 14th and 20th centuries'. [51] The primary production in the second half of 1973 was *Nature's Hands* by Stanley Euernden, directed by Roslyn Dewinter.

In September 1973, CAT was granted \$7,043 by the Australia Council for the Arts to support school tours. A further federal grant from the theatre board of \$18,000 was announced in December and \$3,000 for half the salary of an executive director. The State Government awarded CAT \$25,000 in February 1974. On the basis of ongoing funding and an expanded schools program, CAT made the decision to appoint a fulltime Artistic Director. David Young, former drama teacher and member of the theatre in education unit at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry was appointed as Executive Director in November 1973. [52]



1966-1974

Young had a suitable background and some experience of Australian theatre. He had trained as an English and Drama teacher at Birmingham University. In a trip to Australia he became involved in the Sydney New Theatre, an amateur left-wing company, where he directed *Tom Payne*, designed by Trina Parker. Young also wrote a play, *Truth*, which was directed by Aubrey Mellor from NIDA for the 1971 Jane Street season. Young married an Australian actor, Sandy Greentree, and returned to England where he worked as a teacher, and subsequently as a professional actor. He was appointed to the Belgrade TIE team from December 1972, and worked with them for a year until returning to Australia to take up the Arena position. [53]

The Belgrade Theatre TIE team was established in 1965, the first of its kind in Britain and a model for many others established during the next decade. It offered a free service to schools from prep to senior secondary. The TIE team devised all its own work, working with groups of young people who were fully integrated into performances. With this background, Young was able to bring the most recent and innovative ways of working with children to CAT. Young had seen the work of Brian Way and thought the Belgrade techniques were 'a big advance' on those that Way was using in London.

Brian Way's plays were predicated on the fact that they had to earn quite a bit of money. The way it was run during his time was that it covered the whole country for a start, so the localism we had in Coventry wasn't there. The plays that Brian Way did were pretty general. He would hire actors... and as I understand it he was insistent upon absolute attention to detail and first rate acting and stuff. Each (touring) company did three plays – one for lower primary, one for upper primary and one for secondary, which were often on the same theme. And they all involved the audience in some way or another. I've seen audiences of over 200 kids involved in crossing a ravine. [54]

Young was just over 30 years old when he was appointed and 'was keen to do his own thing and didn't want to be told what to do'. He brought a clear new direction to Arena, incorporating smaller audiences, more intensive participation and a company of actors who were appointed for a year. [55] Particularly, he established a Theatre in Education (TIE) team of four performers, Common Ground, which was based on the model he worked on in Coventry. It included, at various times, Karen Corbett, Nick Kislinsky, Bill Nagle, Alan Hardy, Dina Mann, Val Lehman, Martin Mowlam and John O'May. Common Ground demonstrated an innovative approach to Theatre In Education and a commitment to the developmental aspects of drama in education.

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1966-1974

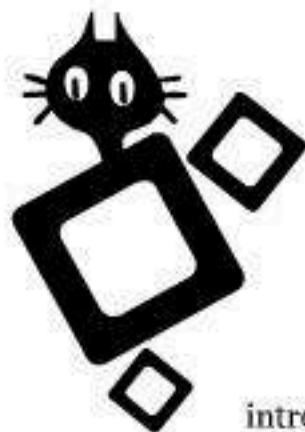
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As part of the Common Ground project, Young researched and wrote the scenario for Eureka, in which upper primary students would improvise the drama of the stockade from the point of view of nineteenth century immigrants. He had begun the research for this show in England before he left. After he arrived in Australia he used the weeks leading up to Christmas to visit primary schools and propose his idea of the show about Eureka. Young's intention was that this TIE group would perform to inner city schools on a regular basis for no charge, working with single class groups of less than thirty-five. While he managed to get considerable support from schools, funding was not confirmed until after the project was well underway. To their credit Marks and her colleagues supported the experiment and the *Eureka* tour opened on 25 February.

So I remember, I worked out a scenario for a two-act play based on the Eureka Stockade involving one class of upper-primary kids and it was quite a detailed scenario. I knew exactly what the casting was and I contacted the Elizabethan Theatre Trust (ETT) and they agreed to lend us costumes free of charge. And over that Christmas period of 1973-74, I got all the props and the set together myself. There was no stage manager or designer. I did all that myself and it involved about ten gold panning dishes painted in obscure ways so that when strips of tape were pulled off, kids who were doing gold panning could see how much gold they had theoretically panned, getting leg irons made up and building a bit of a set used in some scenes. I auditioned for it before Christmas, so as soon as the actors were confirmed with their contracts, I was able to give their measurements to the ETT, which was based in Sydney, and this large hamper of costumes arrived! [56]

Funding finally came from the State Department of Education. *Eureka* played to around 40 schools in Melbourne during 1974, targeting the poorer inner suburbs. The play used minimal sets, including a log with several sets of leg chains on it 'for people who were captured for not having gold licenses', and a lot of props. The aim was to totally involve the children:

They were inducted as nine and 10-year-old weavers at a mill in Bradford, England. They were inducted with early trade unionism. (The character) George Black, who was one of the ring leaders of the Eureka Stockade, was a provocateur among the kids. He would have been the bloke who got the workers to pull the plugs from the boilers during the first 1836 strike in England and basically sabotage the factory, for which he got sent out to Van Dieman's Land. Anyway the wool for the factory came from Australia when all the shearers ran off to the goldfields, the wool was no longer available and the factory went bust and with some convoluted plot the kids saved enough money to emigrate to the goldfields, and a happy reunion with George Black, as a freed convict and he'd become the kind of ringleader in the battle with the authorities on the goldfields, which leads to the Eureka Stockade. [57]

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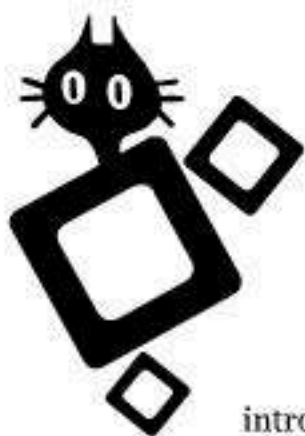
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Common Ground subsequently produced Shems Boat by Chris Bond for prep to grade three and Once Upon a Place, a Belgrade Theatre Company text adapted by the ensemble for middle primary children. *Once Upon a Place* was about a blood feud between two brothers and involved the children in resolving the feud. John O'May, a member of Common Ground, remembers this production as 'the epitomy of TIE'. The play opened with cartographer (Alan Hardy) entering the classroom to deliver a lecture on mapmaking. The lecture is interrupted by an old Greek woman asking for help. She has a letter telling her to go to a particular place. The children find the spot where they meet another member of the family and learn the story of the feud. Further clues and meetings take them to other places in the schoolyard where they find a buried box containing old pistols. The children have to decide whether the feud will end in reconciliation or a duel between the rival family members. [58]

Common Ground had been funded for year with a special grant, but lack of ongoing funding led its closure. [59] In addition to the Common Ground experiment, Arena continued its usual touring program in 1974 with a remounted *Calico Curtain* performed by Paul Bugden, Jan Hollister, Stephen Oldfield, Joy Thwaite, David Murray and Jo White. In April, Arena introduced a new primary program of three plays based on Brian Way's *The Key*, written and directed by Marion Heathfield with actors David Bradshaw, Vivien Davis, Sherrill Taylor and Brandon Smith.

Arena began the second half of the year with The Wreck of the Corsair by Melbourne Theatre Company resident dramatist Simon Hopkinson, an adventure story based on Bass Strait shipwrecks, including the sinking of the Blythe Star in 1973. The Corsair, a coastal trader on its regular run along the Victorian coast, mysteriously disappears. Two survivors are washed up on the beach at Anglesea and an inquiry follows, testing the loyalty and relationships of those involved. [60] The production was directed by Young and subsequently remounted by John O'May in 1975. Trina Parker designed the production – her first involvement with CAT and her first professional job. Young had met Parker at New Theatre in Sydney and brought her down to Melbourne for the contract. She was to remain with CAT for many years. *The Wreck of the Corsair* was previewed at the Bouverie Street Theatre on July 4 before touring to secondary schools. The first cast was Val Lehmann, Stephen Oldfield, Ray Burgess, Barbara Hewitt and Frank Duffy; the second cast included Marcel Culgola, Michael Eckersley, Esme Melvinne and Martin Mowlam.

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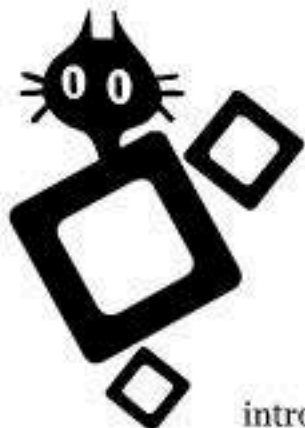
Young was also concerned to establish a more permanent home for Arena:

One of the things I would like to see happen most is a theatre built especially for children with great seating, lights, a turntable and all the nonsense and to concentrate on children's work in the theatre. [61]

In June 1974 the Viaduct Theatre decided not to renew its lease on St Martin's Church Hall at 27a Cromwell Road, South Yarra. With the assistance of \$2000 from the Prahran Council, Arena acquired the premises and developed plans to convert the hall into an arena theatre seating 132. [62] Young remembers 'we ripped out some of the front and side rows and we made a very large kind of apron on the same level as the front stalls. The old proscenium stage was kind of an upstage area and it was a huge playing area'. [63] The Children's Arena Theatre opened on 26 August with a musical for nine to twelve year-olds, The Battle of Lumbertubs Lane written by Grazyna Monvid, a colleague of Young's from Coventry. Reviewer Fiona Whitlock praised the production:

For 60 cents children can not only enjoy a wonderful Goodies versus Baddy piece, set most topically for adults on a construction site, but they can think the stage is their world for one and a quarter hours. The children can be heard squeaking with excitement, 'helping' the actors, and telling the cast, on request sometimes, other times not, what they think of policemen, construction magnates and wicked women who sell their soul for diamonds. [64]

The new theatre provided an administrative base and also allowed the company to further develop CatsPlay, its drama workshop program. Arena also bought its first touring vehicle, a Toyota Commuter Bus. The company produced three plays by Chris Bond for its primary school tour in the final term of 1974: Gravy Garden, St George and the Kangaroo, H.M.S. Pursuit. Gravy Garden, designed for prep to grade two, about a greedy dragon; St George and the Kangaroo, for grades three to four, on wildlife conservation; and HMS Pursuit for grades five and six, set in 1790 England, when sailors were press ganged into the war against France. [65]

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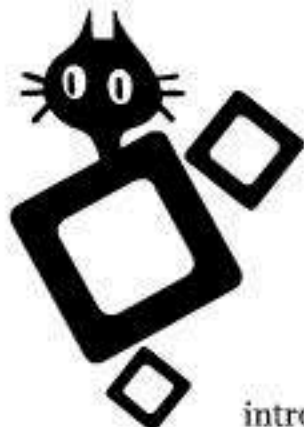
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David Young resigned as Artistic Director early in 1975 after many significant achievements, not the least of which were the development of a dedicated TIE team, the introduction of a community outreach program and the establishment of a physical theatre base. Founder Naomi Marks has written about the positive impact that David Young had on the company but also recalls the division between the regular CAT company and the special Common Ground TIE team. She also remembers that there were tensions between the externally appointed (and generally young) artistic directors and the Council, 'the Four Farting Ladies' as she remembers they were called: 'newcomers to the company did not want to know anything of the past or CATs usual way of working'. [66] For Marks and the Council, their relationship with funding bodies and school had been hard one over many years and it seemed pointless to them when they observed new directors 'try and invent the wheel when we had a whole box of wheels already'. [67]

Young subsequently took up the position of Artistic Director at the newly established Drama Resource Centre in Bouverie Street, funded by the Department of Education. In little more than a year at CAT, he brought a new concept of TIE to the company and Victoria, creating artistically innovative shows which offered a new model for theatre groups working in schools. John O'May, an actor in Common Ground and CAT's next Artistic Director aptly sums up Young's inspirational contribution to Arena and to TIE in Melbourne:

David's main projection into the company was his development of TIE, in the real sense of the term. Probably in my thirty-five year career, the best thing I've ever done, which was something for David, which was a TIE production. It was a show called *Once Upon a Place*. My definition of what a real TIE company was, was that the kids didn't even know we were theatre. All of a sudden we were people who came from the community into their room and created this hour of incredibleness. And it was a fantastic production. Fantastic. And it made me very excited about being in children's theatre. [68]

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David Young resigned as Artistic Director early in 1975 and was succeeded by 28-year-old John O'May, an American who had worked in professional repertory and summer stock [69] before coming to Australia in 1972. O'May was trained as a teacher in the United States and had taught English Literature before moving into professional theatre. He originally came to Australia to visit his sister and began auditioning for professional theatre. His first role was Judas in the Sydney production of Godspell which he played for ten months. [70] Trina Parker, a previous tour manager and designer was appointed as Technical Director of CAT in August 1975. In January 1975, CAT was granted \$30,000 from the Australian Council for the Arts with a further \$30,000 from other sources, primarily the Victorian Government. [71]

O'May had been working for CAT as an actor before his appointment to the Artistic Director role, and had been inspired by the work that he had done with previous director David Young, as part of the Common Ground TIE group. O'May recalls that his driving force as Artistic Director was 'to have a permanent annual company' that could together 'decide what the work would be and develop it'. He remembers thinking 'it was really silly doing all these English plays' and that there was sufficient talent available for CAT to create their own work. At the same time, O'May understood that CAT was the most established children's company in the state and that he had been hired to 'continue, not throw the company into total upheaval'. [72]

In a media interview he commented:

Theatre in education is when you can go into a school and teach a history lesson ... teach students a subject through drama. But in this country at the moment the resources for that sort of thing just aren't available. Theatre in education in the broad sense is being done, but in the true sense it is financially impossible in Australia. [73]

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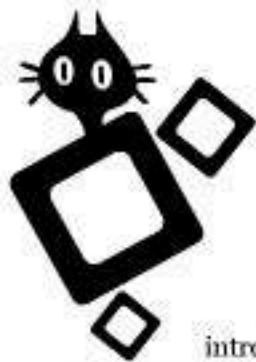
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CAT continued to tour the three Chris Bond plays to primary schools in the first half of 1975 with actors Fiona Syme, Trina Parker, Nicholas Kislinsky, Peter Hall and Martin Mowlam. The plays were: *Gravy Garden* for prep to grade two, about a greedy glutton; *St George and the Kangaroo*, for grades three and four; and *HMS Pursuit or Mutiny* for grades five and six. A new play for younger teenagers, [Rock n Roll Business](#), by Simon Hopkinson and directed by Bruce Kerr, toured secondary schools in terms two and three. This play, about a boy who wants to become a rock star, was reviewed as 'refreshingly succinct, clear and entertaining'. [74] John O'May directed two Brian Way plays for the primary schools tour in term three 1975, [The Magic Hat](#) and [The Decision](#) with Marion Heathfield, David Price, Nicholas Kislinsky and Fiona Syme.

Trina Parker was a key figure at CAT from the 1970s, working closely with Artistic Director, John O'May. During this time she was developing a reputation as a designer and stage manager beyond TIE. As Technical Director for CAT, she was, effectively, the only committee member taking part in production. Initially trained as interior designer at East Sydney technical College in 1970, she gained most of her practical theatre experience working for Sydney's prestigious amateur company, New Theatre. After a period travelling overseas, she settled in Melbourne and joined CAT in 1974. Parker designed and built sets, painted scenery, acted as costume and stage manager, publicist and sometimes operated lights and performed. [75] John O'May remembers meeting Parker when he joined the theatre and credits her with helping him develop the profile of the Cromwell Street theatre:

...that's when I met Trina Parker. She was painting the walls black on that day to make it a real theatre. And we made it into a real theatre. It was my idea that it should be used more often, David was very into the political TIE thing. I came from a much more commercial background, so I thought we should (be an) entrepreneurial theatre and rent it out to amateur companies or semi-professional companies. But I said during the school holidays we should be putting on shows there. [76]

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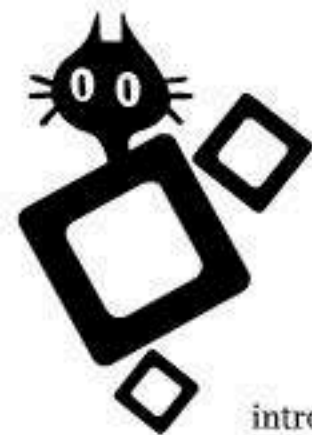
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The Children's Arena Theatre space at South Yarra was used for holiday and after school workshops and holiday theatre productions. In September 1975, CAT produced [Hand Me My Lid and Go Away](#), written by John Murrell and David Lander, later to become a drama education lecturer at Melbourne State College. The production was directed by John O'May with Fiona Syme, Trina Parker, Will Deufer and Nicholas Kislinsky. John Smythe, writing for *The Australian*, praised this play about two tramps looking for a home for the 'low key fluidity of the production and the ease and spontaneity with which interaction is achieved'. [27]

O'May realised his ambition to hire the theatre out to other companies; collaborations with start-up professional companies became a feature of his artistic leadership. Former Artistic Director David Young recalls that while he 'could not fault (O'May's) contribution', he was 'never convinced about his interest in young people's theatre'. [28] For much of his time as Artistic Director at CAT, O'May continued to be involved in adult professional theatre ventures, creating a base for his subsequent successful career as a performer in musical theatre. In early 1976, he wrote and directed a musical play *Gershwin*, which was produced by the Total Theatre Company. O'May played the lead in *Gershwin*, which was presented every Friday night for four months, while continuing his full time position at CAT.

CAT's 1975 Christmas pantomime, [Swaggy Mack and his Magic Backtrack](#) was written by John Smythe and directed by Allen Bickford; it featured a fantasy trip from the city to the outback with Swaggy's friends Knick-Knack, Paddy and Wack. The play was performed at various theatres around Melbourne by performers John Smythe, Carole Yelland, Ross Skiffington and Lee Tholen. [29]

In 1976 CAT continued its complex offerings of after school workshops, holiday programs and productions, library readings, and tours to schools. The Australia Council grant for 1976 was \$38,000 in total. For the first time, Arena developed an all Australian program for the primary school tour throughout the year. This program of three plays, known as [The River Plays](#) was written for the company by Nancy Sawyer and directed by Philippa Metz. The plays were *Simple Simon and Silly Sue* for preps to grade two, *Greedy Creek* for grades three to four and *River Rumpus* for grades five to six. *The River Plays* toured with performers Robynne Bourne, Heather Brookman, David Bradshaw, Michael Carman with stage manager Peter Ford in one company and Greg Ham, Sue Thornton, Kym Gyngell [80] and Peter Ford in the other. O'May directed the secondary show, [Ill Be In On That](#), written by Anne Harvey and the Tasmanian TIE Company, which toured in terms two and three with performers Valerie Lehman, Fiona Syme, Lis Waters, Bill Binks, Don Bridges and tour Manager Trina Parker. This show followed the sentencing of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in England in 1834, their transportation to Australia and their contribution to workers' rights. *The Age* reported O'May's comment that 'the play was an attempt to made education interesting for students'. [81]

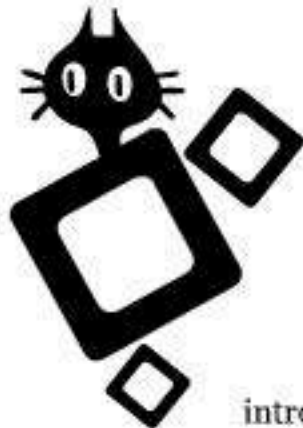
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In the July holiday period, The Fabulous Arena Poetry Show was performed at the Arena Theatre in South Yarra, directed by John O'May and designed by Trina Parker. It was CAT's second annual program based on the Higher School Certificate literature curriculum. [82] In the September school holiday period, **S*Patricks Hat Trick*S**, written by Ross Skiffington and John O'May and directed by John O'May was performed at the South Yarra theatre. The play charts the efforts of Patrick, a school leaver, in his efforts to become a magician. Writer and magician Ross Skiffington played Patrick and was supported by cast member Don Bridges.

The Australia Council for the Arts granted CAT \$37,000 for 1977. During this year there were two companies in operation with eight actors offered one-year contracts: Rupert Burns, Tim Burns, Linnet Hunter, Margaret Davis, Stephen Walker, Val Lehman, Liz Medina and Robbie McGregor. Peter Gray notes that the challenges of touring made it impossible to maintain a permanent ensemble and only two actors saw out their twelve months contracts. [83] O'May's aim to develop a company that created its own work was realised when four productions in 1977 were company devised. [84] The Season Reason and The Australian Travelling Patent Medicine Show were developed for lower and upper primary students respectively. Money the Root of All...!, an ensemble devised show directed by O'May with Val Lehman, Stephen Walker, Robert Bell and Jennifer Watkins toured secondary schools. The fourth ensemble devised play, The No-Song Bird, based on an ancient Chinese legend, directed by O'May and designed by Trina Parker, was performed at the Arena Theatre in the May school holidays. While directing *The No Song Bird*, John O'May was performing in another show he had written, *The Twenties and All That Jazz* (with Ross Skiffington). This show began its life at the Cromwell Street theatre in January 1977 and transferred to a larger theatre when it became popular. Parker was the set designer and stage manager for *The Twenties and All That Jazz* and organised the transfer of the show from the Cromwell Rd Theatre to Her Majesty's. Subsequently this show toured Australia and overseas.

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In July, CAT performed its third annual program on HSC literature poetry texts, [The Persecution and Assassination of HSC Poetry as Performed by the Inmates of Arena Theatre](#) with Margaret Davis, Andrew Forster, Val Lehman and Trina Parker in the cast. This production was not well received by some critics:

The CAT troupe conceived a show based on a mental institution's therapy session of poetry reading. It was a neat idea which ran amok. The CAT quartet tended to distract rather than enhance the texts by over use of mime, visual jokes, fooling about and regrettably, camping it up. [85]

In the August school holidays CAT offered creative holiday workshops at the theatre. By this time, John O'May had resigned from his position as Artistic Director. He recalls that he 'just couldn't do it all' and 'had to make choice'. [86] In his term as Artistic Director, he had achieved the aims he had identified - a focus on Australian content, the establishment of a company of actors who could devise work, and increased use of the theatre space. In his term, he worked very successfully with both Trina Parker and Cynthia Mountstephen; together they were known as the 'triumverate'. He remembers Mountstephen as 'the most lovely English lady with an incredible English accent... who had a steel trap mind. (She) saw my weaknesses right away and covered up for me all the time by doing the job'. [87] He was later appointed as Chairperson of the CAT Board where he continued to work with both Parker and Mountstephen.

The position of Artistic Director was advertised at the end of June. The listed duties were to set up and organise:

- Theatre in Education programmes for primary and secondary schoolchildren
- Creative workshops for children, students, actors and teachers;
- Holiday Programmes and other activities. [88]

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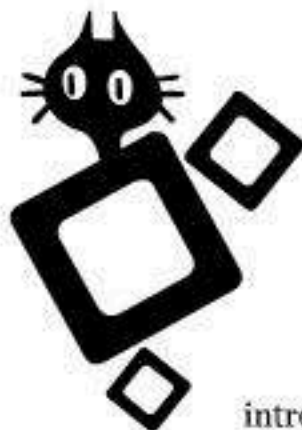
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Thirty-three year old Peter Tulloch took up a two year contract in October. Tulloch was a trained primary teacher, theatre director and designer from New Zealand with considerable experience in both children's and mainstream repertory theatre. Ironically his first professional job had been with a touring 'CAT', Children's Art Theatre, in New Zealand. Immediately prior to accepting the CAT job, he was working for the Melbourne Theatre Company Theatre in Education (TIE) program. [89] The press noted that Tulloch hoped to broaden Children's Arena Theatre activities from pure children's theatre to include child drama in schools and to open up CAT to include opera, dance, musicals plays and music. [90]

Tulloch brought new ideas to CAT, including the production of a classical modern play for senior secondary students, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* with performers Val Lehman and Paul Trahair. Tulloch suggested that his reason for undertaking *The Glass Menagerie* was to 'get rid of the hex about it being a children's company...there'd been this animosity, well that's too strong a word for it, apathy in the company to the secondary work we were doing. I thought that what we needed was to present something that was relevant but not specific to the kids'. [91] In a subsequent media interview he suggested that he wanted to fill the gap between the Melbourne Theatre Company and the Australian Performing Group: 'There is a large area of small cast plays, not only newly written ones, but overseas plays, by people like Pinter and Albee, which just don't get done.' [92] *The Glass Menagerie* toured in term one of 1978 with *Adapt or Die*, a group devised play about evolution, written for younger secondary students and performed by Karen Corbett, Val Lehman, Paul Trahair and Stephen Walker. ([Adapt or Die and The Glass Menagerie](#))

In 1978, CAT established two companies with four actors each, to tour primary schools. Two shows for 5-8 year olds were developed; [Yertabulti and Sticks and Bones](#). *Sticks and Bones* included three traditional stories from Asia, told through song, dance and rhythm. These included 'The Hole Story', 'Mr Stupid' and 'Three Sons and Three Sticks'. *Yertabulti* introduced nine to twelve year olds to Indigenous myth making. The audience became an Aboriginal tribe called Yertabulti; each child was given a tribal mark identifying them as either Hunters, Food Gatherers or Dreamers. The tribe has to come together for the retelling of a number of legends when an American tourist blunders in on their meeting. Two teams were all involved in the touring companies during 1978: team one was Michele Kidd, Liz Rule, Stefan Dennis and Damien Smith; team two was Ernie Gray, Paul Trahair, Sue Dean, Katie Brinson and Ross Barnett.

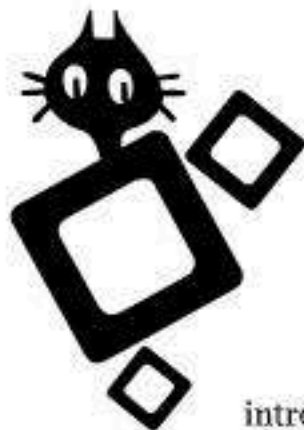


1975-1984

In February CAT announced a new season of their plays at the Cromwell Road Theatre, performed by Bow-Tie, a group of five graduates from Rusden State College and led by Chris Dickens. [93] Bow-Tie was an independent company working on a co-operative basis with CAT, but with considerable interchange of personnel. *Bottle-O*, about an old bottle collector, and involving mime, slapstick comedy and melodrama, was performed on Saturdays during February and March. *Mafelo*, 'a simple, old fashioned fantasy' written by Elizabeth Rule and Robyn Sedgwick, and directed by Peter Tulloch, was presented by Bow-Tie during the May school holidays. This play focused on Fafle, The Hermit (Robin Sedgwick), who was atoning for past misdemeanours by working for King Kink (Mark Gordan), feeding the amazing Mafelo machine which spreads love throughout the country. By the end of the play Fafle has won the Princess (Robyn Dickins) and, with the help of Wanda the Fairy Godmother (Chris Dickins), saved the kingdom from evil Snistertus, the snake man (Elizabeth Rule). Critic John Larkin praised the 'hard working little troupe' and their ability to create a show that was 'alive', unlike much of the other children's theatre available. [94] Sally White was less enthusiastic, describing it as 'self-conscious and a little precious'. [95]

Bow-Tie presented three further original plays for schools, each incorporating an hour performance and a one-hour workshop: *Wizzi the Wizard*, based around the four elements of Land, Air, Fire and Water, was developed for prep to grade two; *Shoes*, which followed the lives of six pairs of shoes was written for grades three to six. In *Shake, Rattle and Roll* for upper primary students, three troubled young people come together to the Turning Point Dance Studio. *Shoes*, initially performed during the September school holidays, was very well reviewed by Sally White as 'a rich and varied show, full of wit and skill. Its subtleties and changing moods make it stimulating theatre for the over sixes and highly satisfying for the accompanying adults'. [96] *Shoes* was performed by Robyn Dickins, Robyn Sedgewick and writer Chris Dickins. Chris Dickens also developed the mime play *The City Times* for Bow-Tie. The production opened on October 11 and was performed on Wednesday to Saturday nights at Arena Theatre before touring to the International Mime Festival in Tasmania in 1979. *The City Times* was performed Robyn Dickins, Chris Dickins, Fiona Syme, Robyn Sedgwick, Paul Trahair, Russell Beedles and Ernie Gray.

In August 1978, CAT presented its fourth annual poetry show for HSC students, [Said the Raven to the Skunk](#). The poetry show was performed at the Cromwell Road theatre by performers Elizabeth Stevenson, Karen Corbett, Peter Charlton and Andrew Foster.



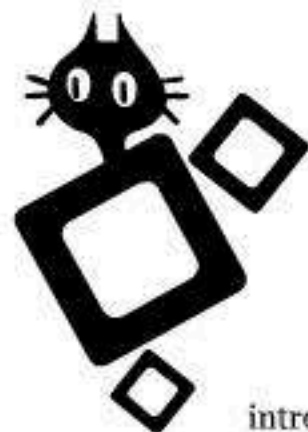
1975-1984

During 1978, Peter Charlton joined CAT as Director of Community Activities; previously he had done similar work in Adelaide. Peter Tulloch remembers him as a 'beautifully sensitive artist who cared absolutely desperately about the world' and was 'very aware of the environment'. Subsidies during 1978 had risen to \$85,000 so the company was able to experiment. Charlton developed a program of community art activities in the Prahran area involving young people from the Hore Petty housing estate and Prahran High School. By the end of the year, the company was running a women's theatre group and a youth theatre group for young people over the age of fifteen. A dance movement workshop and storytelling in the library and after school and Saturday workshops. [97]

Mixed Company, an offshoot of CAT established by 'a group of unemployed actors', and supported by an anonymous private sponsor, mounted a production of *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, directed by Peter Tulloch, which opened on December 4, 1978 at Arena Theatre. The cast included a number of CAT stalwarts, Wayne Comley, Fiona Syme, Ian Christie, Peter Charlton and Elizabeth Stephenson.

In 1979, CAT again established two touring companies involving old and new faces, with some trained teachers and at least one Bow-Tie graduate: Company One included Bob Constable, Suzanne Wagner, Ross Barnett and Sue Derry; Company Two was Stephen Oldfield, Elizabeth Rule, Peter Withall and Brenda Clarke. The production team was Peter Tulloch as Artistic Director, Peter Charlton as Director of Community Services and Ernie Gray, who CAT commissioned to write three plays for the 1979 season. It was difficult for the company to sustain its two companies given the challenges of constant touring and there was a turnover of personnel. David Young, Scott Board, Joan Murray and Peter Hosking performed as a touring company in term three. Tulloch and Charlton continued their involvement with the musical theatre group, Mixed Company, which continued to work out of the Arena Theatre, opening *The Great American Musical* on April 17, 1979 and playing through to June.

The touring secondary school plays for 1979 were [Paul Palmer and His Fight Against the Universals](#) by Ernie Gray; a scaled down version of *Star Wars* for the junior school; Brian Friel's [Winners](#) for the upper secondary students and [Seascape](#) by Edward Albee, all directed by Peter Tulloch. [He Who Would Say Yes Or No](#) by Bertolt Brecht was directed by Peter Charlton. The primary school productions included [The Musicians of Bremen and Hercules and the Golden Apples](#), written by Ernie Gray. *Hercules*, for grades four to six was based on ancient Greek stories and intended to involve the young people in the tradition of myths and legends. *The Musicians of Bremen* was adapted from the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. Peter Tulloch directed both productions. CAT continued to run three workshops each Saturday for young people between six and fifteen years old.

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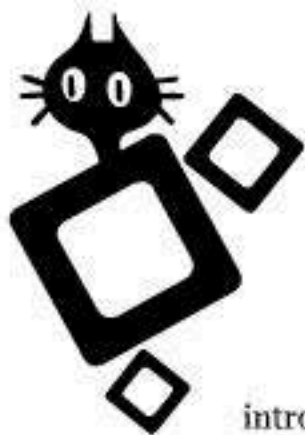
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Tulloch left CAT at the end of 1979 after two years of artistic leadership. In interview he suggests that his 'style was just too cramped' after two years in the job and there had been differences of opinion with the members of the Board about artistic direction. [98] He was succeeded by Richard Meredith early in 1980 who accepted a two and a half year contract. Kathy Herbert assumed the role of Community Liaison Officer. In December 1979 the State Government awarded CAT \$48,000.

By 1980, CAT was operating within a burgeoning TIE environment, including the Magic Mushroom Troupe, Why Not Theatre, New Theatre Daytime, Jika Jika, Mad Hattie and West Community Theatre. By 1982, almost 30 TIE companies had emerged in Victoria, all competing for government funding and school audiences. CAT showed its new plays for secondary schools at the theatre on March 5, 1980. The junior secondary play, *The Whale* by Ken Kelso was directed by Richard Meredith. Peter Tulloch stayed on as guest director for the senior secondary play *The Private Ear* by Peter Shaffer. The touring primary school show *Where To, Turelu?*, by Yves Hugues and directed by Paul Jones, was in the tradition of continental clowning with crazy props, slapstick and audience participation. CAT continued to fund two touring companies: Term 2 - Nigel Cox, Frank Italiano, Helen Zervopoulos and Bernadette Vincent; Term 3 - Kath Stuart, Fran Jenkins, Andrew Buchanan and Bill Connolly; Kath Herbert and Denise Scott also performed in the 1980 season.

Richard Meredith resigned as Artistic Director in August 1980. Peter Gray suggests that Meredith was critical of the company's financial structure. The low ratio of subsidy attendance meant that CAT was reliant on box office income for its survival. Meredith believed that this did not leave enough time for research and development of shows. In August 1980, CAT was one of fourteen signatories to a the Victorian Ministry for the Arts questioning the proportion of grant money being directed towards the Victorian Arts Centre and the major companies who were performing there. [99] He also questioned the structure of two companies that had been introduced by John O'May in 1976. [100]

Peter Charlton was appointed to the position of Artistic Director in October 1980 and made few structural changes in 1981, maintaining the two-company structure. There were changes to the Management Board however, with the resignation of two of the original directors, Chairman Naomi Mark and Robin Ramsay. Former Artistic Director, John O'May, was elected as the Chairman and Peter Tulloch and Trina Parker were appointed as directors. [101]

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CAT produced two new plays for secondary schools in term one, 1981. Minamata was a documentary drama based on the 1971 citizens campaign against mercury poisoning in a tiny fishing village in Japan, initially developed by a British TIE group and further modified by the CAT ensemble under the direction of Peter Charlton. Charlton is reported as saying that CAT was 'interested in presenting original material that dealt with environmental, controversial and social issues .. (to) stimulate discussion and give audiences a greater awareness of global and national problems'. [[102](#)] White Mans Mission, written by Albert Hunt and the Popular Theatre Troupe was first performed in Queensland and presented the attitudes of white settlers towards Aboriginal people at 'their most bigoted and brutal'; [[103](#)] the play was directed by Jane Ahlquist. Two plays were toured to primary schools: Get the Point, directed by Peter Charlton and based on a story by Harry Nillson and Accidentally Yours, a Magpie TIE Company devised show directed by Jan Ahlquist. In third term Peter Charlton directed a 'sex education play for teenagers', Until Ya Say Ya Love Me, by John Lonie and Magpie TIE.

From February 21, 1981 CAT began offering drama classes on Saturdays and weekdays for school age children, pre-school age children and adults under the direction of Kathy Herbert. Sadly Herbert's position, along with the workshop activities were phased out during the year. CAT also acted as an umbrella organization for Toes, Victoria's first dance-in-education program.

In 1982 CAT successfully secured funding for major structural changes including the abolition of the two company structure, the reduction of actors from eight to six and the appointment of a tour manager. Charlton's aim was to establish a permanent ensemble and develop a house style. In June, CAT shortened its name to Arena Theatre to remove what was seen as the limiting effect of a reference to children. Director Trina Parker explained: 'It was a deliberate ...attempt to take away the ... (patronising label) and to be able to do plays for upper secondary. We found it very difficult to sell plays to secondary schools under the title Children's Arena Theatre because secondary kids do not regard themselves as children'. [[104](#)]



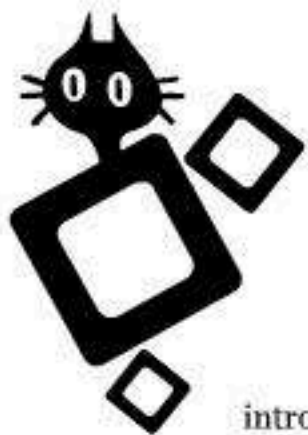
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The secondary touring show for 1982 was *Boots and All - A Footy Fantasy*, which focused on the question of whether year 10 star football player, Gary, should choose to give up school for a career in the VFL league. *Boots and All* was performed by John Bayliss, Paul Chappel, Kath Herbert and Wendy Gale. There were two productions for primary students. *Blackwater*, written and directed by Andrew Lemon for lower primary students was an International Year of the Tree production with a conservation theme involving a group of (talking) animals discussing how to save their homes in the Australian bush. For the upper secondary school audiences, Peter Charlton wrote and directed *Wolfboy*, the story of a child who has been brought up by wolves, based on the reported real life incidents of feral children. [105] The story follows the finding of Wolf Boy, and attempts by his 'captor' to tame the child through reward and punishment. The frightened boy, who is given the name of Victor, tries to make sense of the new 'civilised' world. [106] The show was designed by Ken Evans with cast members Wendy Gale, Mark Morrissey, Lynne Ruthven, John Bayliss, Paul Chapple and Kath Herbert. The production involved singing and mime, improvising with stylised costumes and limited props. In third term Peter Charlton remounted *Until Ya Say Ya Love Me* for secondary schools with Peter Gray, Kathy Herbert, Rick Ireland, Kathy Riseborough, June Laurie and Gerry Fitzgerald.

Wolf Boy proved to be one of Arena's most successful productions and formed part of the Arena repertoire into 1983. It was translated into Cantonese for a production by Roger Chapman for the Hong Kong Chung Ying TIE program. *Wolf Boy* was subsequently performed at the 'Come Out' Youth Festival in Adelaide in 1983, selected for the ASSITEJ conference in Moscow in May, 1984 and performed as part of the Sydney Festival in 1985. Charlton's play received rave reviews. Jill Morris from *The Age* described it as a 'remarkable piece':

The delightful universality of *Wolf Boy* is underlined by accompanying the dialogue and carefully choreographed movement with balletic, rhythmical hand movements based on signing – the means of communication with hearing-impaired children being used here as a language accessible to all. The resulting communion of voice, speech and hand movement is haunting, engrossing to all age levels and entirely civilised. [107]

While *Wolf Boy* was originally set in early nineteenth century France, for the Hong Kong production guest director Roger Chapman changed the setting to early twentieth century Hong Kong. *National Times* reviewer Michele Nayman wrote that the imposition of colonial values worked as secondary to the plays original message: 'The desolate howl of the wolf boy through the bars of an apartment window is relevant in any society at any time'. [108]

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In 1983, Arena introduced two new primary school productions, [The Boy Who Set Out to Learn Fear](#), based on a Brothers Grimm fairytale, written and directed by Peter Charlton for lower primary students and [Whose Game?](#), written and directed by Kath Herbert. Peter Charlton wrote and directed [Buckleys Chance](#), the story of escaped convict William Buckley who lived with Aborigines for thirty years during the early settlement of Victoria; the play dealt with the conflict between Aboriginal and European values, and between environmental protection and progress.

In 1984, the Arena Board of Directors adopted a new Memorandum and Articles of Association, putting it in line with similar organizations. It allowed employees of the company to sit on the Board. The size of the Board was increased by seconding members of the acting company; the Artistic Director and Administrator became full members of the Board. John O'May resigned from the Board and Peter Tulloch became the new Chairperson. Phillip Metz, one of the original directors of the company resigned. In the 1984 funding round Arena was awarded \$100,000, considerably more than competitors Handspan and the Geelong based Mill Theatre, both of whom received \$60,000. [[109](#)]

The work of the company continued under Charlton's direction. There were two productions for secondary schools. [Frankenstein in Manhattan](#), written and directed by Peter Charlton was designed to support peace education and investigated the challenges for a scientist working on weapons development. The cast included Rebecca Ponford, Janice Cleland, Stephen Payne and Peter Gray. [Busted](#) written by Pat Cranney and directed by Jai McHenry for lower secondary audiences 'hunt(ed) for emotions kept hidden by homeless teenagers.' [[110](#)] [Future Tell](#), by Peter Gray and directed by Peter Charlton, dealt with life many generations after a nuclear attack where survivors wait each Spring for the arrival of the future teller who initiated the annual 'greenings' ritual. [Somewhere Else](#), written by Patricia Cornelius and directed by Patricia Cornelius and Peter Charlton was toured to the lower primary group.

Artistic success under Peter Charlton's direction continued into 1985. *Wolf Boy* was presented at the Sailor's Home Theatre in January as part of the Sydney Festival, directed by Peter Charlton and designed by Kenneth Evans with performers Peter Gray, Trish Moynihan, Janice Cleland, David Bright, Russell Thompson and Rebecca Ponford as Wolf Boy. *The Daily Mirror* described it as 'a delightful new play (which) uses the technique of mime and music to tell a story which has appeal for adults and children.' [[111](#)] Other reviewers praised the 'haunting, mythic quality' of the production and Rebecca Ponford's portrayal of fear, inquisitiveness and delight'. [[112](#)]

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Semmelweis by Geoff Gillham of Cockpit Theatre, London, and On the Brink written and directed by Patricia Cornelius, were toured to secondary schools during first term in 1985. *Semmelweis*, about an innovative Hungarian medical scientist in conflict with the established order, was directed by Stephen Payne and designed by Peter Mumford. *On the Brink*, a play about two 'street people', unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, was performed by Trish Moynihan and Janice Cleland; it returned for a short season in second term. Pippi Longstocking was produced and presented by Mixed Company for Arena Theatre's primary program, with Fiona Syme and Bob Burton.

The artistic highlight of the year was Streets in the Sky, a musical theatre piece, written and directed by Peter Charlton, designed by architecture graduates Robert Wardrop and Jennie Davis, with music by Bill Just and choreography by Janice Cleland. *Streets in the Sky* was Arena's contribution to the United Nations International Year of Youth and was subsequently performed in May as part of the Adelaide Come Out Festival and at Arena Theatre in August as part of the first Next Wave Festival. The idea for the play came from 'a real housing experiment in Budapest, Hungary where the Government sought to relieve the student housing shortage by placing young people into flats occupied by old people. The young people had to care for the aged tenant in turn for one day being able to live in the flat permanently.' [113] The Arena interpretation focused on generational conflict. It presented a group of high school age youth standing up against a fascist totalitarian regime in an unspecified country, ultimately inspiring the community to overthrow the regime and liberate the country. [114] The production involved contemporary music and dance forms with stylised 'kabuki' make-up and vivid expressionistic sets. Geoffrey Milne, writing for the *National Times* noted:

This is Charlton's last production for Arena Theatre. I hope it doesn't signal the end of his writing career. Charlton is one of the country's finest playwrights for young people and the industry can ill afford to lose him. [115]



1975-1984

1985 was a significant year in terms of leadership change and personnel change. Cynthia Mountstephen, the Arena Administrator, resigned from her position in March after fifteen years of service. Diana Greentree, the Marketing Manager appointed in 1984, also resigned early in the year. Richard Jones was appointed as the Administrator in May but resigned after a month. Peter Charlton finished his term as Artistic Director at the end of June.

Angela Chaplin was appointed as the new Artistic Director and took up the full-time position in September. The current Arena Production Manager, Russell Thompson, took over as Company Manager, initially in a replacement capacity and then subsequently became the full-time Administrator from November 1985. [116] There were also changes on the Board of Management with resignations from Cynthia Mountstephen, Peter Charlton and David Bright. Solicitor David Andrews, Artistic Director Angela Chaplin, Administrator Russell Thompson joined Peter Tulloch (Chair), Peter Gray, Patricia Cornelius, Trina Parker and Stephen Payne on the Board in the second half of 1985.

The Annual Report for 1985 records a deficit for the year of \$33,386, which is attributed to 'increased costs of production, lack of revenue due to poor or inadequate promotion and administrative problems within the Organisation' in the first half of the year. The productions recorded a combined deficiency of \$66,036. After attempts to secure bridging funding failed, The Board made the decision to go into temporary recess in third term allowing the new Artistic Director and Administrator to plan a new approach for 1986.

Despite the upheavals of 1985, Arena's second decade consolidated it as Victoria's leading Theatre in Education company. The appointment of a succession of experienced directors and the appointment of acting companies ensured a more consistent professional standard. After the establishment of a permanent physical theatre space, Arena found itself hosting or collaborating with a range of other companies, both commercial and TIE. Arena's interface with companies such as Bow-Tie and Mixed Company involved some considerable crossover of personnel and these relationships were sometimes a distraction from the company's core business.

This decade saw a focus on Australian content within the touring productions, through both commissioned plays and group-devised pieces. Ernie Gray was Arena's first commissioned playwright; the success of his plays led to many other collaborations with playwrights. Peter Charlton, particularly, emphasised the importance of group devised work and theatre development more generally, which was to be an important feature of the next two decades. Towards the end of the eighties, Arena loosened its ties with the founding directors as they left the Board and it became a more distanced governance body. In the eighties, as drama in education expanded in schools and with the growing numbers of drama teachers graduating from Melbourne and Rusden State Colleges, the TIE scene became more competitive. Arena needed new strategies both administratively and artistically. These strategies were to emerge more clearly in the next decade.

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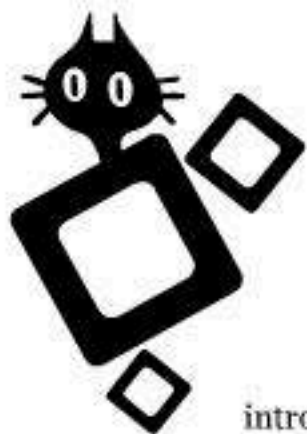
Angela Chaplin came to the position of Artistic Director of Arena in a period of artistic strength and financial uncertainty. During the eighties, Theatre in Education (TIE) continued to grow with an increasing number of companies competing for government funding and young audiences. [[117](#)] Arena was recognised as Victoria's leading company and this was reflected in the Theatre Board of the Australia Council funding announced in November 1985. Arena was granted \$100,000 in the Young People's Theatre category, with competitors Woolly Jumpers and Four's Company receiving \$50,000 and \$15,000 respectively. The Victorian State Government committed a further \$84,000.

The Board's decision to put the company into recess during third term in 1985 allowed for financial recuperation and also offered the new Artistic Director time to 'come to an understanding of Arena's operations in the past and also the opportunity to plan and research the 1986 program'. [[118](#)] She developed a new direction for the company:

This program I have designed around the philosophy of 'access to process' ie, providing access to the young people we perform for, and work with, to the processes through which we create theatre for them. It is my belief that if we are to engender a community in which young people see theatre as important in their lives, then we must allow them the opportunity to affect that theatre. [[119](#)]

Angela Chaplin was 25 when she was appointed to the position of Artistic Director. She had worked as a teacher after graduating from Rusden State College in 1979 and subsequently (1981) joined the ensemble at The Mill Theatre directed by James McCaughey. The Mill actors created a work with a class of grade four children from Geelong Primary School. She remembers this as informing her early shows at Arena:

We brought the kids in and the actors had a sequence of movements that they had made up and we would show them to the kids and ask (them), 'What do you think those things could be?' Then those things would be written down and we'd choose one ... and that would become the main part of the story... Then we'd say, 'What do you think would happen to this star, for instance...so basically we would run a narrative with them, using the actors as a stimulus. [[120](#)]

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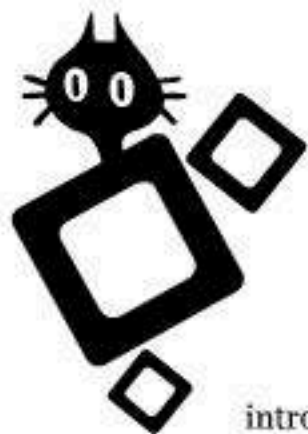
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Chaplin had also directed a show for the Woolly Jumpers, a Geelong-based TIE group. The appointment of Chaplin to the position of Artistic Director was a courageous one for the Arena Baord: 'Well one of the things that I find really amazing and ...these days it doesn't happen, is that Arena took such a risk on me. I'd directed one show in my life.' [[121](#)]

Her first production for 1986 was *Whats the Difference?*, a play about equal opportunities for young people. The play was created with a 'steering committee' of young people from diverse backgrounds who came to the theatre once a week to discuss the difference between the generations and young people's rights. *What's the Difference?* was written by dramaturg Elena Eremin, using the young people's words, and designed by Neil Greenaway with performers Rosie Tonkin, Peter Murphy, Jane Bayley and John Cheshire. After a public showing at Cromwell Street, it toured 54 secondary schools from March to May. Neil Greenaway's innovative set involved a series of metal frames that hinged together to create three large pyramids for the actors to climb and sit on. Unfortunately, they didn't fit in the van so a special bracket was constructed for touring. [[122](#)]

Our Antigone was mounted in conjunction with Playbox Theatre Company's production of *This Antigone* and was a radical innovation for TIE. As Director, Chaplin developed a workshop performance of the text that schools could experience before seeing the professional production. It involved upper secondary school students working as a chorus with the actors to create sections of the play, which they then performed within the school, using the chronological order of the narrative. Chaplin used both the original Sophocles text and Julianne O'Brien's Playbox version. Chaplin knew O'Brien from The Mill, where they had worked together. *Our Antigone*, which was performed by two different companies in 61 schools from April through to June, met with considerable success. Company One was Jill Mancini, Peter Gray, Carole Patullo, and Daryl Pellizer; and Company Two was Jane Bayley, Peter Gray, Karen Paton and Stephen Smith. The collaboration was negotiated with James McCaughey, who was the Artistic Director at Playbox at the time, and a mentor for both Chaplin and O'Brien.

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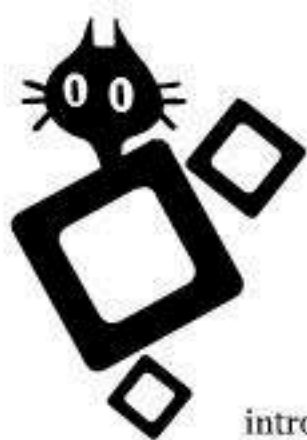
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Made Together, which toured 21 primary schools in July and August, was written with physically disabled children from Yooralla (Balwyn), a non-profit disability support and community service provider in Victoria. The young people developed a story about a dirt digger called Distance who could fly. Chaplin remembers it was 'extraordinary because these kids, so many of whom were encased in so much metal' had created a character out of 'a heavy piece of machinery that they decided could fly'.
[123]

Arena had a commitment to presenting one in-house production at the company's theatre in South Yarra each year. In 1986, Chaplin invited Robert Draffin, theatre maker and educator, to guest direct Harold Pinter's The Dumb Waiter, which played 21 performances over a three-week season in August to 21 schools and the general public. Ernie Gray and Trevor Kent performed the play in Simon Barley's exciting design, featuring a dumb waiter that dropped down from the ceiling. The final school production for the year was Stacks On, written by Peter Dickinson and directed by Angela Chaplin. This play about safety and decision-making, was performed by Jane Bayley, Carole Patullo and John Cheshire and toured upper primary schools in third term. Simon Barley's set was like a skateboard ramp, painted in layers so that as the performers braked with their skates, different colours would emerge.

1986 was a year of financial consolidation during which Arena played to more than 21,000 young people in Victoria and the company recorded a surplus of \$1,568. Chaplin was able to develop an ongoing acting ensemble for 1987 and employed Jane Bayley, John Cheshire, Marcia Ferguson and Robert Lyon. John Cheshire joined the Board of Management; Russell Thompson continued to administer the company and Clare de Bruin was appointed as Production Manager. The company noted, with sadness, the death of one of the original founders, Philippa Metz, in November.

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1987, celebrated as Arena's twenty-first birthday, was another successful year for the company in both artistic and financial terms with the annual surplus increased to \$12,973 and international recognition for the artistic work of the company. The Women There, written by Julianne O'Brien about early white settlement in Australia, was toured to upper secondary students in 91 schools from February to May. The production was intended to redress the predominantly male orientation of history curricula in schools by focussing on three female characters, two convicts and the wife of a senior official. [124] The set was designed by Hugh Colman, funded through a special Australia Council grant to place high profile designers in young people's theatre companies. The play was choreographed by former Arena actor, Daryl Pellizer; performer Drusilla Hendry joined the four permanent company members.

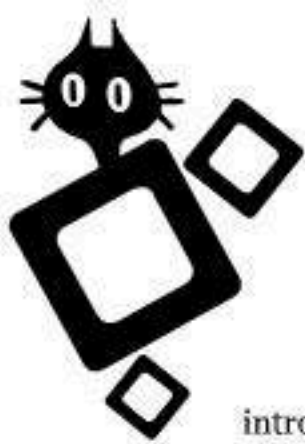
Chaplin remembers Colman's set as a highlight of the production:

It was beautiful. It was a canvas floorcloth and it wasn't painted, a saw horse, two very long oars from a rowboat, I guess, and a big sheet of canvas that could be picked up by those oars and made into anything. We made it into a ship, all kinds of things. I was really into transformative design so nothing stayed as it was. [125]

The Women There was performed at the Come Out Festival in Adelaide in March, in conjunction with the ASSITEJ World Congress. The first performance received a standing ovation from the 300 delegates from around the world. The *Lowdown* critic wrote:

The Women There does everything a piece of young people's theatre should do - it excites, thrills, moves and informs; it creeps back into your mind time and time again; it makes you want to watch theatre. [126]

This exposure gave Arena international recognition. Arena was invited to perform at the 1988 Vancouver Children's Festival and Angela Chaplin was invited to give a keynote address at the associated conference, 'The Place of Theatre in Youth Culture'.

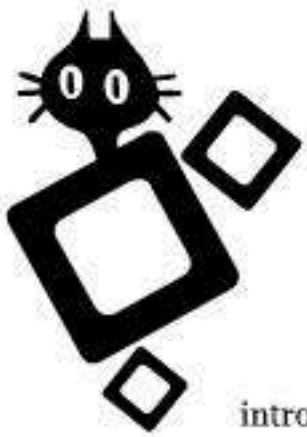
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The next production of the year, Meeting Mother Courage, for HSC and upper secondary students, extended the performance workshop model established by *Our Antigone*. While it was an artistic success, it attracted fewer school groups than *Our Antigone*. The production gave the cast a grounding in Brechtian theatre before the 1987 in-house production Brecht X 2, The Beggar or the Dead Dog and The Measures Taken. *Brecht X 2* was directed by Angela Chaplin, designed by Simon Barley and performed by the permanent ensemble with Peter Gray. This production was both an artistic and financial success offering 19 performances in August. The play was widely reviewed with critics praising the ensemble acting: 'They (the actors) work as a team, investing what could otherwise have been a dry exercise in propaganda with warmth and humanity.' [127]

The final two productions for 1987 toured primary schools from October to December. Where Do You Live? was commissioned by the International Year of the Shelter for the Homeless, and challenged the stereotypical image of homeless people and offered some ideas for change. The play was written by Clare Madsen, directed by Chaplin and performed by the Arena ensemble. It was about an old lady who lived a car and who became friends with a little girl, Anna. Meredith Rogers' designed 'a pop-up set like a cardboard pop-up book'. [128] The play was well received by schools and centres for the homeless in which the company performed: 'Everyone (every role) within the play was given dignity...it was also good to see just Anna and her father as a family unit'. [129] Jumping Off the Shelf offered a dramatic interpretation of six popular children's books for very young audiences. The books included were: *Piggy Book* by Andrew Browne; *The Very Worst Monster* by Pat Hutchins; *Jo Jo and Mike* by Jenny Wagner; *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and *Alexander and the Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst. Children selected three stories to be performed. The Arena ensemble used simple everyday objects in their performances, connecting stories with a song.

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1988 began with the tour of a musical play for upper primary students on the theme of the ocean. [Beyond the Breakers](#) was written by Pam Leversha, directed by Angela Chaplin, designed by Meredith Rogers and performed by the Arena ensemble. Music was composed by Andree Greenwell and Trudy Hayter was the Production Manager. *Jumping off the Shelf* was remounted in the first half of 1988 and toured to junior primary schools.

The highlight of the year, however, was a tour of *The Women There* to the Vancouver Children's Festival where it was an artistic triumph. Alison Cotes, the Courier Mail critic wrote: 'This is a gentle and lovely piece of theatre, disarming but sentimental, theatrically ostentatious but ultimately moving.' [[130](#)]

Angela Chaplin recalls remounting *The Women There* in the evenings while she was directing a new Julianne O'Brien play during the day. Chaplin suggests that the idea for this play, [The Rainbow Warrior](#), came from the ensemble, who wanted to do a play about heroes. She credits Marcia Ferguson with the suggestion of Greenpeace and its protests against nuclear testing, including the last voyage and historic sinking of Greenpeace's flagship *The Rainbow Warrior*, by French forces. The production brought together a number of former Arena collaborators: Andree Greenwell composed the music which was performed by Karen Hadfield; Darryl Pellizzer choreographed the work; Simon Barley created the design; and Clare de Bruin was the Production Manager. Because the Arena ensemble was touring *The Women There* to Canada, Chaplin auditioned a new group of actors; the performers were Merfyn Owen, Melanie Beddie, Rosemary Myers, Richard Margetson and Maude Davey. Ken Harpur worked on the play as an associate director through an Australia Council professional development grant. [The Rainbow Warrior](#) undertook an eight week tour to schools under the auspices of the Victorian Arts Council and mounted a season at South Yarra theatre as Arena's contribution to the Next Wave Festival. The play was a significant artistic success with The Herald critic describing it as 'highly energised and exciting theatre' and 'overwhelming dazzling' and The Age critic praising its 'imaginative and fluid direction'. [[131](#)]

The Rainbow Warrior was Angela Chaplin's last production for Arena. She was headhunted by Magpie Theatre Company, the youth arm of the State Theatre Company of South Australia and she left Arena in July 1988. During her time at Arena, Chaplin sought to move the company beyond stereotypical Theatre In Education, what she described as 'the bright overalls and four clown boxes stuff'. Her aim was to create theatre for young people that was political, 'not naturalistic', offering 'alternate voices' and that had the 'layers and the depth of any adult drama'. [[132](#)] Russell Thompson, the Administrator during Chaplin's directorship, had left earlier in February 1988 to join Toe Truck Theatre in Sydney.

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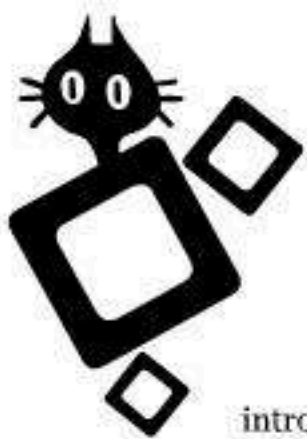
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John Paxinos and Jacky Fidler took over administration of Arena and Barbara Ciszewska was appointed as Artistic Director in April 1988. Barbara Ciszewska's first production with Arena, and the last play for 1988, was [Play the Game](#) for lower secondary students, written by Peter Dickinson and based on workshops conducted by the ensemble about children's games. By the end of this show all four members of the 1987/8 ensemble left for various career reasons and Ciszewska set about establishing a new company. She selected three actors, Jules Hutchinson, Stephen Smith and Helen Trenos to join Andrew Spence who had been recruited for *Play the Game*. During November Ciszewska, Jane Bayly, Andrew Spence, Diana Stewart and Rosie Lalevich worked with the Theatre of the Deaf company in Sydney, exploring new ideas and forms to feed into Arena's future seasons.

Barbara Ciszewska came from a background of freelance directing rather than drama education. After involvement in student theatre at the University of Melbourne, where she worked with James McCaughey, she left to become a founding member of the The Mill theatre which McCaughey had developed in Geelong after establishing Deakin University's theatre course. She spent five years in professional and community work at The Mill where she established her directing and design skills. She remembers The Mill community nights as good training for Arena.

We had a lovely space. It was an old windmill and it was a flexible space where anything could happen. So each week we'd get together and plan for The Mill Night and so each member of the ensemble would run a workshop or do some design, I'll do some instant poetry, I'll do some movement/drama, I'll do a bit of text, and so we had this model which was a good pedagogical model, basically coming together for a big warm-up. Basically, I'll do the warm-up for this week and learning how to work with a large group in terms of warming up voice and body. [133]

After leaving The Mill she worked with Meredith Rogers and Suzanne Spinner in the Home Cooking Theatre Company and directed at the Victorian College of the Arts. [134]

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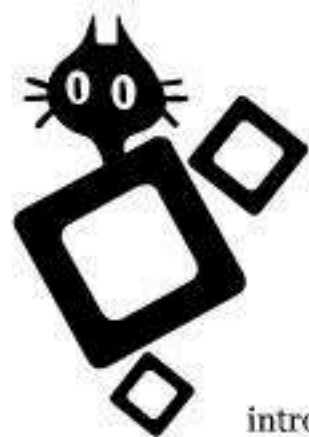
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It is important to pay tribute to McCaughey's mentoring of both Chaplin and Ciszewska and his influence, through them, on the evolving artistic direction of Arena. Many other Arena actors, designers, writers and musicians were introduced to theatre at The Mill. Ciszewska recorded her artistic intentions for Arena in the 1987 Annual Report, published in 1988:

I see the task ahead of myself and John as consolidating, building on and extending all the areas of Arena's strengths. I would like to see Arena used for holiday seasons of some of the touring shows. I would also like to add to the concept of the actor development, that of script development and even design development. I intend to do productions of classics as well as create new plays for them. I plan to conduct a number of workshops on a informal basis with primary and secondary students in the latter half of 1988. [135]

Ciszewska's first production for Arena was The First Day, the Last Day, a music theatre production of four short medieval plays, *The Creation and the Fall of Lucifer, Abraham and Isaac, The Crucifixion* and *The Last Judgement*. She had previously done a mini-production of this show at the Church Theatre in Hawthorn. Musical director Hartley Newnham created choral music for the play, which was based on a new Australian adaptation by John Jacobs from the original works. *The First Day, the Last Day* toured schools and was presented in-house at Arena during the Easter holiday.

Following the success of *Jumping off the Shelf* in 1987 and 1988, Ciszewska and the Arena ensemble of Jules Hutchinson, Steven Smith and Helen Trenos used this formula to create Leaping Off the Shelf. Five new stories were dramatised, *Crusher is coming, The Monster Bed, John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat, Princess Smartypants* and *The Talking Skyscraper*. The lower primary school audience were asked to choose three stories to be performed. This again proved to be a winning formula with accolades from children and teachers: 'Very enjoyable. Kids loved it. The books literally come alive and leapt off the shelf'. [136] The final production for 1989 was Your Number is Up for upper primary students written by maths and drama teacher Peter Dickinson, a former student participant in The Mill nights. Audience members participated in the solving of real life maths problems facing the three grade 5 characters represented by Arena ensemble members.

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Ciszewska's final production for 1989 was [Fix it, Alice!](#) which explored a young woman's entry into the male-dominated world of motor mechanics.

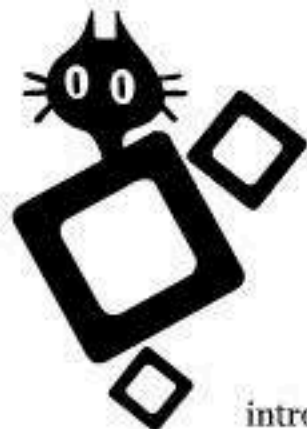
I suppose my grooviest show would have been *Fix It, Alice!* because it's got issues that are really there in the schoolroom. Women wanting to do a man's job and the struggle to get acceptance. So all the young girls ask, could I be a mechanic? You know, career decisions. That was by far my most creative play. [[137](#)]

Ciszewska credits writer Ernie Gray, a VW lover and amateur car mechanic, with suggesting the theme of this play, based on a brief autobiography written by a young woman then working with Ford. She and Gray interviewed the subject of the play and Gray developed the script. This was to be one of Ciszewska's most successful productions, playing in 111 schools in its first two tours, and the play which best represented her preferred directorial style:

Fix it Alice! employed highly physicalised movement sequences to demonstrate the various technical aspects of the car. Actors became a series of tools of engine components in a very non-naturalistic way. [[138](#)]

Peter Tulloch resigned from the Board at the end of 1989 to take up a position at Ballarat University College. Cynthia Mountstephen also left the Board after sixteen years. John Paxinos was replaced by Maria Katsonis as Administrator and Barbara Ciszewska's contract was renewed for a further two years. Outgoing Chairperson, Peter Tulloch commended the Arena ensemble for their work in 1989, noting it was a difficult year with 'tight rehearsal times', 'long and hard' touring and the challenge of mounting four productions. [[139](#)]

David Andrews was appointed Chairperson of the Board for 1990; new members appointed were Marie Brennan from the Ministry of Education, Jo Moulton from Express Australia, ensemble member Irene Jarzabek and Stefo Stojanovski. Arena mounted three new productions in 1990 and yet again increased its financial reserves with an accumulated surplus of almost \$80,000. The 1990 Annual report records a total audience of 25,158 for the year with a total of 191 performances over seven weeks touring in each of four terms.

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Two new shows, [Jumping Stories](#) and [Three Stories High](#) for lower and upper primary respectively, were workshopped in 1989 and rehearsed in January 1990. In her report of the 1990 season, the Artistic Director notes that the company successfully produced two new plays with original live music in six weeks. [140] Writer and dramaturg Rosemary Fitzgerald worked on both shows, adapting six folk tales from various countries – three for lower primary and three for upper primary. The famous Turkish story teller Nasreddin Hodja introduced the three stories for the lower primary audience – *Mekala and Reim Esau* (Cambodia), *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* (Ivory Coast), *Strega Nona and her famous pasta* (Italy) and *Lopburi Monkey Club* (Thailand). Ten-year old Lucy and her family are characters that link the three stories in *Three Stories High* – *The Giant's Daughter* (Norway), *The Contest* (Armenia) and *The Five Chinese Brothers* (China).

The plays toured primary schools in first and fourth terms with ensemble members Josie Eberard (replaced by Jules Hutchinson in the second tour), Irene Jazabek, Glenn Perry and Steven Smith. *Fix It, Alice!* by Ernie Gray, the story of Ford's first female motor mechanic, was remounted for term two, choreographed by Daryl Pellizzer with a design by Tim Bishop. Jonathon Davey was Production Manager. *Fix It, Alice!* was presented in-house as part of the New Wave Youth Arts Festival, with a new lighting design by Liz Pain. The secondary show toured in term three, [Dancing in the Dark](#), was a play about teenage relationships, written by Gilly Farrelly and based on conversations with young people. The show was designed by Peter Long with music composed by Shirley Billing. During 1990 Ciszewska conducted a number of company days to plan future projects, including the workshopping of the 1991 project *Zac's Place* which she commissioned Greek playwright Tess Lyssiotis to develop.

In 1991 Arena celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. *Zac's Place*, Arena's 99th production and the first for the year, was followed by an anniversary celebration. The play looked at life and family dynamics from the viewpoint of Zac, the fifteen year old son of a Greek milk bar owner. The play used bi-lingual actors and was one of the earliest works to investigate multi-cultural issues. *Zac's Place* toured to 46 schools, playing to over 7,500 upper secondary students. The term two production for lower secondary students, [Spitting Chips](#) by Peta Murray and guest directed by Andrea Lemon, told the story of an adolescent girl coping with death, grief and change. With the involvement of guest directors, Ciszewska was freed up from directing to research scripts for the 1992 season.

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From July to November the Arena ensemble was joined by Kathryn Niesche, an acrobat in residence funded by an Australia Council grant. Niesche worked with the ensemble on [Animal Talk](#), a lower primary show by Ernie Gray, which traced the history of animal domestication through the eyes of four pets: Magic the cat, Spike the dog, Digger the horse and Bandit the Guinea Pig. The play was directed by Barbara Ciszewska and performed by Jules Hutchinson, Irene Jarzabek, David Pidd and Steven Smith. Meredith Rogers created an innovative design with bright green grass carpet. The upper primary show, [The Incredible Voyage of Leonard Greylead](#) by Rosemary Fitzgerald, toured in term four. Composer Hugh Covill developed a series of musical themes to support the story of a lead pencil purchased by a Frances, a grade five girl.

The 1991 ensemble disbanded at the end of the year and Ciszewska undertook an extensive audition process to select the 1992 ensemble. The new team, Kim Trengove, Phillippa Adgemis, Richard Davies and David Adamson participated in a three-week creative development workshop for a new play, [Bring Down the House](#), written by John Romeril. Arena played to more than 23,000 young people in 124 schools during its 25th anniversary year. It was a successful year, with minimal personnel change and a near break-even financial result, but by 1991, Arena was operating almost exclusively as a touring company, with the attendant strain on the acting ensemble and production team.

In 1992 Arena re-evaluated its product mix in relation to touring schools and in-theatre productions. Barbara Ciszewska had always valued Arena's Cromwell Road theatre and wanted to extend its use:

James [McCaughey] and Annette Hassall instilled in us that you have got to have a stage that is like a frame for the actor's body. A nice clear space. And so Cromwell Road used to have seats all the way up to this little proscenium arch and somebody had taken at least half the seats away, so there was a floorspace and the floor was sanded and Angela said my job was to keep that floor sanded, keep it beautiful. And I did! I (went) over the floor a few times with linseed oil in the quiet times, because you had to move well and to also have a three-dimensionality about your movement where you need a good floor. So I had a lovely floorspace and I think the walls were a pale colour, which used to be black and I walked into that and I very happily maintained the floor. We used to use the space to rehearse in. We used to have try outs and that was another one of James's great principles, you know, do a work in progress and test it with an audience, test it first, don't go out and do a play with something that you don't know that you haven't worked in an inner space. So we'd have our try outs there. We invited teachers and some local schools to come in. It was a great space to get kids to sit around in a circle or in the seats and those try outs worked very well. [141]



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The company made the decision to try to increase the number of in-house productions as 'a means of fulfilling its artistic objectives'. [142] In addition, during 1991, Arena had begun auspicing independent projects like *Walking on Sticks* by Sarah Cathcart and Andrea Lemon and providing resource assistance for a number of independent projects, including the Arts Industry Council, *Crying in Public Places* (Maudie Davey, Karen Hatfield and Jane Bayley), Midsumma Festival and Graffiti Dance Festival. Arena wanted to create a viable alternative venue for emerging independent artists and companies. The theatre at 27A Cromwell Road was considered too small and inappropriately located for these new directions. To facilitate them, Administrator Maria Katsonis proposed that the Company relocate to 199 Napier Street, which was to be vacated by Anthill Theatre Company when they moved to a new venue at Gasworks. In May 1992 Arena was advised that the Victorian Ministry for the Arts approved financial assistance of \$66, 930 for the Napier Street project, \$30,000 of which was to be allocated to refurbishment. The Victorian Ministry understood that that Arena proposed to 'take up residency ... and operate the venue as a centre for project-based and individual artist productions in the performing arts, as a supplementary activity to the company's annual performance program.' [143]

1992 was a year of debate and discussion as the Arena Board and Administration developed the Napier Street project. There was minimal new production development during the year. *Bring Down the House* by John Romeril with music by Irene Vela, was set in the future in what Ciszewska remembers as 'a grim post-nuclear landscape'. [144] This play for secondary students featured four homeless youth on the run. Flashbacks to the 30s and the 60s demonstrated that these were equally hard times in which people learned to cope. *Bring Down the House* was performed in the Playbox theatre to accommodate Trina Parker's design and more ambitious lighting and sound; it subsequently toured to schools. The primary touring show in 1992, *Fossils*, by Heather Nimmo, was designed by John Bennett. *Fix It, Alice!* was revived for secondary schools later in 1992.

Arena moved to the new premises at the end of 1992. Roderick Poole was appointed as Venue Manager and Nicol Beechey was appointed Technical Manager. Barbara Ciszewska stepped down from the position of Artistic Director and was replaced by David Carlin. Carlin had worked for six years in a theatre collective in Adelaide called Red Shed. He was also freelancing at the time and came to Melbourne to work with the Melbourne Workers' Theatre in 1990 on *Black Cargo* by John Romeril. Carlin's background was not specifically with theatre for young people:

I had done some shows for young people in Adelaide. The Red Shed did a show called *Miracle Mum* which Melissa (Reeves) wrote as well, which was a comedy and a nativity play. I'd done some schools touring shows on the side. But I didn't have a particular drive to do theatre for young audiences. [145]

At this time, the Arena Board was interested in the company changing direction and Carlin offered an alternative to the traditional Theatre In Education background. Victoria Jones had already been appointed to the position of Administrator when Carlin was appointed and she was to work closely with him throughout his artistic leadership. Carlin recalls that Arena 'were very open to new ideas and I was interested in stretching the boundaries of what theatre for young audiences could be'.



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Encouraged by the Board, Carlin disbanded the ensemble company model, employing actors on a show-by-show basis, which he saw as providing greater flexibility and working outside the limitations imposed by 'four actors and a floor cloth'. He saw Theatre for Young People (TYP) as covering ages three to twenty-five and recognised that there is 'a huge range of different audiences' in that age span who needed to be approached 'quite differently'. [146] He sought new ways of extending the work of Arena:

Partly by collaborating with the best possible people and by (bringing) in exciting writers, actors, designers, composers and also (carrying) on some of the work we'd done at Red Shed, which was exploring particular actor-audience relationships. It was like breaking through and finding forms that were more engaging, more exciting. [147]

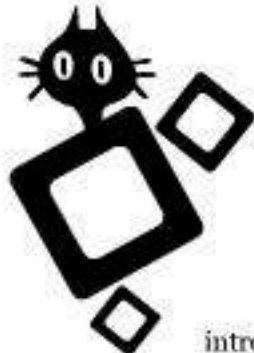
Carlin's new artistic direction was supported by the Arena Board which included a number of new members in 2003 including John Cheshire, Marcia Ferguson, Shirley Sydenham, Victoria Jones and Peter Robert.

Carlin's first production for Arena in 1993 was *In Cahoots*, written by Melissa Reeves, which had already had a highly successful season at Red Shed. The play is a comic look at the conservative tradition of Brownies or junior Girl Guides. Arena's production was designed by Tim Maddock from Red Shed, who turned the theatre into a Brownie Hall. Throughout the play, the Brownies are shown to be increasingly subversive, refusing to pay allegiance to the Queen until finally we learn that they are running an undercover surveillance exercise. *In Cahoots* was performed at the Napier Street Theatre as part of the Comedy Festival with a much larger cast than earlier Arena productions. The success of the play was largely due to the inspired comic acting of the performers, Jennifer Castles, Susie Dee, Sally Hildyard, Jules Hutchinson, Genevieve Morris, Carole Patullo and Siobhan Tuke. The play had more of an appeal to an adult audience than to youth, as Richard Sallis indicated in *Lowdown*: 'while there is much in the play to keep students interested and amused, there is the possibility that some of the underlying themes may go a little unnoticed.' [148]

Carlin's second show for Arena was *Once Upon a World*, a touring show for years three to eight that he and his multicultural cast adapted from four folktales. Carlin both wrote and directed the show, which was designed by Amanda Johnson. Musician Marianne Permezel wrote and performed the music. The performers were Ronaldo Morelos, Josephin Eberhard, Jennifer Castles and Eugenia Fragos. Schools could choose to see three of the stories performed: *The Three Sillies* (Greek), *The Monkey and the Turtle* (Filipino), *Whuppity Stoorie* (Celtic) and *Rosemarino* (Italian). Each of the stories related to the cultural background of one of the actors who introduced the performance. In this production, Carlin experimented with the notion of story telling when one of the characters argues with the narrator about how the story is to be told. [149] *Once Upon a World* was a successful and relatively low budget show performed in the round and involving music, dance, slapstick and melodrama. It became a staple in the Arena repertoire during Carlin's artistic leadership. This production exemplified Carlin's philosophy about touring which was to have a higher production budget and values and to keep the plays in repertoire for a few years. *Once Upon a World* performed in schools in both 1993 and 1994, and toured to Queensland as part of the Out of the Box Festival in June 1994.

The third show for 1993 was a collaboration with the Melbourne Theatre Company adapted by Mary Morris from *Blabbermouth*, one of Morris Gleitzman's novels. This ambitious work, directed by Carlin and designed by Trina Parker, was performed in the Russell Street Theatre, but despite its high production values and the popularity of Gleitzman's novels, it was not a financial success. *Blabbermouth* was performed by Mike Bishop, Sally Cooper, Merridy Eastman, Patricia Moffat, Jane Turner and Doris Younane. *Blabbermouth* was revived in 1995 at the Fairfax Studio with a new cast.

In term four, 1994, and in association with the West Australian company, Acting Out, Arena toured *Visiting the Relatives*, by Paul Tolton and Grahame Gavin. This play was devised by Acting Out and explored the Orang-utan's struggle for survival.

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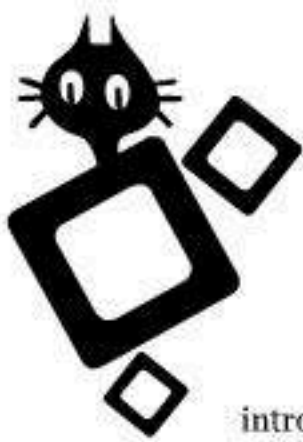
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Three shows premiered in 1994. *Malache* a one woman show by Virginia Jane Rose was targeted towards upper secondary school students and performed by Indian classical dancer Tara Rajkumar and directed by Madeleine Blackwell. Jacqueline Everitt designed the show with music composition and performance by Adrian Sherriff. *Malache* was sponsored by Community Aid Abroad and told the story of a woman bringing up to small children on her own in a third world country and Harriet, a foreign journalist (presented as a voice-over) who is making a documentary on poverty. Critic Mary-Anne Caleo described *Malache* as 'superbly rafted and styled dance theatre with a politically universal base'. [150]

Carlin commissioned John Romeril and Irene Vela to write a new play for the Next Wave Youth Festival in May 1994. *Doing the Block* was a major theatrical piece performed in the Fairfax studio. The play was a contemporary urban story involving a culturally diverse cast, Petru Gheorgiu, Minh Ha, Tom E. Lewis, Carman Mascia and Kha Viet Tran. One *Herald Sun* critic described it as 'high energy musical theatre'. [151] Carlin also commissioned Melissa Reeves, author of *In Cahoots*, to write a show for younger audiences. She developed *The Emperors New Clothes*, based on the traditional fairy story but with a new twist. Carlin describes the play as half way between *Once Upon a World* and *In Cahoots* - using Reeves' satirical wit but employing slapstick elements.

Carlin relinquished the role of Artistic Director towards the end of 1994 to redirect his energies towards film and television. Rosemary Myers was appointed towards the end of 1994 but did not direct her first show until 1995. There were successful return seasons of two of David Carlin's earlier productions: *Blabbermouth* by Mary Morris and *The Emperor's New Clothes*. *Blabbermouth* was redirected by Carlin with a new cast: Jayne Bayley, Mike Bishop, Sue Giles, Francis Greenslade, Danny Nash, Frances O'Connor and Carole Patullo. Kim Carpenter redesigned the play for a season at the Fairfax Studio at the Arts Centre. The *Herald-Sunday* critic, Chris Boyd wrote: '*Blabbermouth* is to children's theatre what the Simpsons is to cartoons. *Blabbermouth* is good natured, appealing, wise and tremendously enjoyable.' [152] *The Emperor's New Clothes* toured Victorian schools as well as Brisbane, Darwin and Alice Springs on a Playing Australia grant. [153]

During his time as Artistic Director, Carlin revived Arena as a theatre company as opposed to primarily a schools' touring company. His collaborations with the MTC and a number of freelance artists lifted the public profile of Arena. The two shows that he directed for schools were smaller in scale. His decision to employ actors on a show-by-show basis provided flexibility and allowed him to create special actor/production synergies as in *Once Upon a World*. Most of the theatre based shows Carlin directed were performed outside of the Napier Street theatre. The management of this venue was a continuing strain on the company.

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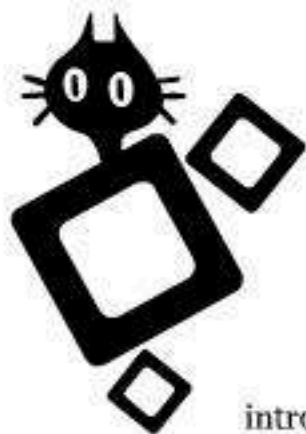
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Towards the end of 1994 Rosemary Myers replaced David Carlin as Artistic Director. Prior to this Myers had been working as Artistic Director of Student Theatre at The University of Melbourne. She had a history in Theatre for Young People as a former member of the Woolly Jumpers, based at the Mill Community Theatre in Geelong. Myers had trained at Deakin University, and like her predecessors Chaplin and Ciszewska, she had worked with James McCaughey. [154] At both Melbourne and the 'Woollies' she was actively engaged in group-devised work. In her position at the University, Myers also demonstrated a commitment to contemporary production techniques and plays based on primary research about historical or contemporary issues. *The Princess Ida Parlour*, for example, focused on the contribution of the first group of women to attend The University of Melbourne.

Myers' appointment at Arena offered a significant opportunity to refine the artistic style she began to explore in her previous positions. She recalls that she had been interested in Arena Theatre Company as the flagship company for young people, while she was working with the regional company Woolly Jumpers: 'We always had this perception that we were like country cousin cousins to Arena Theatre Company which was the big city-based company.' [155] At that time she had already considered the kind of work she would like to do at Area should the opportunity arise: work that connected contemporary theatre and popular culture because Myers wanted to create 'the kind of work that interested young people'. [156]

At the time of Myers' appointment Shirley Sydenham was Chair of the Arena Board. John Cheshire retired from the Board after many years and within the next year new members with varying expertise were appointed: Grant Stephenson from Anderson Consulting, Linda Sproul from Museum Victoria and Ann Galt, an accountant. Jennifer Barry was appointed to the position of General Manager at about the same time as Myers' appointment. Pam Trannore also joined the Arena staff as Office Manager. Rod Poole left the position of the venue manager of the Arena Theatre in Napier Street and was replaced by Trudy Hayter.

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When Myers was appointed to the position of Artistic Director, the 1995 program was already in place. This gave Myers the opportunity to focus on exploring avenues for the funding that was necessary for the type and scale of work she wanted to create. She built on her connections and experiences at Melbourne for her first production as Arena. Myers had worked with Anita Punton on *The Princess Ida Parlour*. They collaborated again at Arena to create *Electro Diva*, a documentary play about the life of pioneer Florence Violet McKenzie, the first Australian woman to qualify as an electrical engineer. Florence was a 'quietly determined woman' [157] who had joined the Navy during World War II as a member of the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps and developed an on-going correspondence with Albert Einstein.

Electro Diva, written by Anita Punton and the Arena ensemble, was presented in thirty-five scenes by performers Carole Patullo, Robert Lyon, Maria Theodarkis and Fiona Todd. The show was designed by Jacqui Everitt, with music composed by Hugh Covill. While the play was based on history, the treatment at Napier Street Theatre was contemporary, with rock music, banks of television monitors, and a huge painting of a circuit board. This first play marked the emergence of the artistic style Myers was to consolidate at Arena - contemporary work with high technical values that also engaged with popular culture. But Myers noted in her report on the production: 'The complex staging use of video and large PA system made the schools tour of the show difficult and exhausting. For me it raised questions about the logistics of mounting a production that needs to work in both a theatre and a school hall.' [158]

Myers' artistic vision for Arena was clear and based on her extensive experience:

I spent so long touring around with the Woolly Jumpers and had strong ideas about what young audiences were interested in and what excited them. [159]

After *Electro Diva*, Myers assessed the challenges and costs of running a touring company, and recognised that it was inappropriate to overload actors with more they could reasonably take with them on the road. She also realised that Arena was 'spreading itself too thin' and did not have sufficient resources to be concurrently running programs for lower primary, upper primary as well as lower and upper secondary. [160]



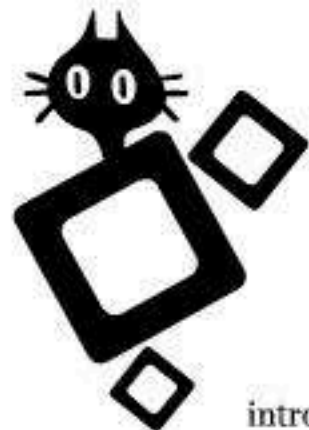
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Over the next three years, Myers sought new ways of responding to young audiences, in part looking for different ways to ensure young people had access to theatre. She developed an artistic policy that Area would develop two kinds of productions: theatre shows with high technical and production values and touring shows which were 'raw' with a pared back aesthetic style. In part this vision was a pragmatic response to the newly corporatised approach to the arts which developed in Victoria under the leadership of Jeff Kennett. Corporate planning was now an issue: three-year funding cycles, rather than annual funding turnover, were now in place. Myers' aim was to develop projects with a longer gestation period where she could implement her fascination with interdisciplinary work and technical production. Fortunately, new funding opportunities opened up at this time, including the Digital Media Fund (formerly Film Victoria) the Australia Council's New Media funding and Cinemedia funding.

In this period, the Arena Board and General Manager Jennifer Barry were assessing the costs of running a venue as well as a production company. Barry was a key figure in Arena's new financial directions, including the search for new funding sources and the financial demands of Napier Street Theatre. Barry and Myers looked to these new sources of funding to supplement base funding from the Australia Council and Arts Victoria. For the 1994-5 funding round Arena received \$172,000 from the Australia Council and \$130,000 from Arts Victoria, amounts well in excess of its Theatre In Education competitors. Two key regional Theatre In Education companies, Ballarat's Barnstorm and the Woolly Jumpers closed in 1995 for lack of Government funding. [161]

In 1996, Myers implemented her signature artistic style for Arena with an ambitious creative development project entitled *AnthroPOPtrilogy*. She had three collaborators on this project: Bruce Gladwin with whom she had worked at the Woolly Jumpers; Hugh Covill, with whom she performed in a pop group, the Band of Hope; and writer and playwright Julianne O'Brien who had worked on previous Arena shows and trained with Myers at Deakin University. The first play in the *AnthroPOPtrilogy*, *Autopsy*, was based on a lengthy research project with young people: a 'kind of coming together of anthropology and popular culture', the research involved surveys with a hundreds of people contacted through newspaper advertisements and phone books on issues ranging from 'whitegoods to religion,' [162] work, relationships and the role of art; 'crazy stuff!' [163]

The play begins with a serious accident and then focuses on the challenges faced by Louise, the central character, who has to decide whether to turn off her brain-dead boyfriend's life support systems. Louise is also coping with a number of other issues in her working life in a scientific laboratory, including conflict with Gregor and an on-line relationship with co-worker James. A dissection project is being undertaken in the lab where Louise works; this was theatrically represented through a projection slide-show of cross sections of the human body. *Autopsy* interrogates relationships at work as Louise and her fellow lab workers struggle to communicate effectively. The dramatic scenes were short, carefully juxtaposed and punctuated by music. The set, designed by Mary Kozic as a soft sculpture with inflatable projections of a brain and a heart, exploited the possibilities of new theatre technologies. Ben Cobham of Bluebottle Productions managed both the lighting and production needs. Arena was awarded an Inaugural Victoria Commission for *Autopsy*, which toured nationally in 1997 under a Playing Australia grant and internationally to North America in 1998. The *Vancouver Courier* described *Autopsy* as 'an exciting cutting edge collage of sensory stimuli that addresses, in little more than an hour, life, death, love, sex, loneliness and alienation in today's speeded up world'. [164]

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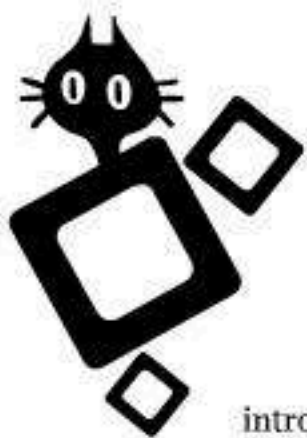
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Parallel with the experimentation exhibited through *AnthroPOPtrilology*, Arena also produced some low budget workshop shows for schools' touring. *Dr Dog* (1995) based on a storybook, was a performance and workshop show for primary school children. *Bad Hair Day* was written by director Sue Giles following two weeks of creative development with cast members David Pidd, Jim Russell and Stayci Taylor. *Bad Hair Day*, a group-devised work based on a school student who was told to cut his long hair, investigated issues of discrimination and youth culture. It toured schools in term three in 1996 and term two in 1997. *Bad Hair Day* began with a 20-minute performance that allowed audiences to suggest directions and experience the actors improvising and creating work in front of them.

Rosemary Myers directed the next 1996 production, an adaptation of Jeff Raglus's book *Schnorky the Wave Puncher*, by comedian Sue-Ann Post. The central character Schnorky is a 'surfin' non-conformist, subvertin' environmentalist disowned by the townsfolk of Bodgey Head,' [165] a wild surfer who lives with his dog Spider in a boatshed. Despite some disapproval from the conservative community about his unconventional lifestyle, Schnorky becomes the local hero. The local kids, of course, see Schnorky's positive characteristics, especially Bert (short for Roberta), who has aspirations to win the local surf competition.

Schnorky the Wave Puncher! opened at Napier Street Theatre on September 21 with a set designed by Raglus evoking 3D images of the wacky cartoon figures and landscapes in the original book. It featured 'a large cartoon map on the floor of the Town of Bodgey Head, gorgeously painted surfboards with trees and music by Frank Wood of Lano and Woodley and plenty of jokes about surfing and bodily functions'. [166] The cast included Bruce Gladwin, Noel Jordan, Maria Theodorakis and Katrina Stowe as Schnorky. Kate Herbert described Rose Myers' direction as having a 'roustabout physical style with much poppy music, oodles of tumbling and balancing and a kooky cast of broad caricatures. [167] With *Schnorky*, Myers initiated the simpler style of touring shows. *Schnorky* could be performed in a small performance space (10mtrs x 10mtrs), using natural or fluorescent light or a simple wash and required only four actors and a production manager. *Schnorky* toured nationally (to Sydney and Queensland) and internationally (to Canada).

In 1996 Arena celebrated its 30th year and Rachel Griffiths agreed to become the Patron for the year. [168] There were some administrative changes: Nicole Beechey left the Company and was replaced for a short time by Angela Pamic as Technical Manager and Marcia Ferguson and Jane Allen both left the Arena Board. Arena ended 1996 with a small deficit of \$5,000 and the decision was made to vacate Napier Street Theatre in June of the next year.

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There were two creative developments in 1996 in preparation for the 1997 season: *Peter Pan* and *Mass*. The Arena artists Sue Giles, Pam Laversha, Genevieve Morris, Hugh Covill, Ian Pidd and Rose Myers spent four days in Geelong working with Back to Back Theatre, a company of intellectually disabled actors. Together they created an adaptation of an abridged version of the JM Barrie classic. [169] The show opened on April 2, 1997 at the Fairfax Studio, Melbourne Arts Centre, as part of the Melbourne Comedy Festival. *Peter Pan*, featuring a set that metamorphosed from the Darlings' house to a Pirate Ship, had a limited season at the Melbourne Arts Centre and the Geelong Arts Centre.

Mass, the sequel to *Autopsy*, opened on August 21 1997 at the Universal Theatre in Fitzroy. The program, which describes the show as 'part docu-drama, rock concert and installation' claims: '*Mass* is an unnerving and humorous story of human pack animals guided by the primal instinct to possess, hoard and survive'. [170] The plot revolves around two corporate office workers (Bruce Gladwin and Fiona Todd) who decide to have sex in a photo booth on a railway platform on their way to work. This sexual encounter, which results in pregnancy, is the beginning of a long protracted legal battle for the custody of the child. *Mass* interrogated a raft of issues, including consumerism and materialism with a focus on the commodification of the child born out of the careless sexual encounter. It asked 'Who owns it? Who pays for it?' The multimedia approach to this production demonstrated the new house style and involved collaboration between actors, artists, designers, digital artists, musicians, and a dramaturg. *Mass* further explored projection techniques and inflatable sets used in earlier shows and was the first partnership between 'kinetic artists' Pete Circuit and Daniel Crooks and Arena Theatre Company. The music was written by Hugh Covill and performed by the Band of Hope: Rosemary Myers, Bruce Gladwin and Hugh Covill.

In 1997, Arena relocated from Napier Street to new premises in the North Melbourne Town Hall precinct. According to Myers, the decision to vacate Napier Street Theatre, which had been an administrative millstone for Arena, offered exciting possibilities for identifying new venues that might accommodate Arena's new vision. [171]

General Manager Jennifer Barry left Arena at the end of 1996 and was replaced by Vanessa Rouse whose background was in film administration. Rouse was involved in the relocation to North Melbourne and active in pursuing new funding sources. Trudy Hayter supervised the move to new premises. In this year Arena also secured triennial funding from the Australia Council and solicitor Allan Watt joined the Board at the beginning of 1998.

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Panacea, the third part of *AnthroPOPtrilogy*, was launched as part of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts on October 16, 1998 and performed in the former Police Garage in Russell Street. Devised by Rose Myers and Bruce Gladwin, and written by Julianne O'Brien and David Carlin, with music composed by Hugh Covill, *Panacea* was described as an '80 minute multimedia extravaganza'. [172] It featured an animated film by kinetic artists Daniel Crooks and Pete Circuit using stop motion techniques and computer post-production. The play was inspired by the story of Jorg Sieves, a young boy who died of medical complications resulting from the systematic doping of young athletes in East Germany in the 1970s. [173] Sieves' heart grew at a disproportionate rate, until it exploded. *Panacea* explored the personal and political world of drugs in sport and the pursuit of physical perfection.

In *Panacea*, 11 year old Axel (Brandon Burns) is training for the 1974 Moscow Olympics and drowns as a result of performance enhancing steroids. Two other stories are woven into the plot: Petra (Genevieve Morris) is a swimmer who experienced success but at a cost as she is now feral and drug addicted. Shelley (Fiona Todd) is an Australian swimmer who believes she was cheated at the Moscow Olympic Games by the use of drugs. Ironically Shelley now relies on cosmetic surgery to assist her in maintaining physical perfection and has signed a contract with *New Idea* to display her \$20,000 breast implants. As one critic noted: 'Both East and West are shown to be awash with manufactured images, where athletes are the creations of medicine or corporations and sport fields are laboratories or boardrooms.' [174]

Panacea, with its budget of \$250,000, part of which came from Cinemedia, represented the ambitious theatre productions that were the focus of Myers' vision for Arena and relied on the Vanessa Rouse's success in attracting new funding. Cinemedia approached Arena to be part of a consortium (with Chunky Move and Not Yet It's Difficult) exploring back-end royalty payments and new media delivery. Arena researched a project in which the company would develop the products for the project, including a documentary, an audio-CD, an educational CD ROM and a cinema advertisement (from animation in the show), all relating to the production. It was a site-specific piece on two levels with roll down screens and an interface between the digital projections and the live actors on stage. Animator Daniel Crooks suggested: 'the aim is to integrate projection and dance and music into a symbiotic whole that blows everyone away – a fusion of drama and film'. The set was alive with inflatables emerging out of the screens on stage, including the image of an exploding heart. With its fusion of performance art, technology, and image saturation, *Panacea* was more successful than the earlier shows and received good reviews: 'Rose Myers direction has a slick, pop-cultural style tapping into television, funky dance-music and issues based theatre. *Panacea* is her most successful production and demonstrates the mature development of her aesthetic.' [175]

There is little doubt that the *AnthroPOPtrilogy*, culminating in *Panacea*, introduced Melbourne audiences to a new 'hybrid theatre form combining video, computer graphics, amplified music, miked voices and fragmented narrative.' [176] 1998 was a high point for the Company in many ways. Three weeks before the show opened Arena was advised that it was to receive triennial funding of \$185,000 from the Australia Council. [177]

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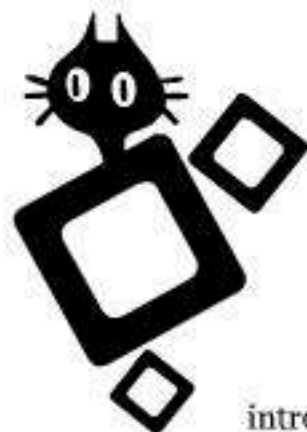
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Oblong, described as 'an original show for three to ten year olds of the 1990s who are hip to the psychedelic swirls of the '60s,' [178] was developed in 1998 and toured to Victorian primary schools, followed by seasons at the Festival Centre in Adelaide and the Awesome Festival in Perth. Designed by Jeff Raglus, and featuring popular songs by the Band of Hope, *Oblong* was a creative response to a Coast Care State Government grant to do something beyond the usual, and involved collaborating writers Rosemary Myers and Bruce Gladwin working with researchers at the Early Learning Centre at the University of Melbourne. The play follows the sensory adventures of identical twins Same and Same (and their remote control pink cat, Pussy) who are thrust from obscurity into fame after being discovered by big time talent agent Walter Can (caricatured as a big watering can). *Oblong*, 'a whacky, slapstick comedy about self discovery' [179] demonstrated 'children's capacity to think around the boxes', [180] and traced the twins' naïve but imaginative responses to a world of technology. *Oblong* had a vibrant interactive set, playfully satirising big city gadgetry, including a 'Thing'-like room service hand that pops out of the wall in their hotel room. *Oblong* was presented at the Sydney Opera House (1999), 27ACromwell Road South Yarra (1999, Brisbane's Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood (2002) and the Wickid Kids Festival in Melbourne (2002). *Oblong* was then invited to open the Singapore International Festival for Children (3-8 March 2004) and was performed at the Jubilee Hall, Raffles Hotel.

In 1999 Arena won the prestigious Honorary President's Award of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ). In presenting the award for International Excellence, the judging panel cited Arena's multimedia approach as indicative of a new direction for theatre for young people. The panel praised:

The inspiring, provocative and experimental way in which they combine theatrical expression – film, video, projections, lighting, music – looking for a new theatrical language appeals to young people in our modern time. [181]

1999 saw various changes to Arena staffing with Katherine Crawford Grey replacing Vanessa Rouse as General Manager early in the year. Subsequently Pam Trannore left and was replaced by Brad McDonald with a new portfolio to work on Development and Publicity.

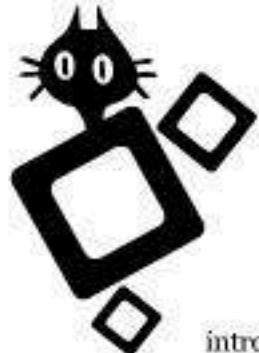
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With the artistic development of *Chronic* created by writer Dion Teasdale, Arena began to integrate young people into their performances, and established the process of using a steering committee of young people. Part fantasy and part documentary, *Chronic* investigated young people living with serious illness through the life story of Cystic Boy from his birth to his suicide at 18. The artistic team spent ten weeks in Geelong working in the Geelong Hospital and the final production was performed by the young participants on October 28-30, 2000. In 2000 *Chronic* was awarded the VicHealth Award for Community Participation in association with the Paediatric and Adolescent Support Service (PASS).

There were significant changes to the Arena Board at the 2000 Annual General Meeting. Shirley Sydenham retired, along with Anne Galt and Grant Stephenson while Campion Descent, Rosemary Hawke and Lisa Shaw were welcomed to the Board. Catherine Jones was appointed to the position of General Manager in 2001, replacing Katherine Crawford Gray. With her broadbased experience in festival management and as Artistic Coordinator of Queensland Theatre Company, Jones was well-equipped to consolidate Arena's business systems and processes. Nina Bonacci was appointed to the Arena staff in February 2002 to replace Brad McDonald; her role involved attracting corporate sponsorship and facilitating audience access.

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In 2000 Arena took another step forward in the production of high-powered, large-scale multi-media productions. Julianne O'Brien was commissioned to write a new play, under the working title of *Girl One*, which was to draw on the true-life files of a young woman who grew up in Government care during the 1970s. In part, the creative development was fuelled by the debates surrounding the contemporary privatisation of prison and anecdotal evidence about young wards of the state. The final outcome, *Eat Your Young*, was staged for the 2000 Adelaide Festival [182] and was subsequently performed in Melbourne, [183] Canberra, Brisbane and Sydney throughout 2001, and toured to the Taipei International Arts Festival and at the University Cultural Centre Theatre, Singapore International Arts Festival in 2001.

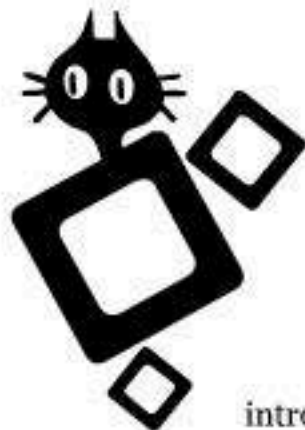
Eat Your Young tells the story of the three Bird children, Buddy (Christopher Brown), Mary (Kate Denborough) and Ava (Emma Hawkins) who have been made wards of the state after their father is sent to prison and their mother is charged with neglect. The children are incarcerated and monitored by electronic surveillance in a futuristic state run institution. Implanted with behaviour monitoring computer chips, the children are exposed to a regime of reward and punishment through simulated reality. Floor to ceiling screens circle the characters on stage with the huge faces of the controlling adults, including the mother state Childress (Margaret Cameron), projected onto the screens. Through a dramatisation of the classic struggle between the individual and the totalitarian state, the production follows the children's resistance and overthrow of the system as a malfunction in the technology offers the youngest child access to the psyche of the caring but flawed social worker Francis Tapp (Merfyn Owen).

With considerable funding from Cinemedia, technology was the focus of the play in terms of both story and production values. One challenge was to find a means of integrating the two dimensionality of film into the three dimensional theatre space. As *Lowdown* critic Laurie Webb notes:

As the screens revolve to encircle the performance space they become very much an interactive part of the children's daily mechanically monitored environment as well as cleverly affording the onlooker opportunity to gain alternative perspectives presented in the storyline. ... Hugh Covill's futuristic digital surround sound and Philip Lethlean's light complete the experience of the children's claustrophobic and lifeless world. [184]

At times, as critic Kirsten Krauth noted, the screens faced off in a showdown or overlap, 'a sensuous merging'. [185]

Eat Your Young also maintained a live performance energy with highly physicalised performances by the key players and theatrical imagery such as the ring of broken crockery circling the stage, 'which six year old Ada crunches and smashes underfoot, a reminder of un-happier times, the fragility and brokenness of a disconnected childhood.' [186] *Eat Your Young* was well reviewed in all cities as a 'courageous concept where popular culture, performance, design and brilliant technical energy intersect to create one powerful integrated whole' [187] in which 'technology has genuinely liberated extraordinary powerful creative energies'. [188]

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In 2000, Arena won a tender to design a multimedia installation for the [North Coal Bunker](#), part of the historic Spotswood Pumping Station at the Scienceworks Museum. [189] The aim was to make the building more accessible. In collaboration with Bluebottle 3 Production Company, Arena designed a walk-through multimedia installation evoking the history of the Pumping Station through the stories of those who had worked there, with moving projections, lighting design and an immersive surround sound composition. Approximately 300,000 people experience the work annually. Linda Sproul assumed the position of Chairperson of the Arena Board in early 2001. Arts educator Kate Donelan and corporate accountant Gerard Healy also joined the Arena Board.

2001 was a busy year for Arena as *Eat Your Young* toured throughout Australia and into Asia and *Schnorky* travelled to the Vancouver Come Out Festival. It also saw the premier of [Australian Marriage Act](#), a new in-schools touring show written and directed by Marcia Ferguson with music composed by Byron Scullin and a set design by Simon Tyrrel. *Australian Marriage Act* was based on a newspaper article about a pregnant teenage girl who wanted to get married but who was underage: at 17, Amy Willis was forced under the Australian Marriage Act to turn to the courts for permission to marry her 22 year-old fiancé before she turned 18. After the original application to marry was turned down, she appealed to the High Court and won her case. The article noted: 'the level of public support had been enormous... under federal Statute a precedent has been set... Miss Willis and her husband-to-be were elated'. [190]

Australian Marriage Act dealt with issues of the age consent, teenage sexuality, privacy and the law and was designed as a economical show: three actors, Kim Leeanda Wilson, Georgia Power and Anthea Davis operated the sound track through the use of wristwatches, the set comprised of three milk-crate like objects, and no lighting was required for the performance. Such innovations solved the difficulties of constraining the cost of in-schools shows. *Australian Marriage Act* opened on March 29, 2001 and completed in-schools tours in Queensland and Victoria in 2001 and again in 2002.

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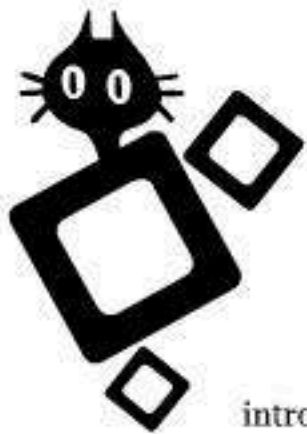
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After two busy touring years, Rose Myers was keen to undertake a significant large-scale, in theatre production; she also wanted to allow for an artistic development showing to a large youth audience in the Myer Music Bowl. *Play Dirty*, co-written with Stephen Sewell, premiered on October 16 as part of the 2002 Melbourne Festival. It was the culmination of a creative development which involved hundreds of students during the 2002 Next Wave Festival under the working title of *Petrolhead*. The development included establishing a website on which Arena published the emerging script and young people offered feedback. This site-specific show was one of the largest to be tackled by Arena with a huge production team. It was also very expensive with funding from the Australia Council, the Victorian Commission and Cinemedia. General Manager Catherine Jones raised funds for the extensive audience development aspect of *Play Dirty*. Over 600 to 800 young people saw the show with around 2,000 accessing the website and leaving feedback.

Play Dirty is set at the 2002 Australian 'Mega Moto Mania' - the competition set to decide the Australian champion of the fastest growing, hardest edge extreme sport, an amalgam of motocross and motocross freestyle jumping. Newcomers Troy Hill and Dougie Digwell, find themselves pitted against reigning champion Mad Pete in what fast becomes a gladiatorial style battle to the almost end. Competing on the anniversary of his father's death, Troy Hill is confronted with personal and professional challenges. On a rite of passage journey, Troy struggles to separate himself from his anxious mother and identify as a man.

Miranda, a devoted groupie of the scene, is pursuing her own dream of stardom as she uses the championship as a backdrop for her Big Brother audition tape. *Play Dirty* explores the human desire for acceptance and recognition in a society where the media defines our expectations and emotions. The introduction of the Miranda character picked up on the significant role that girls play in the motorcross culture through the Miss Motor Cross functions and as 'groupies'. *Play Dirty* fused rapid image feedback, music, physical theatre and live freestyle motorcross stunts. It explored themes of risk, stardom and the contemporary male condition. In this production, Arena took risks with both the staging of the production and its content: the company received some criticism for the suggestion that the protagonist's father has committed suicide. *Play Dirty* won the 2002 Drama Victoria Award for the Best Production by a Theatre Company for Young People.

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During 2002, Arena began discussions with Western Australian company, Woodside Energy and subsequently developed a partnership focused on the development of a new touring production for young people. *Outlookers* was developed with the input of Woodside Energy's staff and their families, in conjunction with upper primary school students, and work in progress showings and an interactive website. Emerging playwright Lally Katz was commissioned to work with Rosemary Myers on the script. *Outlookers* follows the adventures of two unlikely and reluctant friends who are thrown together through a school project on endangered species. Tina, bereft when her best friend leaves school, is forced to team up with Tom, a classmate obsessed with the latest collectible craze from McFaddy's fast food: Outlookers. The young duo begin their quest to save the animal kingdom when they receive an urgent SOS from the plastic toys and find themselves travelling to the Otway Ranges where the animals have been stripped of their life energy. The set, designed by Jeff Raglus, was made up of inflatable pieces as big as four meters long and two metres high. These formed a backdrop for the production, representing both the Otway ranges forest and a zoo. *Outlookers* opened in term four 2003, with a tour of primary schools in regional Victoria and Melbourne before touring New Zealand in March 2005.

The production of *Gamegirl* came as a concept from the Queensland Theatre Company and the technical development for this show began in 2003. Writer Maryanne Lynch spent some time working on the show in Queensland before she began working with Arena. Directed by Rosemary Myers, *Gamegirl* was the first show involving high technical production values created specifically for primary school children. It involved a live actor working in front of a green screen, choreographed so that it appeared as if she was within a game. The theme of the show was the seductive appeal of interactive computer games and the narrative follows a troubled young girl Lila (Jessamy Dyer) who loses herself in her hand-held 'Gamegirl'. *Gamegirl* premiered at the Arts Centre Melbourne in November 2004 and subsequently played at the Awesome Arts Festival in Perth.

Building on the success of *Chronic*, Arena decided to undertake another community arts project with young people, 'From the Ground Up', and obtained funding from VicHealth. In 2003, emerging writer Angus Cerini worked with a group of young writers recruited through the Frankston Youth Resource Centre to develop a performance script. The final script, *Confessions Of A Troubled Mind Dot Com*, was made up of three interweaving narratives about four young people linked through a school project website about confessions. The story involved a soft drink with a truth serum. *Confessions of a Troubled Mind Dot Com* involved five writers, seventeen actors, three musicians and a media artist; it was performed on July 7-9, 2005.



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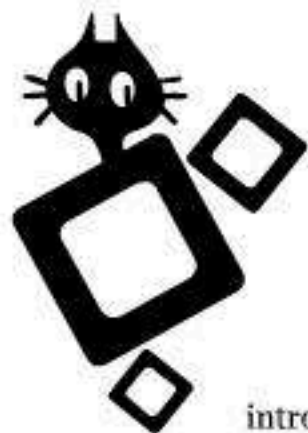
2005 saw changes to Arena staffing with Kirsten Rowbottom appointed in April 2005 and Erin Milne assuming the position of General Manager in August 2005. The new part-time position of Artistic Associate was established in 2005 with independent theatre director Chris Kohn appointed to the position. *Confessions of a Troubled Mind Dot Com* was co-directed by Chris Kohn and Christian Leavesley. Gary Chard joined the Board at the 2004 AGM. Allan Watt and Vajello Gantner both stood down from the Arena Board during 2005. Former General Manager Catherine Jones rejoined the Arena Board in early 2006.

After the considerable success of *Play Dirty*, Arena was invited to collaborate in a similar style production with Contact, a British theatre company for young people based in Manchester. The production, *SKID 180*, with a focus on BMX riders, was intended for the Culture Shock Festival at the Commonwealth Games. Beginning in 2003, Rosemary Myers and other Arena production staff undertook the lengthy script development process in Manchester where they worked with eighteen street kids. The final production, written by Mancunian, Louise Wallwein and involving four young British performers – two MBM riders and two emerging actors, was first performed in Manchester in May 2006 and opened in Melbourne on July 27, 2006 at the North Melbourne Town Hall.

SKID 180 is a story of BMX bandits in a 'scorched industrial landscape, outriding 'The Man' while seeking the secrets of their past'. McStone (Chris Mahoney) runs away from his foster family and falls in with a trio of street toughs (Curtis Cole, John Deprielle and Rachel Glendevon) who join him in his crusade to infiltrate the government building that holds the file on his genetic parents.

This high action show included high technical values and involved professional bikers performing virtuosic 'stunts' on a ramp specially constructed on the stage. [191] The sophisticated multi-media design work which provided visual echo to the riders' stunts, was undertaken by Peter Brundle of Nice Device. Wallwein's dialogue is sparse and disjointed leaving the focus on action. *Skid 180* was performed as part of Arena's fortieth birthday celebrations. One critic praised the play as a 'romantic fantasy':

Melbourne's Arena Theatre has a 40-year history of producing theatre for young people that neither patronises nor preaches to its audience. It has long provided interest for older theatregoers by confidently incorporating other media in its productions. *Skid 180* adds extreme BMX riding to the usual mix of multimedia projections, outstanding sound production and elaborate design. Its setting, unfortunately, is an Orwellian nightmare that was dated by the time 1984 rolled around. The seduction of the post-apocalyptic scenario is that it allows us to imagine starting over, free from the constraints of society and no longer subject to the fantasy of technological salvation. The ruined Earth of these stories is one of crumbling cities and deserted wastelands, in which alienated individuals fashion a rude existence from the scrapheap of their ancestors. Typically, a tyrannical regime is trying to impose order on this anarchy, but our protagonists know freedom is the only thing worth living for, and it probably will require some wicked stunts and serious attitude to attain. It's not hard to see the parallels with the teenage experience.

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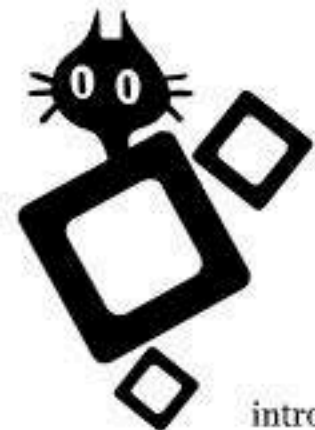
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A new schools' touring production, *Missing Link*, written by Chris Kohn and Lally Katz and directed by Chris Kohn, had it first season in April 2006. *Missing Link* addresses the issue of anonymous sperm donors and recent legislation which has given recipient access to sperm bank records. It follows the journey of three teenagers, Holly, Eddie and Calvin, as they set off on a road trip to meet the sperm donor who helped give life to Holly eighteen years ago. *Missing Link* toured schools throughout the following year.

In 2006 Myers decided to work on a notorious criminal case that had received considerable media coverage and had subsequently been used as the basis of a book, *Joe Cinque's Consolation*, by Melbourne writer Helen Garner. The case involved Australian National University law student, Anu Singh, who was convicted of killing her boyfriend Joe Cinque in 1997. After a group of their friends gathered for a dinner party, supposedly a 'send-off' for Singh who had decided to take her own life, Cinque died from a lethal cocktail of drugs injected by Singh. Singh was eventually sentenced to ten years for manslaughter after pleading reduced psychological capacity. Myers commissioned writers Lally Katz and Tom Wright and based her dramatic version of the events on newspaper reports and the imagination of the production team. Garner's book was not used as a basis for the work nor were interviews with the key protagonists in the events.

Criminology, a co-production with Malthouse Theatre, opened on August 3, 2007. It was directed by Rose Myers and Chris Kohn, designed by Anna Tregloan with the following cast: Gemma Cavoli, Jing-Xuan Chan, Simon Maiden, Bojana Novakovic, Hazem Shammass, Luke Ryan, Samantha Tolj. While Garner's work focussed on the victim, Joe Cinque and involved extensive interviews with Cinque's parents, Cinque is almost absent from the Arena's *Criminology* and it is Anu Singh and her state of mind who is central to the work. (While Cinque is physically present throughout the play, he never speaks.) The production drew on iconic personalities from the period Princess Diana, Mother Teresa and Michael Hutchence who provide a choric foil to Singh's neurosis and narcissism. *Criminology* received mixed reviews. Anna Lozynski's review was favourable:

Bojana Novakovic convincingly captures the emotional liability of her character's preoccupations with romanticising death, self-worth, bulimia, feminism and love. These themes, as well as sexuality and drug use are explored by the supporting actors in a Greek chorus style with social references to the headline events of 1997. The delivery is comical yet staggering; the social commentary clear. [197]

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Alison Crogan described *Criminology* as:

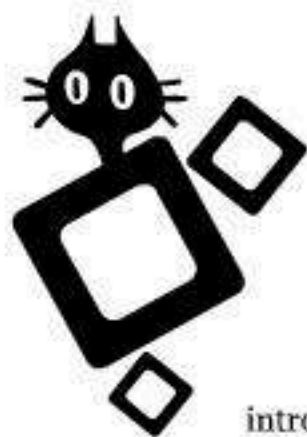
A fascinating exploration of the pathologies beneath the surface of middle class suburban Australia. This is theatre of profound semantic richness – performance, image, design and Jethro Woodward's brilliant soundscape combine to create a complex and confronting language. [[193](#)]

Cameron Woodhead from *The Age* and John Bailey from the *Sunday Age* were less positive:

Director Rosemary Myers seems defeated by the script, with direction that staggers like an alcoholic between realism and anti naturalistic devices... the show's set design, projection and visual effects are arresting, if not well integrated – unless there's a story worth telling, it's to little effect. [[194](#)]

There's much to criticise in the production. That flatness the apparent depthlessness to its insights, the needless obscenity and the drawn out narrative which repeats key motifs without adding anything new will be grating for many viewers but somehow they're intrinsic to what *Criminology* is, intentionally so or otherwise. Its not a piece you could exactly image liking but neither is it one you'll quickly forget. [[195](#)]

Late-2007 and early-2008 saw major changes to staffing at Arena Theatre Company. Rosemary Myers resigned from Arena Theatre at the end of 2007 to take up the position of Artistic Director of Adelaide's Windmill Performing Arts in 2008. In January, Jaclyn Booton was appointed to the role of Administration and Development Coordinator. In April 2008 Chris Kohn was appointed as the new Artistic Director of Arena Theatre and David Everist assumed the role of interim General Manager for the year.

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Myers final production for Arena was [Girl Who Cried Wolf](#), written by Angela Betzien. *Girl Who Cried Wolf* premiered on May 11, 2008 at the 16th ASSITEJ World Conference held in Adelaide. *Girl Who Cried Wolf* subsequently performed at the Sydney Opera House and The Arts Centre in Melbourne with performers Gemma Cavoli, Angus Cerini, Sharon Davis and Samantha Tolj.

Girl Who Cried Wolf is a rite of passage story set in a claustrophobic new housing estate in the outer suburban sprawl in an unidentified city mixing 'Lemony Snicket gothic with suburban satire in bold and imaginative proportions'. [196] Two storylines intersect in the play, that of an awkward eleven year old Laura (Gemma Cavoli) desperate to be become accepted by her peers and older girl Ada (Sharon Davis) trying to come to terms with the tragic disappearance of her younger brother. Betzien's script was the 2007 winner of the Australian Writers' Guild's prestigious Richard Wherrett Prize for Excellence in Playwriting.

The Adelaide Advertiser reviewer praised the 'spooky Vincent Price narration and the projected computer backdrops by Chris More and Peter Brundle'. This review captures the quirky and contemporary style of *Girl Who Cried Wolf*:

Freaky, funny and frightening, this slick hi-tech morality tale is wickedly good entertainment for *CSI/Without a Trace* fans. Habitual fib teller and geek Laura Black convinces snobbish Princess of Pleasant Lakes to fake her own disappearance in order to lure the latter's neglectful parents back from overseas. But things get out of hand... [197]

In her twelve years with the company, Artistic Director Rosemary Myers revolutionised and reinvigorated Arena Theatre, bringing its production techniques into the twenty-first century. She succeeded in her aim of creating a company with production values that compared with those of the flagship companies throughout the country. Supported by excellent administrators, Myers identified new sources of funding which allowed her to extend both the artistic and geographical range of Arena's work. Perhaps most significantly she instituted many national and international collaborations – with writers, composers, media artists, funding bodies, corporations, arts institutions and a range of other theatre companies, both mainstream and youth oriented. During her stewardship Myres reinvented the idea of theatre for young people and lead Arena to become one of the most highly regarded international companies dedicated to theatre for young people.