

The Ugly Duckling

Our end of year production is something for the whole family – A.A. Milne’s play *The Ugly Duckling*. Opening at Laguna Hall on October 30, with performances on October 31 and November 1, 5, 6, & 7.



Having been a keen fan of Winnie-the-Pooh for as long as I can remember, I was somewhat surprised to learn that Milne had written more than the adventures of my favourite bear and other such books – *The House at Pooh Corner*, *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We are Six*. I made my stage debut as the King in *The King’s Breakfast* in 1950, and still have the original programme. It was a traumatic experience for me, as I had to slide down the banisters and kiss the Queen. I stood at about 3 feet (we weren’t metricated at the time), and the Queen, played by a classmate named Veronica, was about a foot higher than me, so I had to have a box to stand on.

I digress. Alan Alexander Milne (pictured left) wrote more than 25 plays, even a detective novel, *The Red House Mystery*, which was severely criticized by Raymond Chandler, who wrote “The detective in the case in an insouciant amateur named Anthony Gillingman, a nice lad with a cheery eye, a cosy little flat in London, and that airy manner... The English police seem to endure him with their customary stoicism; but I shudder to think of what the boys down at the Homicide Bureau in my city would do to him.”

His father owned a private school, where H.G. Wells was a teacher. Later, when Milne became assistant editor of *Punch* magazine, which published many of his early essays and poems, Wells suggested that he turn some of his sketches into a novel, and *Lovers in London* was published in 1905. He married Dorothy de Sêlincourt in 1913 because, he said, “She laughed at my jokes”. Christopher Robin was born in 1920.

During WWI Milne served in France, where he wrote propaganda for the Intelligence services. He also found time to start writing plays. “To write a play, then, while I was a journalist seemed to me a depraved proceeding, almost as bad as going to Lord’s in the morning,” he wrote. “I thought I could write one (we all think we can), but I could not afford so unpromising a gamble. But once in the Army the case was altered. No duty now urged me to write. My job was soldiering, and my spare time was my own affair. Other subalterns played bridge and golf; that was one way of amusing oneself. Another way was to write plays.”

The horrors of war he witnessed made him yearn for the joys of childhood, and he turned to writing his now classic works. But, he said, “A ‘children’s book’ must be written, not for children, but for the author himself,” which no doubt explains why his works are so popular with adults as well as children.

Which brings us to *The Ugly Duckling*. Googling the play revealed that it definitely was or was not based on the Hans Christian Andersen story of the same title. It contains no bears, tigers, pigs or donkeys, and definitely no ducks or swans, but it is to do with the importance (or otherwise) of physical beauty.

It’s about a princess who was cursed (some would say blessed) by her godmother to be loved only for herself, not for beauty. When David Kilpatrick directed it in New York, he said “It’s a hilarious play, and I wanted it to have a life.”

Cordelia Howell’s production for Valley Artists is certainly going to give it life. The cast features the young actors of the Wollombi Valley – none are over 16. I’ll attend a rehearsal or two, and bring you more in our next issue. If you, like me, see the genius of Milne in writing as much for adults as for children, then note the dates in your diary. Definitely not to be missed!

Competition

The answer to the puzzle in our last edition is obvious when you consider their surnames:

Barbe-Nicole Cliqot Ponsardin
Louise Pommeroy
Mathilde-Emile Laurent-Perrier
Lily Bollinger
Jean-Remy Moët

Our winner is Brian Connolly, who correctly identified these as the great ladies of the champagne industry – plus one bloke. Brian's prize is the first bottle of a new wine from Noyce Brothers – a sparkling chardonnay – personally signed and numbered by the winemakers. As we go to print – or screen – bottling has not quite commenced, but the new bottle can be seen at Noyce Brothers cellar door in Wollombi.

Surprisingly, the champagne we are now accustomed to drinking is largely due to British tastes. French champagne was sickly-sweet, and destined for the Russian market, but the Poms insisted on brut. Rule Britannia!

How do you pronounce Moët? Mo-way? No way. Mo-wee? No sireee. Mo-wet? You bet!

Now for this month's question: Englishmen, including Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, do it with a feather, a custom which has, in more recent times, spread to include a few Australians – but definitely not Americans. However, the Swedish think it's silly to use a feather, and use a more technologically advanced method. What is it?

Answers to info@valleyartists.org. The first correct entry will win a worthy prize.



In 2003, the 17 judges of the Bangkok International Film Festival watched films for 64 hours 58 minutes, taking a 15 minute break after every third film. We have no such expectations of our judges.

We do ask our audience to be moderate in their behaviour. In Copenhagen doctors spent two hours separating two lovers caught in a passionate kiss in a city cinema. Their braces became entangled, and they prolonged the parting, according to one of their rescuers, because they couldn't stop laughing.

The Wollombi Valley Short Film Festival

In 1968 a young couple on their honeymoon got lost, and found themselves on a strange and very rough road. They drove on, through the smoke and ashes of a just-passed bushfire, fenceposts still smoldering, and eventually ended up at Wollombi.

This was Michael Noyce's first visit, albeit accidental, to this valley. This year, Michael will be one of the judges of the Wollombi Valley Short Film Festival.

The Noyce family has a long association with the valley, and with the arts and in particular film. They purchased their property in Milson's Arm in 1969, running cattle initially and establishing their vineyard in 2001. In the early seventies they purchased the Wollombi Tavern from Mel Jurd, and have recently opened their cellar door in Wollombi.

What have Michael Noyce and Nicole Kidman got in common? Read on.

Young brother Phillip is perhaps Australia's most successful filmmaker. *Dead Calm* made Nicole Kidman a star. In *The Saint* (1997) Michael played a CIA agent. In Australia, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* won the Australian Film Institute Award for Best Film in 2002. One of his earliest films, *Backroads*, was made partly in the Wollombi Valley, and will be screened following the entries at this year's film festival. Stay to watch and spot the locals!

Michael himself was a highly successful lawyer and businessman for forty years, before selling the business in 2004 to concentrate on some of the more important things in life. He will be joined on our judging panel by Wendy Squires and David Brown.

Wendy Squires began her career some twenty years ago with News Limited. She has worked in New York as a freelance writer. She has edited Cleo and Australian Style magazines as well as holding senior positions on Elle, Mode, Who Weekly, Madison and the Australian Women's Weekly, where she is currently associate editor.

Her friends say that a few years ago Wendy lost her mind, and became Director of Publicity for a television channel. However, her experiences there led to her first novel *The Boys' Club* – a book which, we are told, ruffled a few feathers. She's currently working on her second.

David Brown has been proclaimed "a major new voice in Australian drama". His play *Eating Icecream With Your Eyes Closed*, received best production, acting and directing awards in the 2004 Brisbane Matilda Awards.

David's play *The Estimator* won the Queensland Premier's Theatre in Public Life Award, and was produced by the Queensland Theatre Company in June 2007.

In 2007 Newcastle's Tantrum Youth Theatre commissioned David to write *Boy Called Flag* as part of their production *Riot!*, and more recently *Something Like Lost, Something Like Found*, which explores issues surrounding mental health and young people.

The Wollombi Valley Short Film Festival has been an annual event since 1998, and now attracts entries from around Australia. We can be certain that this year's winner will be well judged and reach the high standard that we have come to expect.

If you'd like to view last year's winners, or to learn more about the festival, go to our website: <http://www.valleyartists.org/index.php?page=filmfestival>.

The Last Word

Well, Art is Art, isn't it? Still, on the other hand, water is water. And east is east and west is west and if you take cranberries and stew them like applesauce they taste much more like prunes than rhubarb does. Now you tell me what you know. — *Groucho Marx*

Don't miss it!

Wollombi Valley Country Fair

November 7-8

Visit the website: <http://fair.wollombi.nsw.au/>



Coming in April 2010.

Valley Artists presents
David Williamson's
Smash hit

MONEY AND FRIENDS

To be directed by BOB PHILIPPE this play is regarded as the cleverest and wittiest that Australia's leading playwright has written.

A revealing clash between materialism and ideals, it is David Williamson at his best demonstrating as always his acute observation of the Australian character. Peter, a mathematician who is niceness itself, is in financial trouble because of his brother's bankruptcy. His neighbour Margaret, decides that he needs help from his friends, who are all wealthy. What happens is funny and confronting.

First performed in 1991 this play is found to be every bit as relevant to us in 2009/10.
Great characters and superb comedy – Don't miss it!