



Not the Programme Notes

*Being sundry items of interest about our upcoming productions and the arts in general
December 2009*

A Bright Future!

Here are some interesting statistics:

The average age of all the performers in our last production was 15.6 years. If you leave out the Barbershop Boys it was 12.3 years. The combined ages of all the other performers was half the combined ages of the Barbershop Boys.

The youngest performer was ten years old. The oldest – well, that's none of your business.

This was an important production for Valley Artists. Most of the cast and crew were new to the business – for many it was their first performance. They delivered, and in doing so proved that we have a very bright future indeed.



Valley Artists has a charter, not only to provide first class theatre for the residents of, and visitors to, this valley, but to do so by showcasing the talents of our people. It would be easy to stick with a tried and true formula, but this would not be fulfilling our charter. The involvement of the whole community is what it's about, and it's the community's involvement that makes this such a wonderful place to live.

I won't leave out the backstage crew, without whom none of it would be possible. Wonderful

sets, professional stage management. In future issues I'll be interviewing some of those people the audience glimpses only as figures in black, flitting on and off stage between scenes, feeding the company, taking care of the front-of-house – often with little more acknowledgement than their name in the

program.

That's what our sponsors make possible – we couldn't do it without them.

Of course we love our audiences too! The word is spreading, and early booking is advisable!

So we wish you all Compliments of the Season, and we look forward to sharing our talents with you with an exciting and entertaining program in 2010.

A Holiday Treat

Valley Artists is proud to present The Mad Cow Theatre Company's production of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Four performances at Laguna Hall – January 22, 23, 24, 25 at 8pm. Bookings on 4998 3419 or email to boxoffice@valleyartists.org.

The play is set in Northern Ireland, and the time is Bloody Sunday, 1972. Tensions arise between English backed Unionists and the Irish Nationalists. Guerilla warfare is resulting in an alarming rate of casualties on both sides. Among the familial fighting we witness the tale of Romeo & Juliet, whose love transcends racial hatred and displays the innocence of youth.



Director Juz McGuire says, "It's all about passion. Passion about who we are, what our identity is, and how we fit into the grand scheme of things – this is the eternal search for identity which defines our lives. It has been an honour to lead and serve such a brilliant cast of talented and dedicated young actors."

See inside for more information.

Fiona Burless reviews The Ugly Duckling



W.C. Fields said “never work with children or animals” Another of his personally attributed quotes about children was that that they should neither be seen nor heard from...ever again. I’m so glad that director Cordelia Howell ignored his churlish advice. I believe that children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way. And what a future these children have! It may not have been a picnic by any means, directing 12 children in Valley Artists’ latest production, but perhaps Cordelia had an enjoyable time of it because children are still readily in contact with their imaginations. That and having a wonderful backstage crew!

I had the advantage of seeing The Ugly Duckling in the company of small children. My “advantage”, may have been interpreted by other audience participants as a “disadvantage”: “Where are the ducks?” one accompanying three year old whined. However, this Ugly Duckling, a comedy by A. A. Milne, had nothing to do with the Hans Christian Andersen story. “When are they getting married? I want to see the wedding.” one of the four year olds bleated when the lights came up on the fait accompli. “Can I go home now?” another mercifully young child cried out. Ahem.

Together, we were charmed by the performances of Hannah Udodzick, Lauren Boxall, Harmony Forest, Ziggy Russ Hartland and Reanna Ede in A.A.Milne’s verse-fable King Hilary and the Beggarman. These budding actors - bursting with enthusiasm, enjoying them selves immensely and providing Valley Artists with a bright future – comprised a combination of new-comers to the stage and those returning to the stage for the first time since Valley Artists’ Wind In The Willows. As the last line of the poem said, “Whatever fortune brings, don’t be afraid of doing things.” Well done girls.

Proving that Valley Artists provides a creative outlet for performers at all levels, we were crooned to by the enormously entertaining Barbershop Boys: Tony Palfreeman; Peter McCloy; Graham Jackson and Ray Smith. While not quite the usual 4 part harmony expected with quartets of that nature, they were not exactly singing in unison either. Oh, come on boys, you can take it! I loved it.

After intermission, we were treated to an enjoyable performance of The Ugly Duckling. The King (Adi Ringma, with his wonderful comic timing and somewhat mesmerizing grace) and the Queen (Sally Jackson, a fitting ruler of the stage) had a hard time trying to marry off their “ugly” daughter, Princess Camilla (not at all ugly and utterly enchanting Rene Butterworth). Her beauty eluded all, including the ever tactful Chancellor (delightful Alysha Noon,).

So, to meet the next suitor, the Princess Camilla disguised herself as her maid Dulcibella (an ideal Edna Panarotto), while Dulcibella pretended to be Princess Camilla. Meanwhile, Prince Simon (Sam Williams, with beguiling charisma) masqueraded himself as his servant Carlo, and dressed Carlo (regal and charming Max Kamatsos) as the prince.

Luckily, the real prince met the real princess, found her beautiful, and they revealed their true identities to each other. The Princess also revealed the story of a gift from her great aunt that would make everyone ignorant of her real beauty - so that she wouldn’t grow up vain - until the day she met her one true love. The king was perplexed as to why Princess Camilla appeared suddenly beautiful, while the audience could see that it is because of the blessing/course coming to fruition. I was delighted by the story every bit as much as I was by the performers.

Combined with Giles Tester’s creative set design and construction, Neville Newman’s illuminating technical design and installation, Linda Marsh’s top drawer Wardrobe design, and countless hours put in by other backstage crew, Cordelia, producer Jordis Pointu and Stage Manager Karen Butler Hues brought us a very compelling production.

Well done Cordelia, well done children, well done Barbershop Boys. Well done Valley Artists.

- Fiona Burless.

The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet



Romeo and Juliet was one of Shakespeare's earlier plays – first performed c1595. It was a fairly well-known story – its source was a poem written by Arthur Brooke – *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, published in 1562.

In 1593, playhouses in London were closed by the plague, which killed some 15,000 Londoners – more than 10 per cent of the population. Edward Alleyn, a major player on the London circuit and a direct rival of Shakespeare's company, while on tour wrote to his wife instructing her 'every evening throwe water before your door and in your bakesid (back of the house) and haue in your windowes good store of rue and herbe of grace.'

Shakespeare admired and imitated Christopher Marlowe, his main competitor. But Marlowe died after being stabbed in the eye in a brawl. Perhaps the death of his rival encouraged Shakespeare - his great lyrical plays – *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *Richard II* were all written in the next four years. Shakespeare was now the principal playwright in London.

The cast of the first performance included some of the great actors of the day. Richard Burbage played Romeo, Will Kempe played Peter. Shakespeare himself played a number of parts including the Friar and the Chorus. But his favourite part was Mercutio, the bawdy friend of Romeo. According to John Dryden, 'Shakespeare showed the best of his skill in Mercutio, and he said himself that he was forced to kill him in the third act, to prevent being killed by him.' The role of Mercutio is rather incompatible with the lovers' tragedy which is the main theme of the play, he had to go to allow the play to progress to its romantic conclusion.

Of course the plot is now well known. My *Folio* edition of the play notes that 'Within the framework of public life Romeo and Juliet play out their brief tragedy: in the first act they meet and declare their love...; in the second they arrange to marry in secret; in the third, after Romeo's banishment, they consummate their marriage and part; in the fourth Juliet drinks a sleeping draught prepared by Friar Lawrence so that she may escape marriage to Paris and, after waking in the family tomb, run off with Romeo; in the fifth, after Romeo, believing her to be dead, has taken poison, she stabs herself to death.'

So who was responsible for the death of the two young lovers?

Would you believe that it was the plague? When Friar Lawrence's letter explaining that Juliet has taken a sleeping potion failed to reach Romeo in Mantua, it was because the bearer of the letter is suspected of having been exposed to the plague, and is locked up in a house in Verona.

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is the only play in which the plague plays a major part, it was an important part of Shakespeare's life. He survived a major outbreak in Stratford in his first year, and perhaps developed an immunity which served him well. One in fifteen of the population of Stratford had been infected in 1564.



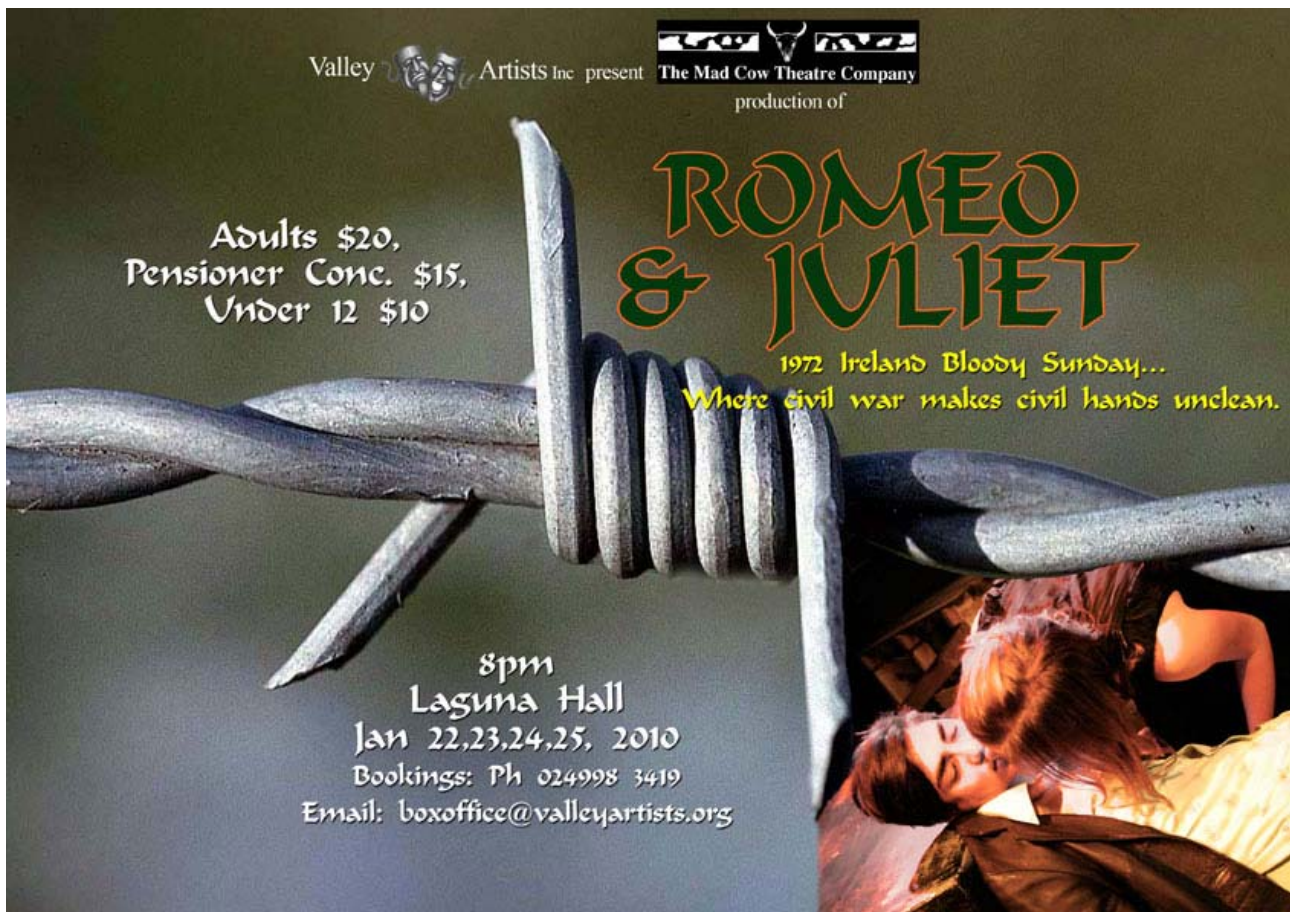
Shakespeare dedicated his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* to the Earl of Southampton, and it may be that Southampton, in appreciation gave Shakespeare refuge from the plague in his country house at Tichfield, in Hampshire. Certainly Shakespeare valued his sponsorship, subsequently dedicating *The Rape of Lucrece* to the young Earl.

At the time, according to one source 'there died above sixteen hundred a week in London'. Mercutio's dying curse, 'A plague on both your houses!' is both literal and metaphoric.

Romeo and Juliet was immensely popular with students during the seventeenth century. A copy of the 1623 First Folio edition acquired by Oxford's Bodleian Library was so damaged by students apparently especially fond of the balcony scene that the curators removed it.

I don't know if modern day students share this enthusiasm for the original play, but modern versions and variations certainly continue to hit the mark – think *West Side Story* and recent movie versions.

Now *The Mad Cow Theatre Company* sets the play in the Ireland of 1972 and the events of Bloody Sunday. Their production was a hit on the Central Coast during the October school holidays this year, and now we're privileged to be able to see it here in the Valley. Not to be missed!



Other Dates for Your Diary

Our AGM will be held in the Wollombi Cultural Centre on February 7 at 4pm.

Money & Friends, the first Valley Artists production for 2010, has been rescheduled. It will open Friday 2 July with performances on July 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Interested in being involved in this production – either as cast or crew? We'll be inviting your participation early next year, and rehearsals start 20 April.

W.C. Fields was asked whether he'd ever had the DTs since coming to Hollywood. "I don't know," he replied. "There's no way of knowing where the DTs leave off and Hollywood begins."

Our Competition

You will recall that our last quiz question was to do with birds making their nest in a horse's mane. So far there have been no correct answers, but one has come pretty close. So I'm holding the results over until next issue, in the hope that at least one respondent, given suitable encouragement, will come up with the correct answer.

A clue: Think proverbs.

The cricket season is upon us, and while this anecdote refers to hockey, I feel that it's quite appropriate:

The first testicular guard (box) was used in hockey in 1874 and the first helmet was used in 1974. That means it took 100 years for men to realize that their brain is also important.

Not the Programme Notes is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of Valley Artists, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. All correspondence to info@valleyartists.org.