

## **The SBW Foundation Archives Theatre Programme Collections**

The recent acquisition of a collection of theatre programmes donated by Miss Rita White of Mittagong has contributed significantly to the importance of the SBW Foundation Performing Arts Collection as a research resource for the study of Australian theatre and the theatrical arts. The SBW Foundation Archives had its origins in the donation of the personal papers of ABC Radio personality and “Showman” John West, who, in June 1991, presented his invaluable collection of press clippings, research papers, correspondence, long play gramophone recordings and theatre programmes to the Seaborn, Broughton and Walford Foundation.

While the John West theatre programmes have been maintained as an integral part of the John West Archives, the SBW Foundation has also continued to acquire and preserve an extensive and separate collection of theatre programmes of Australian, British and American theatrical productions donated to the Foundation by Friends of the Foundation and members of the public.

A third substantial and very significant collection of theatre programmes was acquired in January 2006 from the University of New South Wales Library, which had originally acquired the collection from the Dennis Wolanski Library of the Performing Arts following its closure by the Opera House Trust in 1996. The acquisition of the Dennis Wolanski Library collection of theatre programmes by the SBW Foundation was accompanied by an extensive collection of press clippings on Australian theatre and performing arts, a substantial collection of books and journals, and a card catalogue which facilitates ready access to the programmes, press clippings and theatre journals down to 1996.

Numerous other smaller collections of theatre programmes have been acquired as an integral part of the archives and personal papers of theatrical organisations and individuals, including the Marionette Theatre of Australia, Judith Johnson Publicity Pty Ltd (1983 – 2006), and Performing Lines, of which Wendy Blacklock is General Manager.

The abovementioned theatre programme collections, which together must constitute one of the largest in Australia, are an extraordinary source of information for students and scholars of Australian theatre, and are frequently consulted by university students enrolled in higher degrees. Most recently, a PhD candidate enrolled with the University of Sydney made extensive use over several days of the press clipping collections while undertaking research on the history of the Ensemble Theatre. The collections have also been used by students enrolled with the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) for undertaking research on early Australian actors such as Nellie Stewart, Dame Judith Anderson, Lottie Lyell, Peter Finch and Roy Rene.

Theatre programmes are a rich source of biographical information and pictorial illustration on theatre personnel, including actors, directors, set and costume designers, producers, composers and many other persons involved in the mounting of play productions. They are also invaluable for the study of theatrical companies, theatre groups and movements and theatre houses. They are essential for verifying the opening and closing dates of theatrical productions, notwithstanding that many programmes neglect to specify the year, and often the entire date, of the production.

Many theatre lovers accumulate large numbers of theatre programmes throughout their theatre-going life, and often wonder how best to dispose of them when they can no longer accommodate them. The SBW Foundation Archives and Performing Arts Collection is always interested in acquiring theatre programmes to fill gaps in its collection, or to replace programmes which have been damaged from poor storage conditions, and is pleased to accept all donations of programmes at its premises at 925 Botany Road, Rosebery.

A recent acquisition of a private collection of theatre programmes included a programme for the production of “The Two Mrs Carrolls” which opened at the Palace Theatre, Sydney on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1950, and in which Ms Jacqueline Kott performed in the role of Cecily Harden. According to the programme, Miss Kott was a 22 years old Westralian actress and an Arts graduate of Western Australia. She was well known in Little Theatre movements for some years, and played the leading role in “Hedda Gabler” for the University Dramatic Society at the Drama Festival in Melbourne in 1947. After moving to Sydney Ms Kott played many roles for both national and commercial radio stations, as well as important roles for Little Theatre Groups.<sup>1</sup>

A youthful Jacqueline Kott from the theatre programme for “The Two Mrs. Carrolls”, a play by Martin Vale presented by Sir Benjamin Fuller which commenced its season at the Palace Theatre, Sydney, on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1950. A copy of this programme was recently donated to the SBW Foundation Archives and Performing Arts Collection by Miss Rita White of Mittagong, along with an extensive collection of programmes of Australian and British productions accumulated by Miss White over the past sixty-five years.



Dr Peter Orlovich  
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**Correction:** In the article on the Metropolitan Theatre, Sydney, in the insert to vol. 17, no.6, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, reference was erroneously made to the author of the play “The First Joanna” which opened at The Metropolitan on 12 March 1948, as Dorothy Hewitt. This should have been Dorothy Blewett.

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<sup>1</sup> Theatre programme for a production of “The Two Mrs. Carrolls” with Elizabeth Bergner in the role of Sally Carroll, which opened at the Palace Theatre, Sydney, on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1950.