

It's the LEIGH EDMONDS

Sing Along With Me

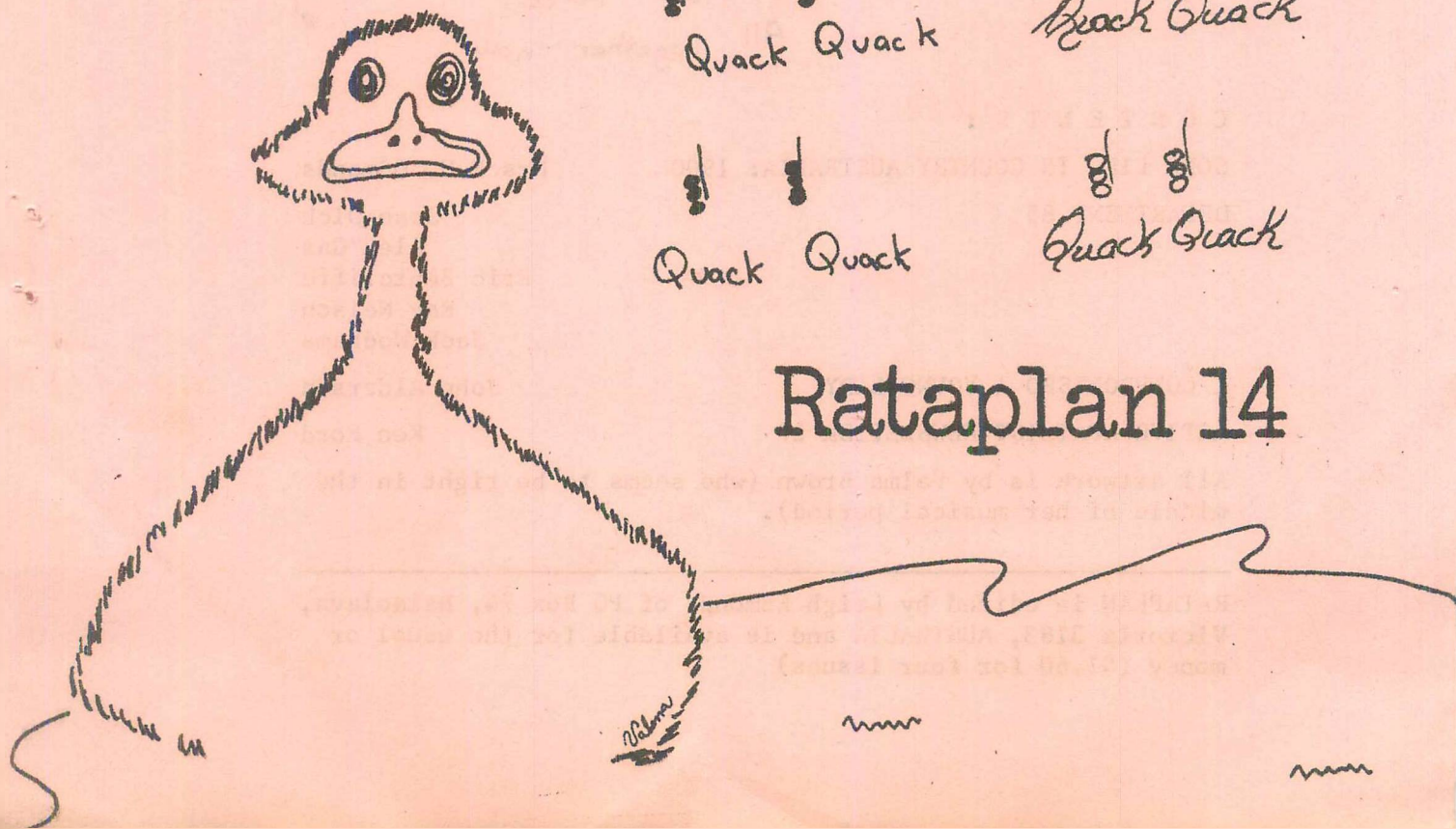
Time

I'm a little ducky-wuck sittin in
a pond-y

Quack Quack Quack Quack

Quack Quack Quack Quack

Rataplan 14



RATAPLAN
FOURTEEN



C O N T E N T S :

SOME LIFE IN COUNTRY AUSTRALIA: 1900

Mrs E.H. Edmonds

DEPARTMENT 85

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I COMPROMISED A YOUNG LADY

John Alderson

ACTIVE APATHIST NEWSLETTER 27

Ken Ford

All artwork is by Valma Brown (who seems to be right in the middle of her musical period).

RATAPLAN is edited by Leigh Edmonds of PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183, AUSTRALIA and is available for the usual or money (\$1.60 for four issues)

On Tuesday, January 7th Mervyn Binns and the bosses of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club held a Gala re-opening of the club which seems to have lain dormant for the last few years.

The highpoint of the MSFC was when it still resided at 19 Somerset Lane, the top storey of an old warehouse where the fans of Melbourne used to congregate every Wednesday night to talk, play cards and other games and be intimidated by Merv to pay over their fifty cents. The members in those days were a strange crew, as fans usually are, many were lonely or alienated from the normal ways of society and once a week they used to get together to feel as if they belonged. Then at the end of 1970 the club was closed down, it seems that somebody got annoyed at the two 35mm projectors that had been set up, reported the club to the authorities and that was that.

The club moved, with Paul Stevens, to a flat out in South Yarra where it declined slowly and when the flat on top of the Space Age Bookshop became vacant the club moved there but it has not enjoyed anything like the success that enjoyed years ago.

Why?

Well that's an interesting question and nobody has come up with a decent answer. Perhaps the old members don't need the club any more, they've found some of the things that they were searching for when they went to the club and anyhow the weekly informal gatherings down at Degraives Tavern are far more enjoyable than any meeting of the old club ever were. Perhaps an institution like the MSFC just doesn't have a place in the 1970's when science fiction is something that almost everybody has read a little of, where is the need to gather together in little groups to talk about the latest Niven story when you will quite likely find people at work who have read it. Perhaps the social atmosphere of the MSFC is just out of date and not attractive to most people.

At the Gala re-opening the club was filled with people, standing room only. There were a lot of faces there that had not been seen for many years, it was almost like a reunion. But there have been other attempts to revive the club and they have all failed and there seems no reason why this attempt should succeed.

Social fandom in Melbourne is a very haphazard affair. Weekly gatherings at Degraives serve the purpose of a place where fans can meet regularly and then there are parties every once in a while and if somebody wants to meet somebody else at another time they just say, "I'll see you at Space Age". Apart from keeping up the tradition there seems to be no need at all for a Melbourne SF Club.

A couple of years ago the Nova Mob was set up and for a while it enjoyed a considerable amount of success. But it didn't continue, not because the fans weren't interested but because nobody bothered to keep up the organisational end and maybe because just when it was beginning to show signs of success some fans decided to try and use it to political ends.

All the organisational talent in Melbourne is being poured at the moment into getting and keeping AUSSIECON on the road. There isn't too much energy left over to put into attempts to organise Melbourne fandom

and I think this situation will probably continue until after AUSSIECON. Some fans feel that Melbourne can only run a WorldCon if it has a large fandom to support it and this is why they show concern for the MSFC. They would do better to forget about it for the time being and concentrate on something that really does need their time.

Besides, if a new Melbourne Science Fiction Club doesn't grow out of the WorldCon I will be very surprised.

This issue of RATAPLAN has next an article by my grandmother. Ray Nelson publishes a very nice little neo-Victorian fanzine and some of the discussions in it prompted me to ask my grandmother what life was like when she was young, when Queen Victoria was still alive.

The setting is somewhere in the Wimmera district, about two hundred miles North West of Melbourne.

* * *

My early days were lived in a good old brick house on a 600 acre farm on the banks of a small lake. Mother had caught perch in the Wimmera River six miles away and put them in the lake where they thrived until a dry season dried the lake up and we had fun catching the stranded perch in the rushes. The wild ducks reared their ducklings there and we would hunt for eggs laid among the rushes.

Mother had four daughters in a row and Father was getting a bit downhearted. One day Mother hung out the old red shawl and Father saw it while he was ploughing in the paddock. He frantically unhitched the team, put one of the horses onto the buggy and galloped six miles to collect the bush nurse. She was untaught but a natural for her job. We four daughters were packed off to the neighbours for the day and when we were collected again to go home there was a tiny little brother.

Father went back to work putting a huge canvas cover over a partly finished hay stack. In his excitement he accidentally put the prongs of the pitchfork through the canvas which was really a minor tragedy. But he took a deep breath, pulled the fork out and shouted "Never mind, I've got a son atlast".

Three more sons arrived at intervals of eighteen months. Grandpa was a bricklayer and more rooms were added to the house. Father had read a book about life in Canada and basement rooms so two very big rooms were evacuated and had brick walls, tile floors and windows. Over this there were built a lounge room and a large kitchen. There were eighteen steps to the staircase leading to the basement and a six foot verandah was added right around this very good home. We used the basement rooms on very hot days and enjoyed the coolness. I was told to keep my younger sisters and brothers from falling into the excavations while the work was in progress.

When the huge red gum trees were grubbed out of the ground to allow cultivation to proceed Father had a man help him saw the huge tree trunks into five foot lengths while the wood was still green and easy to cut.

They used a six foot saw with a hold at each end and a man at each end pulled it back and forth until it cut through the huge trunk which was often five feet in diameter. It was dreary and hard work. They cut large stacks of fencing posts this way and stored the rest to dry in huge long stacks. Later on the timber was split and sold to provide fuel to stoke up boilers at the Flour Mill, Machinery Foundry and the Dooen Pumping Station which all had steam engines. In between harvesting Father carted firewood to the town to supply the different Enginedrivers.

An eight horse load was measured in 'cords' of wood and as far as I remember the price was £1 for a cord and there were four cords to a load. Think of the manhours of work before even one cord was ready. Machinery and replacements from the Foundry and flour from the Mill and other bills were all paid from money that the firewood brought in. Also many customers had orders for two foot six firewood for their homes and this came from branches of the trees. Nothing was wasted except the leaves, even the stumps were split and used in our own fireplaces - such huge fireplaces that really warmed the house.

As we girls grew stronger we had to help load the timber, Father stacked the wagon load and we staggered, three of us to a log, to hand them up. The two foot six wood was easier to load but it took longer.

Father would start early with eight horses harnessed to a large wagon. The horses could only travel at walking pace, five miles an hour to travel the ten miles to Horsham and the same to return. It wasn't convenient to carry chaff for their dinner while the wood was being unloaded so they didn't get fed or watered until they got home. I always drove a dray, three horses with a load and I had to hand the wood down while Father stacked it very neatly close to the Engine Room. He always put a white chalk mark on the end row.

One day it started to rain a couple of miles before we reached town. Earthen unmade roads got slippery and one horse in the dray fell over. I was fourteen years old at the time and too scared to get up on the dray again so most of that load was thrown over into a paddock and on we went. After unloading the wagon Father was going back to collect the wood so I was told to take the wagon and eight horses home. Four of the team were teathered to the trail of the wagon and lead by ropes. One mare was an outlaw called a 'Gib', she didn't fancy a rope around her neck. I stopped the team to pick some pretty wild flowers and when I got back, picked up the reins and said "Get up laddies" they moved on but they seemed to be pulling a heavy load. It didn't look right to me, I looked around and could only see three horses being lead. So I yelled "Whoa boys" and jumped down to find Lucy on her side. She had hung back when I had started up, lost her footing and was being dragged along by the rope around her neck. Luckily she was not dead so I gave her some cuts with the whip and got her up. Then I yelled to the horses yoked to the wagon to start and I followed Lucy with the whip until things got restored to order. Then I clambered back up onto the wagon and gathered up the reins. It was a real adventure.

I got home, took all the harnesses off and led the horses for a drink

while I bagged up chaff and poured it into the feeding troughs. Later on Father got home and found everything in order. He patted my shoulder and said "That's my good girl". That made everything right in my world - "Something attempted, Something done, Had earned a nights repas".

I helped my Father in every kind of farm work until I was sixteen. Then I felt I should not be doing a boys work and I got a job at my Aunts doing housework for five shillings a week and my keep. Father said he missed me.

Imagine a life that had only Church where young people met. There was no football, no tennis, no cricket, no dances and no Saturday afternoon off from work on the farm. There were no cars, no electricity, no telephones, television or even radio. Everybody was interested in playing some kind of musical instrument and every lad who wished to impress the girls carried a mouth organ with which he serenaded his girl friend on the only occasion which appeared, the walk home from Church on Sunday nights.

There were twelve children in the family but we were not encouraged to enjoy the company of other young folks. But we made the most of the mile long walk home on Sunday nights. We never lingered over farewells as we had to be home by 9.30 and tell our parents who we had been with. We were strictly brought up.

Our two young Uncles, in their mid twenties, were very religious and as they longed to display their talents the only thing there was for them to do was to become local preachers, each one striving to outdo the other on their successive Sunday evenings. Their beliefs were crude. They endeavoured to bring the young folks into the 'Kingdom' and hoped and believed that for every Soul they Saved they would receive a star in their crown in Heaven.

After the sermon Uncle George would say "Now we will have a prayer meeting", and those who were already saved would be invited to give their 'testomony' as to their spiritual life of the past week. Then sinners were exhorted to come out onto the platform and Get Saved. We didn't appreciate these prolonged intervals, we were wanting to be walking home together, our only time to laugh and joke.

My sister and I did go out to the penitentform and were asked if we could see Christ on the cross bleeding for our sins. I replied that up to date I hadn't committed any sins that I knew about.

Uncle Edward had an unwelcome habit of strolling down to our home at the evening milking time and he would ask us, "Are you keeping Saved?" We hated him coming, he knew that we couldn't leave the milking but never offered to carry the full buckets to the dairy for us. So one day we decided to test his holy ways and at a signal from my sister we turned a stream of milk on his waistcoat instead of turning it into the bucket.

You should have heard the result! In the middle of a long lecture of his religious theories he stopped short and let out a few not too religious words. We shouted at him; "Now you will have to save yourself!" That finished him.

I have lived to have nearly all my early ideas of Heaven and Hell disproved. If Heaven is up above why didn't the American space men run across it when they visited the moon? The idea of Hell being a bottomless pit of fire and brimstone is outdated too. We firmly believed that a white robe, a crown, a golden harp and streets paved with gold were waiting for us but nobody ever came back to report on it. When I recall the words of the Hymns we used to sing it seems fantastic that people believed in them. But whatever else we didn't have in entertainment there was always Church and singing Hymns. Until we bought a phonograph and records we lived in a tight and narrow world.

I recall my Uncle Edward getting married and his bride's wedding dress which had fashionable huge 'leg of mutton' full sleeves at the shoulders. Uncle said that they were too worldly and he took the sleeves out of the bodice, got the scissors and cut material off the sleeves and sewed them back again skin tight. The bride couldn't bend or lift her arms and the frock was ruined. We were not allowed to curl our hair or use cosmetics, girls today lead a different life.

-- Mrs E.H. Edmonds (88 years on 23rd
October 1973)

I wonder what a fruit fly inspector would do if one were to whip out one's pet fruit fly and say: "Here you are, inspect."

- Ken Ozanne

I hope that you found my grandmothers article interesting, the things that she has written are things that we all take for granted as having happened way back then but which we never think about people having lived through. All we really know about the 1890's and 1900's are the historical facts and it never really occurs to us that people like us lived then and we really know little about what their lives were like. When I wrote to her asking her if she would write this article she sent back a letter wondering if anything she wrote might not be a bit "Dan & Davish" but as I pointed out at the time most of you reading this will be Americans or English and you would never have heard of Dad & Dave and of even the Australian readers only one, John Alderson lives in the country. Joan Dick lives in Albury which is on the main highway between Sydney and Melbourne but it is a fairly large town and I hope she won't feel too cheated if I think of Albury as being a city.

Joan Dick
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Many thanks for RATAPLAN thirteen, it arrived in an hour of dire need. The house and I were surrounded by water. As you may have heard or read we have had quite a lot of rain in the last twenty-four hours. What started as a gentle scotch mist very quickly turned into a torrential down pour and the city gutters, unable to keep up with the large volume of water overflowed and we had a small river running under

and around the house. I was amazed at the number of things washed out from under the house. Eventually my husband turned up with a load of sand bags to block off the water flowing through the front fence but not before we had lost all the surface on the driveway. It is somewhere amongst the grass in the back yard. I don't think I will have to water the garden tonight.

I am wondering "What is a fanzine?" I used to think that it was vaguely connected with science fiction or fantasy, but I have changed my mind. It is an outlet for lots of people to express their frustrated yearnings or to say what they really think about a subject, any subject, under the sun, to people who are not afraid to disagree with them and say so in no uncertain terms. It is a clearing house for wandering minds. What wonderful places those minds find to wander through.

How often did you wet the babies head when the Active Apathists League was born?

If you win DUFF please don't take pies with sauce over with you. They will declare the votes for Australia in '75 invalid if you do.

((I didn't realise that they had a bit of flooding in Albury, after all the news in the papers and on the television about the flooding in New South Wales and Queensland I guess it's not too much to suppose that a little flooding in Albury would have been forgotten beside the mass disaster further north and inland..

I hope you haven't got out of the habit of watering your garden, I hope you still have a garden left.

Most fanzine publishers probably wouldn't mind printing material about science fiction and or fantasy if they got any that they thought was good enough to print but unfortunately, in Australia atleast, Bruce Gillespie soaks all that up and we are left with having to print material about any old thing that comes to hand. Not that we complain too much really, John Alderson in his breaking down old heap of a car, "wop opera" or entertaining yourself by walking home from church seem to be generally far more interesting than the latest Bob Silverberg book.

The Active Apathist League was born while Ken Ford and I collated a section of Boys Own Fanzine 2 so I reckon that the sweet scent of the still wet ink on those pages was what intoxicated us.

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Gee, it's nice to get a RATAPLAN again, do you realise that I haven't seen a copy for atleast twelve months? That's not terribly surprising since I haven't seen or written to you for atleast, oh, twenty four months. But I do read your zine, you know. In fact I think I've got a loc for RATAPLAN 8 stashed away somewhere. I must have the biggest

collection of unposted locs in Australia. It's because I don't have any envelopes.

Yes indeed, RATAPLAN makes superb bathtub reading - just the right length to while away the time during a good soak. Do you read in the tub? Do you bathe? Great for your mind you know. One day I'm going to write to the newspapers and complain about the size of their sheets. Much too big to turn the page in the tub - it's not easy to read wet newsprint.

I bet Archimedes read in his tub. Have you ever dropped book into the water while reading? Several of my books are rather crinkled and bulky due to such excursions into the depths. I bet Archimedes didn't write in the tub - a bit hard with a chistle and a stone. Or did they have paper then? Yes, I think they did. In fact I'm writing this note to you in the tub. Haven't dropped in in yet though... How profound RATAPLAN 13 is. Politics, ideology, the race problem, sf, DUFF, it's all there.

Ken Ford is wrong. Yakka is not slang, it's a brand of coverall very similar to Al Grassby's Riverina Rig. In fact that particular gent could be giving a preview of Yakka's spring selection (spring?... autumn?).

Lovely to hear that Australia has won 1975. It's almost enough to make your heart burst with pride and bring a tear to your eye... really, I mean it. But I suppose that's old hat by now.

Never have I doubted the power of vegemite sandwiches. I hold great hopes of being able to one day present clinical proof of their power as an aphrodesiac. In the meantime I keep working on it.

Hmmmmmm... the water's getting cold. Have you heard the one about the bid who's sitting in a tub, without water. Dry. His mother walks in and kindly inquires as to his purpose in sitting in a tub, without water. Dry. The shrewd little bugger replies that he's having a dry clean.

P.S. The Society of Intrepid Bath Soakers (Inc).

((I do bathe. In times gone past I used to lie in the bath, soaking and reading but not anymore. Perhaps it is a phase that fans go through. When I used to do this I was always worried by the problem of keeping my hands dry so that I could turn the pages of the books without getting them wet. Now that I have passed from the bath soaking phase I have entered into the 'standing in the shower for thirty minutes' phase and I have found that it is absolutely impossible to keep a book or fanzine dry in those conditions. The first publisher who prints his books on waterproof paper will make a fortune from me, not only by providing me with reading material for use in the shower but also because I like to read while I am walking places and it is most annoying when it rains.

When you set up your Society of Intrepid Bath Soakers you might think of producing your newsletters on waterproof paper or perhaps even plastic. You would be opening a new realm in the history of publishing.))

Having reached the halfway point in this issue I think that perhaps it is time for another article. This time we have the story from John Alderson which I promised you from last issue and while I know that a lot of you have been hoping that I would forget about it, the original has been sitting in my material folder taking up space and I haven't been able to forget about it. I admit that I print this with some misgivings, I do not think it fit for a fan to discuss the more intimate parts of his private life as you may remember but I cannot afford to turn down a contribution from such a well known fan as John Alderson and so maybe I'll close my eyes while I'm typing this.

I C O M P R O M I S E D A Y O U N G L A D Y

Wool prices had fallen enough for me to be desperate enough to take a job navying. The job was laying concrete footpaths in Carisbrook... All this is immaterial except for the fact that somewhere hidden in Carisbrook they have a factory manufacturing girls. They are everywhere, atleast two hundred going to school. Unfortunately production seems to have started recently though some of the older prototypes look attractive enough, but there is only one or two of them, and whilst they didn't mind being looked at, across the street, by rough navy types, they certainly did not come within capturing distance.

Well, one afternoon we had a shower of rain. Now if there is anything that effects the delicate constitution of a navy more than anything else, it is rain. So we were in one fellow's car, sort of hoping that it would drizzle on until about five o'clock. At about four the streets suddenly filled with all these delectable little girls, and too of them, a bold brassy type, daughter of the local publican actually, and her mate whom I called Tubby came to talk with us. Of course I was very fond of Tubby and concentrated on winning her affections. She has beautiful long rust-coloured hair, and beautiful long rust-coloured hair is the most wonderful thing a young girl could have, excepting perhaps five older brothers. Well I don't think Tubby has five brothers, older or not; I don't think there are that many boys in Carisbrook, certainly I had not noticed so many.

"Hi Tubby, how's my fourty secondth girl-friend today?"

"I am not your girl-friend. I hate you."

Ah, I thought to myself, I have stirred the young lady's emotions very strongly, this is a good beginning. Nothing is worse, nothing is so difficult to overcome as a girl's indifference. But Tubby was won, she hated me.

"Yes you are" I said, "you're my fourty secondth girl-friend."

"I bet you have hundreds of girl-friends!"

How girls learn to boost a man's ego at such an early age. They must surely teach them the art at school. Ah, if only I did have hundreds of girl friends. Why, I don't even know hundreds of girls, including about fifty nieces... well it seems that many when I am buying Christmas presents.

"But not one of them's nice like you."

Notice how subtle that is. They could all be nicer though this would be difficult as Tubby is very nice, but the possibility that anyone could be exactly as nice like her is too remote to bear consideration. Long experience has taught me never to say anything to a girl that I would not say under oath... it's a terrible thing to have a bad conscience; I know men who cannot sleep at nights because of the lies they have told their girl friends. Yet all they had to do was to tell the truth so that their girl friends could put a nice face on it and that would be it. Tell a girl that there is "no other like her" and she is flattered, for she will never, for one moment think she has a face like a hippo, and which she may certainly have. If a man tells a girl she is the most beautiful girl in the world she knows he is lying, he knows he is lying, and both are unhappy because he lied. A bloke needs to stick to the truth.

"I bet you tell them all that."

"Ooh, what an evil mind you have!"

That's the way to get out of a tight spot where you may be found faulty. Suggest the other party has faults. Usually it shuts them up because invariably they have faults. One has to be discreet of course.

"Oh I have not!"

Of course they deny it. Women in particular always deny things. If you get the girl who says, "So what! It makes me interesting", beware.

"No, that's the end of it, you can run along," and I settled back against the back of the seat as far away as I could. "After all, you were only my fourth second-hand girl friend..."

This is the sort of thing that rouses the fighting spirit in a girl. She leaned forward and put her head inside the car window so that her long rust-coloured hair fell onto my knee. My hand clasped it and I gently drew her further in, then leaning forward I kissed her.

"Now you have to be my girl-friend. Everybody in Carisbrook knows I kissed you."

They would soon at any rate seeing that the publican's brazen daughter was watching scornfully... she had not been so successful. Indeed in her pique she did not come and see us for several days.

"You're awful." I let her hair go, and she backed her head out of the window some inches or so to demonstrate her indignation. "I don't like you at all," but her voice belied her words.

"Oh well, never mind," I consoled her, "Not every girl has a boyfriend like me."

I took it from her silence that she had no further objection to being my fourth second-hand girl-friend.

Ah, but I have made a permanent conquest here. I was driving through Green Street in Carisbrook three months or so later, and who should be walking along the footpath but Tubby, her long rust-red hair as beautiful as ever. Seeing me she gave me a shy little wave.

Not I am in a quandry; what am I to do? Should I just see her occasionally and hope she will stay faithful. Should I see her father and tell him the whole story of our passion. Should I abduct her and keep her in the cellar for a few years. I tell you, it's a worry when your fourth secondth girl friend is only ten years old

-- John Alderson

* * *

See what I mean... As a matter of interest today is a hot day. After I had finished typing John's article I went out to the kitchen and drank half a litre of coke. This room is hot because of all the frantic activity I've been putting in on this typer but the kitchen is even hotter, probably because the fridge is labouring so frantically to keep the coke from boiling away. As I stood there with the bottle raised to my mouth I thought about John Alderson living up there at Haverlock. I don't know the place personally but I do know the area from having paid visits to farms around the area with my father when I was younger. Having stood out in the middle of paddocks in weather like this with only a water bag between us and death I wondered how John survives. Perhaps he goes and sits in his fridge, that would explain why nobody hears from him though he would probably claim that he is too busy with the harvesting. Anyhow we know why he doesn't produce any fanzines in the summer, it is so hot that the ink in his duplicator becomes runnier than water and the wax in his stencils probably melts.

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Thanks for the copy of RATAPLAN which penetrated these hinterlands a few days back. A pleasant offering, and I enjoyed perusing it even though I'm completely out of touch with Aussie fandom - I think the last letter I wrote to you antibodies was either to Rog Dard or Don Tuck, which should give you some indication as to the extent of my fafia.

I'm not sure I'd be writing this letter now, if it wasn't for that article by John Alderson; a highly readable little travelogue which I hope Hansa and he have recovered from, (incidentally, what breed of car is a Hansa?) but it's more the title than the piece which provides the comment hook! That mention of GUNDAGAI took me back a good many years, to when I'd just entered the RAF prior to winning the war for the allies, in fact!

I, and sundry other wights were doing square-bashing (this, for the youths amongst you refers not to stomping on those unappreciative of jazz, but to practising odd military manoevers inspired by even odder Flight Sergeants) at a former U.S. Air Force Base in the fen-country - flat as hell it was and just as well, for the Americans had wisely (?) widely dispersed everything and you had to walk five miles to the cookhouse; they all had jeeps, I presume, not new boots... but that's irrelevant to

the subject under discussion, anyway.

Y'see we had this character in the corner of our hut who kept singing a dirty song about the 'Track to Gundagai', his version didn't match John Alderson's but I can understand you not printing it in a family-magazine like RATAPLAN... After a while we got to find out that he was an aussie, I think it was the pet 'roo that clued us in on this. Anyway, he has a repertoire of versions of the 'Track To Gundagai' that kept us amused during the looong summer nights spent nursing our aching feel. He was probably the most popular man in the hut... until one of the bods in the hut was put on temporary HQ duties. Which, allowed him access to the various and varied personal-files - that night, when our aussie was walk-about, he revealed in a stuttering voice that our lead vocalist had narrowly escaped aquittal of an axe murder before joining up... After that we joined in his songs even more vigorously.

I suppose the only moral to this is that you never know what sort of letter a fanzine is going to provoke!

Ray Nelson
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US of A

I'm afraid I'll have to put in my word for the sweet little old lady who, at the modern music concert, booed the "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and whispered "That's real music when they fell back on good old Paganini, mainly on the strength of reading composer Felix Werder's statment on the position. When I hear Werder say, "What we need is tremehdous creativity. Not "good" or "bad" - who are you to judge?" I feel ~~hoshohite thithhsubdendathat~~ I doubt if I would like his music even if it were good. I wouldn't let myself like it.

Classical music in general and opera in particular are nearly dead. There is no audience for anything in the establishment modern style, and thus very few performances. The music of the Victorian Era continues to draw crowds... it is the backbone of the concert repertoire. The 18th century has its fans, and among creative anachronists even earlier music is held in high regard. Pop opera, like "Jesus Christ Superstar" goes over big, and Broadway and Hollywood still seems to be doing all right.

But there's no doubt in anyone's mind that a "modern" opera written since 1914 will probably not be performed once, and almost certainly will not be performed more than once.

The ~~reasons~~ reasons to be found in exactly the attitudes flaunted by Werder. He says to us, "Listen to my music and applaud it whether you like it or not. Only the future has any right to judge." Up yours, Mr. Werder.

Do we get one good composer out of 500 bad ones? Just like getting "Hamlet" out of five hundred chimps typing out random combinations on typewriters? That's not how I read my history. As I see it, we get one good composer first, then, when his work is a hit, we get five hundred

bad ones jumping on the bandwagon to turn out imitations of various degrees of quality. Later on, perhaps, some of these imitators produce stuff that caps the work of the first Big One. Or maybe (I'm thinking of Verdi) the master caps himself in his later compositions. Verdi wrote so very many operas, both good and bad, because his works were hits; there was a public out there howling to hear anything, anything at all that he wrote.

Still, if Felix Werder really wants these five hundred chimp composers bashing out one awful opera after another, all that sounds and fury signifying nothing, he can have it. Really. All he has to do is write one - not more - one really popular opera, one opera that is a hit, that the "vulgar bourgeois" public goes mad over, that gum chewing grocery checkers hum and cab drivers and factory workers sing in their showers. If he could write that one really pop opera, a public will appear like magic that will actually listen to and maybe even applaud what those five hundred chimp composers churn out to meet the demand.

But he won't do that.

A man who coins an expression like "wop opera" is too far gone to produce anything but noise.

It's the "wops" who invented the modern opera. There was a little group of friends (there always is a little group of friends when real creative work is being done) in 16th Century Italy - Jacopo Peri, Vincenzo Galilei (father of the astronomer Galileo), and Giulio Caccini, who gathered regularly to work on the impossible task of re-creating the music-drama of ancient Greece and Rome. They were all amateurs, but the first semi-public performances of their operas were so successful that a great many other composers quickly took up the new form and in 1637 the first opera house was built (in Venice) to satisfy the demand for public performances.

Werder and his friends could learn a lot from these "wops", most importantly that the music comes first, then the popular demand, and last of all the construction of large scale architecture to house the multitude of screaming fans.

In Australia you've got it all backwards. You've already built the opera house, but you haven't got any Australian operas to perform in it that anyone wants to hear. You should have had the compositions first, then the small scale performances leading to popular acceptance, and then, finally, the building of an opera house.

I'll venture a prediction.

There may be some worthwhile opera created in Australia, but it will not come from anywhere inside the musical establishment, not from the famous music critics or from composers who get commissions, or from the teachers on the faculties of the large schools.

It will come from some little group of amateurs who get together once a week or so to talk and perform for each other and compare notes... and who aren't afraid to criticize each other.

If it happens at all, that is how it will happen, because that's how it always happens.

((The first thing I found strange was the statement that it is the Victorian music that draws the crowds. The greatest of all the Victorian composers, a fellow called Felix Mendelssohn (the Queen approved of him rather highly) is nothing short of a flop these days unless they are going to be playing the music from "A Midsummernights Dream" or the "Hebredies Overture". Liszt and others like Wagner are crowd drawers to be sure but just mention the names Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn and you've filled your hall. Apart from some Germans and one or two Frenchmen and a couple of others the Victorian era was a bit barren, musically.

I will agree with you that contemporary music has to begin in small places, some of the best concerts I've been to have been the ones I've only heard about by chance, the best one was not advertised in any way at all and I only heard about it because a friend happened to be passing at the time and let me know about it. However this does not mean to say that a lot of the music that can be heard in little halls before an audience of a couple of hundred wouldn't go just as well in the Melbourne Town Hall before an audience of a thousand or so. But this music never gets to be performed before a large public, not because it isn't worth performing but because the people who organise concerts feel that going over the Beethoven Fifth for the umpteenth-hundredth time is going to be more appreciated by the paying public. That is something to do with the organisers who are afraid of change and nothing to do with the audiences and the music.

A lot of people think that the music of JS Bach is about the best thing that happened to the human race and yet when he died people stopped listening to his music until Mendelssohn discovered it again. Up until about that time people didn't bother to listen to music that was very old. Now listening to old music is all the rage, a piece has to be so old before people will think that it is worth their time to listen to it. Bela Bartok is a big deal these days, you'd think that he had invented modern classical music and Stravinski is old hat, he sits next to Mozart or Bruckner very nicely these days. The problem is that people are told that they have to venerate the great composers of the past and because of that it is inferred that there is nothing worse than modern music.

As for opera in Australia, there have been thousands of the things written but nobody wants to put them on. While the audience is given to think that the Italians of the last century are the ultimate in opera and until they are shown something different there is going to be no real way they get to find out about modern opera. There is the occasional modern opera put on by one of the smaller opera companies and one or two of them are even Australian. But what Felix Werder, and most of the people there at the symposium, wanted was for the Australian opera company to produce

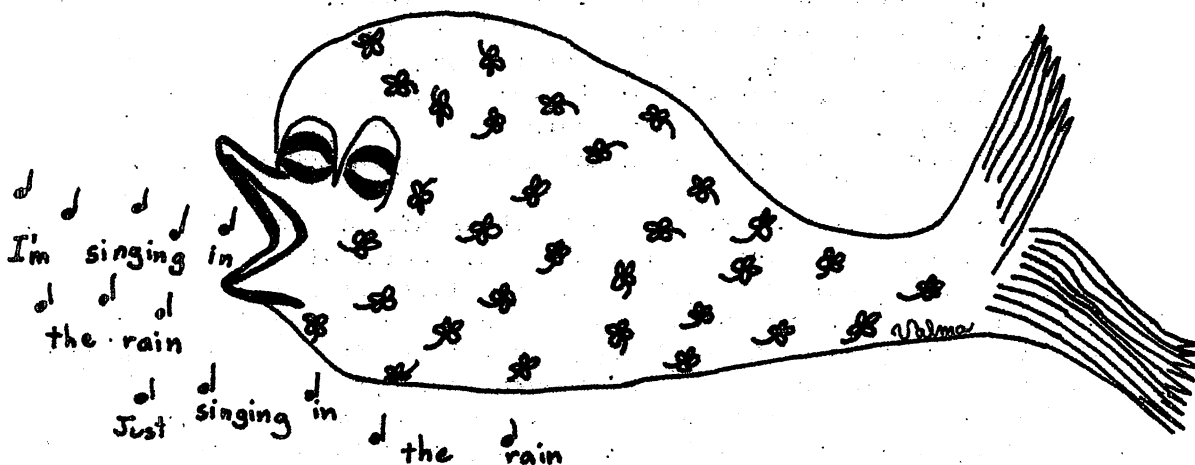
some Australian operas, not because they want the company to put on rubbish but because they believe that it's about time the people were told that there is something more to opera than Verdi and Puccini.

Your analogy of the five hundred little chimp composers is a very apt one and one which exists in all fields of art. The three composers you named have become, with the passing of time, just some of your chimps. What they did wasn't particularly outstanding. You said that they were the composers that the five hundred followed but they were just a part of the whole renaissance period. That they were the first to write the music of something which we would call opera might not be disputable but the possibility that somebody else would have come up with it soon enough in another place cannot be discounted and it is possible that only their being the first of a great many makes them memorable.

But if you heard one of their operas you'd find that it bears little resemblance to what we call opera these days and infact the only reason that opera did not bankrupt itself within a century of its inception was because the castratii, having sacrificed all for their art, forced the quality up and up. I'm getting side tracked.

Creativity is something that happens in an environment of creation and people thinking about what they are creating. You are right that this can happen in small groups but I think that this has only to do with people creating new forms for their art and an example is the Mannheim school which formed the symphony. If people are going to think up new forms to replace the opera then it is likely that this might happen when a few people get their heads together but if people are just going to write in an established form then there is no need for a group effort. This is not to say that there isn't a musical community in Melbourne or any other place but you are talking about something special.

As you can see, I agree with you and yet I don't agree, your approach seems to be based too much on the idea of



popularity. Popularity can be nice because it brings in a lot of money but it is misleading because unless somebody is to lead and educate the popular taste it will remain static and closed to new ideas. Writing a popular opera is no solution to the problem because the situation is such that any opera written will have to be in the old style to get the public acclaim. Nobody has yet thought up a way to make the new music instantly popular and that is what you are asking and it seems I could go on like this for pages but there are other people waiting in the wings so I suppose that I'd better get on with it.

Jack Wodhams
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Naturally I exaggerated a little. Of course we need a nationality of some kind to aid our tribal cohesions. But tribes, like businesses, either absorb and expand into conglomerates, or go into insular decline.

Australia is a great nation in embryo. The seeds of greatness are here - however, this seed is not brand-new and a spontaneous creation, but is derived from the tree of our heritage. Where we came from is not Australia, and where we go to may not be Australia - but in the meantime it is very convenient for the people who live here to call themselves Australians. I am not a royalist, but the Queen is a marvellous tourist attraction, unique, and Australia gets the spin-off inexpensively and for very little sweat. It is heritage, identity if you like, and we, here, should certainly not seek to entirely cut our loose ties with the crown. Why give something away, and get nothing in return? Unless you count Fuhrer Whitlam a fair exchange. I still claim my English nationality, have a British passport. Why not? It means that if I ever go back to the U.K. I shall not be plagued to have to get work-permits, visas, permissions, and a whole lot of other possible nuisances. I live here, and intend to stay here, and have no plans to desire to return to that land which has become less like 'home' than a foreign country to me. But renunciation promises no reward. If the Aussie government twists my arm, yes, I'll get naturalised, but otherwise, no.

My nationality is a matter of indifference to me - that is, where nationality is unrelated to ideas. We fought Nazism, rather than Germans, as I would fight Communism, rather than ethnic Poles, Bulgarians, Chinese, or whatall. We should fight for ideals, yes, but so many of today's conflicts seem to have degenerated into aquabbles over the totems themselves, rather than what the totems represent. Again fixation. Even totems must change, be improved, superceded, must not be maintained for ever as an ultimate expression, must be relegated, modified, to join a pantheon rather than seek to be supreme.

Roll on WALTZING MATILDA. Now here is an anthem worth having - as distinctive as the MARSEILLAISE, vital and evocative. It would be tempted to form THE LEGION TO PROMOTE THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF WALTZING MATILDA AS AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL ANTHEM. As a must for '75. How do you feel about this true belief, eh? coming from an anti-nationalist.

Port and Wibbly? Crunkled past many moons with tomato chips cut sausages. "Elastickazoo!" Strawberry-creamed Bolderdash, a Norse crockery. Oh to be in Bermuda when the wind comes from the coginas. But seriously folks, if not for Tuesday, where would we stand on. Prunes; with or within, out on in by down under, if, and only if, bloob sps and gringe. I feel grotty, oh so grotty, I feel grotty and spotty and blythe. The League is not rules under cats a dog. Hail Brisbane, you flunked Geography seventeen sacks. Burl Ives lives.**

** This could of course be read as:-

The League has been admirably non-active in the past month. Those people who refused membership, although frowned upon by us upper-echolon (and up yours too!), for showing enough interest to refuse, have gained the League's distinctive Honour Medallion by not being interested in Active Apathy.

This is what we want. More disinterest. People of the world, show your disinterest by remaining unknown, how else will we realise if the League serves its purpose.

Whatever happened to the Newsletter 2 through to 26. Well, who cares anyway? If you didn't see them, so much the better, at least you're informed about what's going on.

The new multi choice patron saints are:-

- a. That's right.
- b. You've guessed.
- c. Cassius Clay
- d. and
- e. Mohammed Ali.

To Clay's (PUNCH!!)... I mean, Ali's threat to Joe Frasier that he was gonna knock Joe's teeth way down his there throat wins him the Christain Sentiment of The Month Month Award. Be proud of that Ali, put it in your glove so you don't lose it.

A specail contest is underway, all you disinterested people, and you can win great prizes like a year's supply of strichnine, a book about "How to Live with Strontium 90", or else a live bandage. So get those entries coming in. The winners will be announced on Febraury the 31st.

Okay kiddies, till next time Bye-bye and remember; I take a great risk writing this, but I can't be bothered kicking myself out of the League.

Serious Post Script: Think about what DUFF means, then chose between Leigh or John.

* * * *

This appears to be the last page and there's a bit more yet to get through so maybe we'll call an end to the letters here with the WAHF's. I hope to be able to print some of the letters here next time but maybe not. If your name is here there is still some hope, especially if your name is Kevin Dillon or Frank Denton.

WAHF, Kevin Dillon, Frank Denton, Paul Anderson, John Alderson, Chris Sherman, Ken Ozanne, Eric Lindsay, Ron & Sue Clarke, John Snowden and Brian Walls.

There is a saying which apparently goes, "The Proper study of Man is Man". I've never seen this written anywhere reputable but I'll believe it because it sounds sensible enough, at this time of the night anyhow. Bearing in mind the time as I type this you will forgive me if I change a couple of letters to make that little saying read "The Proper study of Fans is Fans". Now doesn't that sound just as sensible. So we'll make a few additions and get a saying which goes; "The Proper study of Fanzines is Fanz'nes" and so we'll have some fanzine reviews. In particular Australian fanzine reviews.

ARK 1/ Ronl & Suep Clarke, 2/159 Herring Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113.

75c for a single copy and subscription of \$2 for three/45pp.

To be quite honest this strikes me as pretty much of a toy fanzine, but then Ronl fanzines always have. I don't know how Ron manages to work some really good material into such a bland format but he does it with elan. When Ronl and Suep said they were going to combine their seperate into a new one I had hoped that there would be a lot of the GOF influence in it because I had been enjoying GOF but Suep's influence seems rather minimal and I hope that she can do some more for it in the future.

The contents make good reading, especially Del & Dennis Stocks writing about the "Dorsai" series and Bert Chandler who proves that he really is a writer by turning his viewing of an episode of "Lost in Space" into a real gem of an article.

SOMETHING ELSE 3/ Shayne McCormack, 49 Orchard Road, Bass Hill, NSW 2197. available for the usual (I suppose)/24pp.

This is Shayne's report of her trip to TORCON and her travels around America and England and it's very enjoyable to read. It is also very welcome because this is the first time that any Australian fan has tried to do something like this and even more welcome because it comes off well.

To my knowledge this is the first time that Shayne has written at such length and I hope that it encourages her to continue writing for fanzines because she does it well.

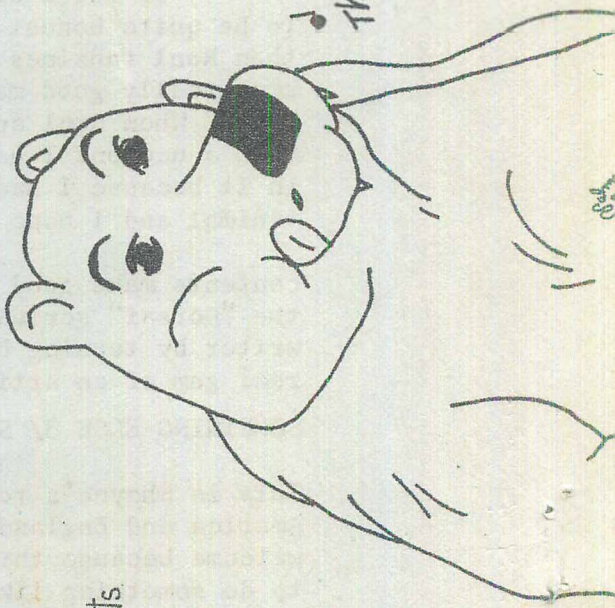
MITHRIL 6/ Del & Dennis Stocks, PO Box 235, Albion, Brisbane, Qld 4010. 106pp.

Right at the beginning of this mammoth fanzine Dennis says that this is probably the last issue. He's not going out of the business because of lack of interest but because he can't afford it any more, reasonable enough considering what it must cost him to publish this.

I will be sad to see this goe, it always reminds me of a fannish "New Scientist".

Rataplan 14

The Magazine of the Arts



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