

Angela Bailey  
Frank Van Straten Fellowship  
2022/2023

The starting point to this fellowship was exploring queer histories within the Australian Performing Arts Collection (APAC) A somewhat mighty endeavour that considers the connections of queer culture and connections within the collection

This Fellowship was conducted on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung of the Kulin and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land. Always Was Always Will be Aboriginal Land.



State Theatre Curtain, Victorian Arts Centre \*

Most often institutional collection narratives assume the hetero-normative and are sensitive to aligning a collection/s with a queer identity. This project explores some of queer lives and connections within the Performing Arts collection of Arts Centre Melbourne and considers a broader accessibility of these stories for contemporary LGBTIQ+ communities, who are historically underrepresented in our mainstream cultural institutions. In bringing a contemporary lens and an understanding of queer history to these stories we can connect the lived experience and explore our shared histories.

Queer individuals have always been integral to the performing arts, encompassing its various and diverse forms and creative expressions. However, it is only in recent decades that queer narratives have been more so explored, as researchers and historians interpret history through a queer lens.

The Glad Project initiated several events, the most recent, in late 2023 was presented with the rich backdrop of the Performing Arts Centre collection in the depths of Hamer Hall.

During this event, I highlighted to the audience that they had walked past a display of a costume worn by Deborah Cheetham-Fraillon – a Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer, and actor, who had recently added her wife's (Nicollete) surname to her own.

Also on display was the costume of Circus Oz performer Dale Woodbridge-Brown, a proud queer Kamilaroi man. His outfit, worn for his roles as ring

master in the 2016 production of *TwentySixteen*, emblazoned with the Aboriginal flag, featuring dazzling sequins and tiny shorts. He describes it as 'super camp' and 'a costume design that fully reflects his identity'.

### **Queers have always been here.**

The GLAD project begins with connections – queer connections across the generations within the Performing Arts collection. In this exploration I also acknowledge the timeline of injustice and criminalization particular to queer communities. The language used to identify the queer community has also shifted over the decades and use the term 'Queer' predominantly an umbrella term for the LGBTIQ+ communities and recognize that identity is complex. I bring our queer eye of reinterpretation to queer lives lived – to the 'passionate friendships'; 'long term bachelors' and 'long-time companion' that thread through to now. In starting this research - One of the first photos I found in the Gladys Moncrieff collection was signed 'To Angela, with Love from Gladys' – I was on my way!!

\* The majestic State theatre curtain was designed by Graham Bennett (1933-2004) in 1984 and painted by him and a team of artists at Scenic Studio in Preston. Bennett was commissioned by his partner John Truscott to design the curtain. John and Graham were partners for several years and many of the material within the collection relating to Truscott was donated by Bennett after Truscott's death.

Gladys Moncrieff, born in Queensland in 1892, was a soprano of remarkable talent, dominating the musical stage from the 1930s to the 1950s. Renowned as a star of her era and a household name, Gladys, affectionately called 'Our Glad,' captured hearts with her voice and the profound affection she received from fans and the public alike.

Despite her widespread acclaim and recognised career, her 46-year relationship with Elsie Wilson, her 'long-term companion,' remains less recognized. Following a brief and, by her own account, unsuccessful marriage to a chorus singer in the early 1930s, Gladys invited Elsie, originally a Gallery Girl, to join her on tour and assist with the demands of her career. Their partnership extended beyond the professional realm as they worked, lived, toured, and vacationed together, eventually retiring to a house they had designed on the Gold Coast.



Gladys and Elsie 1950s

The Gladys Moncrieff Gallery Girls would queue for the cheap tickets and present Gladys with flowers (always mauve hydrangeas and pink roses) at stage door, at homecomings from her travels and throw onto the stage during her performances. The Gallery Girls were organized and connected and many would be invited back to Gladys' home for parties and get together. Streamers and flowers were often so abundant on stage they had to be swept off so Gladys could perform an encore.

In 1991 Marjorie Cronin gifted red and blue paper streamers to the Performing Arts collection that were thrown to Marjorie and her sister by Gladys Moncrieff on the final night of her performance in the *Maid of the Mountains* at the Theatre Royal Melbourne on the 17th November, 1933.



Streamers from *Maid of the Mountains*, 1933

It was also noted in a news-clipping within the Gladys Moncrieff scrapbooks, that the Gallery Girls had crafted and gifted an Illuminated Address to Gladys that told of their affection for the artist.

A performer's adoring fans and the concept of fandom underscore the narratives of our 'heroes' and 'icons'—figures celebrated and admired as role models and yet generations within the queer communities have often faced a dearth of such role models due to the erasure and invisibility of their stories.

Gladys Moncrieff, became a star after signing with JC Williamson Theatres, a partnership that spanned her entire career. She gained immense popularity in musical theatre, particularly for her role as Theresa in *Maid of the Mountains*, a part she performed 2800 times. Gladys Moncrieff's stardom in 1930s Australia cannot be overstated; she was among the era's most celebrated, adored and photographed figures.



Gladys and Elsie, Gladys Moncrieff scrapbooks

Within the collection there are scrapbooks and albums, filled with aspects of her professional achievements and captured moments that offer a glimpse into parts of her personal life. Notably, there are fleeting glimpses of Elsie. The scrapbooks were assembled by family, friends, fans, and Elsie herself and serve as historical testimonies to Gladys's illustrious career and achievements.

News clippings, ephemera, photographs, and text—sometimes compiled over many years - these illuminate her stage legacy and moments shared with Elsie... By her side after Gladys was injured in a serious car accident...Kicking her in the behind for good luck before each show...Beside Gladys when she receives an OBE...Boarding an RAAF plane to go to PNG for Gladys to entertain troops...Accompanying Gladys to the opening of the Sydney Opera House...Cooking together...Entertaining together...Sharing a house and life together

**A life of love and devotion.**



## Dear Gladys

*We the Gallery Girls of Melbourne,  
perched up aloft the Gods,  
see most of the game.*

*We claim to be the best judges,  
not particularly of the dramatic act,  
but of the artist.*

*No one on the modern stage  
has so completely won our admiration,  
our warm appreciation and  
we are sure you will value most of all*

**our love**



**Carvers** Gladys Moncrieff carved for herself a successful career on the stage, also shows she is good carver in the kitchen. Helping her are left to right: Elsie Wilson, Herbert Browne, Nancy Taylor. Soup, ham, salad, apple pie and custard also were on menu.



Australian soprano Gladys Moncrieff left by a Qantas plane last night to make a five weeks' concert tour for troops in Korea. Here Miss Moncrieff (left) boards the plane with Miss Elsie Wilson, her secretary, and Miss Mabel Nelson, her pianist.

Gladys and Elsie, Gladys Moncrieff scrapbooks

In one of the scrapbooks is a small clipping announcing the death in 1976 of Gladys Moncrieff ...“Hospital Authorities made an extra bed available alongside Miss Moncrieff’s for her companion of many years, Miss Elsie Wilson.” After Gladys’ death, Elsie continued to promote her legend, donating materials to institutions across the country, including the Australian Performing Arts Collection. Elsie continued to live in the house on the Gold Coast until the 1990s.

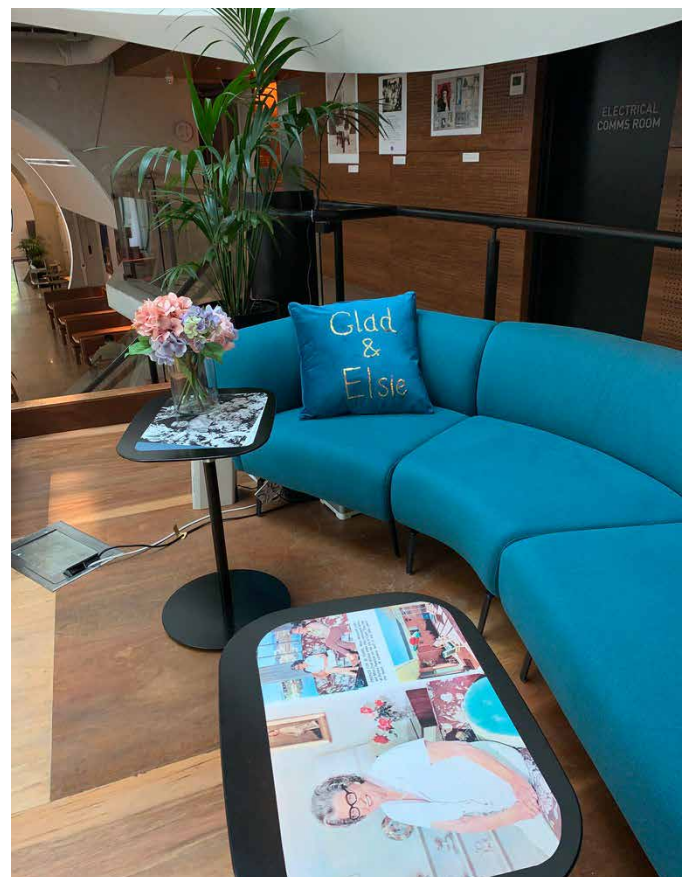
The legacy of Gladys Moncrieff continues in place names across Australia, including the suburb of Moncrieff in Canberra, the Federal electorate of Moncrieff in Queensland, an Entertainment Centre in Bundaberg, a park on the Gold Coast and a Moncrieff hibiscus flower - all named in her honour.



Gladys and Elsie 1950s



Our Glad at Victorian Pride Centre 2023



Our Glad at Victorian Pride Centre 2023

The installation at the Victorian Pride Centre as part of the 2023 Midsumma Festival acknowledged and celebrated Gladys and Elsie and the nonconforming life they forged together. The mezzanine of the building, like a stage, was illuminated with an OUR GLAD sign, photographs and an embroidered cushion (Glad&Elsie) that talk to the personal and domestic

space they shared. Inspired by a photograph from a 1975 Women’s Weekly feature of their life together on the Gold Coast - they are sitting distanced from each other on their couch. In the queer space of the Pride Centre, we bring them together and bring them into the contemporary context of being part of queer history.



Max and Gladys (far left) in *Maid of the Mountains*, Gladys Moncrieff scrapbooks, 1930s



Gay Rosalinda, Max Oldaker and Albert Chappelle standing on table, *His Majesty's Theatre*, Melbourne, 1946.

One of Gladys' leading men was Max Oldaker (1907-1972) who was known to be openly gay – Max features extensively in the Gladys Moncrieff collection as a friend and one of her leading men. Max also had his share of adoring fans – one of whom would leave expensive gifts at stage door such as gloves, scarves, slippers, shoes and the note merely signed 'upstairs left'. It was said Max always gave a bow direct to 'upstairs left'. Max later traveled overseas and worked in London and USA in various productions, including many by the legendary Noel Coward.



Max Oldaker



Angus Winneke Bell Ringing costume design 1960s



Angus Winneke, Balloon Girl 1960s



Sea maiden costume design 1960s

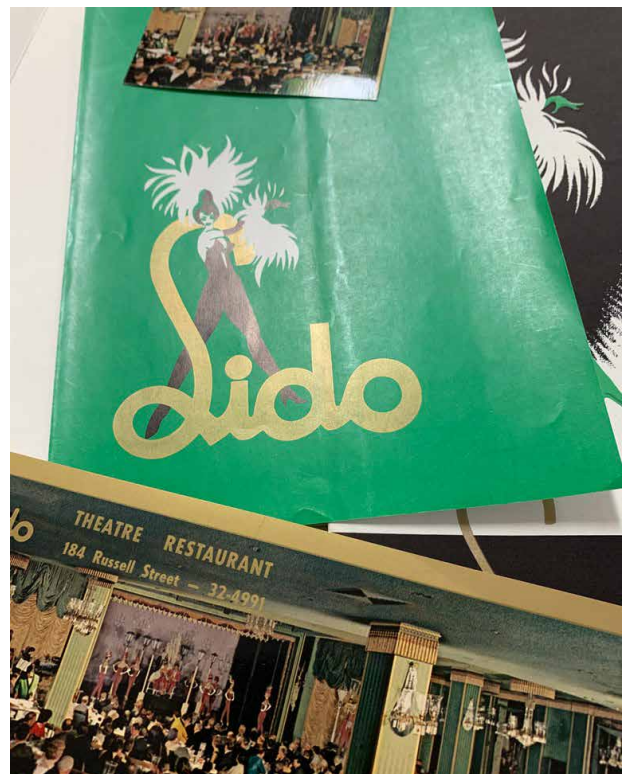
Many queer connections in the collection start with Melbourne's iconic Tivoli Theatre - particularly in the 1940s through the 1960s and include Barb Angell, Val Eastwood, Kenn Brodziak, Evie Hayes and others – all have the Tivoli as part of their story. The Tivoli costume designs by Angus Winneke (1911– 1982) evoke its unique style, campness and frivolity. Winneke's drawings are sometimes annotated with the name of the performers – including Evie Hayes, Barb and Colleen and the Balloon Girl – obviously created with the future in mind – Queer Cabaret Burlesque legend Moira Finucane and her outlandish, fabulous balloon act. Winneke worked for the Tivoli for over 30 years and was instrumental to its style and success. After the closure of the Tivoli Theatre in 1966, he went on to design decor for the Lido Theatre Restaurant in Bourke Street. Prior to his work with the Tivoli, Angus had worked for a time with William Johnston, living in the Johnson apartments in East Melbourne that later became the home of the Johnston collection.



Moira Finucane, courtesy of Moira Finucane



Angus Winneke , Lobster Girl c1950s



Lido Theatre Restaurant promotional material 1965



Angus Winneke, Mary Cathedral costume design 1960s

An earlier story of a Tivoli personality, extensively researched by historian Frank Van Straten realtes to actor and theatre entrepreneur Frank Neill (1886-1940) and documents his early beginnings and extensive career as both an actor and manager. Born near Ballarat, by 1910 he was working for Coles Bohemian Dramatic company. Neill later formed a relationship with actor Maurice Tuohy and were together until Tuohy's death in 1926. In 1934 he took up with the Tivoli alongside Mike Connors and Queenie Paul. "Frank was a force. Eyes on everything. He lived show business, slept show business, loved show business, was show business. No-one but Frank could have got the Tivolis back on the map". In 1940, Neill was crossing Sturt Street in South Melbourne at night and was hit by a car and later died in hospital. Rumored to be a deliberate homophobic crime by friends and the gay community, the driver of the car and his associates were never charged.<sup>1</sup>



Val dancing at the Betty Lee Dancing Academy, 1940s Australian Queer Archives

Val Eastwood (1927-2009) was a dancer and performer at the Tivoli during the late 1940s and early 1950s and a cherished member of the LGBTIQ+ community, particularly as a café proprietor. By establishing Val's Café on Swanston Street in the early 1950s, she forged a haven for the bohemian, queer, and theatrical communities of Melbourne during the post war era. Val's café, replete with a piano, hosted regular performances by Frank Thring and others and became a safe, vibrant cultural hub for queer people to gather.

*To be a friend of Vals and part of that pecking order, to sit at the head table with Frank Thring and Peter Gordon and all those grand queens that was the be all and end all of everyone's dream.<sup>2</sup>*

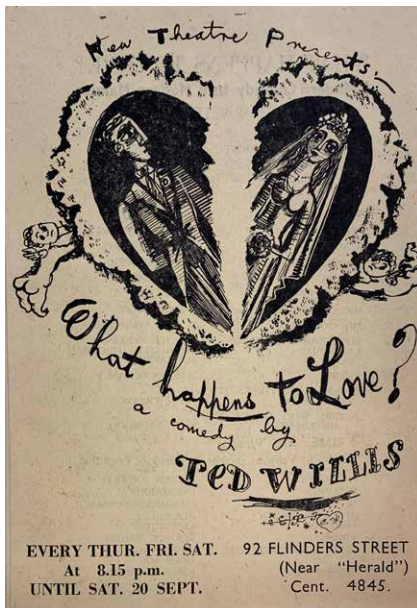
Eastwood, an out and proud lesbian, had lived in a flat above the Tivoli Theatre for a period, where she experienced the theatre's dynamic social scene first-hand. She dated a fellow Tivoli dancer, embedding herself within Melbourne's theatrical and bohemian community.

<sup>1</sup>Jim Hutching in an interview by Frank Van Straten, 1973 [www.theatreheritage.org.au](http://www.theatreheritage.org.au)

<sup>2</sup>Noel Tovey, oral history interview with Gary Jaynes 2010, Australian Queer Archives



Val Eastwood in her cafe, Val's Coffee Lounge in Swanston Street, Melbourne 1950s. Australian Queer Archives



Her recollections, shared in a 1998 oral history interview with Ruth Ford, illuminate the connections between Val's Café, the Tivoli Theatre, and the broader artistic scene of the time, including her relationships with Tivoli dancers and her acquaintance with Kenn Brodziak, the Tivoli theatre's stage manager

Beyond her Tivoli engagements, Eastwood took to the stage in several New Theatre productions, including *What Happens to Love* by Ted Willis and *Jack the Giant Killer* in 1947. The Program for *Jack and the Giant Killer* states: "In this pantomime the Dame is class conscious, the Fairy escapist and the Giant is symbolic of the capitalist system."



Val Eastwood (far right) in *What happens to Love*, 1947



Val Eastwood dancing in rehearsals for *Jack the Giant Killer*, 1947  
Australian Queer Archives

Performer Bunney Brooke, (1921-2000) was a good friend of both Val Eastwood and Noel Tovey and performed with Noel in a number of productions. Letters within the Australian Queer Archives from Bunney to Val Eastwood reflect on her romantic liaisons and relationships with women. Her letters always signed off with 'love from Bundles'.

Bunney appeared in numerous productions at the Little Theatre and later went on to tv and film, particularly in *Number 96*. Bunney also ran Prompt Corner, a small café at the top of Bourke Street in the 1950s.



Bunney Brooke



Publicity photograph, at 'prompt corner' for the Melbourne Little Theatre during a production of *George Washington Slept Here*, 1953. Featuring (left to right): Charles Murray with rainbow, Peter Batey, unidentified man, Fay Parsons, Bunney Brooke and Irene Mitchell, 1953.



Noel Tovey with Bunney Brooke in *The Member of the Wedding*, National Theatre Melbourne, 1958 Australian Queer Archives

Noel Tovey AM (1934-) is an Indigenous performer, dancer, choreographer and activist and while there is minimal material in the Australian Performing Arts collection particular to his overall career, Noel's personal and theatrical life connects in with this Fellowship.

Noel was introduced to the theatre by his friend Chesca (Frances Curtis 1931-2021) who worked with him at Collins Bookshop. Chesca took Noel to a Les Sylphides performance and connected him with the National Ballet School. Noel soon embraced ballet lessons and the stage and performed in various productions, with his first professional role in *Paint*

also introduced him to cafes and bars of Melbourne accepting of queer folks such as Vals Café and Raffles Coffee Lounge in the basement of the Block arcade. In an oral history with Gary Jaynes, Noel talks about his early days in the theatre and the subtle and not-so subtle discrimination he experienced.

*My friend Ivor went into an audition and got into the chorus of 'Kiss Me Kate' - the other boys were so against him. They actually got him sacked. That same voice tried to get me sacked from 'Paint the Wagon' in 1954. They didn't succeed with me but they succeeded with him'.<sup>3</sup>*

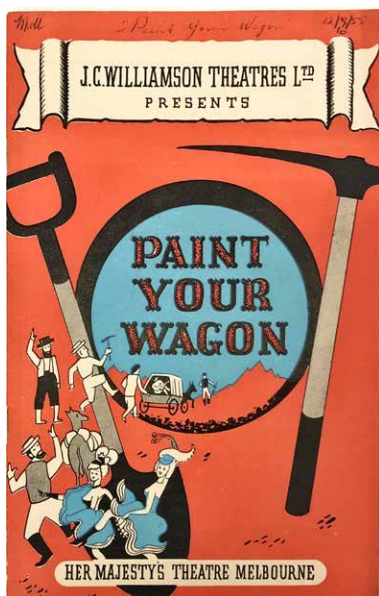
<sup>3</sup> Noel Tovey, oral history interview with Gary Jaynes 2010, Australian Queer collection



Noel performing as an extra in the premiere season of *The Sleeping Princess*, Borovansky Ballet, His Majesty's Theatre Melbourne 1951-1952



Ivor Freeman and Noel Tovey, Arts Ball 1950s.  
Australian Queer Archives



In 1951, Noel was wrongly convicted and found guilty of engaging in 'homosexual acts' and imprisoned for a short time in Pentridge Jail.

Noel left for London in the early 1960s and became a principal dancer with Sadlers Wells and a successful choreographer. In 2016, Noel was present in the chamber when the Premier of Victoria, Dan Andrews, apologised to those who had been convicted for homosexual acts and expunged the criminal record against him. Noel's friend Chesca became an identity within the LGBTIQ+ community – being one of the first Lesbians to come out on national television in an interview in the early 1970s. She was also a founding member of the Australian Daughters of Bilitis Group, later the Australian Lesbian Movement.



Barb Angell during her Tivoli days, Photo Harry Jay

Barb Angell, born in Melbourne in 1935, was a Tivoli dancer and performer during the 1950s. By the 1960s Angell was also a writer and actor on the popular television show – *The Mavis Bramston show*. Some years later, while working in England, she met her partner of 40+ years, Pat Gaye - an actor and England's first female stunt performer.

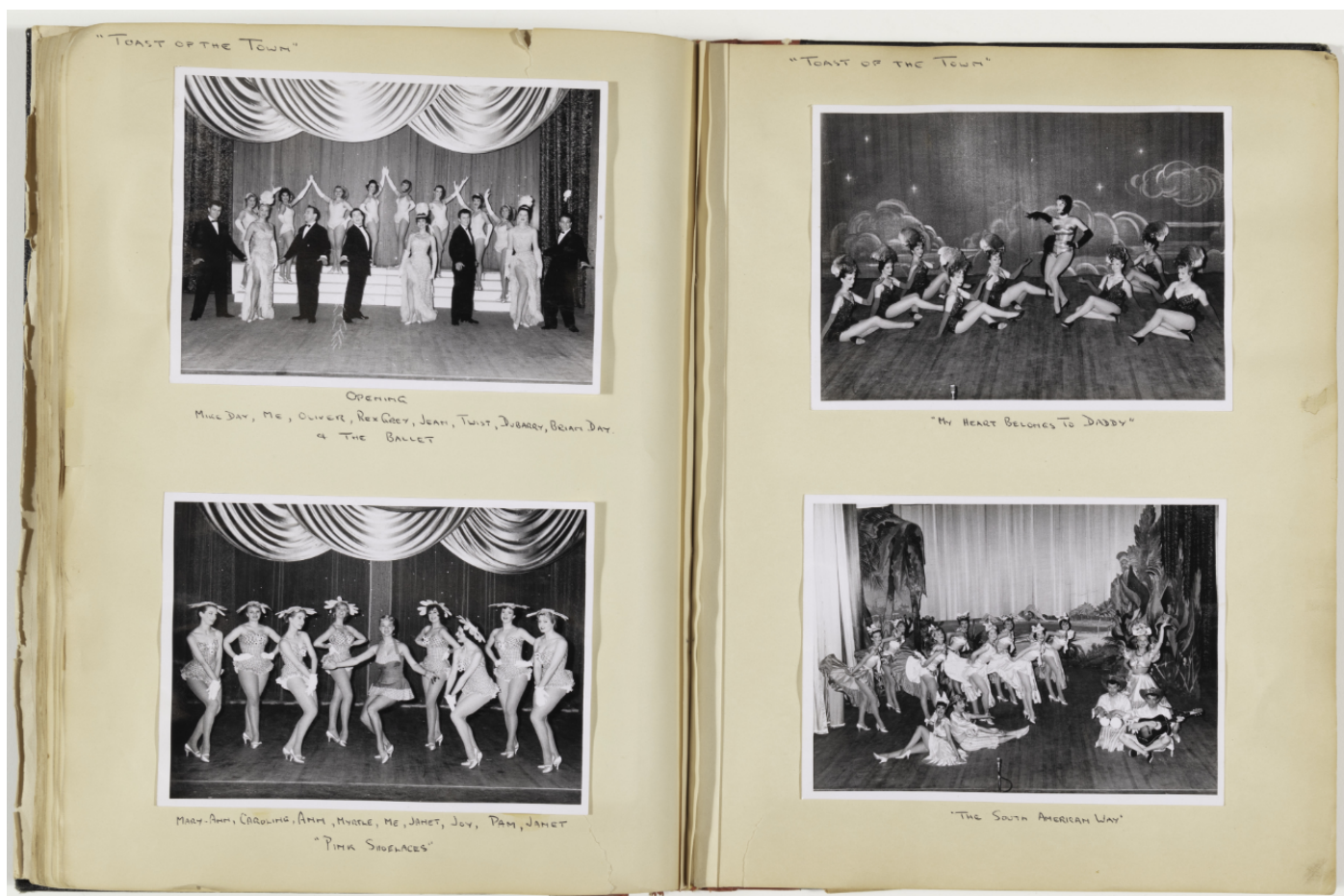
Like many of her local contemporaries, Barb was also connected with the Little Theatre (which later went on to become St Martin's Theatre) She wrote for various performers for film and television and, like many other performers of that time, crafted a scrapbook and photo albums of her career which she later donated to the performing arts collection. Barb also donated personal material to the Australian Queer Archives. Barb Angell went on to write *The Coral Browne Story* in 2007



Barb Angell, photo by John Hearder



Barb Angell as Greta Garbo, Mavis Bramston Show c.1960



Barb Angell Scrapbook



Coral Browne (1913-1991) was born in Footscray in 1913 and died in Los Angeles in 1991. Coral was most well known for her performances in film, particularly in *Aunty Mame* and *The Killing of Sister George* – which endeared her to queer audiences. She was particularly known for her acerbic wit and camp sense of humour.



Pearman died in 1964 and Coral later married fellow actor Vincent Price. In her book, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography*, Price's daughter, Victoria Price, recalls a conversation with Coral about her relationships with women. Coral mentioned that one of her female partners had wanted more visibility in the relationship, but



L-R Coral Browne with Philip Pearman , with Vincent Price, with Robert Helpmann

In 1950, Coral married fellow actor Philip Pearman and while not doubting the partnership, Pearman was known to be gay. Once, while reading a potential script, Pearman asked if there might be a part for him. Skimming through the script, Coral wittily remarked, 'Yes – here's the perfect part – Act Four, Scene Three: A Camp near Dover.'<sup>4</sup>

Coral was close friends with fellow Australian actors Gwen Plumb and Thelma Scott and during the 1930s, Coral and Thelma performed together in various Melbourne theatre productions. Gwen and Thelma were partners celebrated in an exhibition at State Library NSW as part of 2023 Sydney World Pride.

Coral's career took precedence, leading to the relationship ending. Coral said ending that relationship was one of the hardest things she did.<sup>5</sup>

The extensive Coral Browne photographic collection documents her early days in Footscray right through to her successful celebrity status in Hollywood. Browne and Price also visited Melbourne and the Arts Centre site during its construction.

<sup>4</sup> Ned Sherrin's theatrical anecdotes: a connoisseur's collection of legends, stories, and gossip (London: Virgin, 1991)

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Price in *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography* 1999 pg 326



Joan Hammond in costume for role of Leonara in *Fidelio* c1950s Photo by Angus McBean



Joan Hammond in costume for the role of *Tosca*, 1957



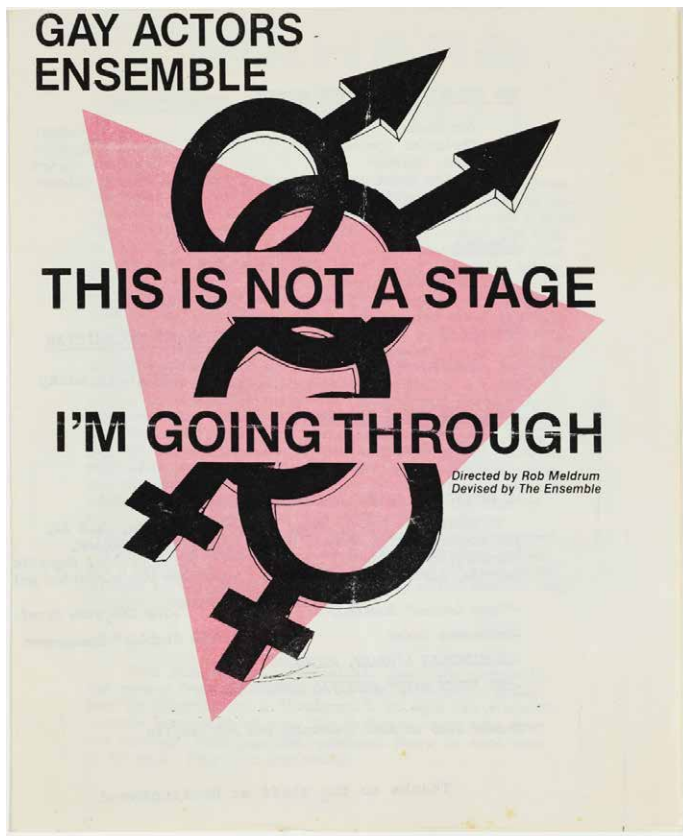
Lolita Marriot and Joan Hammond outside their cottage in the UK. With Joan touring throughout the UK and Europe, to protect their privacy they ditched hotel accommodation and opted instead for a touring caravan.



Joan Hammond in service, London WWII

Dame Joan Hammond (1912-1996), was a internationally successful operatic soprano – working extensively overseas with concerts, recordings and radio – she also volunteered in London for the Women’s Voluntary Service during WWII. In later years she was Artistic Director and Board member of the Victorian State Opera. Hammond taught music and voice at the University of Melbourne and within the collection diligent notebooks attest to a student’s strengths and weaknesses. For over 60 years, Joan shared her life with partner Lolita Marriot. In 1992, at an event at the Arts Centre and celebration for her 80th birthday, Joan publicly acknowledged Lolita (Lol) as her lifelong partner for the first time. Lolita passed away the following year, in 1993.

There are a series of photographs that feature the personal life of Joan and Lolita and correspondence also from adoring fans. One letter simply addressed to ‘The Miss Joan Hammond, International opera Star, Somewhere in Australia’ and writes “Although it sounds “flowery” and I am no hand at “fan” letters - I want you to know that no-one has ever taken your place in my heart – you’ve always been “top of my list” in my absolute admiration of your God given talent – long may you reign dear lady, long may you reign....”



*This is Not a Stage I'm Going Through Program, 1985*

The emergence of gay themed productions by mainstream theatres was a slow initiative, with smaller collectives and theatre groups, such as La Mama and the NewTheatre often taking the lead in bringing queer stories to smaller venues and community events.

In 1985, The Melbourne based Gay Actors ensemble devised and performed *This is Not a Stage I'm Going Through*, directed by Robert Meldrum, and performed as part of the Next Wave Festival. The show was billed as a "powerful and moving celebration by young gay men and women, focusing on the needs and rights of young gays and the pressures of 'coming out'". As a community supported production – the program thanked the local bars and community groups including – the Laird, Pokey's/Pennies, Mandate, Club 80 and Victorian AIDS Council. By the mid 1980s, the AIDS Crisis was impacting the LGBTIQ+ communities of Melbourne and communities were supporting each other as the AIDS crisis manifested in grief, stigma and discrimination for those effected and the broader queer commnties.

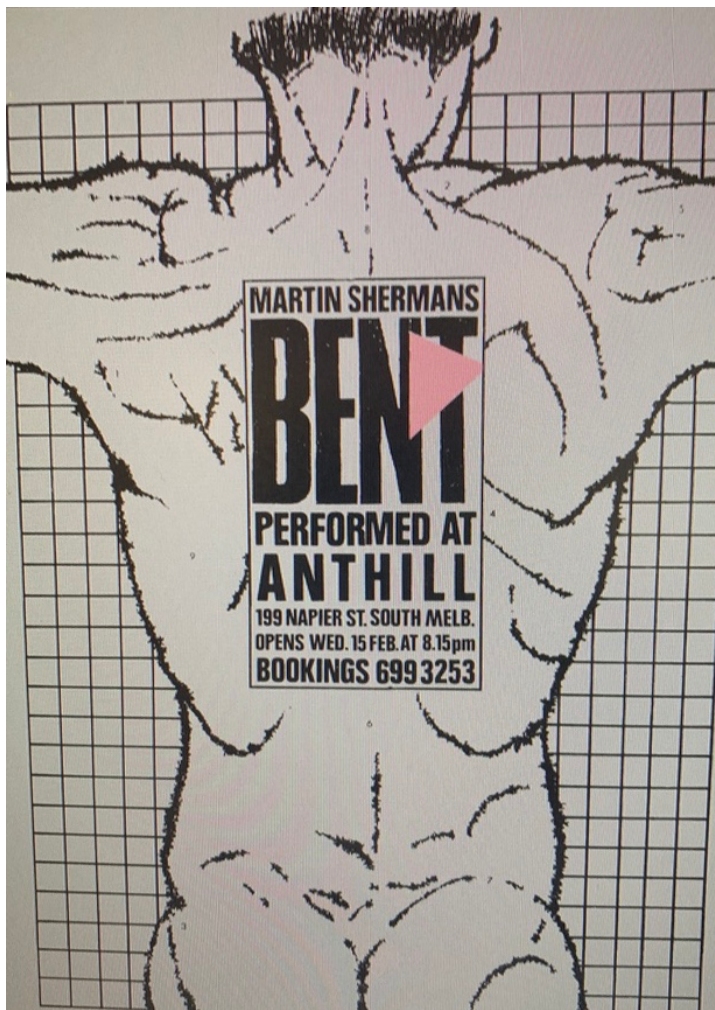
As Vito Russo writes in the introduction to the 1981 book, – *The Celluloid Closet* "We have cooperated for a very long time in the maintenance of our own invisibility. And now the party is over." <sup>5</sup>

Martin Sherman's *Bent*, first premiered in London in 1979 and in 1980 was presented by the Melbourne Theatre Company at the Russell Street Theatre. The play, focuses on the persecution of gay men in Nazi Germany leading up to WWII and in the concentration camps. *Bent* is recognized as the first production to depict this oppression and use of the pink triangle as an identifier for Gay men in Nazi concentration camps.

The 1980 Melbourne season was directed by Bruce Myles with design by Anne Fraser. During the 1980s it was also presented by the Melbourne University Guild Theatre; St Martin's Theatre and Anthill Theatre in South Melbourne.

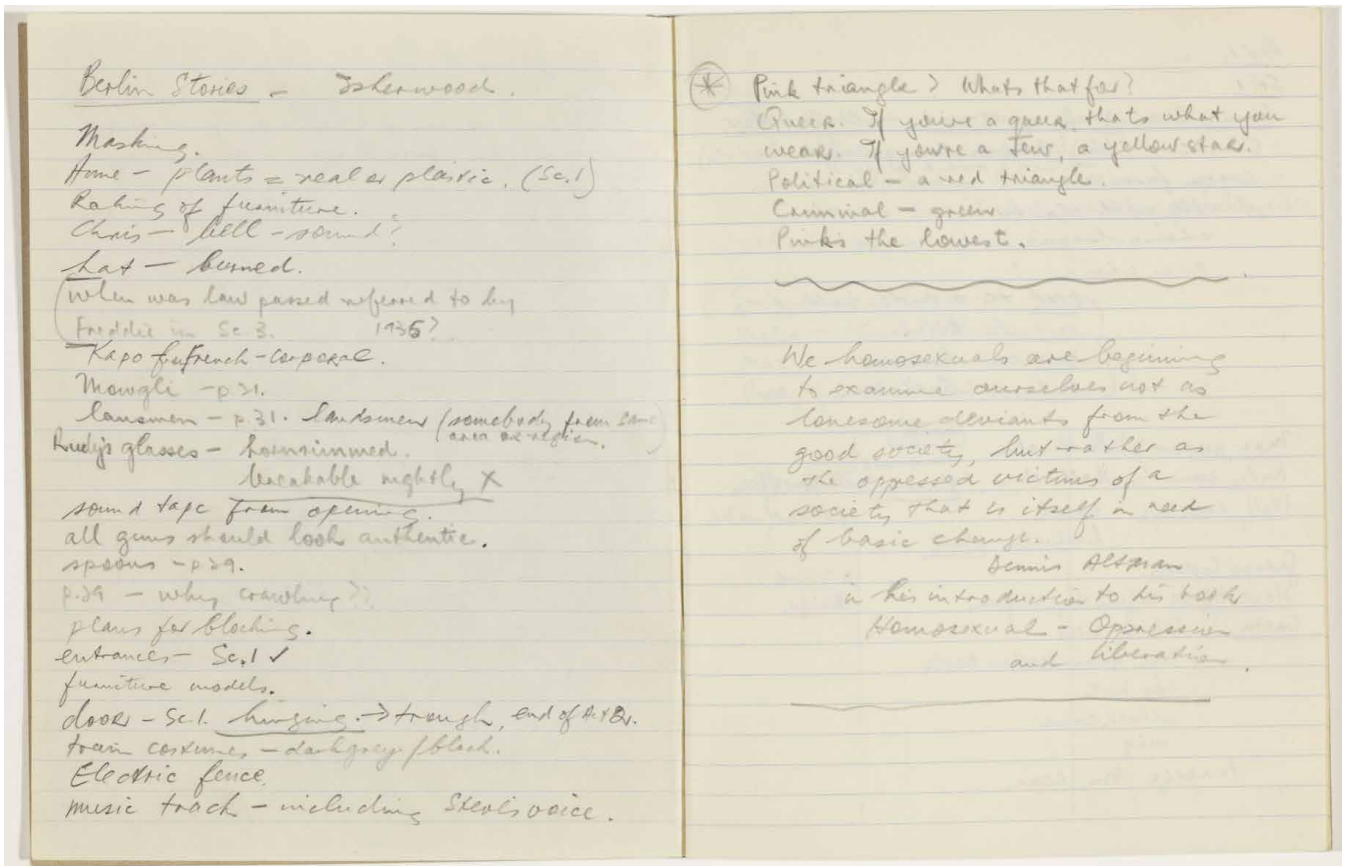
*Homosexuality was decriminalized in Victoria in 1980*

*The First AIDS case diagnosed in Australia in 1982*



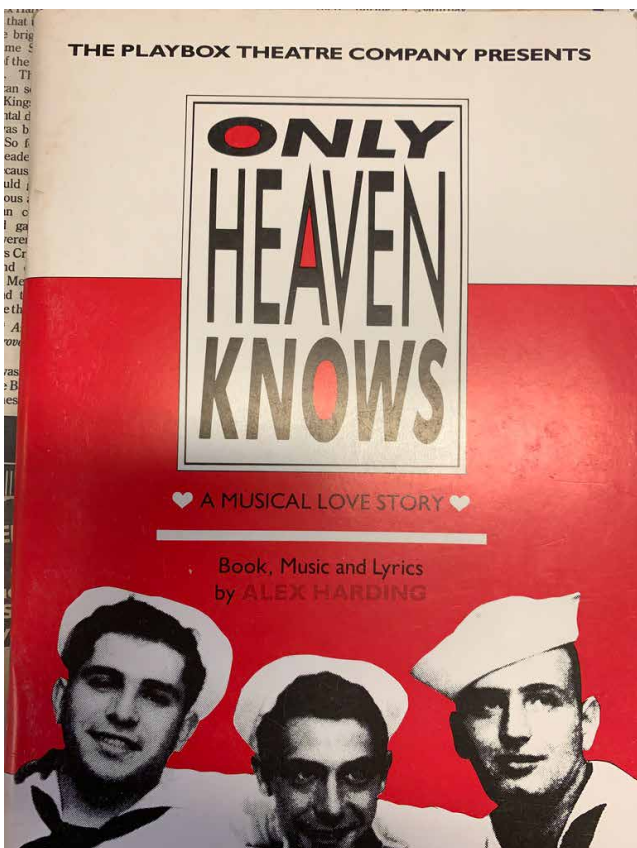
*Bent Program, 1980*

<sup>5</sup> Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* 1981



Bruce Myles notebook, Bent Production

Within the collection, there is a notebook in which *Bent* Director, Bruce Myles, lists his inspirations and considerations. It includes a quote from Dennis Altman's 1971 book, *Homosexuals: Oppression and Liberation*. "We Homosexuals are beginning to examine ourselves not as lonesome deviants from the good society, but rather as the oppressed victims of a society that is itself in need of basic change." In recent conversation with Altman I asked if this quote was still relevant today – he replied: "Basically I think I grossly underestimated the ability of consumer capitalism to incorporate us—and the sad reality that other forms of inequality and injustice remain so solidly in place"<sup>6</sup>



In 1988, the Griffin Theatre in Sydney presented *Only Heaven Knows* by Alex Harding (1949-2022). Alex Harding was a founding member of England's Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company and moved to Australia in 1984. After a few smaller cabarets for Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, he was commissioned as part of the 1988 Bicentenary to write *Only Heaven Knows* - a 'Romantic Musical Comedy of sorts'. Set in King Cross/Sydney during the 1940s and 1950s, it follows the lives of the key characters as they navigate life and various romantic liaisons. The Daily Telegraph said of the play: 'this is a brave and often poignant piece,' and claimed there is 'much pleasure in this heaven'.

In 1989, *Only Heaven Knows* was presented in Melbourne by Playbox Theatre Company at the Arts Centre's Studio Theatre. The staging of the play in Melbourne was helped along in part by a letter from performer Evie Hayes (herself a former Tivoli performer) to Carillo Ganter (then Artistic Director of Playbox Theatre) praising the performance she had seen in Sydney and hoping it could be presented in Melbourne.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Altman email to Angela Bailey 2024

EVIE HAYES

39 Alexandra Avenue,  
SOUTH YARRA 3141

23rd May, 1988

Chief Executive,  
Playbox Theatre,  
MELBOURNE

Dear Sir,

No one knows better than I the fallacy of "overnight stardom" - it usually means years of hard work before being "discovered" - so perhaps to refer to Alex Harding as a new writer is something of a misnomer, but he WAS new to me. Until last week, while holidaying in Sydney, I was taken to see his new show "Only Heaven Knows". I can only say that I was tremendously impressed. The quality of his writing, his understanding of human nature, his professionalism, overwhelmed me. The dialogue is totally believable, and the show is in the true genre of the musical that also has tragedy - and doesn't human life? His cast has been shrewdly chosen, and act their little hearts out. The musical numbers Alex has written - I think I was told there are thirteen - capture essentially what he wished to convey. The lighting and costuming were all superb, and I believe it would be a feather in your cap if you could obtain the right to perform the show in Melbourne. I for one would certainly attend, and I shall be telling people to watch out for it. This young man has an extremely interesting future in Australian theatre - indeed, possibly in world theatre. I have suggested to him that he should make noises in the U.S.A. as I am confident there would be an enormous interest in his work.

I guess what I'm saying is - this was a truly memorable evening of theatre, and I shall be keeping in touch with him to watch for further of his captivating writings.

Yours very sincerely,

*As ever,  
Evie Hayes*

Evie Hayes

Letter from Evie Hayes to Carillo Ganter, 1988

**Playbox**

23 February 1989

**COPY**

Dear Cast -  
Here is a copy of a letter sent by Carrillo to George Fairfax today regarding a nasty incident at BASS. XX

Mr. George Fairfax,  
General Manager,  
Victorian Arts Centre Trust,  
100 St. Kilda Road,  
MELBOURNE, VIC. 3004.

Dear George,

Friends of Caroline Gillmer, who stars in our production of ONLY HEAVEN KNOWS at The Studio, rang BASS on Monday morning, 21 February to book tickets for this production. They were told, "You wouldn't want to buy tickets for that. It's awful. It's all about poofers".

I had previously heard an account from Andrew Porter, of similar treatment given to a potential customer at BASS' outlet in Myer Melbourne. The message was apparently the same. I had not acted on this because it was only hearsay. Now, however, with a specific witness we demand action, including, I would suggest, a formal apology from BASS, evidence of action against staff members involved and financial restitution for ticket sales lost.

BASS is meant to act on behalf of theatre managements, not against them. We had, in fact, invited all BASS outlets to have four tickets each for a preview performance of ONLY HEAVEN KNOWS so that they would be familiar with the show. Some of the outlets sent many more than four, which created some embarrassment at the preview because of overflow numbers. But, overall, we thought it a good thing that people wanted to see it. Obviously, we can't expect all members of staff at BASS outlets to like every show. We must, however, expect that they represent us to the customer.

...../2

**PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY**

**PRODUCTION AND ADMINISTRATION**  
The C.I.B.  
Mathews Theatre  
117 Sturt Street  
South Melbourne 3205  
Phone (03) 690 9033  
Fax (03) 690 4925

**BOX OFFICE**  
Shop 46, Collins Place  
45 Collins Street  
Melbourne 3000  
Phone (03) 650 4888

**SEASON 1989**  
Studio, Victorian Arts Centre

**HATE**  
by Stephen Sewell  
presented by Playbox  
410 and Belvoir Street in  
association with the  
Australian Scenic Arts Authority.

**ONLY HEAVEN KNOWS**  
by Alex Harding

**CORALIE LANSDOWNE SAYS NO**  
by Arie Sizo

**Ant Hill Theatre,**  
159 Napier Street,  
South Melbourne

**THE SECRET HOUSE**  
by Noel Hooda

**SAFE HOUSE**  
by Ron Sime

**REDNKA'S LESSON**  
by Linda Aronson

**NICE GIRLS**  
by Linden Wilkinson

Letter from Carillo Ganter to George Fairfax, 1989

Only Heaven Knows was directed by Robert Meldrum (part of the Melbourne Gay Actors Ensemble). The playwright, Alex Harding was also actively involved with the Gay and Lesbian Arts Association and the Gay Immigration Task Force. Alex noted to friends that "it is not often a piece of Australian gay theatre is seen in such a high-profile venue and not often either that a piece reflecting part of our own history is centre stage for all to see."

Melbourne's queer community were keen to see the much anticipated play but those trying to buy tickets through the BASS agency phone ticketing service were initially dissuaded by an employee who responded to callers trying to buy tickets to Only Heaven Knows with: 'Don't book tickets to that show it's all about poofers!'

The Bass ticketing agency was then managed internally by the Victorian Arts Centre and Carillo Ganter approached the Arts Centre manager George Fairfax, demanding a formal apology from the Bass agency to the company, cast and crew. The correspondence between Fairfax and Ganter continued back and forth and BASS staff failed to identify who was responsible.

**C**USTOMER relations 1: A row has broken out between the Playbox theatre company and the computer-ticketing agency BASS over Playbox's latest production, 'Only Heaven Knows', a musical play by Alex Harding, set in the gay Sydney of the middle 40s and middle 50s. The fracas is worthy of a three-act play in itself.

Act I, scene I. Last week, prospective patron rings BASS to book two seats for 'Only Heaven Knows', only to be told by the person taking the booking, "Don't book for that play; it's all about poofers." Scene II. Friend of one of the actors in 'Only Heaven Knows' rings BASS to book: "Don't go and see that, it's all about poofers." Friend relays story to actor; actor hits the roof.

Act II, scene I. Incensed Playbox management fires off letter to Arts Centre management (which runs BASS) demanding an apology. Scene II. Saturday. Message circulated via computer terminals to BASS staff, saying their job is to sell tickets, not moralise.

Act III. Later that day, Alex Harding hears of story, takes matters into his own hands and rings BASS, ostensibly to book two seats. The following exchange takes place:

Ticketing clerk: "You wouldn't like that play; it's all about poofers."  
Alex Harding: "I'm the playwright."  
Phone goes dead.  
Curtain.

Epilogue. The artistic director of Playbox, Mr Carrillo Ganter, is still furious. "BASS is supposed to be helping us, providing a service. It appears there's a serious problem not only in attitude but in management control," he said. Mr Ganter contacted the Arts Centre again yesterday over the matter.

The general manager of the Victorian Arts Centre, Mr George Fairfax, said yesterday: "It's not up to a seller to make those comments. We're finding out more about it."

Letters to Playbox regarding *Only Heaven Knows* included both glowing praise and homophobic responses. A 1989 letter from a visitor from Queensland offended at the language but also vile in its denigration of the characters. Queensland's queer community were still battling for the decriminalization of homosexuality that didn't eventuate until the Goss Labor Government came to power in 1991. The letter on the right from a retired schoolteacher, upset at the use of 'offensive' language and worried that the play would potentially 'force' younger people to become 'homosexual'. Gay and Lesbian community groups at this time, had already been pro-active in providing information to a younger generation that it was 'ok to be gay' with the Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students group publishing the *Young, Gay and Proud* publication in 1978.

Robert Meldrum  
Director  
ONLY HEAVEN KNOWS  
Playbox  
MELBOURNE

Dear Robert,

My wife and I (visitors to Melbourne from Brisbane) saw your play this week on the same night Hector Crawford and his wife made their story faced exit after the first Act.

We nearly joined them,  
Which would have been a pity.

You have a fine moving play which can do much to dispel some of the hate and loathing a lot of heterosexuals like me (and possibly her) have for the homosexual stereotype.

Alex Harding's play can do much to ~~change~~ <sup>change</sup> this with its insightful spotlight on the pain and alienation, the loneliness and the loving and the fears carried by ~~xxx~~ homosexuality.

Where Harding, and you, fucked it up (to use a word the play uses loosely) was to emphasise some of the grosser and repellent aspects of homosexuality. If you are looking for a wider heterosexual acceptability of this ~~subject~~ <sup>subject</sup> in a more receptive play you could start by cutting out some of the unnecessarily offensive stuff.

The use of fucking language in modern playwriting is now dreadfully commonplace. If your play it is tremendously effective when used to convey great intensity of feeling and dramatic impact.

Apart from that it reinforces the commonly held heterosexual belief that homos are just a rotten lot of fucking poofers.

Which, in view of the plays tender and compassionate message, is a pity.

Oh and out that bedroom scene too. It, too, is unnecessarily offensive.

Best wishes

Since I am writing I may as well have my say about the show at the Studio. As a fairly recently retired secondary school teacher of English and creative Drama I am all for encouraging senior sec. students to go to live shows and used to do so taking them in and having performances at the school. However I found the too frequent blasphemy offensive and think a proportion of the students, maybe 10% would be Christians and would dislike it also. Now the "f" and "s" words were not only overdone coarseness, and the homosexuals I know are not given to overmuch swearing, but surely those words were not used in the 1940's. Homosexuality as a crime in 1940 with 1980's swear words seemed out of kilter to me.

I would very much like to read the blurb sent out to schools suggesting this show as suitable, please may I have a copy. The play will certainly promote discussion but only the very brave student will dare to suggest we are letting down our standards and becoming more decadent each year. Kids cant stand against peer pressure so you are forcing them to accept blatant homosexuality as a cult and fun, and because you show genuine love and compassion they should accept all the rest as o.k.. Is it?

Yours sincerely  
Daphne P...



Kenn Brodziak



George Carden and Kenn Brodziak

Kenn Brodziak OBE (1913-1999) was a successful figure in the arts, achieving success as a theatre and music manager, entrepreneur, and in his early days, was an aspiring actor and playwright.

While studying law and honing his skills as a playwright, Brodziak was annoyed by the censorship laws of the time. In 1936, he cleverly leveraged these constraints for publicity by writing the play *Desire Brings Welcome: 'The experience of a Law student who desires to be a Playwright in 3 Acts'*, thereby challenging the status quo. The play featured gay and lesbian characters and was eventually banned.

Australia, like many Commonwealth nations, had adopted the United Kingdom's outdated 1838 Lord Chamberlain's Theatres Act, which censored "acts of indecency" in theatre, including content with gay themes. It was only in 1949, that the death penalty for sodomy was officially abolished in Victoria.



Kenn Brodziak, amateur theatre group, 1940s

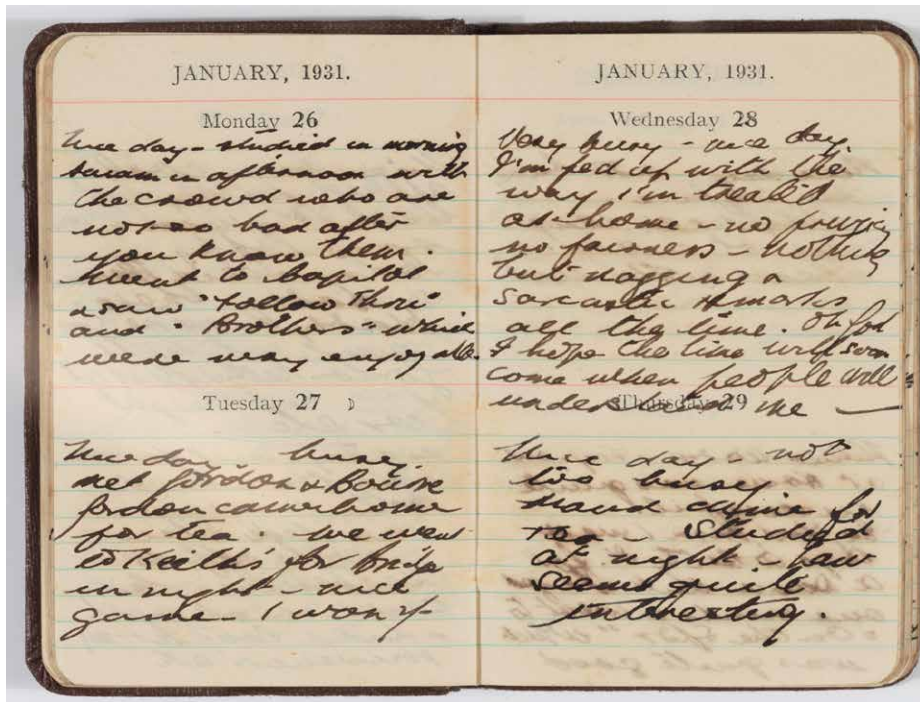


Olga Roberts and George Carden in "Call Me Madam", Coliseum London, 1940s

Both George and Kenn were also acquainted with Noel Tovey and in Noel's autobiography he mentions having a brief relationship with Kenn and also being encouraged by George to move to London.



Kenn Brodziak



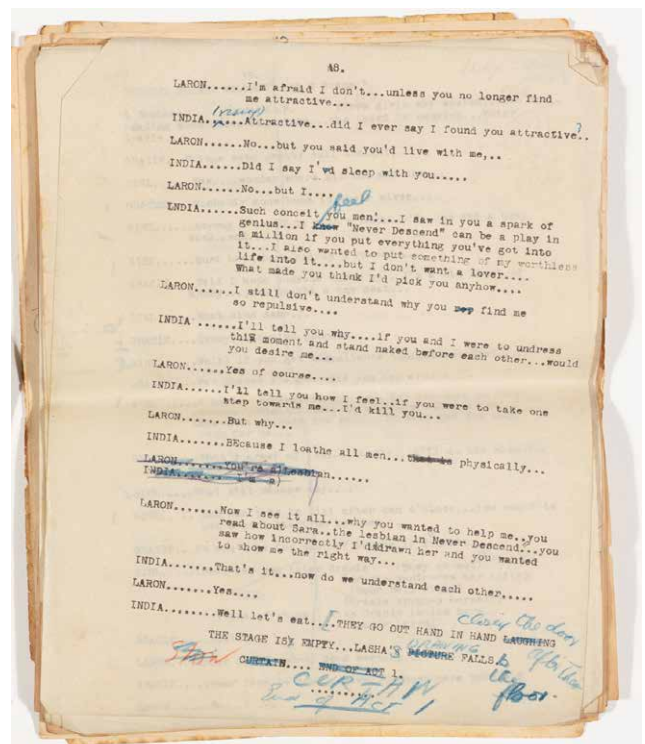
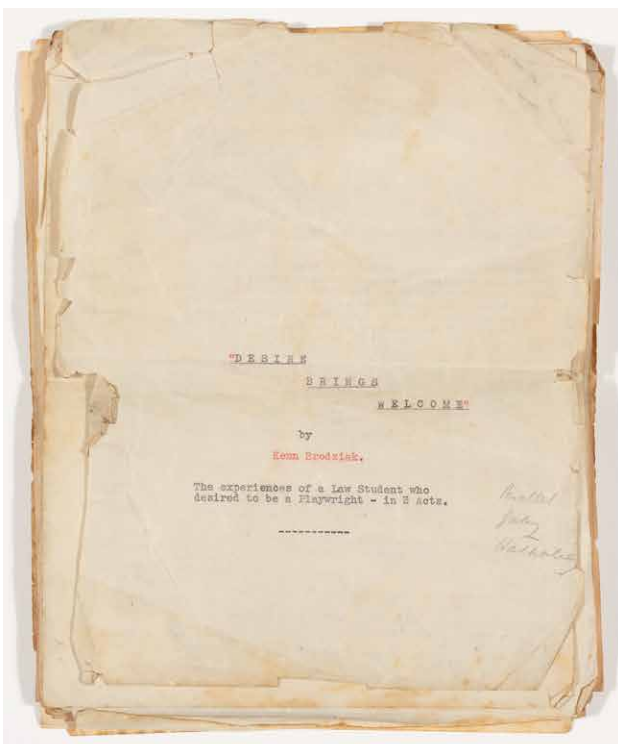
The Kenn Brodzia collection holds two small diaries from the 1930s written when he was in his early 20s, living at home and studying law. In the entry for Wednesday 28th January, 1931, he writes:

Very Busy, nice day. I'm fed up with the way I'm being treated at home....no fairness – nothing but nagging and sarcastic remarks all the time. Oh lord I hope the times will soon come when people will understand me..."

Throughout the diaries there is a continuing reference to visits from 'George'. One of the main protagonists in *Desire Brings Welcome* was also called George and later changed by Kenn to

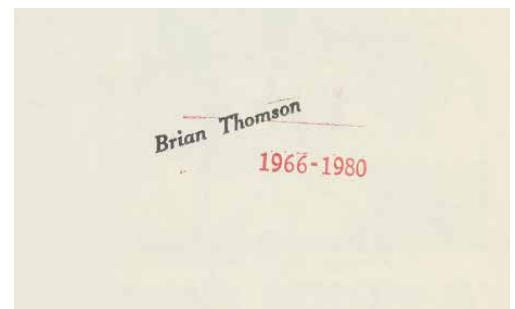
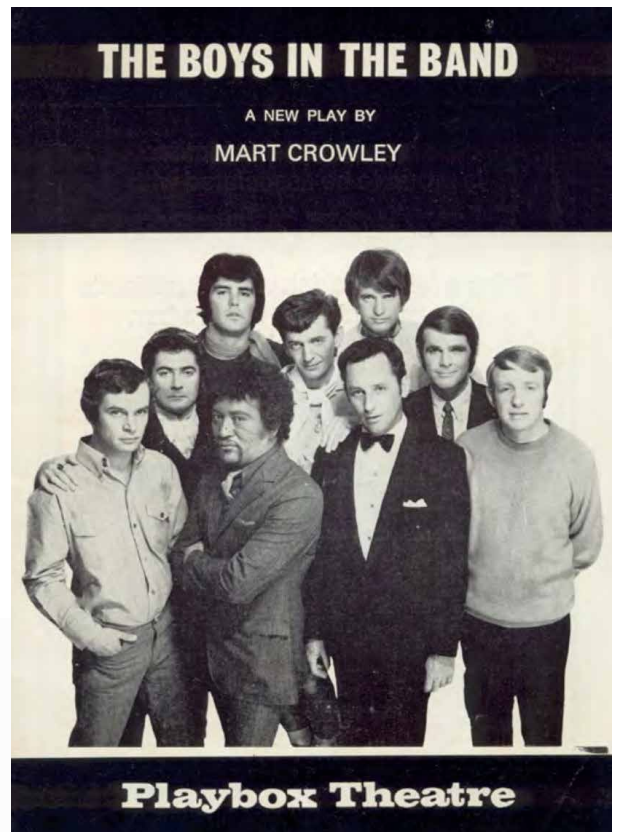
Peter. In 1931, gay men risked criminalization for being homosexual and little material evidence of domestic queer life exists from this time. In this dialogue between the main protagonists – George talks through the struggle with his sexuality and chastises Laron for calling him a 'homosexual' "Don't Keep using that word..." "What shall I say then..." "Camp is the word we use..."

The word homosexual was predominantly used by the wider society (medical and legal) at this time – not by members of the community itself. The term Gay was not widely used until the 1960s.



In a continuing campaign of confronting censorship, in 1969 Kenn Brodziak, in partnership with Harry Miller produced *The Boys in the Band*. The play had recently premiered in New York in 1968 and was one of the first to feature gay characters and themes. While not censored for the portrayal of homosexuality, police did attend the performance and the actors were prosecuted for using 'obscene' language. The conviction didn't hold and was later thrown out after the magistrate himself, went to see the show. *The Boys in the Band* had a hugely successful season.

*The Boys in the Band* premiered in New York the year before the 1969 Stonewall Riots

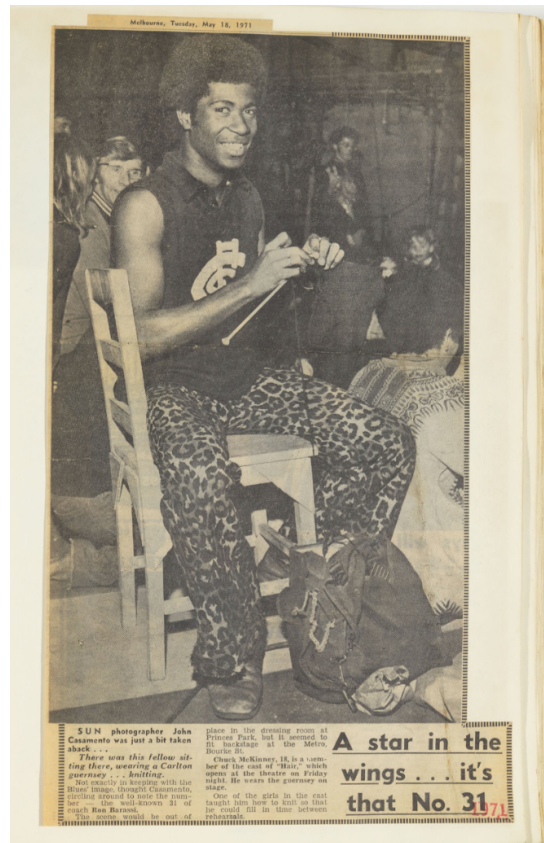


Model bus for "Priscilla, Queen of the Desert: The Musical", Palace Theatre, London, 2009. Designed by Brian Thomson

Brian Thompson (1946-) is a set designer for stage and screen and having started his career in the 1970s, has a considerable list of achievements, particularly working on seminal queer productions including - Rocky Horror Picture Show – both stage and screen, HAIR, Priscilla Queen of the Desert, Jesus Christ Superstar, Angels in America, Holding the Man and 100s more. Thompson is a patron of the Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras and in 2000 designed the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games.

Brian loved the flamboyant and spectacle and talks of his love of football – and the experience of the spectacle of the footy at the MCG – hence why he gave one of the actors in HAIR a Carlton jersey to wear. He lived and worked in London from 1971-1981 and had a bohemian life of sorts – made his own clothes and never experienced any discrimination. His friends in Sydney would later recount to him the 1972 Mardi Gras protest.

In discussions with Brian and others, the theatre and the theatrical environment created a safe/protected place to work for LGBTIQ+ people – and I think all these connections and threads speak to this as well. Brian donated numerous scrapbooks to the Australian Performing Arts collection meticulously documenting his career.



Brian Thompson Scrapbooks with a news clipping feature of one of his first theatre designs in 1971 for Director Jim Sharman's *As You Like It* at the Old Tote Theatre



Frank Thring in the United Artists film *The Vikings*, 1958.



Frank Thring as 'Pontius Pilate' in the Metro Goldwyn Mayer film *Ben Hur*, 1959.



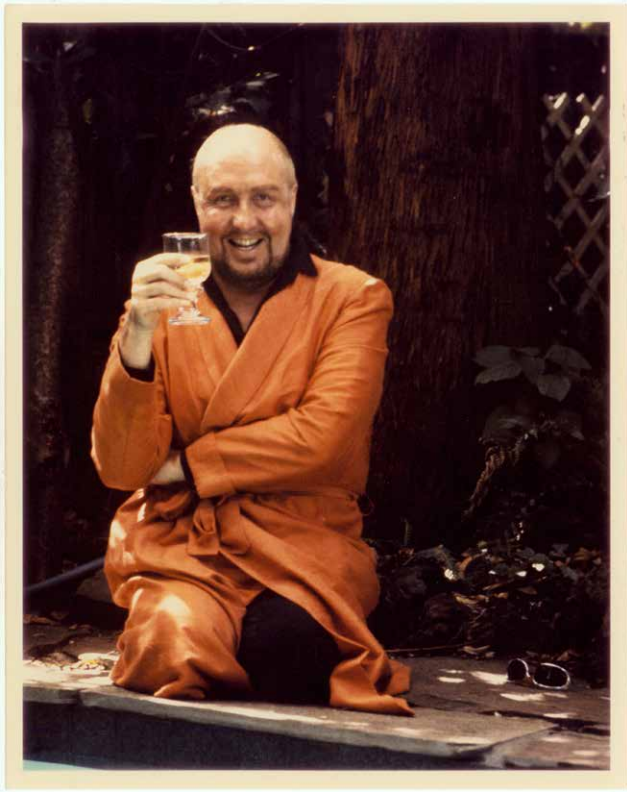
Frank Thring as 'Herod' Antipas in Metro Goldwyn Mayer film *King of Kings*, 1961.

Frank Thring (1926-1994) was outrageously gay. The actor and entertainer was a riotous, flamboyant character and although his most successful roles were as villains in numerous Hollywood films, the personal photographs and jewellery within the Frank Thring collection showcase a life of camp culture and celebration.

The camp demeanor and poses of Thring and Brodziak speak to an ease with their identity. A card within the Kenn Brodziak collection to Kenn, from a friend, humourously suggests Kenn has been seen loitering around the Botanic Gardens with Frank Thring!

Later in life Frank would regularly pop into the studios of community radio station Triple R and chat on air about his wide and varied life experiences. 'Frank had a way of saying 'Darling' that engulfed everyone within earshot'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Noel Tovey in *Little Black Bastard*, 2004, pg185



Frank Thring (1926-1994) in his home c1978.



Frank Thring in drag, 1950s and Thring's cufflinks below



Costume design by Loudon Sainthill, King Arthur, *Canterbury Tales*, c1967



Window design by Loudon Sainthill, Prince of Wales Hotel, St Kilda c1936

Loudon Sainthill (1919-1969), born in Hobart, was an artist and designer for theatre, opera, ballet and film. After studying for a time at the Arts School in Melbourne, he worked briefly as a designer. His earliest works are the 1936 etchings of the Prince of Wales/Fleur de Lis symbol on the windows of the Prince of Wales Hotel in St Kilda. By the 1970s The Prince of Wales hotel was well known as a gathering place for the LGBTIQ+ communities with Pokeys Drag show and in the 1980s Pennies Lesbian disco.

By 1939 Sainthill had met his partner, writer Harry Tatlock Miller whose connections with the art world consolidated Sainthill's career. They later moved to London and during WWII enlisted with the Australian Army medical Corps. After the war, his first production was *The Tempest* at Stratford-on-Avon in 1951. Sainthill then went on to work extensively in London and New York with companies such as the Old Vic, Royal Opera House, Savoy Theatre and others and had firmly established himself within London's theatrical circle.

In 1991 John Truscott initiated a major retrospective of Sainthill's work as part of the 1991 Melbourne International Arts Festival.



Costume design by Loudon Sainthill, Pluto in *Canterbury Tales*, c1967





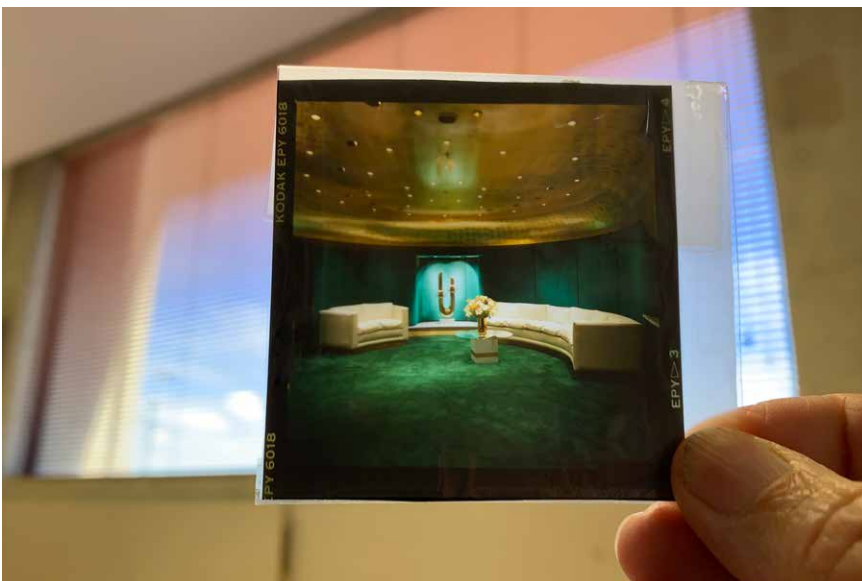
Set design by John Truscott for the 1962 production of *Under The Sycamore Tree*



John Truscott riding a bike through Warner Bros. Studios, California, 1967. Gift of Graham Bennett 1997



John Truscott on the film set for *Camelot*, Warner Bros Production, 1966-1968. Gift of Graham Bennett 1997



The performing Arts collection is housed within the mighty Hamer Hall and this fellowship also engaged with the iconic interior design features of the building itself. One of the most enduring and original elements of the interior designs by John Truscott (1936-1993) is the John Truscott Lounge (formerly the Cadbury Lounge) – a lush gold and emerald green experience with a nod perhaps to the green and gold found in the designs of his predecessors in Angus Winneke and Loudon Sainthill.

John Truscott was a designer, artist and producer whose early career was championed by Melbourne's Little Theatre company director, Irene Mitchell – who engaged him as designer at the Little Theatre and supported his work throughout his career. After much work for the stage he moved to LA to work successfully in film and received two Oscars for the costume design and art direction of *Camelot*.



Costume Design for 'Oberon', the National Theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1954/1956

His partner, Graham Bennett had accompanied him to LA and also worked on some of the heraldic designs for *Camelot*. Although he didn't publicly acknowledge his relationship, Truscott's relationship with Bennett has been recounted as his first complex, long relationship, something also noted by friends of the couple. By the 1980s Truscott had been invited back to Melbourne to design the interiors of the Victorian Arts Centre. His success also enhanced by his ability to create loyal teams that worked with him on productions and supported and helped realise his vision within a safe environment.



This fellowship has highlighted just a few stories, rich in history, creativity and resilience with many more faces, places, stories and quintessential queer connections still to be explored and claim queer space. The next installment of this project will be creating an exhibition.



Pair of crocheted blue wool slippers worn by Tony Sheldon in the role of Arnold Beckoff in the 1983 J.C.Williamson Productions Ltd. of *Torch Song Trilogy*.

This project was further enhanced by material from the Australian Queer Archives – particularly from the oral history collection.

All images, unless otherwise credited are from the Australian Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne. Thanks to Arts Centre Staff, Frank Van Straten, Arts Centre Collections Team and the Research Centre Claudia Funder. Brian Thompson, Joe Noonan, Tony Harding and the GLADA Employee Reference Group, Denise Whitehouse, Gary Jaynes, Nick Henderson, Dennis Altman, Australian Queer Archives.