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A HISTORY OF SOLO THEATRE

A
Dissertation
Submitted for the Degree
of
Master of Literature

by

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to

The University of Glasgow
Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies

May 1988

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CONTENTS

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	i
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	ii
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
 <u>SECTION ONE:</u>	
<u>CHAPTER ONE:</u>	<u>HISTORICAL ROOTS</u>
	14
The Regulation of the Stage (The Licensing Act of 1737)	17
<u>CHAPTER TWO:</u>	<u>ANTHONY ASTON TO MATHEWS, THE ELDER</u>
Anthony Aston	22
Samuel Foote	25
George Alexander Stevens	26
Charles Dibdin	28
Jack Bannister	30
Charles Mathews	31
 <u>SECTION TWO:</u>	
<u>CHAPTER THREE:</u>	<u>THE GREAT EXHIBITION TO THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN</u>
	38
Albert Smith	39
Charles Dickens	40
Mark Twain	46
The Lecture Circuit	47
Sir Squire Bancroft	53
Dan Leno	56
Albert Chevalier	57
Bransby Williams	58
The Festival of Britain	59
Emlyn Williams	60
 <u>SECTION THREE:</u>	
<u>CHAPTER FOUR:</u>	<u>A CANON OF BIOGRAPHY</u>
Hal Holbrook	68
The British Dimension	72
Brian Barnes	72
Micheal Macliammoir	74
Max Adrian	76
Roy Dotrice	77

Russell Hunter	80
David McKail	81
Chris Harris	83
Peter Florence	84
The American Extension	85
Richard Blake	88
Henry Fonda	88
James Whitmore	89
William L. McLinn	93
Alec McCowen	95
The Place of Design In the Solo	98

CHAPTER FIVE: **AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUTOPERFORMANCE** 99

David Kossoff	102
Bruce Mason	102
Peter Ustinov	104
Spalding Gray	104
Pat van Hemelrijk	107
Performance Art	108
Vidar Eggertson	110
Autoperformance	111
Amy Taubin	112
Linda Montana	114
Norma Jean Deak	115
Claire Dowie	115
Barry Humphries	116

CHAPTER SIX: **THE ONE-WOMAN SHOW** 119

Sarah Siddons	120
Fanny Kelly	120
Fanny Kemble	122
Charlotte Saunders Cushman	123
The Famous Five	125
Beatrice Herford	125
Cissie Loftus	126
Ruth Draper	127
Dorothy Sands	129
Cornelia Otis Skinner	130
Joyce Grenfell	131
Beatrice Lillie	133
Elsbeth Douglas Reid	134
Maria Corven	135
Nancy Cole	135
Julie Harris	136
Estelle Parsons	137
Pat Carroll	138
Annie Griffin	140
Tilda Swinton	142

<u>CHAPTER SEVEN:</u>	<u>CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF THE SOLO MODE</u>	145
Dave Allen		147
Billy Connolly		148
Jack Klaff		150
John Sessions		151
Ian McKellen		153
A Vehicle for Experiment		154
A Future for the One Person Show?		156
The Audience		158
<u>CHAPTER EIGHT:</u>	<u>NOTES ON A SOLO PERFORMANCE (Mr RLS)</u>	160
<u>CHAPTER NINE</u>	<u>FINAL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS</u>	168
<u>REFERENCES</u>		172
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>		178
<u>APPENDICES:</u>		
<u>APPENDIX A:</u>		
Letters to players and specimen questionnaires		187
<u>CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX OF SOLO PERFORMERS</u>		
HISTORICAL		
18th Century		194
The Early Victorians		196
Late Victorians		197
The Edwardians		198
Inter-Bellum		199
Post-War		201
MODERN		
The Early Sixties		203
The Late Sixties		205
Early Seventies		208
Late Seventies		212
CONTEMPORARY		
Early Eighties		223
Mid-Eighties (1983/4)		232
Mid-Eighties (1985)		239
TODAY		
(1986-1988)		244
<u>APPENDIX B:</u>		
<u>SOLO STATISTICS</u>		255
<u>APPENDIX C:</u>		
MR R.L.S. - (A Solo Play by John Cairney)		261
Curriculum Vitae		323

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The writer wishes to dedicate this thesis to the memory of the late Professor James Fullarton Arnott, MA, M.Litt. (1914-82), formerly Emeritus Professor of Drama at Glasgow University, who not only instituted that Department, but introduced this student as a much younger man to the joys and responsibilities of dramatic scholarship.

ABSTRACT

The intention of the thesis is to provide an overall and comprehensive history of the solo contribution to the theatre in terms of the one-person performance. To do so, research has been made into the single performer through the ages, and his progress has been traced from his emergence from the Greek Chorus to his latest manifestations in terms of the dramatised autobiography. Many of the problems faced and conclusions reached are those which affect any actor in whatever genre he chooses to perform, but in this instance, special emphasis is placed on the solo aspect, and discussion centred on these points.

Given the main chronological thrust, the thesis thereafter develops along generic lines, where it can be seen that certain groups of performances are similar - that is, historical-biographical, bio-dramatic, thematic, autobiographical and improvisatory, especially in contemporary autoperformance and performance art. Under these headings, the solo convention is considered in all its present day forms, and can be seen to have developed enormously, especially in the last two decades - particularly in terms of the one-woman show.

The main figures of the solo movement are analysed in some detail and act as stepping stones in the development from one phase to another, from the mid-eighteenth century to date. Around these seminal performers cluster the lesser names, who, nonetheless, contrive to add to the undoubted growth and acceptance of the one-person theatrical mode.

The solo actor's position is discussed in relation to the writer, the director and the audience, and a detailed analysis of one particular one-man show is added in conclusion.

The appendices carry a full index to date of every known English-speaking solo performer, and a specimen script, fully annotated as for performance, is attached.

This thesis attempts to show that one-person theatre may be considered and evaluated thoroughly as a dramatic genre, and as a valid part of our contemporary theatre heritage.

INTRODUCTION:

'Acting is.....a fit subject for a lecture. All people judge of it.... merely for the pleasure they received from the actor..... but without entering into the science or the art of acting.'

It is difficult to be more than merely personal about the science or the art of acting. It is not easy to be properly objective about an action which is so subjective in its processes. The response to it is often reflex and is conditioned by so many variable elements, such as the conditions in which a performance is witnessed, the state of physical and mental being of the spectator at the particular time and the degree of attraction and prowess in the performer. For these reasons, any attempt to lay down absolute rules of correctness, or to formulate precise standards of attainment must be approached with caution, and accepted only as the expression of an opinion based on educated, professional experience. Whether science or art, the art of acting is a subject worth the study, and in this instance it is to be considered as it specifically applies to the one-person play.

The burgeoning of solo theatre, or the 'One-Man Show' as it is commonly called, is something that is only comparatively recent in theatre practice but its origins are very much older. Its growing favour today, with public and managements alike, indicates that it satisfies a need in theatre and in society, and deserves therefore a considered investigation and enquiry into its form and a comprehensive history of its development within traditional theatre practice.

This historical aspect will be dealt with chronologically as far as available information will allow so that the current development may be seen in context.

The study has been undertaken principally because none such exists. At least no record is available that might be considered as a complete survey or detailed study of what is an expanding field. There is a marked lack of scholarship in this

specialised area of the performing art and it would seem appropriate at this time to take a closer look at the monodramatic tradition as it has now developed. There has been previous discussion of aspects of solo theatre and analysis of its techniques, especially in American universities, but so far there has been no attempt at a broad history, nor any exhaustive research on the subject as a whole.

While it is recognised that this dramatic format has become a popular and respected genre of contemporary dramaturgy, a plethora of terms exists to describe it accurately, mainly because the boundaries of the solo are difficult to define. It also has so many names - the one-man show, the one-person show, the one-player performance, singular theatre, monodrama. It is not only that one person is self-evidently involved, but that the result may take one of many forms: recital, reading, scripted impersonation of a real or fictional figure, from the past or present, or the actor as him/herself and where there may, or may not be, musical accompaniment. In addition, any or all of these may also use accepted conventional stage devices such as the monologue, the soliloquy, the aside and the direct address to the audience.

Whatever its particular format however, the one-person show has, at its base, and relies for its chief recourse, on the ancient tradition of the bard or story-teller, whose roots are in the poet-players and rhapsodes of classical Greece. But even non-literate societies have their oral poets. The instinct for one man to speak to others, and for those others to gather to listen in a group goes very deep in the social psyche and has been evident in the evolution of theatre presentation down through the ages. The roots of the drama are entwined in the roots of society and neither can be considered without reference to the other.

Everyone has histrionic sensibility to some degree and the ability to imitate is innate in all of us. In short, everyone of us has the faculty to act, and the instinct to be an audience. This duality has conditioned our reaction to what is now called theatre, even when it is considered not as dramatic

art or as the science of the drama but as part of the religious mystery. In other words, the instinct for the drama goes very deep in all of us, and a long way back in our history.

In no other convention of dramatic activity is the emphasis or focus so firmly placed on the actor himself, in all his aspects, than in the one-person show. All other agencies concerned in the dramatic product - writer, director, designer, musician - however excellent in themselves, are only ancillary to the presenting of the actor before the audience in the solo play. He acts so that they may react. His 'play' is made only so that they may respond. In his one form the actor has to find not only the emotional and intellectual propensities at the base of any dramatic exercise, but he has to persuade his audience to respond to him as if he were indeed 'a whole company of players' and his solo text a full play. He is a one man ensemble met in his own person to present his play. In his person, he is everything the company play has to be. The only company he has is his audience. It is a big part to play. There is no bigger in theatre, and it must also be borne in mind that in solo theatre there are no understudies!

Solo theatre might be generally considered as that convention of theatrical presentation in which a single actor by means of a prepared text or improvised scenario, either as himself or as an impersonated character, holds and sustains the attention and interest of an audience for the duration of a complete play/performance, and by so doing entertains and instructs them. It is not a play in the normal, accepted sense, but nevertheless, it represents a contemporary and considered approach to the theatre act in terms of the single actor.

As indicated beforehand, the terms for the convention are as diverse as the styles of performer working in it, but the level of impersonation or representation is also a variable. The particular solo could be thematic or narrative. The presentation may also harness an individual skill or aptitude, vocal or instrumental. In the main, this survey will concern itself with the scripted or dramatised one-person play as it has developed from historical roots until the present day.

Literary Links:

This singular focus has been long apparent in literature. The use of the hero-figure in the literary monologue, either as a character or in the poet's own voice, is an accepted device. There is a sympathetic appeal here in the use of first person, but there is a difference between the speaker's view of himself and the larger view which the poet implies in the narrative. Generally, it is left to the reader to develop the relationship. The literary monologue appeals to the silent reader. Its voice is not really meant to be heard aloud, never mind be performed in a theatre, although many poets successfully read their own work theatrically in public recitals; Tennyson, Eliot, Dylan Thomas. Many writers have made a particular use of the literary monologue; Goethe in Prosperina, Southey in Sappho, Browning in My Last Duchess and Fra Lippo Lippi and Tennyson in Maud. These were all instances of the monologue and super-monologue which developed from early Victorian times and were still in vogue with T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound, and to some extent, Robert Lowell, in the late thirties.

Brecht and Wilder made use of the monologue device in breaking clear of the theatre's 'fourth wall', and in one-act monodrama Strindberg makes use of the character as listener, (Miss Y being non-speaking with Mrs X in The Stronger). Eugene O'Neill in Before Breakfast places the second character in another room, and in Cocteau's The Voice, the second character is on the telephone. (This is performed regularly by contemporary actresses.) Beckett uses the same technique of the Krapp voice (recorded) in Krapp's Last Tape, as does Jim Gracie in his contemporary play, Hugo's Voices (1987).

These pieces however, while relying mainly on the single performance, should not really be considered, strictly speaking, as being within the scope of this study, which concerns itself solely with the practicalities and techniques of the full-length, English-language, one-person play or performance. The main purpose being to show how this form has evolved from a spontaneous, individual performance in the eighteenth century to the definite theatrical entity it now is.

For the same reason of definition, the survey must also exclude traditional solo performers, such as mimes, clowns, magicians, hypnotists, instrumental musicians and conventional comedians, as these are not actors in the accepted sense. A certain ambivalence must obtain nonetheless in considering the latter two categories. Certain musicians and comedians very much attain to the status of legitimate solo performers (Viz: Dibdin, Coward, Lerner, Connolly etc.) and many are capable of sustaining, on their own, a whole evening in the theatre. The place of music and the musician in the solo show is undeniably important, and can be seen as something more than an additional skill or mere decoration, but as an integral component.

Two European figures in particular, a French writer and a German playwright, were early influences in the use of music, or orchestrated choral voices, as an integral part of the theatrical performance rather than as an adjunct. Musical instrumentation has of course always been part of dramatic performance - the drum, the lyre, the flute etc, but the first experiments in speaking against music, that is, on a bed of rhythmic sounds, or between specially-written musical sections, were in eighteenth century France.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a philosopher and man of letters. Around 1762, he wrote a short dramatic piece Pygmalion with music by Horace Coignet, which was produced in Lyons in 1770 and at the Paris Opera in 1772. The story was from the Greek and is well known, but the use of music gave it the term 'melodrama'. This was where the action was heightened or underscored by the use of music and song either as sung dialogue or as background to the spoken word. The device was especially popular in nineteenth century drama. The term is still used in opera to denote spoken passages between musical sections. Schoenberg however, preferred the term 'monodrama' for a composition for solo voice where the singer has also to act spoken lines. Incidentally, Harrison Birtwhistle, a contemporary British composer of the avant-garde has written an opera called Monodrama (as yet unperformed) and Nicholas Maw's One Man Show is a solo opera for the baritone, Louis Berkman.

Johann Christian Brandes (1735-1799) was a minor German actor in Hamburg, who turned playwright and wrote a monodrama, Ariadne Auf Naxos, for his actress/daughter to perform as a monologue with on-stage chorus. Strictly speaking, this was not a one-person play, but a scripted monologue with a listening chorus present throughout, (as is seen today in Beckett's solo pieces), but it further indicated the value of a chorus even in what is ostensibly a solo performance. They also act as a second, or proxy, audience.

The place of the audience is recognised in this research not only as an entity in itself in the mono-performance, but as a virtual co-performer with the solo player. In no other dramatic convention is its role so vital. All theatre is of course, audience-orientated. It must be, as it is for the audience that the whole exercise is intended, but in the solo play the actor and his audience enjoy a special bond. Theirs is the twin axis on which all theatre action depends, but in the case of the one person play an inter-action with the solo performer is mandatory and creates, in the course of the performance, a genuine 'dialogue' which enlarges and intensifies the normal actor-audience relationship. The actor speaks directly to it as the 'other character' in his play and not tangentially as he would in the conventional ensemble. Rather than character to character, it is character to audience.

Reference is often made to the supposed lack of conflict in any dramatic exercise which features only one player, but the solo actor, in fact, has a special recourse to the audience in this regard, and in the on-going dialogue which ensues between them in the course of his performance, he has all the opportunities to explore any areas of dramatic conflict. A very special relationship is built up between them and on this basis, a valid and effective platform for exchange is provided.

During its development, and especially in the last hundred years, the solo performance has had many forms in its progress from the fairground droll of the seventeenth century to the formal platform lecture of the Victorian era, and from the Edwardian dramatised reading to the full-length solo play of

today and its contemporary experimentations. The record of individual performers concerned throughout is a catalogue of theatrical ingenuity in all its aspects. The survey will highlight the fact that there are many types of solo show. Today actors are involved, not only in the conventional sense of being scripted and rehearsed in a given character, but as themselves, in improvised 'conversations' with the audience, as in versions of Performance Art or in what is termed by some American schools, the autoperformance. Finally, there is the solo personality tour de force exemplified by the actor/comedian or musician/commentator who present the solo in terms of their speciality. Even when confined to actors, the field is wide enough. The proliferation in recent years of what are commonly called one-man shows, indicates that the practice is gaining ground, and there is little doubt that the convention has current validity as a theatrical genre and a legitimate claim as a stage form. The growing acceptance of the 'one-man show' and its obvious appeal to performers and public alike must lead to its ultimate confirmation as a fact of life in present-day dramatical representation. It has good claim to be a dominant genre in modern times. It is a unique and individual expression of the living actor in the age of the computer - a re-assertion of the human factor.

In the long course of dramaturgy, the mask of theatre has had many faces, and in the particular expression under review, it offers to the audience the actor in his mask as a solo player. Plato long ago claimed that the actor becomes the mask he wears and more recently, Joseph Chaikin, in The Presence of An Actor² agreed, but if the mask is worn too long, the face beneath it is changed. Superficially, this is maybe a caveat against typecasting, but fundamentally, it can be held that an actor is indeed changed in himself by playing as he certainly is by having played alone. A barrier has been passed. No other role can ever be as big, nor as free from conventional production restraints. Yet the one-person performance can have its dangers too. Its very freedom can be a quicksand to the unwary - any excess, or self-indulgence an always-present trap.

Even its success can back-fire. It is already an adage in contemporary theatre that once an actor has done a one-man show he is unemployable on the conventional stage.

Not every successful actor makes a good soloist, but every successful soloist is always a good actor in the first place. When working alone however, he has to be a good actor and more. That is, he has to be an actor with more than the ordinary, an extra-ordinary actor. If not, he must at least be a performer with a difference. The solo is an unusual format, and it makes unusual demands of the artist performer, both physically and psychologically. Not all performers find it a congenial mode. Indeed many, like Sir John Gielgud, Ian McKellen (for a time), and U.S. actor, Robert Vaughn, have positively disclaimed it.

All normal acting problems are intensified when they are focused on the abilities of the single actor. Whatever the character, it is a total commitment of enormous proportions; physically, in terms of memory and actual performance energy; artistically, in terms of imaging or vivifying events in the narrative. Talent is energy and a good performance is hard work. For the soloist, there is the continuing requirement to shift focus between 'scenes' as it were, and to observe in his story the self-cueing involved between 'characters' and events so as to maintain continuity.

This is the problem of the form's bi-modal structure, that is, between direct address to the audience and the inner dialogue necessary for the life of the character being realised in performance. The first convention is presentational and non-realistic, the second, representational and realistic. It is this fusion makes for a dynamic double effect, and the combination of both that makes the solo actor the unique spectator of, and participator in, his own world. He has to act and to be. It needs a special skill to maintain this balance and engage an audience. This duality in performance demands a fine actor who can command a stage. It calls for a certain kind of personality, an appeal and sympathy, to hold a house alone for two hours as Williams, Holbrook, Macliammoir, Dotrice,

Fonda, McCowen and others have done. It needs vitality and charm. It also requires courage, a needful bravura and not a little vanity. No other performance modality can be as satisfying in ego-fulfilment. American actor/director, William Norris, who has two one-man shows in his repertoire (Byron and Adolf Hitler), maintains, 'Anyone who tells you it isn't an ego trip is lying.'³

Yet it must be more than ego and self-conceit to attract so many performers of high calibre to risk the comprehensive exposure involved. All monodrama is self-disclosure to some extent for this is the persona as performer, and it can be a dangerous area. There is often a manic element in the soloist's make-up which drives him on to face the ultimate theatrical challenge in facing an audience alone, but it does not appear to be daunting. Research done for this study indicates that, on average, a new solo is performed somewhere in the English-speaking theatre at least once a month. Not all survive of course, but many do, and take their place in the carousel with the others, sometimes for year after year. With the general disintegration of classical education, it may be that audiences today prefer to see their heroes, their history, their national character thus animated theatrically. On the other hand it may be merely economic. The solo is cheap. 'In times of recession the one-man-show flourishes.'⁴

With political reputations at a low ebb today the attraction of the hero-figure in reality is diminished, but not so in the myth. Today's hero is wounded. 'Freaks, and the abnormal are the reigning metaphor for the age' writes Mel Gussow,⁵ but perhaps the one-man show is the modern link to the ancient rituals and rites; part of our search today for old heroes, where the one-person show may be seen as a mythopoeic romance with a palpable and obvious hero-figure. Myth is part of our links with the past, and it is realised in ritual. Drama is a rite exemplified in theatre. Its vehicle for today is the one-performer play, and whether it be autobiographical, thematic historical-biographical or improvised, we live in what Thor Eckhart called, 'A One-Man-Show-Mad Age' - like it or not!⁶

It is the lot of the actor in any age that his is only a contemporary fame. Only in his own generation can one know him. Posterity is left to guess at the impact made in his own day. His genius and artistry, however unique, remain only as a memory, until they pass into myth and legend. Acting is a man-made artifice that can occasionally attain to the status of art. Every art has its own artifice and can only survive if artists obtain mastery of it. The actor's art is constantly being reconsidered in every generation. From Burbage to Betterton to Quin, Garrick and Kean, Kemble to Macready, the greasepaint lineage extends to Irving, Tree, Du Maurier and so on down to Gielgud, Olivier and Richardson until Guinness and Scofield today - but none was a soloist. Yet the solo player was always there, in one form or another, from the beginning. Therefore, in considering the history of the single performer it will be of value to consider it in terms of the persons who have figured prominently in its story.

Modern times need a modern approach. The theatre reflects what it sees around it, although it depends on how the actor holds it to catch the light. Present-day concerns with improvisations, performance art, street theatre and community drama, illustrate the development of alternative theatre. Solo theatre is only a part of this development. The contemporary cry is for freedom, and nothing can be freer than one man alone with his audience. However ephemeral the actor's effect, his shadow is thrown across every age.

A further ingredient in the solo is its intimacy. It is in effect, a long conversation with an audience almost on a one-to-one basis - one actor and an audience who become one, or at least, attain a temporary one-ness. The attitude to the soloist is more personal, because he is only one person. The subjective response is spontaneous and sympathetic. The audience wants him to do well, because they could not face the embarrassment of his doing badly. They have nowhere else to look but at him. The actor may be all things to all men, but in the monodrama he is one particular man at a particular time in a particular place for a particular audience.

The inscription on an Egyptian temple reads: 'He is himself alone, and to this aloneness, all things owe their being.'

In the same way, the soloist, in his 'aloneness' creates his 'characters' around himself on stage and transmits them to his audience. His play exists in his own person and in the 'persona' that the audience becomes in being the co-protagonist of the performance. From the solo actor must come every voice, every sign-post to any change of scene, every aspect of narrative development, and from the audience all it needs is trust and faith. It means the audience has to work too.

This study has sought to delineate its history in order to understand its effect as a theatre form. Dr Richard Southern, in his Seven Ages of Theatre gives exactly thirteen lines to the phenomenon of the solo performer: 'It preserves a tradition in a period of decline.....or may occasion a new turn in the course of a vigorous phase.....it remains an unpredictable element in the theatre story.'⁷

That is the view of the scholar. On the other hand, in reviewing Dotrice as Aubrey at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1967, and considering Emlyn Williams, Macliammoir and Max Adrian at the same time, Ronald Hayman came to the conclusion that - 'it is an entertainment which proves.....that the dramatised monologue is still one of the living theatre's strongest suits.'⁸ That is the view of the critic. However, as C.V. Wedgwood has wisely opined, 'All historical scholarship reduces itself ultimately to a mere matter of human opinion.'⁹

To write, present and perform a one-person play today, the actor can not only write his own meal ticket, but travel warrant as well. So many festivals are now available in the international calendar throughout the English-speaking world, that the actor is offered a real life in theatre that is also something of an adventure in living. It is more than a means of earning. It is a congenial, stimulating, satisfying and often rewarding professional avenue. Instead of being at the whim of chance casting, the freelance solo actor is in total control of every aspect of his career. In return for this freedom he may forfeit a more conventional career development,

but what he has really done is to sever the umbilical cord that ties the average actor to his agent's telephone.

The soloist makes himself free to seek new outlets away from a very crowded market-place. By virtue of his mobility, portability, economy and minimum platform needs, he can make himself available at a day's notice to go anywhere. The world is literally his stage. All he needs is a space the size of a carpet on which to perform, and enough people who will pay enough to listen to justify his hotel. All this posits an undue reliance on the character qualities of the individual. He may be free from company restraints but he must be his own manager. He may be removed from production excesses, but in him alone lies the responsibility of satisfying an audience. He can avoid company jealousies, but he must maintain his own standards. In many ways, it is 'clean' theatre, and even 'poor' theatre in Grotowski's sense. In the one-man-show there is only the man and his audience. They make the compact between them. The one-man actor may be the entire cast but he is also the entire wage bill.¹⁰ Perhaps the best advantage however is as Barry Humphries points out, 'They can't start without you!'¹¹

It is said that theatre is basically no more than a plank and a passion, as it were, or as Kenneth Tynan puts it, 'A large room with one man facing a crowd of people'.¹² What else does the solo player know? The one-man show is only another focus on theatre. It begins with one man and ends with the audience too, as one. The science, or process, by which this occurs is the mystery we call theatre. To understand this phenomenon in terms of the single performance, and, in particular, to explain its rise in recent times, we must first appreciate its history; a history which, it is hoped, will justify the research now offered. So, in the words of George Stevens, himself an early solo performer, in the forward to his 'Lecture Upon Heads' (1764):

'Braving the quicksands of apocrypha, puffs, generalisations, errors of fact, bad memory, acrimony and adulation',
I respectfully append this study,
bearing in mind:

Bearing in mind:

'It is not the critic that counts. Not the man who points out where the strong man has stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; and comes short again and again, yet who knows the great enthusiasm; who, at the best, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.'

SECTION ONE

Ancient and Historical
Regulation of the Theatre
Medieval to Mid-Victorian

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL ROOTS

About five hundred years before Christ, in what might be termed pre-natal dramaturgy, the poet, Thespis, stepped out of the Greek Chorus to become the Hypokrites or 'answerer', and in so doing, became the very first Actor. The religious rite had become an act of theatre in the person of a poet, and in this one man the Art and Science of the Drama was born. In the ancient world, Man was the measure of all things; he was the solitary playing out the conflict within himself; the Hero alone with his Fate. By his 'act' in 534BC, Thespis had invented the 'actor'.¹ Although Solon reproached Thespis for 'telling lies', his was the aboriginal one-man show and formal acting may be said to date from this time.

In what is referred to as 'The Dark Ages' it could be said that theatre too was 'dark'. There was an innate theatricality in many aspects of the early Church's liturgical rites. There was indeed Religious Drama, but for the most part the Early Church disapproved strongly of the infant drama or any part of pagan play-acting. A 5th Century edict prohibited acting under pain of excommunication and it was considered unlawful for any woman to marry an actor! Rude theatre of a kind survived in the streets, in the celebration of public festivals. The holy days of the early church gradually evolved into the holidays of the medieval fairs which served as a platform for the antics of the clowns and montebanks. The annual presentation of the morality plays as performed by the masons' and trades guilds also served to maintain the dramatic tradition as Dr Billington indicates in her study of this period: A Social History of the Fool.

Individual development was largely left to the gleemen and the like, reciting their epic poems at court and to the vagabonds and tumblers performing their antics in the inn-yards and country fairs. But, although these entertainers maintained a primitive theatre, they cannot legitimately be called actors, since impersonation or the assumption of

character is absent from their activity. They were, in a sense, professional behaviourists rather than performers as such. Nevertheless these 'performances' preserved some of the essentials of acting and enabled the frail thread of the drama, extending from Thespis in Athens and Roscius in Rome, to be carried through the fabric of rudimentary performance in the Middle Centuries, until the actor achieved first recognisable status, if not wholehearted approval, in Elizabethan times.

Historical exactitude might not permit of Adam's being regarded as the first One-Man Show, but certainly one of the earliest solo performers was by a religious, St Simeon of Stylitus, Bishop of Antioch (390-459AD), who sat on top of a pole for 40 years. Another rudimentary soloist, albeit apocryphal, was St Genesius, the recognised patron saint of actors, who was converted to Christianity in the Roman arena by taking the part of a Christian who was condemned. Genesius, a soldier, was martyred for his performance. Many actors have 'died' on-stage since, or 'murdered' a role, or 'killed' a laugh or 'buried' a piece of business or by-play - all necrophilic allusions owing to the unfortunate Genesius. The embryo of the Actor-type however, though still in rude form, re-emerged in the Middle Ages in the person of the Clown. He was the Sot, the Antic, the Merry Andrew, the Zany, the Cully, wandering or 'strolling' the countryside, developing that individual performing skill required in his sketches and drolls.² Later, he evolved into Shakespeare's 'warne clowne', then eventually the 'charlatan' or Harlequin, and the fore-runner of the histrione or common player.

Thus, despite the Church's continued mistrust of the stage, a kind of theatre practice survived. Acting was forbidden like sin, but like sin, remained very popular. A priest, John Stockwood, bemoaned in a sermon preached at Paul's Cross in 1578, two years after the first public theatre had been opened in London by James Burbage:

'Wyll not a fylthye play, with the blast of a trumpette, sooner call thyther a thousande, than an houre's tolling of a Bell, bring to the sermon a hundred?'

This same complaint echoes down the ages to our own, except that it is now theatre protesting the alternative attractions of television! Ironically, it had been out of the church sermon that the monologue had developed into a laicised comic piece with inserted jokes and songs performed by clowns and street comedians down the centuries.

These mountebanks and strollers were, to all intents and purposes, one-man shows in themselves, and may be seen as the ancestors of the solo players who also 'work the crowd' in a theatre. These medieval exhibitionists were undoubtedly swindlers, cheats and liars, but no more than the actor himself essentially is. Acting is cheating, or pretending. It is action bringing character to life as delineated in a script by means of tricks and lies called the performance. If there is art in this, then the actor is the life of it, for it is his lie that makes the living moment in the theatre. The paradox of acting is that it is a formalistic counterfeit presented by the gift of instinct and experience as an accepted truth for the time of performance. He must appear to believe his own make-believe and in this respect today's urbane actor is no different from his strolling forbear.

In very much the same way the strolling player stood up on his cart before the crowd in the market-place and delivered his 'spiel' to hold them long enough to make a collection. The actor lives by selling himself, or at least, part of himself. This is the prostitute part of his priestly office, another expression on his mask. It is part of the face he shows to the public in order to win their attention and gain their support. He is still in the market-place. He still seeks his audience where he finds them. All theatre is audience theatre, and if Stanislavsky is right when he considers great acting as the art of public solitude, how more alone can the actor be standing up before his audience as a solo player. He becomes its corporate cast and it becomes his corporate hearer. In this exchange is the very kernel of the theatre experience, and links the solo actor of today with the strolling player, his ancestor and common perpetrator of one man theatre.

THE REGULATION OF THE THEATRES

Licensing Act (1737)

This one, contentious, Government edict had more to do with the emergence of one-person entertainment from the middle to end of the 18th Century than any other single, contributory factor. Had it not been for this statute and its precursors, certain actors and managers might not have turned their attention to the solo formula, and therefore, the one-person play, as it is known today might not have evolved as it did in the nineteenth century.

The Act of 1737 was not the first time that bureaucracy had imposed restraints on the theatre. The first statute ever passed relating to control and regulation of the stage was in the reign of James I (3 Jac. I. c. 21),

'to restrain the abuses of players....(and) for preventing and avoiding the great abuse of the Holy Name of God in stage plays, interludes, May-games, shows and such like!'⁴

For two centuries power had lain in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain, an official of the royal household, who was also the Master of the King's Revels. He spoke directly for the King in all matters relating to theatre and public performance, and his control was absolute. After the Commonwealth, attitudes eased somewhat, and Parliament passed the 1713 Act (12. Anne, Stat 2, C23):

'for reducing the laws relating to rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars and vagrants.'⁵

In 1737, however, Parliament defined the Lord Chamberlain's powers as two-fold:

- 1) Any person acting for his own gain without licence from the Lord Chamberlain shall be deemed a rogue and vagabond.
- 2) All new plays, or additions to old plays, might not be acted until a copy had been approved by the Lord Chamberlain.

To understand something of the complexities and anomalies of Parliamentary statutes relating to the Regulating of the stage, it is necessary to begin realistically with the Restoration to the British throne of Charles II in 1660.

It was not only Monarchy that was restored, but public Theatre, and from the start, its regulation was bedevilled by confusions, contradictions and misunderstandings.

Between 1661 and 1663, two companies of actors were formed - the King's Company and the Duke (of York)'s Company. Two friends of Charles' exile, Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant were granted Patents which, in effect, gave them total control over all acting in London. Killigrew, as Master of the King's Revels, was given charge of the King's Company of veteran actors and took them into the King's House, or Theatre Royal at Drury Lane. Davenant took the younger actors (among them Thomas Betterton) to the Duke's House at Lincoln's Inn Fields. These were the only 'legitimate' theatres, that is, given over entirely to acting in straight plays or any new play in London. The term legitimate or 'legit' is still used for actors and acting today. Despite the fact that they had their Patents by Royal Charter, these two established houses still required the Lord Chamberlain's approval before putting on new dramatic works, as did the theatres in Windsor and Westminster and at the 'Two Universities'. This encouraged Davenant to concentrate on Shakespeare and the training of young actors at a new Playhouse in Dorset Garden while Betterton took over the Duke's Company.

In 1677, Thomas Killigrew gave up the King's Company to his son (the Patents were in perpetuity - another cause of dissension) and in 1682, the two companies were united under Betterton, but when the Lord Chamberlain required, in 1696, that ALL plays should be licensed, Betterton moved the company back to Lincoln's Inn Fields, maintaining that their Patent had been given to Davenant directly by the King, and therefore his successors were not answerable to the Lord Chamberlain.

This view was also held by Colley Cibber when he united the companies again in 1710 and returned them to Drury Lane. In 1711, Opera was permitted at the new Queen's Theatre, and other theatres were opened at Lincoln's Inn Fields under John Rich and Goodman's Fields under Odell and Henry Giffard. It was the latter who took the scurrilous The Golden Rump to Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, in order to discredit Fielding.

Henry Fielding (1707-54) was a novelist, who might have been a great dramatist, had not an early play of his, or rather a ballad-opera, The Welsh Opera or The Grey Mare The Better Horse (1731), offended Walpole and insulted, or so it was thought, persons in the Royal Family. Fielding, who was an able and astute writer as well as theatre manager, tried to arouse his contemporaries against Walpole's intention to censor theatre through the imposition of licences on all plays produced by the growing number of playhouses. It was mainly due to Fielding's continued satirizing of current political practices in his brief spell of management at this theatre with plays like The Historical Register for the Year 1736 that the Licensing Act of 1737 was brought in by Parliament.

At the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, Fielding's 'scandal shop' began its repertory of 'satire, song, knockabout and shameless gossip which exactly suited its patrons'⁶ There is no doubt that Fielding's temerity provoked the Licensing Act. He continued his campaign by penning 'some very bold, and very severe satires against the administration; religion, laws, government, priests, judges and ministers were all laid low.'⁷ Fielding often signed himself 'Pasquin' in his letters and articles, a name deriving from commedia dell'arte and French comedy denoting a satirical character. It came to represent a squib or lampoon and Fielding also used it as a title for one of his productions at the Haymarket in 1736. Walpole himself had prepared the way with his Excise Bill of 1733, and in 1735, Sir John Barnard introduced his 'Playhouse Bill' as a measure to gain greater Crown control, (therefore Government control) over theatre and the presentation of plays to the public. This so raised the ire and indignation of actors and managers alike, that the Bill failed. Two years later however, following on the pretext offered by the The Golden Rump, (excerpts of which were read out by Walpole in Parliament) the controversial Licensing Act, despite vehement protests, became law. The Act itself still had only the two main provisions, and it was the imposition of these stipulations that caused much of the dismay and resentment that was to follow. These points were:

- 1 - A restriction of theatres to those which held Royal Patents - Drury Lane and Covent Garden, or those granted licences by the Lord Chamberlain.
- 2 - All new plays, prologues, epilogues, additions to old plays etc must be submitted , in advance, to the Stage Licenser.

Theatrical law in the 18th Century reveals, as John Loftis points out, 'all the ambiguity, pragmatism, compromise and traditionalism associated with the English Constitution. Its structure (Theatrical Law) results from the King's engrafting of a system of Patent Monopoly on a system of State Supervision by the Lord Chamberlain and his subordinate, the Master of the King's Revels (now Sir Henry Herbert). While the Law was lenient and permissive on sexual subjects, it was severe indeed on religious and political themes.'⁸

This of course was where Fielding erred in Walpole's view. The legal complexities caused by the earlier measures created unforeseen tensions and it was to ease this position that the 1737 Act was made law, but it only seemed to make matters worse. The effect was to force many out of theatre, who might have been of value to it - like Tobias Smollett, who had also begun to write plays. He saw the Act as a needless artistic interference and likely to cause hardship to those who earn their living by means of writing or performing for the stage. Although Dr Johnson did write A Complete Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage, its intention was ironic. Subterfuge was required if the restrictions were to be avoided, and a further irony was that one of the first to attempt it was the self-same Giffard who had precipitated the change when he drew Walpole's attention to the scandal of The Golden Rump. Giffard presented a play at Goodman's Fields, 'free of charge' between two parts of a musical concert! No company could exist by such transparent evasions, so most of them folded. Meanwhile, the two Patent houses, freed from any competition, thrived on revivals of old works and productions of Shakespeare. The opportunity for theatrical experiment was narrowed to extinction and a possible theatrical expansion was ended.

By the imposition of an artificial limitation, a very evident theatre revival, begun by John Gay's Beggar's Opera in 1738, was crushed just as it was gathering momentum, and the natural growth of Augustan drama was stunted. Fielding's Great Moguls Company of Comedians was just one of the many groups disbanded. Its founder turned author by converting his five-Act comedies into novels and Giffard received £1,000 from a grateful Walpole for his part in the downfall of Fielding, the dramatist. A sad chapter in English theatre was peremptorily closed. It was due largely to the loss of such as Fielding, that the vigour of the drama in the Walpole era declined almost in direct proportion to the rise in popularity of the novel. Drama yielded to literature, and a great opportunity in English dramaturgy was lost.

The Licensing Act of 1737 also had its effects and thereafter, for actors and managers, the contention lay in whether an entertainment could be defined as a play or not, and whether it was or was not under the control of, and regulation by, the Lord Chamberlain. By virtue of the need for his licence, this official had total power over all public theatres in London north of the Surrey and Coburg bridges. On the south side, the transpontine dramas flourished - cheap, low-grade work which was free of any licence or prohibition. The better quality was drawn to the City of London and Westminster as its greater population allowed for bigger audiences, and all London theatres were strictly supervised by the Crown from whom the required Licence had to be obtained.

To offset this requirement, managers and actors devised 'entertainments' that were not technically plays as such, and were therefore free of licence. Only all-speaking dramatic works were affected, musical presentations were free. This accounted for the sudden rush of special entertainments that were part music-recital, part monologue, part ensemble sketch, and based on the individual skills of a particular performer. It could then be claimed by the managements that such entertainments were not plays. In this way, a format was arrived at that was the genuine basis of the one-person show.

CHAPTER TWO

ANTHONY ASTON TO MATHEWS, THE ELDER

(Circa 1700 - 1850)

If one has to choose any one person who might be said to be the true precursor of the theatrical one-person-show, there is one strolling player of the first half of the 18th Century who has good claim; 'A Gentleman, Lawyer, Poet, Actor, Soldier, Sailor, Exciseman and Publican - (Although I would not have you think that I mention being an Exciseman as a credit to me - I once passed as a Corn-cutter!)', Anthony Aston.¹ This engaging wag treated life as an adventure and traded on his quick wit and charm to carry him through an astonishing series of fortunes and misfortunes in England, Ireland, the West Indies, - and at Charleston, Virginia in 1703 he became the first professional English actor to appear on American soil!

Anthony Aston (c. 1680-1750?)

Tony Aston was the son of an English lawyer and his Irish wife. Always a problem to his father, young Anthony never really settled to a conventional life and drifted, as it were, into theatre. He insists that he first went on the stage at Drury Lane in the season of 1697, but no record of his name survives in the programmes or playbills. However he did tour as a full sharer with Thomas Dogget, and soon afterwards became a stroller on his own account. From these experiences he learned something of the old 'drolls' of the Commonwealth period (1649-60), and put it all to good effect in his Medley, which, in effect, was a one-man variety programme not unlike a vaudeville or music-hall bill in which, as 'Matt Medley', he played all the parts. Using his wit and sense of fun as an improviser, he specialised in 'grimaces,' 'bits of business' and 'horseplay scenes', to which he added impersonations of leading comedians of the day. He toured with this format for so long that he became 'as well known in every town as the Post-Horse

that carries the Mail.'² Despite this popularity, it was a very precarious living to say the least, as witness his own admission: 'I liv'd handsomely by God's Providence, and by the force of my own genius.' In a note to The Fool's Opera, which he wrote after the style of Gay's Beggar's Opera, he mentions, 'I own to have receiv'd £1,334.19.11³/₄ - all in Mr Wood's half-pence.'

A contemporary writer, W.R.Chetwood, noted:

'He pretended a right to every town and if a company of showmen had got to any place before him he would use all his art to evacuate 'these interlopers' as he called them. He declared war on them, and the only condition of peace was that they should act out a play for his benefit before he would leave the stage and march to the next place. He is also known to have left a trunk 'full of cabbage stalks, bricks and stones' as security for an unpaid landlord's bill. But to his credit he returned to redeem the pawn, when his finances, like³ the Kingdom's, were at the tide of flood and not at a low ebb.'

It was this type of country show he brought from Bath to London in 1716. At the Marlborough's Head in Fleet Street he gave a programme of 10 scenes, with dances, comical songs and a prologue. When he tried to add his wife and son and other actors to his entertainment, he fell foul of the London theatre managers, Cibber, Wilkes and Booth, who held that plays with casts came under their patents and could only be performed under licence at Covent Garden, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields. Aston was forced to revert to his one-man Medley format with 'surprising musick without wind or string' and, since he was unable to charge openly for admission, he offered 'Toothpickers on sale for a shilling each'. This was no more than a covert device to extort admission money. His days as a mountebank at country fairs had not been in vain. He knew every trick of survival. Performances were given for 'Gentlemen in Distress', foremost among whom was Aston himself. The truth was that while he was an admirable stroller and mountebank, and formidable Jack-of-All-Trades, he was not a true actor nor a theatrical talent. That he had an histrionic ability, there is no doubt, but he was a mere imitator and lacked the originality for genuine comic creation.

As 'Craftsmen' (No 267) noted in its issue of August 14, 1731:

'Tony Aston is a monopolizer of this kind: he plays all characters; he fills none; he is the whole company in his single person; he receives indeed the salary of Proper Actors, and this is poor Tony's only view; for his plea is Necessity; he confesses his inability to sustain so many parts, and picks your pocket of half-a-crown with some appearance of Modesty; but if he should enter with the air of a Drawcansir...and never permit anyone else to tread the stage, I think he would be hiss'd by the People'.⁴

The effects of the Licensing Act drove him back to the provinces, but before leaving London he, too, joined in the general theatrical outcry against the Bill, and, being Aston, made a personal petition ('having no money to fee Counsel') to the House of Commons as 'Anthony Aston, Comedian' against Sir John Barnard's 'Playhouse Bill'. In his speech, which he later printed in full at his own expense, Aston pointed out the danger of 'The Magistrates having the whip-hand of us all who would be ruined if the Act became law.' He closed his address by asking for monopoly of all the 'Medley' business for his life-time, or failing that, be otherwise provided for in his declining years 'in view of the pleasure he had given the public for more than 25 years.'⁵ He was refused on both points and the Bill became law. This was the end of Anthony Aston, Manager, in London but he continued to travel the country indefatigably and was last heard of as late as 1749 still performing his 'Medley' programme. It is not known when or where or how he died, although he suffered from consumption all his hectic life, but while he lived, if only for a brief hour, he gave the common people some rest from their many tribulations and perhaps better than many more famous names did. As he wrote in his short, biographical sketch:

'Tis silly that people can't like a thing unless they know the name on't - Come laugh again now: why, you come crying into the world; Go out laughing...Yr Obedient Servant, Anthony - Vulge Tony - Aston.'⁶

So, in his own words, he departed the scene leaving the stage clear for the many who were to follow his ebullient example; and if less colourfully, at least more methodically and effectively.

Aston's London sojourn had not gone entirely unnoticed by his fellow-performers. One who had seen and enjoyed him in Fleet Street was a well-born, well-educated, though reckless and extravagant actor and dramatist, who, having taken over the Haymarket in 1747, was also having troubles with the Licensing Act - Samuel Foote.

Aston had shown that it was not beyond the wit and resource of theatre people themselves to find ways to circumvent any imposed legislation, but he lacked Foote's social status and well-placed connections, and was unable to sustain his efforts in the capital, although there is no doubt that the latter would not have moved towards his own solo foray had not the former shown the way first with his 'Medley' entertainments in Fleet Street. Foote however was more ingenious in evading or avoiding the irritating Licensing Act. Foote invited his friends to join him in a dish of tea or chocolate at the theatre, but admission was by invitation card only, which was paid for in advance.

Samuel Foote (1720-77)

Foote called his entertainment Diversions of a Morning, and in it, used his considerable gifts of mimicry and impersonation to entertain his 'friends' sitting around him on the stage and in the boxes. Like Aston, he added players as time went on, and a nucleus of a company was retained to fill in between Foote's items, despite pressure from the other managers. The use of an invitation card instead of a theatre ticket was no doubt inspired by Aston's sale of 'Toothpickers', but in any case Foote's 'entertainment' was not in any real sense, a play. It was a one-man show with minimal assists and the whole town flocked to see him impersonate his fellow actors and well known public figures, especially Garrick, whom he disliked and could never resist lampooning, and later, Dr Johnson, who said of the man regarded as 'the greatest smart in the metropolis':

'Sir, he was irresistible..... Why, sir, when you go to see Foote, you do not go to see a saint; you go to see a man who will be entertained at your house and then bring you on a publick stage. Sir, he does not make fools of his company.

They whom he exposes are fools already. He only brings them into action.' (This was before Foote mimicked the learned Doctor!) 'He has a great range of wit (and) never lets truth stand between him and a good jest'

In 1749, he inherited a fortune but squandered it in Paris. He returned to London to act at the Haymarket in his own comedies. In 1766, he lost a leg through some drunken horse play with the Duke of York and Sir Frank Delaval, a former associate, to whom he wrote, 'A patent for the house in the Haymarket during my life would protect me from want..... I (have) reason to think the public would be rather pleased to see me possessed of this little provision.'⁸ He got his patent, and never returned to his solo diversions.

The field was then left clear for another ingenious dabbler in literature and theatre, and a founding member of the nascent solo club - George Stevens. He was as influenced by Foote as Foote had been by Aston, and was as quick to take advantage of the trend then being established. The difference was that Stevens appeared to have neither the skills of Foote, nor the audacious charm of Aston, yet he created for himself a solo vehicle that was to bring him almost instant fame and make his fortune several times over, but which by the end of a long life, he had lost. Stevens was another pointer on the solo way; an actor, scholar, singer, songwriter, playwright and puppet-maker, who, despite the fact that he had no great talent in any of these fields, by industry, application and sheer cleverness, forged a career for himself in the theatre.

George Alexander Stevens (1710-84)

Stevens was an enthusiast in the Aston tradition. Without this indefatigable quality, seemingly indispensable in the soloist, he would not have survived to become the key figure he is in this history. He was abused, scorned, ridiculed and plagiarised, but he had one genuine success on which his fame was based for the rest of his life. The Lecture Upon Heads was written and presented by him at the Little Haymarket Theatre in April 1764.

In this singular show, Stevens stood behind a long table covered by a long green baize cloth on which stood various papier-mache wig-blocks and busts and sometimes statuettes or paintings, anything, in fact, which could be packed into a single trunk. He then discoursed on each or any of the objects as his script required, interpolating comments on the issues and figures of the day and inserting any topical scandal as the mood took him, so that much of his material was extempore within the script. The Lecture was an immediate hit with the public, and, after his London season, Stevens embarked on a long provincial tour in Britain and Ireland before taking the piece to Nova Scotia, Canada, America and the West Indies. However, the only remaining text, according to Professor Gerald Kahan, was a pirated version from a Dublin performance of 1765.⁹

Since the lecture was not, technically, a play, it was not classified as such under the Licensing Act. It therefore became a staple for any solo performer who chose to do it, and a rash of imitations soon followed, despite Stevens' strong protests against 'The poaching curs who stole my game!'¹⁰

At that time there were no Copyright laws to protect him against the copyists and plagiarists. 'Heads-mania' swept the country and 'Lectures' abounded. Not only on Heads, but Tails, Hearts and any other topic the casual performer might hit upon. There was even a show called The Krainiographon based on parts of the head. Actors would fall back on the Lecture device when other work dried up, and there were tours of it by others even during Stevens' lifetime. In England, the Hillyard family made a speciality of it. Stevens himself made almost £10,000, most of which seemed to melt through his fingers.

Stevens had originally intended the work for Ned Shuter (1728-1776), who did in fact perform it at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin in 1764, and also in London simultaneously with Stevens himself at one point. John Collins, known for his solo presentation entitled Collins Brush for Rubbing Off Care! was another monologist who gave Stevens' 'Lecture' at Manchester in 1766. Similarly, 'Gentleman' John Palmer, dubbed 'Plausible Jack' by Sheridan, was known to have

performed it at Liverpool. In 1774, Stevens sold the rights to Charles Lee Lewis who 'improved' the text so much that it failed, as did a second text by Stevens called The Supplement. He wrote this to beat the copyists, but it did not please the public, and for his next tour he resumed his original Lecture. He played it for the last time in London in 1777, then toured it for three years in the provinces before retiring to Hampstead to make puppets for Samuel Foote.

'Poor Stevens, alas, thy head is laid low,
Who all 'heads' has lectured upon.
The tribute, tho' just, is small to bestow
To say an Original's gone.'

Whatever the varied fortunes that attended Stevens in his dogged application to letters and theatre, there is no doubt he deserves a primary place in the history of the dramatic one-man show, if only for the example set by his original Lecture. Minor Augustan he may have been, but there is no doubt that George Alexander Stevens is a major figure in the annals of one-man theatre. He died at Bedfordshire on September 6, 1784.

'A second Alexander here lies dead
And not less fam'd - for taking off a head!'¹¹

There was no doubt that Stevens had a talent for survival that Aston himself might have envied, and even if he had little else it also might be said of him that his heart had ruled his 'heads'!

The solo arena was thus deprived of another of its more eccentric performers. The 'Lecture' had a rare durability after Stevens' death and continued to be performed by many actors, especially in America by Lewis Hallam and John Henry. The last recorded performance was at the Spruce St Theater, New York, on 23 May 1840.

Charles Dibdin (1745-1814)

The next name in the solo calendar was no less singular than Stevens but at least he had genuine talent both as a writer and musician. Dibdin was a contemporary of Stevens', but did not share the general high opinion of the Lecture. He thought Stevens much over-rated. This view is to be respected,

as Dibdin himself was a much superior performer, and an even more considerable song-writer. By virtue of his sea-songs like The Lass that Lov'd a Sailor and Tom Bowling, he is said to have brought more men into the Navy than the Press Gangs! He also wrote light opera, the best of which was The Waterman (1774).

However, it was as actor-manager of his own theatre, the Sans Souci, from 1788 to 1793 that he made his greatest mark, as author-actor and composer-singer of his own 'table entertainments', called Readings and Music. His performance was conducted from the piano, and his manner of acting was considered to be more like that of a person entertaining a party of friends in a private drawing-room, than of an actor exhibiting to a public audience in a theatre in the Strand. It was not unlike Foote's previous Diversions of a Morning, but with the addition of music and song.

Dibdin was the complete and all-round showman and perhaps it was no surprise when he suddenly gave up his successful theatre and became a circus manager for Astley's Horses and then a circus proprietor in his own right. Regrettably, he never wrote or performed another song. However, his success was not lost on a certain Miss Scott, who opened her own establishment called the 'Sans Pareil' in 1806, and played there in a solo entertainment, consisting of songs, recitations and impersonations written by herself, for no less than thirteen years!

The next solo figure of real consequence, however, was an art student turned actor who had specialised in comedy since 1778 - Jack Bannister. In 1807, following the pattern laid down by Stevens and Dibdin, he put on his own show as a one-man entertainment. Written with the help of George Coleman the Younger, Bannister's Budget was first presented at Drury Lane. The critic, Leigh Hunt wrote:

'The greatest comedians have thought themselves lucky in understanding one or two comic characters, but what shall we say of Bannister, who, in one night, personates six? And with such felicity, that by a greater part of the audience he is sometimes taken for some unknown actor.'¹²

However, Jack Bannister was certainly known in his own time and this actor's son's is the next solo name to be considered.

John Bannister (1760-1836)

Just like Stevens, Jack Bannister used types for his various characters, and like Dibdin, linked his material with songs. His scripts were little more than a succession of jokes, but such was his personality that he was able to make of such a scenario, a finished performance that was a genuine and cohesive whole. This was the old 'medley' made perfect, the 'Heads' re-shaped and coiffured, as it were. Jack Bannister was the first actor, or light comedian, to give the solo a genuine theatrical credence. It was by now a more familiar convention during the first decade of the nineteenth century and Bannister's, the actor's son who might have been a painter, did much to encourage that familiarity until he retired in 1815.

So far, the form had attracted an opportunist (Aston), a dilettante (Foote), a hustler (Stevens) and a showman (Dibdin), to apply their talents. No doubt these were qualities that lent themselves particularly to this very individual mode, but Bannister was the first actor of real quality to forsake the conventional company production to go it alone, but even Bannister did not give over his entire career to monodrama. The question now was, when would a major theatrical talent apply himself totally to the solo medium. Where was the actor who would be willing to risk his career to do so?

With the beginning of the railways in the first half of the nineteenth century, theatrical touring was burgeoning, but provincial managers were reluctant to incur the expense of a full London company. Generally, only the leading players travelled. The better supporting actors preferred to stay in town where they were continually and comfortably employed. Touring casts were therefore made up on the road, and frequently changed from town to town, with the inevitable fluctuation in standards. This frustrated many actors, especially one Charles Mathews. He determined to withdraw from the conventional mode and in doing so, became the first actor to make a serious and studied attempt to base his career on the solo performance. It, in fact, became his entire career. If Aston may be said to be the foundation of solo theatre, Mathews is the foundation stone.

Charles Mathews (1776-1835)

'Of the actors, Mathews must be placed in the foremost ranks equally natural with Bannister.'¹³

Charles Mathews had seen Bannister at Drury Lane and had been impressed. The comedian's solo performance had also given him the inspiration to consider going solo himself if only to escape the increasing frustration and annoyance he felt in touring, but could he put his emerging career so soon at risk? He had made his London debut in 1803 for George Colman at the Haymarket and looked set for a promising conventional career, but the wish to emulate Bannister persisted, despite a diffidence about presenting himself as one-man theatre, in case it might be seen by his peers only as an exercise in ego and self-conceit. An attitude to the soloist not unknown in the profession today!

Bannister, however, had shown that it could work, and finally, Mathews persuaded James Smith to write a solo 'entertainment' for him. It was called The Mail Coach Adventure, or Rambles in Yorkshire, and he performed it for the first time at Hull on April 12, 1808. As his second wife, Anne Jackson Mathews, later wrote, 'so excellent was the whole, that it proved brilliantly successful; and this first effort..... became the foundation of that extraordinary series of 'At Homes' upon which my husband's great professional reputation was perfected.'¹⁴ A great actor had found his forte and his life's work and for the first time the mode had found an exponent of class and expertise, who would give the form the same distinction it was to give him for the remainder of his career.

As a book-seller's son in Richmond, Charles Mathews had developed a great love of theatre literature and an enthusiasm for play-making on a stage he had built in a nearby stable. At 17, he paid the manager of the local theatre ten guineas to let him appear as Richmond in Richard III, so that he could show off his fencing - which he did, 'fighting on and on - ignoring the hoots and calls of the audience...keeping King Richard at it till almost literally a good hour by the Salisbury clock!'¹⁵ He was already an enthusiast as every soloist must be.

In 1794, he was in Dublin as a professional actor, but with no promise of a regular salary 'until it was seen how he pleased'. He tried his first impersonations of famous actors, including Kemble and Macklin, and in a letter to his friend Lichfield he wrote, 'Daly, the manager, asked me to give my impersonations for his benefit at Cork. I was rather fearful at first, but on frequent request, I consented. The house was amazingly crowded... I was received with roars. It did me a vast deal of service.'¹⁶

Returning to London in 1795, his ship foundered off Swansea and he was put ashore with a companion, Montague Talbot. They offered their services to the Swansea Theatre Company and Mathews stayed there for three years, during which time he married Eliza Kirkham Strong. In 1798 he applied to York, which he considered, 'the very best for the development of incipient genius and the maturity of rising talent'. York was, in fact, along with Bath, a nursery and preparatory school for metropolitan talent in this period. In York, under actor-manager Tate Wilkinson, he learned ventriloquism which was later to prove invaluable. When his first wife died, he then married the actress, Anne Jackson.

In 1802, George Colman, whose family had bought the Patent for the Haymarket from the dying Foote, invited both of them to London, and in the next year they left York and began at the Theatre Royal. They signed with Colman for five years, but almost at once Mathews saw Bannister's solo and his future life in the theatre was changed entirely. Following his experiment at Hull, Mathews was launched not only on a whole new career, but a whole new way of life - something which is often the lot of the solo player. So it was with Mathews. His one-man combination of monologue, sketch, impersonation, song and dance (not to mention ventriloquism), which he called the 'Monopolylogue', became his virtual trade mark for the remainder of his long and productive career.

For the first time in solo history, the actor was acting out characters in a prepared script with no assistance other than a change of wardrobe and a few selected props. With

the very minimum of scenic effects and no change of lights, he carried an audience with him through a complete narrative in the course of the evening. The actor was in total control. Yet he could still claim to the Lord Chamberlain that it was not 'technically' a whole new play, even though he knew it was just that, — in the person of one man!

He wrote to the Lord Chamberlain:

'In all my performances, it has ever been customary for the several characters I have selected to be arranged and strung together in something like the order of a story by one or two persons, that is to say, a plan has been laid out which afforded opportunity of introducing characters, anecdotes and incidents which I have intended to delineate.'¹⁷

Brander Mathews and Lawrence Hutton wrote of Mathews:

'This faculty of putting on another man's thoughts with his clothes, so to speak, was quickly appreciated by playwrights and managers; and in most of the plays that were written for him his parts were simply indicated in skeleton and left for him to elaborate ad libitum.'¹⁸

In 1814, he fell from a carriage and broke his hip. As a result, he had a painful limp for the rest of his life. In 1817, he wrote to his wife from Brighton, 'Mrs George Farron's mother and sister to see me - AT HOME.' This was his first use of the phrase for one of his shows, and it became the title of the entertainment he presented at the English Opera House for S.J. Arnold. Again Mathews and Hutton comment:

'It consisted of a table entertainment in which Mathews, in a lively monologue or anecdote pointed with songs, carried his audience with him in a series of amusing adventures, which he illustrated with imitations, making quick changes aided by his ventriloquy'.

Some links to Aston are evident in this, as Mathews uses all his resources to present what is, in fact, a medley or variety of effects within the given sketch programme.

Some discussion of the content and style of one of these 'At Home' presentations might be of value at this point, although no analysis of any text or study of technique can convey on the printed page the effect it allowed the actor to make in the theatre before an audience. The play, whether ensemble or solo, is not the text, it is the performance.

The format used by Mathews in his 'At Home' programmes was the sensible and logical use of the actor's particular skills and gifts. A typical 'At Home' always featured an opening topical monologue, followed by a song or songs then at least three recitations. The pattern would then be repeated with contrasting material. The first half format would then reprise in the second half with a change of material. In the third part, which Mathews termed the mono-polylogue, a typical short farce of the period would be presented, in which all the parts were played by the same actor. (Particularly strenuous for a man with a bad hip!) His scripts were constantly being altered and adapted to accommodate changes of theatre and audience, but however much it was adjusted, it still remained a drama for one actor and depended entirely for its success on its performance by him. It was a formidable effort by one man. No other body of work in this period bears any resemblance to this dramatic form. The 'At Home' programmes were rotated throughout the season by Mathews, sometimes in two parts or three, utilising all his scripts and incorporating new material as it became available to him.

In compliance with the Licensing Laws, all theatre fare had to be labelled, but the One-Man 'At Home' as exemplified by Mathews, defied categorisation. This cunning arrangement of a singular theatre form had been foreseen to some extent by Aston, Foote and Stevens nearly a hundred years before, but Mathews went further in his dealings with the Lord Chamberlain than ever those enterprising gentlemen did. He even claimed a special exemption until they could agree on how to classify it! And he got it!

There was no doubt that Mathews had gained a very special place for himself in nineteenth century theatre, but the truth was it was unique as he was unique. It was a form free of the usual stage requirements and therefore independent of normal theatre strictures. Virtually on his own, and persisting with the format through a long and successful career, Charles Mathews had found a new way of telling an old story, and in doing so, he had confirmed the one-man show.

He was by now thoroughly established, not only in his solo work, but as a respected and successful man of the theatre. In 1822 he made his first tour of America. He arrived in New York to find it plagued by yellow fever. He opened in Baltimore to a tremendous reception by the local critics.

'If the experiment had not been fully tried it would have been considered incredible that any one man, by his variety of tone, the extent of his theatrical reading, the flexibility of his countenance and the rich humour of his style and manner, could satisfy raised expectation and keep his hearers either in a roar of applause or in a state of tranquil pleasure.'²⁰

The New York critics were just as fulsome:

'..the effect he produces is from the text - not from bye-play or grimace, and Nature has been kind to him in giving him a countenance irresistibly, comic and flexible, and a voice capable of every modulation...'²¹

He returned to England the comedian of the age, and with perhaps his finest venture, A Trip to America, which he opened at the English Opera House on 25 March, 1824. He was now 'At Home' for forty nights a year. In 1828, he paid £17,000 for a half-share in the Adelphi Theatre, London, where he was also manager. This meant less strain. His limp was worsening, and he found it harder to hide recurring bouts of irritability and melancholia.

It had been a good life but unfortunately poor investments had lost him all his money and he could not afford to retire. He planned a further trip to America to earn some money. Before going, he gave a final farewell appearance on the very stage where he started - at Richmond.

Mrs Mathews writes again:

'He consequently appeared there to a crowded house on 25th July, and it is remarkable that his last appearance in England took place on the very stage whereon the first essay in public was made in the year 1793.'²²

The wheel had come full circle. He was 58 and had been 40 years an actor; 28 of them in a one-man show, but now he was a very sick man. He boarded the ship for his tour of America and Canada with an infection of the lungs and played a restricted tour. As he wrote to H.B. Gyles on April 23, 1835:

'I am totally incapable of attempting anything professional. My 'At Homes' have been abandoned; and in fact, I have lost a year's income by my fatal trip to America. In 6 months I have performed 32 nights.'²³

Again, Mrs Mathews, in a letter to her son:

'January 31, 1835 - Severe colds left him prostrate and he was induced to keep to the drama, being too weak to do his table acts...'²⁴ These were sequences where he would portray different characters seated round a table or behind it, and suggest them in quick succession by either a change of voice or wardrobe or by a sudden exit and quick change. Understandably this was very demanding physically. What Mrs Mathews called the drama was more than likely a straight reading or narrative monologue.

When Mathews returned to London he wrote to the Covent Garden Benevolent Fund, 'I had the satisfaction of concluding as I commenced, at New York, to one of the greatest if not the best house of the season. The Americas and I parted friends on the night I believe now to have been my last on any stage.'²⁵ He was right. He died on his 59th birthday, 29 June, 1835, and was buried at St Andrew's Church, Plymouth.

He was at rest at last after a long, successful career, which had been becoming increasingly onerous and arduous to him. Charles Mathews the Younger, his only son, with his wife, Lizzie Davenport, appeared soon after as Mr and Mrs Mathews At Home, but 'even their charm and delicacy did not allow them the success of the Elder'.²⁶ What had seemed 'hardly like acting at all' was not as easy as it looked.

Like all great artists, Mathews had made it seem effortless. So much so that he had countless imitators, and not all of the same high standard, not by any means. One such was Lee Sugg, remembered by Mrs Anne Mathews in her Memoirs (1839):

'(Sugg) had one recommendation to the sort of audience with which he contented himself - a good loud voice; and he bawled out some of the hunting songs of the day with as much effect as a thick impediment and lisp would permit. His first attempt to amuse an audience without any auxiliaries, was in Wales; and was a fair specimen, it may be supposed, of what

he in after-time presented... He was too prudent an exhibitor to trust the receipts to any hand but his own; he therefore added to his versatile undertakings that of doorkeeper; and consequently took his station near enough to the entrance of the room... to be able to reach the lock of the door... He then received the price of admission... If satisfactory, (he) placed (it) immediately in his waistcoat pocket, thanking his patrons, and directing them forward to seats... Finding at length a sufficient number assembled... (he) struck up the first song, without the aid of accompaniment... and the following account will in faint colours paint the scene.

'Bright Chanticleer proclaims the dawn' - (One shilling, if you please, sir, much obliged).

'Spangles' - (Sixpence for your little girl, ma'am).

'Deck the thorn' - (Front seat, if you please, ma'am).

'The lowing herd' - (I can't help your hissing, ladies and gentlemen. I must admit my visitors.)

'Now seek the lawn, the lark springs from' - (The third seat, if you please, gentlemen.)

'The corn' - (That's a very bad half-crown, sir.)

'With a heighho! chevy!' - (If you observe, there's no sound in it.) 'Hark forward! Hark forward! Tantivy' - (Go on, ladies and gentlemen). 'With a heigh, chev' -

(I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, for your displeasure, but I can't let people in for nothing.)

'Hark forward!' - (One-and-sixpence for you and your baby, ma'am.)

'Tantivy! Arise the burthen of my song' - (One shilling. Pass on, sir.) 'This day a stag must die! This day'-
(There is no half-price, ma'am).'²⁷

What had been begun by Tony Aston culminated, in its first phase, with Mathews. A pragmatic resort against the 1737 Licensing Act attained respectable status with this fine actor, and it was this fact which largely prepared the way for a complete acceptance of the soloist in the theatre.

SECTION TWO

Mid-Victorian to Modern
Great Exhibition 1851 to Festival of Britain 1951

CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT EXHIBITION TO THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN (1851-1951)

In two hundred years, the improvisations of the strolling player had given way to the scripted professionalism of an assured comedian in the theatre. The line of succession is clear; Aston - Foote - Stevens - Dibdin - Bannister - Mathews. In this way, the prompt-book, as it were, passed from one performer to another down the years. As the demands of the Licensing Act had provoked the exigencies of Aston and the others of the first phase, so it was that the spreading of the railway system in the mid-nineteenth century that encouraged the development of another species of soloist - the Lecturer.

The new mobility combined with an increased literacy in the population generally, and, aided by the growing appetite for anything of an educational interest, soon gave an enormous impetus to the national appeal of the travelling lecturer. Huge crowds flocked to hear the different speakers - preachers, politicians, explorers, cranks, in huge gas-lit halls all over the country. Mathews' on-stage table gave way to the reading lectern, the actor surrendered to the public speaker. Only eight years after Mathews' death, the Theatres Act of 1843 (6/7 Vic C68) finally broke the monopoly of the Patent Theatres at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The stage was free at last to expand again, but the new theatre of the times was neither of the great London playhouses, nor of the provincial touring grid, but the ubiquitous Public Hall. The great age of the Lecture had begun.

Victorians had a veneration for the spoken word, whether preached, proclaimed or recited. To hear a speaker, on whatever topic, appeared to be the great leisure pursuit of the gradually-emerging, and highly respectable middle classes. Six thousand eager listeners would gather in the brand-new Metropolitan Tabernacle (built 1859/61) to hear Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Baptist, preach on a Sunday. One of the most successful of the new lecturers however, was a journalist.

Albert Smith (1816-1860)

Smith, a regular contributor to Punch, as well as playwright and journalist, had attended Crystal Palace during the Great Exhibition of 1851. This was bold and imaginative idea by Queen Victoria's Consort, Prince Albert to commemorate the Census by a nation-wide Festival of the Arts and Sciences. The whole country became a gigantic Fair, and appropriately the occasion attracted its latter-day Strollers. One of the first of these was Smith, who had the idea of lecturing as a one-man entertainment at the Crystal Palace during the Exhibition. He then appeared at Willis's Rooms with a lecture called The Overland Mail, which was a highly exaggerated account of journey to India illustrated by paintings by scene-painter William Beverley. The lecture was no more than a mere lecture or travelogue, it was a veritable one-man show and Smith's engaging style and witty asides made it the talk of the town. It ran for two years at the same venue, being frequently patronised by Queen Victoria and her Consort. In 1853, his next 'lecture' was presented in the same format. This was The Ascent of Mont Blanc, which was the account of a trip to Switzerland, given at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly. This show was even more successful than the first. It took the Metropolitan public by storm, and was said to be 'as popular in its way as the Tower of London and Madame Tussaud's'.¹ It ran for six years, until 1858.

Any passing event of the day was introduced. Smith had no singing voice, 'but had he been another Mario he could not have been listened to with more rapt attention or applauded with greater warmth'.² The charm of the lecture was its naturalness. Smith just came on to his covered table and talked about his travels as if he'd just arrived back. 'What a treat it was to be seated in that picturesque auditorium, completely surrounded, not by bare walls and gas lamps, but by Swiss chalets, the windows of which formed private boxes, where the select few could witness the show and fancy that they were really seated at a window in Switzerland. At any rate, such was the impression from the 3/- stalls or the 1/- balcony.'³

Visual effect was all-important to the Victorian. There was a fascination for, and with, the mechanical effect and stage machinery was never more ingenious, cunning nor more beautifully made than it was at this time. Everything went, literally, like clockwork, in the mid-Victorian gaslight glow. Craftsmen and artists vied with each other in the creation of stunning effects to complement or underscore the spoken word. There was no limit to the lengths, performers would go to entice audiences to attend, and to keep them entranced when they did.

Smith went to China for material for his final lecture, and for this, the Egyptian Hall became a pagoda. Willow pattern plates, with Smith's likeness at the centre, sold at the Hall for a shilling. During the run he married the actress, Mary Keeley. The marriage however was tragically short-lived. Of normal, robust health, he had been in the habit of walking from his home in Walham Green to Piccadilly in all weathers. One Saturday night after the show he walked as usual to the Garrick Club, but was caught in a downpour. Next day he was laid low with bronchitis from which pneumonia developed, but insisted on giving his lectures every night of the following week, omitting only the songs, as a concession to his weakened condition. By the Saturday, he was insensible, and on the Wednesday, he died, one day before his 45th birthday. He had been married only nine months. Ten thousand mourners attended his funeral at Brompton Cemetery.

Virtually at the same time that The Ascent of Mont Blanc reached its 1,000th performance, another Victorian figure emerged, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the tragically struck-down Smith. A man almost from the same flame, another journalist, another novelist, another lecturer, another writer-performer, but greater by far than any of these parts - Charles Dickens. Dickens was a born actor and a natural man of the theatre. He grew up in fervent admiration of Charles Mathews the Elder. It is ironic that this actor is little known today, the fashionable lecturer, Smith is virtually forgotten, but Dickens is as famous now as he ever was and as much for his readings as for his writing.

Charles Dickens (1812-70)

From boyhood, Dickens had been fascinated by acting and actors. At school, he devised his own toy theatre with white mice as performers! In his youth, he wrote to Charles Kemble for an audition, intending to impersonate Charles Mathews, whom he idolised and saw at every opportunity, but according to his sister, Fanny, Charles had earache on the day and did not go. 'See how near I may have been to another way of life', he said later.⁴ Instead, he became a parliamentary reporter and later a journalist with the Morning Chronicle, from which he rose to be editor of the Daily News. During this time he also became a successful and prolific novelist, but he never lost his love of theatre. His whole personality was theatrical.

His energies were always dramatically applied, either as actor or 'ghost' writer or impresario. His sartorial tastes were towards dandyism, and everything about him suggested the extrovert actor rather than the introvert writer. 'Sketches by Boz' were, in reality, rehearsals for the later stage fame he was to attain and had always sought. The verisimilitude of the Vincent Crummies troupe in 'Nicholas Nickleby' was lively proof of his familiarity with, and affection for, the theatre world.

Like Hazlitt, he believed that everyone loved an actor. Whenever he was restless or unhappy, Dickens always burst out in a bout of theatricals. He maintained a constant link with the act of performing, while at the same time, working fully as a journalist and novelist. He saw all the theatre he could and in addition, developed skills as a magician and conjurer. 'Oh, Mr Dickens, what a pity it is you can do anything else,' said Mrs Frederick Yates, an actress.⁵ Half of his fourteen novels feature actors or theatre people; his whole oeuvre is permeated by a feeling for the stage, but apart from play re-writes for the actor, Charles Fechter, and a co-written drama with his close friend Wilkie Collins entitled, No Thoroughfare, he never really took proper time to be a dramatist, or to really learn the business of writing for the stage - one result of which was that he never became a dramatist.

In 1851, he formed the Guild of Art and Literature with Wilkie Collins, in order to put on plays for charity and to help needy actors and authors, 'rendering such assistance as shall never compromise their independence and to found institutions where honest rest from arduous labour shall be associated with the discharge of congenial duties'.⁶ Their first production was Not As Bad As We Seem by Lord Bulwer-Lytton, which raised no less than £4,000 from its London run and provincial tour. The next was The Frozen Deep by Wilkie Collins, in which the two friends played, and once again it proved a great success and a splendid vehicle for their acting talents. For his part as the explorer, Dickens grew a beard, which he kept for the rest of his life.

He took all the time he could to be an actor, and never more so than in his famous readings, or 'Lectures', as he called them. They began in 1857 at the Children's Hospital in Great Ormond St, London, where he read A Christmas Carol as part of his speech. He noticed how moved and affected the audience were by the reading and he began to think of doing more. He could not have failed to have known of Smith's success at the Egyptian Hall, and to his astute brain, the commercial possibilities were self-evident.

As a writer he was already a success, so as a reader what better than to read his own work. He did so for the first time, in a reading that lasted almost three hours, at St Martin's Hall, Covent Garden, on December 5, 1857. In the first year, he gave 125 readings in all; 12 at St Martins Hall, 28 in other venues and 87 in the provinces, partly for charity and partly to pay for 'Gadshill', his big house near Rochester in Kent. There was tremendous reaction everywhere during 1858 and 1859. The master carpenter at Miss Kelly's theatre is reported to have told him, 'It was a universal observation in the profession that it was a great loss to the public when you took to writing books!'.⁷ 'Charley,' said Thomas Carlyle, 'you could carry a whole theatre under your hat!' He told Fanny that her brother was 'better than Macready'.⁸ Macready's own comment on Dickens - 'Two Macbeths!'.⁹

The same Carlyle, that taciturn, Scotch-Englishman, not usually given to praising, wrote later of these 'readings', 'I had no conception.... of what capacities lie in the human face and voice. No theatre stage alone could have had more players than seemed to flit about his face, and all tones were present.'¹⁰ And when Dickens went to New York in 1866, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, 'Another such star-shower is not to be expected in one's life-time'.¹¹ Even Dickens himself was taken aback. 'People were taken off their legs,' he said. 'It was just one roar with me and them.'¹² As he wrote to his lifelong friend, John Forster, who had succeeded him on the Daily News,

'You have no idea how I have worked on them. Finding it necessary as their reputation widened, that they should be better than at first, I have learnt them all, so as to have no mechanical drawbacks in looking after the words. I have tested all the serious passions in them by everything I know. I have made the humourous parts more humourous, corrected my utterance in certain words, cultivated a self-possession not to be disturbed and made myself master of the situation.'¹³

'He would stride on to the stage in the black and white of his evening dress, a red carnation in his lapel, and carefully remove his white kid gloves while waiting calmly for the applause to die down and the late-comers to be seated. He would place his gloves to his right on the lectern beside the carafe of water and a drinking glass and with his hands on the wine-red velvet cover of the lectern, his figure sharply outlined against the violet screen behind him and his face lit by the gas flares, he would wait for his silence. He was in no hurry. Not till absolute hush had descended over the audience did he utter a word. Then the extraordinary performance began...'¹⁴

The Scotsman reported in 1859:

'Hear Dickens and die; you will never live to hear anything of its kind so good. There has been nothing so perfect in its way as these readings. Great actors, like Mathews the Elder, have given us their 'entertainments', eminent authors like Hazlitt, have read their 'lectures', but all these appearances or performances, or whatever they are called, are very different from Mr Dickens. Here is a story-teller, an improvisator, a reciter, who acts out the creations of his own matchless genius. It is said that in a man's work, we see the best of him. In Mr Dickens as a reader, each is equal to the other.'¹⁵

According to George Dolby, his manager on later tours, 'He rehearsed to himself over 200 times,' and Bernard Darwin recounts, 'The new readings he would practise for two or

three hours every day. Nor did he ever again relax from this intensity of painstaking. On the contrary, he toiled still harder to attain perfection.¹⁶ These first readings were: The Christmas Carol, The Trial from Pickwick Papers, Mrs Gamp, Boots at the Holly Tree Inn, The Story of Dick Doubleday and The Death of Paul Dombey. Added later were: David Copperfield, a reading in itself), and Bob Sawyer's Party, ('which cried aloud for reading'). The repertoire eventually contained 21 pieces culled from more than 500 readings from 16 books. Every reading script was punctuated with stage directions and reminders to himself - 'snap fingers' - 'slowly here' - 'faster' - 'pause' - 'stronger' - etc. There is no doubt that this attention to detail more than paid off for the readings were a tremendous success. He drew the town, including the Royal Family and Victoria attended with Albert on two occasions to see Dickens act - in 1851, as an amateur actor, and in 1857, as a reader in the Lectures. Public Readings of Dickens by others were also done - and still are (See P.51) - but it is a moot point, Emlyn Williams apart, whether any were as effective as the author himself.

He had virtually become a professional reader, and inevitably was asked to tour in the United States. Dickens had misgivings about going to America. He had suffered there already as author through the blatant piracy of his novels and their free adaptation by everyone and anyone as stage plays. He was very suspicious of American methods. 'There would be Dickens riots as there had been Macready riots,' he said. 'There are not enough Americans in the world to produce £15,000, and even if fees were paid, the Irish would steal them. And if they were paid into a bank, the bank would fail.'¹⁷

Nevertheless, in 1866, Messrs. Chappells persuaded him to do a third American tour. To avoid 'speculators', who all wore caps, tickets were limited to four per person - and only to those who wore hats! He became ill on the tour and agreed to sit for the 'murders' reading and lie down for ten minutes after every performance - and to drink brandy with the carafe of water.

Dickens had the actor's gift of being able to transcend his material in performance, so that while watching him, people were reduced to tears, or made helpless with laughter and all with words that might, to some, read flatly on the printed page. Dickens himself rarely read flatly - even on the printed page. The combination of his huge literary fame with a pronounced histrionic skill could not fail with audiences and the general consensus among Americans was that his readings were among the greatest one-man-shows of the nineteenth century. He was a demonic performer who 'left faintings in his wake', and yet whose comic performances were tremendous displays of acting technique. His hero, Mathews, had staged his At Homes, impersonating various characters with little or no outward change, but relying on an inexhaustible supply of voices and mannerisms, male and female. This appealed to Dickens as 'the highest form of dramatic talent. (He) had this same uncanny ability to assume a multitude of characters in quick succession and had the true actor's gift of effacing himself in the character he was portraying at the time.'¹⁸

The readings were memorised set pieces staged deliberately at a reading desk before a large, maroon screen and subtly illuminated by gas-light. Every effect was contrived to enhance the virtuosity of the author as actor, so that the lecture/reading was, to all intents and purposes, a finely-tuned performance. The point was he was performing as an actor, not as an author merely reading his own work. Dickens was a true actor in every sense; he played the house for every well-rehearsed effect. Even if, occasionally, the effect was over-studied and mannered, he always knew what he was doing. This did not appeal to all Americans - Mark Twain, for instance.

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was also a journalist but originally had been a printer, then a pilot on the Mississippi River, then a publisher in Connecticut. When this failed he turned to writing under the pen name Mark Twain, the nom de plume by which he is now universally known. Twain first saw Dickens in 1868 at the Steinway Hall in New York in the company of a young female friend (later to be his wife). Neither was impressed by the Englishman's precise and actorish style, but the shrewd Twain was impressed by the number of people in the audience. Thinking that there was an honest buck to be made here, he resolved to attempt the lecture form himself. He did so with such effect that he succeeded, not only in making the desirable dollars, but in making a whole, new career for himself, and a name that spread not only across America but all over the world. His form of solo performance, which he called a 'moral lecture', that is, in his terms, a story with a moral in it somewhere, was part-lecture, part-reading, but wholly entertainment.

He tried it out first at Cleveland, Ohio, and before long had found his own style, which was an easy, relaxed, colloquial conversational stance with his audience. He leaned heavily on his anecdotal skills, quirky humour and personal charisma. He was a born raconteur and to an extent, pre-dated Will Rogers, a folklorist and commentator of a later generation. Twain did not 'read' as Dickens did, and made no attempt to confine himself to a script or to maintain a given format, but rambled on, occasionally reading from one of his stories, breaking off to make a particular point. In its own way, however, it was as much a 'performance' as Dickens' was. Through these appearances on the platform, Twain soon emerged as a public entertainer. His slow, nasal drawl and habit of lounging about the platform allowed him, as contemporary opinion had it, 'to gather the audience into the palm of his hand and tickle it'.¹⁹ He was, in fact, in the words of no less than Sir Henry Irving, 'A great actor'. His success as a speaker on the circuit, culminated in a world tour during 1895-96.

Even though Spanish actors are recorded as having played in Mexico in 1538 and Increase Mather, the Puritan, had heard to his alarm in 1687, 'much discourse of beginning Stage-Plays in New England',²⁰ it is now generally accepted that Tony Aston, as mentioned previously, was, in 1703, the first English-speaking actor in the New World. Given that he had no company to support him, it must be assumed that his 'performances' in Charlestown, South Carolina, in that year and later in New York, were made up of monologues and recitations. In many ways, it is appropriate that America's first actor should be a soloist, for that country's contribution to the genre has been especially generous, particularly in more recent times.

Mathews had made his mark in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in the middle of the nineteenth century, but it was Dickens, with his extensive tours, who may be said to have kindled the flame of native American solo expression, as evinced in the lecture-tours of Twain. The first practitioners were, in the main, Englishmen, or certainly European, as they pioneered what was later to be a formal touring grid, known as the American Lecture Circuit.

The Lecture Circuit

It was Dickens' American success that gave James Redpath the idea of founding a Lecture Bureau in Boston in 1867, which in turn led to the Chautauqua Platform Circuit's growing out of a Bible Study Summer School, instituted by two Methodists, John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller. There had been a previous tradition of platform speakers in America. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) for instance, had been lecturing on 'Poets and Poetry' from 1843 until his death, and was very much the elocutionist. He had a mellifluous and musical voice and it was said he 'cantilated', rather than spoke, his lectures, but like Dickens, he had a sure theatrical instinct, even if he did not match the Englishman's natural theatrical ebullience. Other writers and actors were quick to follow Dickens' example in the Americas. Wilkie Collins, Edmund Yates, Charles Kingsley,

Matthew Arnold, Hall Caine, Anthony Hope, Conan Doyle, and Oscar Wilde of course, were among those who enjoyed the great commercial vogue attending the platform performance in America. It was the Golden Age of the Platform Speaker.

Audiences flocked to the lecture/performances, for that is what many of these lectures were. What had begun as a straightforward lecture, in which the speaker, as a given authority, would impart his knowledge, experience and point of view to an audience assembled for the sole purpose of hearing such information, became, in the hands of skilled and accomplished speakers, a virtual lecture/ performance in which the didactic or polemic elements were secondary to an emotional or aesthetic experience. The audience of that time would not have accepted anything which smacked of overt theatre. Theatre for them, had for too long represented the flesh and the devil. To the respectable, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant middle-classes, this new 'non-theatre' form offered them entertainment with education, and for these nineteenth century Americans, avid for good spoken literature, this was an irresistible combination.

Besides, in the America of that time there were fewer social alternatives. A similar growth of the railway system to that in Britain offered the same mobility not only to the hearers, but to the speakers. Emerson, Thoreau, Graham-Bell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Daniel Webster, Henry Ward Beecher were only some of the famous celebrities and public figures who became platformists. Even William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63) had been drawn into the lecturing game. 'What a blessing,' he wrote, 'to come 500 miles through snow. 20 years ago that journey would have taken a fortnight. Oughtn't I for one to be thankful for railroads who could never have made all these dollars without 'em.'²¹

Richard Mansfield, the Swiss-born, English-educated, American matinee idol, gave the occasional solo reading. He was considered as a mono-actor in the tradition of Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth and also William Macready, the great English tragedian, who had made several very successful American tours.

These famous names, however, were actors who played mainly in their own companies, and only occasionally gave solo readings. To others, it was a complete career, for, at the turn of the century, there was, in America, what was called an 'elocutionary plague'. Yet every speaker would appear to have had a listener. It was a sellers' market and performers could choose their own titles: Recitalist, Reader, Characterist, Monologist, Vocal Impersonator, Mono-Actor, etc., etc.

Leland Powers, for instance, laid special claim to the last appellation. His particular field was the one-man play recital, in which he played all the parts (the plays of Sheridan, for example). He called this 'mono-acting' and on his retiral founded an acting school in Boston. Other actors, like Willis Watson Ginn, 'ranked among the thespian giants of old', according to his own publicity, represented the acting school - the Actor/Readers - as did Sydney W Landon, who impersonated several authors in his programme, changing collar and wig on stage for each and chatting to the audience as he did so. Benjamin Chaplin was still portraying Abraham Lincoln in a four-scene monologue in 1906, and Montaville Flowers survived his one-man 'Ben Hur', in which he played all the parts - except the horses! On the other hand, the elocutionists also had their stars. Dr Robert McLean Cumnock became a very respectable figure indeed and was Principal of America's first School of Oratory. The good Doctor's subjects, which he read with style, were Dickens and Scotch Literature, especially the works of Burns. There was plenty of work for the Elocutionist/Reader, and it seemed that the more boring, the more cultural and edifying it was. What was important was that the lectures should do one good. Lecturerers were zealous in seeking a high moral tone. There was considerable controversy between these two schools - the actors and the readers, or the impersonators and the elocutionists. The latter held that acting belonged in the theatre and that readings were the only media for the Lecture circuit. The actors insisted that the platform itself was a stage, and that an audience was an audience wherever it was assembled. It was vocalising as opposed to theatricality.

As far as Dickens himself was concerned, the American trips, though highly remunerative, were taxing. In the United States, the strain of travelling those vast American distances gradually told on Dickens and the famous vitality was beginning to sap. He constantly complained of the 'influenza', which never left him, and of continual pain in his left leg. His long, unhappy marriage to his 'dearest Kate', his 'donkey' of a wife, was deteriorating fast. (The story of Mrs Dickens was done as a one-woman show by Ellie Dickens at the 1983 Edinburgh Festival under the title 'Dearest Kate').

Since 1857 he had held a fierce passion for the fair-haired actress, Ellen Ternan which both found impossible, although the platonic relationship continued till his death. Many years before, he had also loved his wife's young sister, Mary Hogarth, but she died at 18. An even younger sister, Georgina, was 15 when she came to live with the family to help look after Dickens and all the children, as his wife did not. He was often glad to get out of the house. Indeed, it might be said he undertook his readings to escape his domestic situation. His last twelve years were suicidal in their working intensity. He was still fired by his old ambition to be the great actor, to be another Mathews. As he remarked to a friend, while walking near Westminster Abbey, 'My dream,' he said, 'would be to hold supreme authority in a theatre.... that is my cherished daydream!'²²

The feature of his final, farewell tour was his reading of the The Murder of Nancy by Bill Sykes which both he and the audience found exhausting. So involved was he in this that he felt sure that he would be arrested for the murder as soon as he stepped off the stage! (This reading was given full value in modern times, when the late Sir Donald Wolfit performed it at the Prince Charles Theatre in London as part of Harold Fielding's Music Hall programme in 1964.)

Dickens' left leg was by now trailing badly, a legacy of an early railway accident, and this gave him a life-long dread of trains; hardly an advantage for a travelling reader/performer at the time. He was obviously a sick man and

his friends begged him to retire. His last reading was given at St James Hall, London, on 15 March, 1870. He read the 'Carol', with which he had begun his platform reading career twelve years before and he had never read better, but he was very tired, and ready to go from the stage. 'From these garish lights, I now vanish for evermore with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful and affectionate farewell.'²³

One of his six sons, (he had ten children in all) Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, wrote a life of his redoubtable father, and also gave readings of the works in Australia - for charity, just as Dickens himself had done all those years before for the Children's Hospital. In doing his readings as he did, there is no doubt that Charles Dickens was an acknowledged influence on the spirit of his age.

Another Englishman in America, and professional Gentleman, William Sterling Battis, was quick to follow Dickens' example and took up as 'The Dickens Man', making a whole new career for himself playing 'Scrooge'. The vigorous example set by the original was not lost on a whole generation of Readers and Lecturers. The Dickens industry had been born.

England's 'Dickens Man' was the actor/ mimic and monologist Bransby Williams who adapted 'Tale of Two Cities', 'David Copperfield' and 'The Pickwick Papers' as solo vehicles around the turn of the century and in 1903 appeared in these Dickens programmes before Edward VII at Sandringham. The solo arena particularly, is thick with actors who have specialised in Dickens, - none more so than that protean Englishman, Brian D. Barnes. In his one-man theatre, he performs readings from Dickens as part of his extensive solo repertoire. So, too, do New Zealand's Derek Bolt, Bill Maynard, the actor/comedian, George Harland (on P&O Cruises), and the American actor George Curry in The World of Charles Dickens, (which features a one-man, two-part adaptation of Great Expectations) This was seen at the Adelaide Festival in 1982 and the Edinburgh Festival of 1983. James Anil Graham, also at the Edinburgh Festival in 1986 and most recently, Charles Mugleston read 'A Christmas Carol' at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden in 1987.

There is no doubt that even now, in church halls and school halls and club premises, or wherever the art of public reading is still practised, somebody somewhere is reciting some part of the work of Charles Dickens. The latent drama on nearly every page and the wealth of colourful characters which abound on those pages make Dickens' writing a natural source for theatrical and recital adaptation.

This much-proved, Dickens tradition still persists. The most celebrated 'Dickens' of our time however, and perhaps of all time, was Emlyn Williams, who was inspired to re-create the original Dickens readings as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of the Victorian Great Exhibition of 1851. It was natural that such a great Victorian as Dickens should be remembered, but it was a masterstroke by the actor to re-create the readings as if given by Dickens himself. (See P60) The real Dickens was essentially a mid-Victorian. With his passing the century turned, and the late Victorians emerged with the new Edwardians, but the pattern of solo performance established by the end of Victoria's reign remained constant.

The late Victorian era was the age of the great virtuosi. Crowds flocked to the lectures. They came in their thousands to hear and see the pianists, politicians, and preachers, whose names were sufficient to fill the vast public halls of the time. Great actors were also able to do this in occasional public readings. The actors tended to give their alternative or cabaret performances, as it were, in the new At Homes, in which the great London hostesses vied with each other to bring the stage names into their drawing-rooms to recite privately to their guests. Reciting aloud in the parlour, was a particularly Victorian metier. Just as popular it seems, was being read to, especially by a professional, and it was not unknown for a theatrical luminary to be paid as much as a hundred sovereigns for speaking a poem! One famous name, it is said, on arriving at one of the big houses was directed to the kitchen. The actor thereupon proceeded to give his 'recital' to the startled cooks and scullery-maids, demanded his fee from the butler and left - no doubt with a sweeping bow at the back door!

Domestic attendances by the great actor-managers had a huge social value. The 'name' actor was a 'catch' - (and still is) - but perhaps the main attraction was basically nothing more than curiosity. In many ways, even today, despite the profusion of actor-knights and actress-dames, the profession is still being directed to the tradesman's entrance. In Victoria's reign, some never even got over the door. Scotland's William McGonagall (1830-1902), a late Victorian 'poet and tragedian', achieved local notoriety as a recitalist of his own work in the streets of his Dundee, but perhaps it is more charitable to pass over his contribution to the history of solo entertainment.

It was for charity that the Dickens readings were first begun, and for the same reason, resumed after his death. This time by a very fashionable stage 'name', no less than the second theatrical knight, who certainly had no intention of becoming a lecturer or a solo recitalist when he agreed, as a favour to a clergyman friend, to give a reading of Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'.

Sir Squire Bancroft (1841-1926)

Sydney Bancroft, better known as Squire, was a tall, good-looking, amiable actor who, from monacle to spats, looked more distinguished than he really was. He had made his fortune, as well as a congenial marriage, with actress, Marie Wilton, (an actress who had impressed Dickens when she played a boy in 1858), and with her enjoyed successful theatre -managership from 1865. Marie Wilton took over the old Queen's Theatre (nicknamed the 'Dust Hole'!) and opened it as the Prince of Wales with burlesques by H.J.Byron. It was he who recommended Tom Roberstson's play Society which had been turned down by Buckstone at the Haymarket. This association with T.W.Robertson set the seal on the Bancrofts' success and in 1880 they moved to the Haymarket. The Bancroft/Robertson regime also marked the eclipse of the old burlesques by the new, 'cup and saucer' comedies, just as the popular melodramas of the time had driven the old theatrical repertory from the stage.²⁴

In 1885, they both retired, and in 1897, Bancroft was knighted.

Like Irving, Bancroft was a pillar of the Garrick Club in London. In addition, the Bancrofts were the recognised doyens of the English colony in Switzerland and Sir Squire was an accomplished organiser of fetes, garden parties, concert parties and special events for every possible kind of good cause. This, then, was the man who was asked by the Vicar of Bishopsgate, Rev. William Rogers, to give a reading for charity. Bancroft found it difficult to refuse. He liked Rogers, and besides, many famous actors in their retirement gave similar charitable readings, (although it was known for some to take a fee 'for expenses'). Sarah Siddons had given her Shakespearian readings, as had Fanny Kemble, with particular success in America, also, Dame Ellen Terry. Frederick Yates (who had known Dickens) had also given readings, as had John Parry, another actor of the old school, and James Murdoch was well-known at the time for his edited scenes from the classical plays, which he performed in schools and public halls.

Sir Squire Bancroft, however, had no intention of resuming his performing career by becoming a Reader. He had made a clear £20,000 from his management days and he was happy to live comfortably on it, making only the occasional stage appearance for his friend, and fellow-knight, Henry Irving, or whenever a part appealed to him. Notwithstanding, having yielded to the appeal made to him by Rev. Rogers to do one reading, he was soon asked to do another, and another, till he had a second career and an Indian summer in his life. His own view was that, 'It was a pity to waste the labour of arranging 'The Christmas Carol' just on one performance'.²⁵

His next reading was for the Little Sisters of Nazareth, an order of Catholic nuns, followed by others for the Chief Rabbi's Charity and the King Edward Hospital Fund. Bancroft's 'Tour de Force', as The Daily Telegraph called it, 'has changed a prose romance into a spoken poem'.²⁶ A reading was also given for the Chelsea Hospital for Women, and that first year culminated in a special performance for the Royal Family at Sandringham. He had made £4,000 for the various charities, and a further £3,000 the next year when he toured.

He paid all his own expenses on these provincial tours. Even when he took the 'readings' to Canada, playing at Montreal, Ottawa, London and Toronto, he paid his own way. He was asked by Augustin Daly to do likewise in New York for the Actors' Charities, but Bancroft's sailing on the 'Umbria' had been fixed and he could not stay. In all, he had made £7,000 profit and he gave it entirely to the Victorian Order of Nurses.

He made a grand total of £20,000 for charities from these solo readings - exactly the amount that he had made in his professional career as an actor-manager.

Nothing was too much trouble for this kindly actor when engaged on his performance-readings. On one occasion, he took the wrong train, going to Bradford from Euston instead of King's Cross. As a result he was stranded at Stafford. Calmly, he ordered a private train, 'Spare no expense,' he told the startled station-master, and arrived at Bradford with five minutes to spare - just in time to stop the Bishop of Bradford giving his address on Dante!

The Morning Post declared his performance,

' - a combination of platform and stage. It was one thing to act a part with all the accessories of scenery, make-up, etc, but it was quite another to read the same thing upon a platform sandwiched between a chair and a table... One saw a gentleman in evening dress, but one heard.... each and every character in turn...in a reader, who never really looked upon his book, and whose method was simply the expression of naturalness.'²⁷

His 'special treat', as he called it, was to tour his Dickens readings round the great English public schools. At one of these recitals one boy was heard to remark to his mother, 'I say, Mater, isn't he good? He should've been an actor!'²⁸ Bancroft continued with his readings into his old age and through a long and happy retirement - by which time Queen Victoria was dead. The brief reign of Edward VII (1901-10) was, theatrically speaking, the age of the music hall, now becoming increasingly respectable as it made its way out of the beer parlours and into the new, plush theatres springing up, not only in London but in the provinces. It was a confident, leisurely time, and the theatre reflected this.

The new soloists were now the singer-comedians of the music hall. Most of these performers were highly skilled soloists of one kind or another and whose families had been in theatre for generations— many of them actors, with a musical skill or background, who were quick to turn their individual skills into 'acts', either as singers or comedians. Among the latter category was a Cockney called George Galvin, whose parents sang in the early music hall as Mr and Mrs John Wilde. When his father died the mother married a dancer called William Grant, whose stage name was Leno, so when young George, at 4, took his place as a 'dan' in a clog-dancing act, he took the professional name of Dan Leno.

Dan Leno(1860-1904)

At 20, he was the All-England champion clog-dancer and moved from music-hall to pantomime at the Surrey in 1886. In 1889 he was engaged by Augustus Harris for pantomime at Drury Lane and alternated with this and variety at the London Pavilion for the rest of his life. He was commanded by King Edward to appear at Sandringham and was thereafter known as the King's Jester. In the same year, he wrote a burlesque autobiography - Dan Leno - His Book, then soon after collapsed from overwork and died insane survived by his wife, Lydia (Reynolds) and his son Sydney Galvin, who became Dan Leno, Junior, who was also a dancer and comedian, but never achieved the fame of his father. Dan Leno was at his best on his own on the stage, just standing talking to an audience. It is this aspect of his comedy work that gives him his place among the great soloists. In common with them, Leno had an extraordinary rapport with the house when he was working, and indeed seemed to work on collaboration with them in refining his finished script. This is something the solo performer often does. So intense is the relationship between himself and his audience that even when he is working from a prepared and rehearsed script, he is always ready to act on the impulse he receives from the audience at the time of performing to them and amend or extend as they tell him in a sense - using reaction as punctuation in fact. Leno was apt at this, and was always alert and alive to the feel of the house.

Sir Max Beerbohm saw Leno many times, and wrote:

'.....my delight was in Dan Leno himself. In every art, personality is the the paramount thing, and without it artistry goes for little. Especially is this so in the art of acting, where the appeal of personality is so direct.....and more especially in the music hall, where the performer is all by himself.....Dan Leno was not one of those personalities which dominate us by awe, subjugating us against our will. He was of that other, finer kind; the lovable kind. He had, in a higher degree than any other actor I have ever seen, the indefinable quality of being sympathetic.....To the last.....the power of his personality was unchanged and irresistible.....Often, even in his hey-day, his acting did not carry him very far. Only mediocrity can always be trusted to be at its best. Genius must always have lapses proportionate to its triumphs! A new performance by Dan Leno was almost a dull thing in itself. He was unable to do himself justice until he had, as it were, collaborated for many nights with the public. He selected and rejected according to how his jokes, and his expression of them, 'went' - and his best things came to him always in the course of an actual performance.....Never was a more perfect technique in acting.....without the aid of properties or scenery or anyone else on the stage.....He never stepped out of himself, never imitated the voices of his 'interlocutors. He merely repeated, before making his reply, a few words of what they were supposed to have said to him. Yet there they were, as large as life before us. Having this independence in his art (he was) thus all-sufficient to himself.'

There can be no better testimony of a solo actor's technique.

A near contemporary of Leno's, and also a soloist in the music halls, although more of a conventional actor, was the singer/writer/composer and author - Albert Chevalier.

Albert Chevalier (1861-1923)

This was a soloist in the direct Dibdin tradition, but unlike that earlier actor-singer performer, Chevalier was more than a musical entertainer, he was a first-rate actor as well as writer. The Cockney Laureate, as he was called, was a veritable one-man-show in himself. Son of a French teacher at Kensington Grammar School, Chevalier had been an actor with the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales in 1877, then with the Kendals, and Hare, even making an appearance in Grand Opera. In 1901 he wrote a volume of theatrical reminiscences called Before I Forget, and in the same year, was persuaded 'with great difficulty' by Charles Coborn to make his Music Hall debut at the Pavilion in 1891 singing his own Coster's Serenade and some

of his other songs. The 'Serenade' was quite unlike anything that had hitherto been written for the music-hall. Its complex rhythms and intricate lyric had to be acted as well as sung, and Chevalier did both very well indeed. By this time he had become a prolific Cockney songwriter with more than forty titles to his credit including Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road and My Old Dutch etc., all illustrating typical costermonger humour or pathos in much the same way as Dickens had done. It might be said that the Cockney song and patter as evinced in these popular music hall ballads were genuine folk art and it had not a greater exemplar than Chevalier. This was a people's art and a real expression of their situation and aspirations. Chevalier never appeared in pantomime, as most performers then did, but wrote a musical show, Land of Nod, which had great success on its provincial tour, but only lasted a week in London. He was strongest on his own; reciting monologues, serious and sentimental, and best of all, singing his own songs in the Dibdin manner, and was at the height of his career at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

At its end, in 1918, serious theatre was in danger of becoming moribund, and certainly it seemed in the 1920's that the days of the solo actor-reader were over. The actor was now part of 'show business'. Some of the old school, however, trained in the basics of survival and adaptation, continued to perform, even to thrive. One who did was actor-recitalist and monologist - Bransby Williams.

Bransby Williams (1870-1961)

The 'Referee' of August 26, 1896, advertised:

'Shoreditch Theatre, London - The first appearance on the Variety Stage of BRANSBY WILLIAMS, the Actor-Mimic, in the following impressions - Harry Paulton, E.S. Willard, Beerbohm Tree, Henry Irving, Sheil Barry. etc, etc. Original Music by Jack Baker. Wigs by Gustave.'

So began a long career that took Williams from being an amateur Negro comedian and stump orator in Victorian London through years as England's 'Dickens Man' (as has been mentioned) to fame as a club actor, caricaturist and impressionist before the first World War, to actor-manager, not only in the British

Music Halls, but on Broadway and in tours of Canada, South Africa and Australasia, before the Second. In later years, he concentrated on the monologue - 'Devil May Care', 'The Whitest Man I Know' 'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God', and by the end of his career he was famous in early television days as a story-teller. A not inappropriate finis for a soloist. In 1923, he was touring in Canada with his Dickens company when, in Winnipeg, because of some union difficulties, they were prevented from appearing as scheduled. Williams immediately put on himself in his old one-man show. The Press next day asked - "Why did he bring a company? He is a company in himself." Williams himself made his own comment - 'I gave the company the night off and occupied the stage myself for over two hours, a one-man show. It is said only one person can do this - Ruth Draper. She is a great and wonderful woman, but I never get the credit of having given one-man shows as far back as 1918.'³⁰

In many of these shows, like Bransby Snaps for instance, he would make up in front of the audience, as many of the old lecturers had done, often using only one stick of black Leichner, or ask the audience to 'vote' for the characters they would like him to play. In many ways, he may be seen as a solitary link between the later Victorians and the re-emergent soloists of the New Elizabethan Age. He was the last of a very special breed and when he left the stage, he took the last vestige of the old theatre world with him, leaving the stage clear for the next name on the solo bill whose introduction to the solo field was occasioned by a national event.

The Festival of Britain - 1951.

This was a co-ordinated artistic effort by the whole country to lift Britain's spirits after six years of war, and to deflect the country's pre-occupation with scarcities and post-war austerity. It was also the commemoration of the Great Exhibition of 1851, a remembering of eminent Victorians.

Architect, Sir Hugh Casson, (son of Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndyke), was the chief co-ordinator of events, and he especially encouraged the big houses to open their doors again, and their drawing-rooms, for special events and occasions.

It was only natural that in the celebrations, some acknowledgement be made of that mid-Victorian and Dickensian Age and what could be more Dickensian than Dickens himself in his own readings? And if the drawing room was once more a fashionable venue, why not give the readings there. This was precisely the idea of an established and successful actor-dramatist of the day, Emlyn Williams.

Emlyn Williams (1905-87)

George Emlyn Williams was born in Wales. He won a scholarship to Oxford, after which became a very successful actor in the 1930's, first at the Old Vic, and then in films for Alexander Korda. He also wrote and starred in two West End hits, Night Must Fall (1935) and The Corn is Green (1938). During the war, this charming and personable Welshman continued as writer and actor in films and theatre, and by the time the war ended he was famous. It was, however, the Festival of Britain in 1951 that gave a filip to an already distinguished theatrical career by initiating the actor/dramatist into his first essay in the one-person performance.

The germ of the idea was actually seeded in 1950.

He had been asked to perform an excerpt from his one of his own plays (Night Must Fall) as part of a Gala Performance at Drury Lane, but he thought he was now too old to repeat his original part of Danny and suggested to the organisers that he might recite instead something from Dickens. It was agreed, and he chose Bleak House as a ten minute reading. He had already tried it out on his own children and friends with some success, so now he tried it out on an audience. It was also a great success, and he was encouraged to consider a full evening of similar Dickens' readings.

'I sat down for a year trying to work out that evening.....it was nerve-wracking. Not since school had I ever appeared alone on a stage, and I knew this was to be a rather more demanding audience.'

The Readings were first performed for family and friends in a private house before opening officially at the Cambridge Arts Festival of 1951. It then transferred to the Lyric, Hammersmith, on October 29 1951, moving into the West End of London, first at the Criterion Theatre then at the Duchess.

He was then invited to make his first American tour and opened at the Plymouth Theatre, Boston, before taking it to Broadway and the first national tour. It was a triumph, and remained so in further tours, around and around the world in 1953, 1970, 1976 and 1981. A recording was also made for Argo Records. In 1984-85 yet another world tour took him to America, where, more than thirty years later, a new generation not only discovered Charles Dickens, but marvelled at this dynamic approach to the theatrical solo, that showed the story-teller working as an actor rather than as mere reader. Like Dickens, Williams gives a theatre performance. His multi-talents have made him the master of the one-man show and a seminal figure in its modern development.

As critic and theatre biographer, Sheridan Morley wrote,

'When, at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 1951, Emlyn Williams first drew off those white gloves at the lectern and announced that he was Charles Dickens, he scarcely realised what he was starting. The success of that solo evening.....led him to take it around the world...something, that with remarkable resilience, he has been doing, more or less, ever since. And led other actors to start rifling through the library shelves in search of others who might stand up to an entire evening's reading.'³²

With Williams, the Dickens industry was re-born.

He had the same impact on audiences as the original subject, and like him, called his performances 'readings', although, also like Dickens, he manifestly did not read. But Williams insists that he did not impersonate Dickens.

'I do not do impersonations,' he said. 'How can anyone impersonate Dickens? We don't know what he was really like, his mannerisms, his voice. Each report is different. I wear his clothes and pretend to be Dickens. I do not impersonate Dickens. He had phlebitis in his leg. If I were to imitate this (and limp) everyone would think there was something wrong with MY leg.'³³

His is a triple-layered presentation - he is Williams, the actor, playing Dickens, the reader, who is also portraying the characters as they arise in the various excerpts read. In other words, the actor creates the persona as an aural interpreter of literature. The audience is allowed to be witnesses of a period piece reading, which is the re-enacting of an historical event.

The original Dickens' audience would have known nearly every word of every story. They were topically popular. This is not so today when the stories are regarded entirely as literature. A balance in the text has to be sought. Williams' felicity with the written word goes without saying, and it is this which is brought to bear on the selection and arrangement of the famous stories to give him every opportunity to display his complex acting skills. In the role, actor and writer are as one.

At first it was intended to re-produce the original Dickens material in the original Dickens manner, as if in the surroundings of a Victorian town hall, or public room, but since the earlier performances Williams had so refined and adjusted the text, that it stands now as more than a mere re-enactment of an historical event. It is acted reading, but as such it is unimpeachable solo theatre and a tribute to the totality of the mono-performer's art. Single-handedly, Williams had lifted the reciter's practice into a genuine dramatic form, which a theatre audience accepts without question, as if it were a conventional play. It is a play however, performed by one man and relying entirely on that one man's skill as an actor.

Ostensibly, the form is still that of a public reading from a lectern, but in fact, the actor is involved in a very complicated acting scenario. He not only provides the audience with the given readings, but offers them the man Dickens at the same time, even though nothing of his personal life - his marriage, his affairs, his health - is suggested.

This is a unique feat and calls for an unusual subtlety on the actor's part, since he has no biographical or expository elements to assist him in creating the Dickens character; only a facial make-up and some idiosyncratic mannerisms deduced from the subject's known platform manner - the red carnation in the button-hole, the business with the kid gloves, the savouring of the water-glass, the satisfied glance at the stage lights as they come up, the classical flick of the wrists as he selects a book, the reaction to the bouquet 'From Miss Ternan' - all this shows the actor working.

As Walter Kerr pointed out in his review:

'This is characterisation not affectation'.³⁴

And all the while, the master story-teller is 'telling' the stories as if reading them aloud from the book before him. Williams did all this brilliantly, and in so doing, suggested another dimension in the one-man show, whereby the actor might assume a given persona or the character of a particular person, and play that person in a scripted and rehearsed performance for the entire evening. It was a giant step forward in the genre, and the point from which all succeeding soloists have taken their cue.

Before Emlyn Williams, the solo actors, like Bannister and Mathews, had made a feature of being several people in one. They made a theatrical virtue out of their versatility by use of different voices, different accents, different costumes, and in Mathews' case, by use of ventriloquism, he could even be off-stage at moments. Dickens, himself, was always himself, but now another actor was appearing IN THAT PERSON, doing much the same thing ostensibly, but as an actor reading a prepared script, not an author reading his own work. In 1951, this was an ambitious, if not dangerous intention - to stand on a stage for more than two hours and read from a book. One had to be a good actor though to carry it off convincingly, and Emlyn Williams was a good actor; not only an actor but a writer, and a good writer too, and like Dickens, he brought both gifts to bear in proving the efficacy of his one-man show.

'The master of the solo performance, his Dickens had begun, for good or ill, a theatrical movement - full of perils, prestige, and potential profit.'³⁵

Thus critic, Clive Barnes, confirmed the trend. Not all critics agreed however. John McLain, for instance, on the occasion of Emlyn William's first Broadway appearance wrote:

'This is the absolute, all-time, money-makingest idea in show businesscomes out all alone and 'reads' for two hours - to paying customers. Is this theatre? I wonder. Why not put a long-playing phonograph on stage....?'³⁶

But of course, this was much more than a reading.

This was theatre - as Philip Hope-Wallace confirmed;

'Emlyn Williams is back with his Dickens readings, which are dull words to describe a superlative performance of passages from the great dramatist manque of our heritage. They are in truth acted in a spell-binding bravura style, such as you might have to go back to Lloyd George, catching an audience in its most vulnerable state, to find. I used to think that no one could do the opening chapter of 'A Tale of Two Cities' as well as my own father, but have to give this actor with this author a higher rating. Mr Williams appears in costume, gradually intensifies the delivery, and ends up with a horror story, which fairly makes us gasp... The parade was splendidly well-timed, full of skill, neat and secure... Phrase after phrase of description combined to make strong and often very comic dramatic poetry. If this is not 'theatre' - solo recitation, though of course it is in essence - I must not go to school again.....'³

It was theatre - theatre in the person of one man. Williams did not always do the readings that Dickens had done, and what he did, he cut and cross-cut and re-arranged, but never 'tampered with', as he said. He adapted as freely as Bancroft had done, but, as he wrote, 'I again aver solemnly, that I have not presumed to add one 'embellishment' of my own to Dickens' wit and humour: I swear it in the name of my Celtic forefathers and of the Dickens fellowship'.³

Bleak House, which Dickens had never read, was done as a complete reading. Bernard Darwin remembers:

'When I heard him read 'Bleak House' the book was indeed on the table, but as far as I could see, it was merely there as a theatrical property, and he recited the whole thing from memory.'³

By 1983, he had given 2,200 readings from his Dickens repertoire, and in nearly every country in the world (except China!).

In 1955, he adapted A Boy Growing Up by Dylan Thomas, as his second presentation. A Boy Growing Up was the official title, though it was sometimes known as Dylan Thomas Growing Up. This was just as successful as the Dickens, especially in America. Thomas had at last found a worthy interpreter. A voice for the theatre had finally found a body, and the actor's personality freed the lines from the page.

Thomas was always the putative dramatist - Under Milk Wood is only the promise of a play. It was an arranged schema for voices and it needs a Burton or a Williams to remind us how histrionic the Thomas prose is. 842 performances were given by him as 'Dylan Thomas' before he gave the first performance of his third solo, Saki, in a solo script whimsically entitled - The Playboy of the Week-end World (first performed in 1976).

In this dramatic biography of the author, Saki, (Hugh H. Munro), he collated a series of the best short stories, and set them against the details of Munro's private life between the Wars. As 'Dickens' was an acted reading and 'Dylan' a stylised re-creation, so the 'Saki' was the representation of a literary life. This was the least successful of Williams' one-man shows, yet it managed a respectable run of 131 performances in Britain, America and Canada.

The actor/scholar/writer, Emlyn Williams, was especially suited to working on a solo project from concept to acting script and he never forgot its prime function - to entertain. All three of his solos were, first and foremost theatrical entertainments. Despite his proved skills as author, director and wit, Williams was never anything other than a performer. A performer in words, whether spoken or written, he was always the actor.

There were some critics, and not a few fellow-actors, who considered that a thespian of Williams' status had somehow diminished or demeaned his great talents in concentrating for so long in the one-man medium. He should, they argued, be playing the great parts. But perhaps in playing his respective solos he has played the greatest part of his career. For Mr Williams to have successfully survived, and indeed prospered as a soloist for more than thirty years, is surely evidence not only of his good judgement and professional acuity, but of the public's complete acceptance of him in the one-man show. Far from lessening the public's opinion of this actor, it appears to have enhanced it. Emlyn Williams has given the prime of a very considerable career to a study and advancement of a very special enterprise.

The one-man show was no longer the freakish event given over to the charming eccentricities of dubious manipulators. From now on, managements and public alike would see the commercial and entertainment possibilities of the genre in a new light. Hitherto, the convention had been confined to the reading, or to the display of striking individual musical or comic talents, but now an acting opportunity was offered which gave immense range and challenge to the actor as well as a new kind of theatre experience for the audience.

Williams, virtually on his own, literally and metaphorically, had re-established the mode as a legitimate genre of the performing arts. The ground-rules were now laid down for much of the mono-drama that was to follow. Before he died in 1987, he had been working on his own account of his one-man odyssey. It is to be hoped that these comments might yet be published posthumously as none was more fitted than he, as actor, writer, scholar and solo performer, to write the definitive volume on the subject.

This greatly-gifted Welshman, by his example, encouraged a whole new wave of actors, particularly in the United States, to follow in the one-person mode, and specifically in the genre identified as the Dramatised Biography. From this time on, public recognition of the form would be largely based on this aspect of it. This marked a definite watershed in the development of solo theatre.

It can now be seen that, historically, the One-Person Play has developed in two phases. Phase One saw the medley performance of the strolling player develop into the Early Victorian theatrical 'At Home'. What these earlier presentations had in common was the legal imperative to evade the Lord Chamberlain's sanction and avoid the consequent need for a performing Licence under the new laws. Hence, the very individual, and often idiosyncratic, form the first solo performances took. It was a pragmatic solution of a particular problem and actors sought it each in their own way. Notwithstanding this variety of approach, there was a gradual acceptance of these solo 'entertainments', and so the apparently

shapeless and themeless street and fairground tent offerings of the country strollers and mountebanks were developed into the sophisticated and structured solo sketches of accomplished comedians and actors, such as Bannister and Mathews. What they offered was, to all intents and purposes, solo variety. Their programmes skirted a very thin technical line between the conventional dramatic impersonation and the new miscellany entertainments with music. Earlier actors, like Samuel Foote with his clever mimicry of real people, and Stevens, with his satirical 'Lecture' showed that the public would respond to a personality and performance they liked, no matter in what form it showed himself.

Phase Two covered the exact hundred years from the Victorian Great Exhibition of 1851 to the Festival of Britain in 1951, and embraced those twin giants, the two Dickens - the original, and his 'pretender', Emlyn Williams. It was this actor's first tour in America in 1952 that gave the next major impetus to one-person theatre - the American extension. Williams' first appearance in New York, and his subsequent nation-wide tours thereafter, were inspirational to a whole generation of American actors. They took up the solo baton, one might say, from Williams and carried it on to its contemporary expression. In doing so, by the same kind of relay analogy, Emlyn Williams precipitated a new genre of solo performance on to the running track. This was the Dramatic Biography, in which the actor portrayed for the whole of the evening, one character, generally historical, certainly famous.

As Carlyle remarked:

'The history of the world is but the history of great men.'^{to}

SECTION THREE

Modern to Contemporary
Dramatic Biography to Dramatised Autobiography
Autoperformance

CHAPTER FOUR

A CANON OF BIOGRAPHY (1952-1983)

Hal Holbrook

Biographical drama is 'that which focuses on the lives of actual personages, and centres its appeal to audiences in the related actions and reactions of its characters'.¹ This convention of solo performance was evidence of the further regeneration of theatre practice to suit the tastes and demands of the day. This single confrontation of actor and audience was part of the continuing exploration of new theatre territory. The actor was not only the interpreter of the subject, he was the subject; and among the first to explore this duality was the American actor, Hal Holbrook, as Mark Twain.

Holbrook first encountered Mark Twain as a character in 1947 during a High School English project on which he was working with a fellow pupil, Ruby, who was to become his wife. The idea was to dramatise a chosen literary or historical figure. The Holbrooks chose Clemens, alias 'Mark Twain'; journalist, novelist, conversationalist and folk hero. The point was to explore an aural interpretation of literature or history, so as to offer a living biography by means of impersonation of the author's character in conjunction with the material of the life under review. In doing so, the would-be actor found in Twain a persona that offered him, not only a suitable study for the school project but a character that was to provide him with a unique, career-making opportunity.

Later, while at Denison University, Ohio, in 1952-53, Holbrook saw Williams as Dickens, and, as Twain had been inspired to go solo by the original Dickens, so Holbrook was similarly inspired by the actor now playing him. One of the pieces read by Twain in his own programmes was An Encounter with an Interviewer - the piece first dramatised as a duologue by the Holbrooks. Now it was part of a well-rehearsed script. With their programme, they moved from the school assembly circuit, to the womens' clubs and finally, via the small colleges to the university theatres or campus circuit.

They spent four years with a duo-bill consisting of the Encounter and an hour of Shakespeare, but as the popularity of the 'Twain' grew, the Shakespeare was dropped, so was Ruby eventually, and Hal found himself with a one-man show. He performed it for the first time at the State Teachers' College, Lockhaven, Pennsylvania, on 19 March 1954, under the title Mark Twain Tonight. Somehow his 6'1" stooped to the 5'7" of Twain by adding 4" to the stage furniture to help him look smaller. He also studied a recording of Twain's actual voice and talked to people, who had actually seen and heard the Missourian personally or on the platform. He acquired a rare film of Twain made by Edison and when he saw it he felt 'a delighted pang of recognition'.² All this continuing and painstaking involvement gave to the portrayal an uncanny authenticity, even though it often took him longer to put on the elaborate make-up of wig, moustache and beard as the 77-year old Twain, than it did to play the performance.

In 1954 Holbrook was persuaded by James B. Pond, a promoter and grandson of one of America's first lecture promoters, to consider the vehicle commercially. One of the first dates was at the Purple Onion Night Club in Greenwich Village, New York, for Lovey Powell. Holbrook did three fifteen minute routines and these did him much good in building up audience rapport and full character familiarity. He introduced the cigar into the act, mainly because it gave him something to do. Twain smoked cigars, (See Oliver Herford's poem Mark Twain - A Pipe Dream) but this fact is less important than the opportunity it offered good stage activity or 'business' to the actor in preparing it, lighting it and smoking it. It also emphasised Twain's casualness. In this way, Holbrook shared the man who was Twain with the audience. Williams did the same in his Dickens, by recreating stage business (with the carnation, for instance, and the drinking glass etc) that Dickens himself had used. The difference between the two actors is that where Williams reached his audience via the works of Dickens, read as Dickens read them, Holbrook did so via the character of Twain, impersonated fully by the actor. As Holbrook himself wrote:

'My purpose is to let Mark Twain himself tell you a story about himself and his times, his likes and dislikes, the things he laughed at and the things he loved, his hopes, his doubts, his estimate of the whole animal kingdom from the Amalekite to Man.'³

Holbrook followed Clemens' original example by acting out some of the narrated parts in character thus giving further depth and dimension to the character of an old man in the last few years of his life. The main problem was to keep the works authentic yet allow them to flow from one to another 'without the seams showing', as one reviewer put it.⁴ Holbrook freely adapted the original material, as Twain himself did.

'Not only did he use a good story three or four times, in different contexts.....he cut his original material for use on the platform - and even departed freely from the original text.'⁵

As the performance developed in texture and density, Holbrook, himself, grew in ease and confidence, so that he was able to extemporise as Twain wherever he performed, either cabaret-fashion or theatrically, as in summer stock at Holyoke, Massachusetts, or even on the Ed Sullivan television show. Further television appearances (Steve Martin's Tonight Show, The Jack Paar Show etc.) followed, but the television version was less satisfactory than the live version on stage. Mark Twain performs better to people than cameras. Nevertheless this exposure created wide national interest and it was this led to a thirty minute excerpt given for the Lambs Club in New York. Here he was seen by Broadway producer, John Lotas, who, after several auditions for backers, with partner, Bunker Jenkins, finally brought Holbrook and Twain to that now famous Broadway debut on April 6 1959, which won Holbrook a Tony Award and the Drama Critics' Circle Award. The show also drew the finest set of reviews since My Fair Lady and critical opinion was unanimous. Columbia producer, Goddard Lieberson, wrote in his sleeve notes for the LP of the show:

'As Mark Twain said, "In all matters of opinion our adversaries are insane." Quite so. And in my opinion, this performance by Hal Holbrook is not only a great theatrical work of art, but also a work of real literary distinction. His recreation of Mark Twain is not just a piece of costume and

make-up virtuosity. Certainly that is clever enough, but perhaps a dozen vaudevillians in the old days, given time, could have done something like it. No, it is that this remarkable physical impersonation is but the husk for the mind and soul of Mark Twain; a living, breathing - and, most striking - a thinking Mark Twain. There he stands,.... in front of our very eyes, thinking up those grand sayings, as he goes along. Having known Hal Holbrook, it would indeed be difficult for me to resist saying to my future grandchildren, "Of course, I knew Mark Twain!" Anyway, there is my opinion.'

Twelve years of research had made Holbrook a Mark Twain authority and this authority was stamped all over what was by now the definitive performance. It even converted John McLain on the New York Journal-American, who, before this, had been so antipathetic to the solo:

'These one-man readings can be a booming bore - this one is not. Mark Twain, via Holbrook, is delightful.'⁶

In 1966, his second Broadway run won him an Antoinette Perry Award (A Tony) for the outstanding performance of the year. He then completed several international tours, including a visit to the Edinburgh Festival.

In his many years with the character in the solo format, Holbrook did much to establish the biographical drama in the public image. He was indeed Mark Twain in the 'photographic image', and this total identification with the character allowed him to treat his performance virtually as a conversation with the audience. He now had twelve hours of material in sixty different pieces. This permitted him to improvise where necessary, and to present himself entirely as the subject, so that events and incidents of the life, together with the need to recite or narrate from the works, became an organised and scripted play for one actor. Emlyn Williams had given the example, now Hal Holbrook set the trend.

The device for solo entertainment hitherto known as the one-man show had now become the one-person play. Soon it became the fashion to present famous characters on stage in this way and every actor of any quality, and many without, were all seeking a person they might play. Actors of every kind now sought to showcase their prowess in this kind of way. The new biographical drama was firmly established.

The British Dimension

What just as soon became obvious was that this sort of theatre expression was not within the capability of every actor. One-person theatre was a special kind of performance and required a special kind of performer. Not a star necessarily, but a good actor, with a good personality who, on his own, could fill the stage with his 'character', and by that means, win an audience to him, and sustain their interest during the course of a whole evening. As Allen Saddler commented:

'There is no doubt that the one-man show has brought a new challenge to the actor.....a new kind of satisfaction, but the ones that go down bring almost suicidal levels of embarrassment. The risk is enormous. The Evel Knievels of the Arts Centre circuit, stepping out without a net, all dry-mouthed and wobbly knees, with no one to blame but themselves.'

Despite this, there were many indeed throughout the Seventies who tried to make for themselves, if not a solo career, then at least a convenient fall-back, to which they could recourse when conventional employment was slack. If they had a name at all it was a simple matter to interest arts theatres and small clubs in taking a one-man show for a night, and even better was the growing interest in the mode by the organizers of festivals, both local and national. All this gave the actor a valise or portmanteau propensity - he could pack his solo script with his toothbrush and be available at a day's notice to go anywhere. Of the early English-speaking performers, who were quick to understand and accommodate to this modern solo phenomenon, and establish themselves as soloists, the first, in what might be termed, the British Dimension, was Brian Barnes.

This English actor is one of only three professionals (the others are John Stuart Anderson and Chris Harris), who work solely in One-Person Theatre. Barnes was already an actor in 1958 when he went to Germany to study the theatre of Berthold Brecht and his Berliner Ensemble. Not having a grant or scholarship to sustain his studies, he was obliged to look for work to survive. He was passed from the British Consul to the British Council where an official, on

hearing he was a professional actor, suggested he might give a dramatic recital, in English, and keep the proceeds, if any. Barnes quickly arranged a programme, (The Boy with the Cart), and since he could not afford a cast, he did it himself. Thus was he begun on a solo path, which was to take him around the world. He is still doing so. To date, he has given a total of more than 3,000 performances, utilising 15 different texts and playing in every kind of venue in 72 countries. He has performed in a Roman amphitheatre in Jordan and a drill hall in Northern Ireland, before princes and for primary school-children. In short, he is willing to go anywhere for anyone, as long as they clear enough space for him to act. He has performed extensively for the British Council around the world, since they unwittingly launched him on his solo career, and in the United Kingdom alone he has played in more than a hundred different centres. He is currently touring in nine different shows, which include characters as varied as Oscar Wilde, Samuel Pepys and Browning's Pied Piper of Hamelin. His Dickens presentations are from A Christmas Carol and The Pickwick Papers, and his Shakespeare is Pyramus and Thisbe from A Midsummer Night's Dream. He also does a solo Under Milk Wood, a one-man Murder in the Cathedral, and his modern piece is The Pedagogue, especially written for him by James Saunders.

No other actor working in this field can offer such a range of programme, nor one demanding such flexibility of voice and physical appearance, but Barnes, dressed in a long dressing-gown, and with no other aids, can be both man and woman, young and old, traditional and modern, tragic and comical. He also sings as required and plays several musical instruments - a one-man theatre indeed. While one can only admire Mr Barnes' protean ability and admirable energy, it must be admitted that he is relatively unknown to the general public. While that is not necessarily a handicap in assessing his worth as a solo player, it is self-evident that his is not a world name in normal theatre rankings. Decidedly in that category, however, was the next name in the One-Man Pantheon; a boy actor, called Alfred Willmore, who became - Micheal Macliammoir.

Micheal Macliammoir (1899-1978)

This larger-than-life and extremely personable Irish actor and Jack of so many theatrical trades, not so much entered upon the solo stage but swept on to the centre-spot with a flourish, and once there, occupied it with such style and panache that it seemed impossible he had ever done anything else. He tells his own story brilliantly in his autobiography, All For Hecuba, in which we learn that he first practised to be a painter, became a writer and then an actor and director, and founded the Gate Theatre in Dublin with Hilton Edwards, as well as a Gaelic-speaking theatre in County Galway. This brilliant, all-round artist of the Irish Theatre was, by temperament, personality and disposition, born to be a one-man show. It could be said for him, as it might for Emlyn Williams, that he found his true metier when he found the solo.

No character or style of theatre could have been more fitted to his outre and extrovert nature, than the subject found for him by his friend, Edwards. The histrionic Oscar Wilde was just right for the histrionic Micheal, and their pairing achieved immediate and well-deserved success not only in Dublin, but in London and New York. Imaginatively staged in what Edwards called in his programme note, 'an empty, elegant space', it began as a lectern-reading much in the manner of Williams' Dickens, Emlyn Williams himself having edited the playing script. 'The Wizard of the Welsh West End' performed a miracle of stage surgery,' said Macliammoir.⁸

The performance very soon became this flamboyant actor's tour de theatre, full of brio and dash and arresting pathos. In critic Desmond Rushe's opinion: 'It is the classic one-man show.'⁹

Ironically, he had been reluctant to tackle a one-man show and had to be talked into it by director, Peter Ashmore. He insisted that one-man shows were the preserve of the ladies! 'After all, who could follow Ruth Draper?' he asked. 'Emlyn Williams!' he was told. So he was persuaded, to the great satisfaction of all concerned, not least of which have been audiences in all parts of the world.

Outrageously Irish at all times, Macliammoir was in the tradition of the seannachie, the story-teller. This made him the ideal protagonist in the one-man show, drawing the audience immediately and completely into his confidence. This is the mark of the natural solo performer. The Dublin Herald hailed it as:

'The most remarkable solo entertainment in recent theatrical history.'

The London Times said:

'Mr Micheal Macliammoir has come over from Dublin to show that he is as capable as any of our English virtuosos (sic) of holding the stage alone and the audience rapt for the whole of the evening.'

This striking Irish actor became as much of a celebrity and social lion as his subject had been, and just like that fellow-Dubliner, he enjoyed it enormously. It is an interesting fact that Hilton Edwards chose not to design the set as a cluttered and genteel drawing-room of the period, but left it as a space for the actor, so much confidence had the director in the charm and personality of the actor. As a further professional concomitant, television and radio versions of the show were made, as well as a long-playing commercial record; practices which all of the later and equally successful solo artists were to emulate. These became recognised as the perquisites of the solo performance. In 1966, Macliammoir presented a further solo programme with material made up from his own writing and excerpts from Yeats and others under the title, I Must Be Talking to My Friends. No soubriquet is more apt for his kind of performance, nor is there an ideal more desirable for any mono-performer. This element of 'likeability' is something anyone facing an audience in such a highly personal manner must have if he is to engage them totally.

This was further proved when Macliammoir took part in the Geneva Festival of 1965. In this event, organised by London Productions of Geneva, focus was placed for the first time on the one-man show and several extant solo actors were invited to take part, including the present writer.

It could be said that in the mid-Sixties there was a decided burgeoning of the British solo dimension. The Emlyn Williams/Dickens challenge had been taken up not only by the American Holbrook/Twain combination, but also by British performers who began to consider the solo medium as being worthy of serious thought and practical attention. Every year more and more actors made their entrance on to the solo platform, especially at the various national and international festivals of drama, where the one-person show was an easily integrated commodity in most programmes, and soloists began to travel the circuit of festivals in the course of a working year. Eventually the best of these shows came to London's West End - regarded then, but to a lesser extent now, as the apogee of acting attainment, and the final accolade for any actor. To be a London name was to be a success. One such 'name' actor was already a London success, however, when he was drawn to the solo.

Max Adrian (1902-1973)

This amiable revue artist and diseur, was also a Jew and an Irishman, and a considerable comedian, when he was called on to play a famous fellow-Irishman - George Bernard Shaw. The production began as An Evening of G.B.S. by Michael Voysey, but came to London in 1966 as By George. In 1977, it was revived as My Astonishing Self with another Irish actor, Donal Donnelly as Shaw, at Bromley, and for later tours of the American universities and a showing at the Niagara Festival.

Playwright Voysey took the material entirely from the letters, criticism and miscellaneous writings - not the plays. Both players, like Shaw himself, were natural talkers. As a result, in their performances, they did not so much play Shaw, *as* 'inhabit' him. In addition, Adrian actually knew Shaw personally. If we could not have Shaw himself, then Michael Voysey and Max Adrian, between them, gave us the next best thing. Voysey recreated the Adrian text for Donal Donnelly, but once again, was as successful in creating, not just another lectern-reading, but a play for the theatre. This is an instance of a writer working closely together with his actors to create the solo portrait. This also happened with the Director.

Roy Dotrice

This actor came to his solo creation in tandem with his director, Patrick Garland. Dotrice had played John Aubrey in Brief Lives, for the first time as a sketch in a programme celebrating Shakespeare's Quatercentenary at Stratford in 1964. This was then adapted further by Patrick Garland for performance at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1967. This was the production that transferred to the West End, and from there went around the world. To date, Mr Dotrice has given more than 1700 performances in the English-speaking countries. The 1984 Edition of the Guinness Book of Records lists it as the longest-running theatrical one-man show in consecutive performance - 400 at the Mayfair Theatre, London in 1964.

(Only Williams as Dickens came near this figure. Thereafter, came Holbrook with Twain, followed by Alec McCowen in St Mark's Gospel and Macliammoir as Wilde.)

Brief Lives is a day in the life of John Aubrey (1626-1697). The content of the play is consonant with its setting. This 'John Aubrey' is a dense and complex portrayal, helped by an extremely realistic staging. In a litter of Jacobean properties, Dotrice as Aubrey, has a whole world of his own to live in. The audience is invited into this world without the normal solo need for direct address. They must come to him and not he to them. The director, Patrick Garland, explained why in his Notes on the Staging of 'Brief Lives'.

'When Roy Dotrice and I first decided to work towards a stage version of John Aubrey's writings, we were both determined to recreate as far as possible the authentic atmosphere of 17th Century daily life, and in collaboration with the designer, Julia Trevelyan Oman, succeeded I believe, in capturing the essence of what I called 'Jacobean Kitchen Sink'. This was largely helped by the generous loan from friends of genuine 17th Century , and earlier, furniture and books. In fact, among the hundred of old volumes used to litter the stage, there were several dozen which were already antique when Aubrey was born.'¹²

The action takes place during one winter's day in 1696 in 70-year-old John Aubrey's room at Mistress Byerley's Lodgings, Dirty lane, Bloomsbury in London. The text is delivered almost absently as he fusses about the business of the

day, distracted by the successive noises of revellers, town-criers, street-sellers, a baby crying, hammering above, a lute-player below - he eats, drinks, reads, writes, washes, urinates - all without any self-conscious awareness of the spectators. It is as if one is simply paying a visit to the house of an old man who lives alone and in some discomfort, and who makes up for the absence of friends, some famous, some obscure, by bringing them to life again in reminiscences. The script at one point stresses that the greatest pleasure left to an old man is to renew acquaintance with his old and deceased friends.

Despite the variety and multiplicity of visual effect in the production, the character is totally at home in his environment which assists in giving the actor a performing ease, and for this alone it can be seen that the quality of design is a vital factor to the success of any solo play. Besides, audience scrutiny is especially intense when only one man is involved. In this case the heavy stress on realistic accumulation tells us much about Aubrey and gives Dotrice his world to live in. At the end of Act One, he dozes off in the middle of an anecdote about Sir Walter Raleigh and the actor spends the interval asleep in an armchair - ostensibly asleep of course. Dotrice himself said,

'When I sit on the stage pretending to be asleep, I work out what kind of audience I've got and the stories I tell in the second half (as Aubrey), depending on what kind of material they are responding to: the bawdy joke or the historical references.'¹³

Clive Barnes summarises:

'What happens before our eyes is the re-creation of a period. Suddenly, in our hands, to touch and feel, is the fabric of an age. It is a curious feeling - the kind of real sense of time past you don't expect to encounter in a playhouse.....at once, 300 years are the bat of an eyelid and the past surrounds us like a still-fugitive mist'.¹⁴

This ability to play it 'off the cuff' or 'on the wing' is the fullest use of the actor's resources. He even urinates at one point. Hardly a piece of business that can be rehearsed! The curtain is up throughout the evening and

'Aubrey' never leaves the stage or the sight of the audience. The actor uses anything that happens on the night as touchstones for improvisation. The performance is a constant interplay between actor and audience. Brief Lives is a landmark in the solo field, not only on the strength of its durability as a piece, (Dotrice has given more than 1,700 performances as Aubrey), but for the stamina shown by the actor. As with Holbrook in Mark Twain, make-up required almost three hours to put on and just less than an hour to remove, which, added to the almost three hours of playing and the aggregate of performances played, means that Mr Dotrice, born in 1923, has been John Aubrey night and day for more than a year of his life!

Douglas Rain played John Aubrey in a production of Brief Lives at Stratford, Ontario, also directed by Patrick Garland in 1981. There is no record of any other actor's having played this very long, and demanding role. It is a fact of the solo convention that while it is not unusual for one actor to play more than one solo role, many indeed specialise in the form, it is much rarer for one particular character according to a specific script to be played by more than one actor.

Only Tom Wright's There Was A Man (5), Paul Shyre's The Impossible Mencken (3) Barry Collin's Judgement (3) and Steve Spears' The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin (2) are recorded instances of multiple productions of the same script in this survey.

These, too, are examples of scripts written by writers for non-specific actors to perform. Most solo playscripts are written for particular actors who are also generally the initiators of the project. They are drawn to a subject either by a marked resemblance to, or strong sympathy for the character concerned. This is the principle feature of the dramatised biography - the physical link between the character and the actor. This is also why the actor often prefers to write his own script or make his own compilation from the actual words of his subject with only the assistance of the director. The director is by no means an otiose figure to the solo player. He has a vital part to play in the solo.

The director is the actor's constant reassurance, his only line to the 'outside world' during the necessary introspection of preparation and word-learning. This objective stance is needed if the script is to be realised as something more than a formula for the actor's self-expression. The script is the basis or foundation for any performance. The text is more than a pretext. Under a good director's eye, like Garland, and with the help of his 'audience-ear', the solo actor can prepare his script from the beginning with the audience in mind.

Garland and Dotrice had a mutual function in their realization of Aubrey. It was a dual affair. Mounting a one-person show is seldom a one-man operation. Although there are notable exceptions, the solo actor needs all the help he can get, and usually works as part of a stage team. When the writer is closely involved *it is* a close-knit trinity with actor and director. It is something of a help when the director and writer are one, as is the case with Cacciatore Productions in Edinburgh, where W. Gordon Smith writes for and directs Scottish actor, Russell Hunter, in his solo productions each year at the Edinburgh Festival.

Russell Hunter

After a long and varied professional career as a conventional actor since 1946, Hunter tried his first solo in Jack Ronder's Cocky, based on Lord Cockburn's Memorials of His Time at the Edinburgh Festival of 1969, directed by Antony Kearey for Bonaly Productions. He repeated this at the Arts Theatre, London, in 1970. In 1972, at the Clyde International Fair in Glasgow, he presented his next, and probably his best solo - Jock by W. Gordon Smith - a study of the Scottish private soldier through the wars and down the years.

His natural stage manner and acting style, make Hunter, like Macliammoir, an inevitable solo performer. He reaches out to his audience at once and dares them not to join with him in his journey with the character he plays. He recognises fully the need for direct interaction and interplay with the audience. This actor possesses, again like Macliammoir, an enviable ease on the stage, and this relaxedness

allows him to make immediate contact with the house from the start. This is the uncompromising approach of the cabaret performer in his actor's guise.

Since 1973 his solo titles include Xanadu (1979), What a Way To Go (1983). These were unashamed pretexts or excuses for the display of Hunter's bravura acting style. In 1985 he reverted to the more straightforward demands of the biographical drama with the award-winning Carnegie and in 1986 repeated the format with Vincent, which itself was a repeat, having previously been performed by Tom Fleming in another version by the same author in 1978. Also in 1987, Smith devised a solo programme for an actress (Mary Stuart) and yet another vehicle for Hunter - a re-working of Jock under the title Mr Jock, which is, as the author mentions in the programme:

'...a celebration (of a long and fruitful artistic partnership), a re-dedication (of commitment to a specific kind of theatre in which the emotional and intellectual response of the audience amounts to something more than mere participation,) and an examination (can I still do it, have I learned anything after 20 years?) Jock was seen by more people than any other play by a Scots author...that makes it even harder to follow. Dennis Potter explained once, that as a writer, every time he ploughed the same field he turned up something new. You will see the force of this, I hope, in Mr Jock...and for those meeting him for the first time - I ask only that they take him as they find him...as the years roll by.'

This production is again to be featured as part of Glasgow, Mayfest 1988. Smith and Hunter then, are an old, established firm, already well-respected in the trade for their workmanship, reliability and durability. Garland and Dotrice represent perhaps a more polished approach to the same task, but both duos tender, as it were, for the same contract. Some solo enterprises, are however literally one-man outfits and such an operator in the field is another Scottish actor - David McKail, who writes and presents himself in dramatised biography.

David McKail

This actor wrote Bozzy for himself in 1981 under the pseudonym 'Frederick Mohr'. This featured the life and times of Scottish diarist and debauchee, James 'Corsica' Boswell, and was performed first at the Playhouse Theatre, Edinburgh, and the

Tron Theatre, Glasgow, and thereafter on tour with support from the Scottish Arts Council, who had hitherto declined to support one-person plays. Why had a working actor chosen to write a one-man play as a vehicle for himself? In a letter written to the author, McKail was at some pains to present his reasons and why it was important to know how he approached the project both as actor and writer:

'When I wrote my first solo play 'Bozzy' I had only seen one model, 'There Was A Man' by Tom Wright...
(NOTE: This was the present writer's performance)
which begins with (Robert) Burns saying something like - "I've made some stir in the world. Perhaps you would like to know more of me....."

(NOTE: The actual opening lines were by Burns himself -
"I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself."
- all very well' (continues McKail) 'but who is the you?
It seemed to me, and still does, that the audience should know whom it is supposed to be, and why it is invited to be the auditor of these confidences. And the character should have more reason to confide the details than just the old ear in the railway compartment. I also felt there should be an element of conflict.....and as far as possible I wished to observe the Aristotlean unities of time, place and action.....creating a dramatic impression of James Boswell. The interval is contrived to replenish a bottle and the conflict is supplied by the great off-stage bulk of Dr Johnson, constantly referred to like an unhealed scab being picked'.¹⁶

McKail also wrote a one-man show for an actress to play as a man - Barry. Jane Sharp has performed this play in America, and Gerda Stevenson has done likewise in Scotland. It concerns a young woman who, in 1814, has to masquerade as a man and join the Army in order to become a doctor. McKail again writes, in the same letter,

'The unities here give way to the audience being invited to compare an attractive, healthy, young woman about to go into labour whose apprehension is the crisis that makes her speak, and the wizened, crusty Major-General whose crisis is the duel he is about to fight. The conflict off-stage in this instance is the presence of Florence Nightingale, who as a woman accomplished what men within the system were unable to achieve. The theme is the high price women-achievers have to pay in a man's world'.

Like English writer Alan Bennett in his Talking Heads (1988) McKail seems to be able to create believable women.

In his third one-person play, McKail/Mohr reverted to the Boswell structure in 1986 with Hogg - the Shepherd Justified, based on the 19th Century James Hogg, author of The Confessions of A Justified Sinner. The eponymous hero (played by Donald Douglas) genially tells the audience all about himself and even sings to them. The piece was presented first at the 1986 Border Festival by Borderline Theatre and later the same year by the Traverse Theatre at the Edinburgh Festival, in a production directed by Morag Fullarton. Mohr,(or McKail) finally concludes:

'I try to have some sort of contemporary relevance and an honest, emotional basis for the monologue. The facts cannot be tampered with, but the subjective account of them by the character can be used to illuminate the persona.....I describe my works as solo plays, not 'shows' or 'turns' - and I hope that I invite actors to do honest, dangerous, but ultimately entertaining and rewarding things...'

It can be seen, then, that Mr McKail, both as actor and writer, whether as himself or Frederic Mohr, has made a considered, and considerable commitment to the solo genre. In the same 'do-it-yourself' school for actors performing in the solo biographical sector, and with something of the same commitment, is one of the three contemporary full-time solo artists - Chris Harris as Will Kemp.

Chris Harris

His props and costume for Will Kemp's Jig fit into a trunk, which fits into a van, which he drives to every venue himself - including a Royal Command Performance at Badminton. Harris first played Kemp for a Platform Performance at the National Theatre in 1977, which was followed by a TV version. Since then he has travelled all over the world with this solo about the Clown Kemp's quarrel with Shakespeare - even to the Shakespeare Festival at Dallas, Texas. Like many solos, his is ideal festival fodder, and this has resulted in invitations to Hong Kong, Sydney, Adelaide and Auckland. Like many soloists, Harris handles his own bookings. Keeping his show on the road to him, is like running a small business, and he relishes it. 'It's theatre in the raw. You survive on your own skills. It's just me, and the audience and a 15-amp socket!'¹⁷

Harris now wants to emulate, for the benefit of the Guinness Book of Records, the actual feat accomplished by Will Kemp in 1600, when he Morris-danced from London to Norwich in nine days. A case of the action suiting the word, but also further evidence of the ability certain actors have to make a name and a living from the one-man show. The band of full time soloists still remains very small but nevertheless, every year throws up a certain kind of actor for whom the one-man show is not only professionally viable, but also personally congenial. One such is Peter Florence.

Peter Florence

Here is a further case in point of the soloist working closely with a writer and a director; in this case, his director is his own father, Norman Florence. Peter, while still at Cambridge, founded his own Projects Company in 1982 with his father, to co-ordinate a developing solo repertoire of pieces, which were specially commissioned from various writers for Florence to perform. To date this remarkable young Anglo-Welsh actor has five subjects available:

The Pity of War (Wilfred Owen), Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog (Dylan Thomas), Death In Custody (John L. Hughes), Revolt Rhymes (Roald Dahl) and War Music (The Iliad of Homer translated by Christopher Logue) - all this, and at the time of writing, the actor is not yet 25.

Such immediate and total commitment to the genre is rare in Britain. Only Brian Barnes, Chris Harris and to a lesser extent, Russell Hunter, spring to mind in this context. It is not so unusual, however, in the United States. Broadly speaking, the American solo tradition corresponds to the British, except that, naturally, it has little activity in the First Phase (1750-1850). In the Second Phase (1850-1950), however, America abounded in solo performers on the Platform and Lecture Circuits. In the Third Phase of Solo Development (1950 to date) the United States has positively surged ahead in the field especially in that sector relating to the dramatised Biographical form, and later, its Auto-biographical extension and the continuation into Auto-Performance.

The evolution of the one-man show in any country is essentially a history of that country's popular entertainment. As we have seen, its roots are deep in performance tradition, but for the most part, the one-person show is a phenomenon that cuts across all fields of the performing arts. In Britain, its ancestor is the eighteenth century stroller, but in the United States, it was left to the music hall performers of the nineteenth century to create the great American vaudeville tradition from which distinguishable soloists emerged. Tom Terris, for example, launched his one-man show on Broadway in 1910 before becoming a film director. Having started later, the American soloist lost no time in catching up, and today is far ahead of the his British counterpart.

For the moment, however, the story of the solo in its third phase is, for the most part, the story of the British Dimension's declension to its American extension.

The American Extension

Between 1979 and 1984, the National Portrait Gallery in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington organised a whole series of biographical one-person shows under the title, Portraits in Motion. It was an interesting way of illustrating the place of the mode within the general field of art, and also underlining its value as contemporary comment.

With the changing attitudes to public life there has been a fall in the status of the public figure. Too much is known too soon about too many. Heroes are out of fashion but the American public needs its heroes, so resort is made to history and the great names of the past. Hence the soloists' preoccupation with the famous names of the dead; Lincoln, the Roosevelts, Truman, John Kennedy, etc. 'This necrophilic genre,' as the Rev. Anthony Adler called it.¹⁸

Actress, Ann Meara, approached producer, Mary Ellen Devery, (who had presented Pat Carroll's Gertrude Stein), imploring, "Oh Mary, I'm desperate - will you find ME some dead person to do?" Thanatopsis had reached epidemic proportions!

Hero-worship answers an American need. Homage to the hero is a vital part of patriotism.¹⁹ Indeed it might be that the American attitude to the famous borders on the religious, and, in the current climate of cynicism, there may be a genuine need for a compensating spiritual assurance. The current vogue for nostalgia is further evidence of a contemporary preoccupation with the past as an antidote to the pressures of the present. By featuring the great names of the past, we attempt to re-live their times and enjoy again their greatness.

We all have a common past, but any country's cultural heritage is the product of national character, as seen in that country's great men, and these great men exist so that there shall be greater. Every age needs its heroes. They are our point of reference, our role model, our latter-day gods, the embodiment of the human spirit in a purposeful universe. They are also good fun. Peter Boyden, who was himself an excellent 'Alexander Woolcott', rightly observed, 'Audiences crave individuals who have the courage of their eccentricities.'²⁰ As Jenni Calder asserts, 'Heroes are not only enjoyable, they are necessary. The heroic idea is essential to an imaginative grasp of the human condition.'²¹

History is an explanation of events and our connection with them. In historical figures, we see ourselves as heroes, and from them we receive our reassurance and our hope. As long as they survive, so do we. Therefore, they are perpetuated in some form - in stories, in sagas, in statues, in songs, in paintings - and in this case, in solo theatre, in intimate conversations with heroes from every corner of human endeavour. But there are difficulties, as critic, Walter Kerr indicates. While he admits that the one-man show is no longer regarded as a 'limited spectacle' and that audiences 'even answer it with delight' he still asserts, that 'in the contest between the man on the stage and the man in your head - who wins? The actor becoming the legend or the legend devouring the actor?'²²

This was a dilemma many actors had to face when considering the subject they might play in a one-man show.

The popularity of historical monodrama in America reflects that people's search for roots and reassurance. The last two decades have featured a number of one man shows in which the actor impersonated a famous figure....in none of these did the actor merely 'look like' his subject in the literal sense; the actor's genius was expressed in going beyond (and beneath) literal appearance to create an experience which captured the spirit of the subject, and moreover, captured it in a way that revealed.....a universal truth.²³ Drama is a mirror in which we see not only our own reflection but that of all of those who have gone before us. Part of everyone is preserved in the person presented on stage. He represents not only the one character who dominates and unifies the theatrical action, but can also be seen as a symbol for all.

Old frontiers were now being extended, old barriers broken down. In the modern atmosphere of permissiveness almost anything was allowed, and every advantage was taken by the performers. Current fashions in anything tend to ebb and flow with the social whim and theatre is no less in this. However, audiences have their own way of dealing with the spurious, the meretricious, the outrageous and the bad - they just do not turn up at the theatre. Many would-be soloists have foundered on the rocks of audience apathy, but others, being good actors anyway, not only survived but found whole new careers. Even so, few claim the solo field as their sole professional activity or as their only means of livelihood in a working year. Fewer still can claim mastery of the genre. As can now be appreciated, it takes personality, skill, energy and stamina to hold an audience alone for an entire evening.

American audiences saw the solo actor as the eternal individual, and in seeing him they felt, at least to some degree, their pre-Vietnam, pre-Watergate pride restored and a national hope returned. As long as theatre is alive we are alive - in actors, or rather, in their performances. When the American actors recreated their world of the past, it allowed their public to see the present in a new perspective. Theatre offered a new optimism.

Richard Blake

Blake was in the first native wave to follow Williams and Holbrook into the solo arena and perhaps not surprisingly for an American, it was as Abraham Lincoln. Although he insists it was only because he was 6'4" and Lincoln was 6'4"! Another instance of the 'look-alike' syndrome, which has impelled so many performers, often mistakenly, towards solo characterisation. It is no surety that one can 'be' a person merely because one looks like them. But it's a help. Blake, like Holbrook, began in the school assemblies, moving on to the womens' clubs and then to the university circuit between 1967 and 1981. Over the years, as with many who become increasingly involved and engrossed with the character played, he has amassed so much Lincoln material that only the beginning and end of his show remains constant. In between, he improvises, and determines the length of performance according to the particular audience and locale. Latterly, his performances have been allied to promotions on behalf of the Lincoln Insurance Company!

Henry Fonda (1905-82)

This star from Hollywood was nothing like Clarence Darrow, yet he 'became' Clarence Darrow, by psychological gesture, rather than superficial physical mimicry. He played the famous American lawyer in a dramatisation by David Rintels at Chicago in 1974, and later at the Helen Hayes Theatre on Broadway. He collapsed after 22 performances, but in 1975 resumed on tour across America. Clive Barnes was of the opinion ' - if Clarence Darrow wasn't like this he should have been.'²⁴

'A perceptive and deeply human portrait. Like all successful one-man shows, it not only presents a vivid and detailed picture of its principle subject but also evokes the images of those who figure in his life and suggests the time and temper of the world in which he functioned.'²⁵

The play is based on Irving Stone's book Clarence Darrow for the Defense and traces his career from case to case. This is the historical drama as platform and it re-creates the past in the time of the present via the given central character.

As his theatre programme notes quoted - 'I fell in love with the man,' said Fonda, 'just as audiences now do.' Reports indicate that the show grossed the greatest amount of box office of any one man show in the United States, almost \$5,000,000. Even allowing for Mr Fonda's fee and percentage this made for a good investment by the producers. Producers are comparatively rare in this area, as will be seen later in this study. The one man show is nearly always just that - a one-man operation, conceived and carried out by the performer.

The great majority of performers who appear in mono-productions are their own actor-managers and compile their solo scripts from the subject matter available. Henry Fonda was one of the first instances of an American actor appearing in a solo script written especially for him. The genre was now seen to be more than worthy of the playwright's attention and in 1975, Sam Gallu wrote Give 'em Hell, Harry! for James Whitmore, in what was to be the first of his several solo shows.

James Whitmore

Whitmore went on to make something of a corner for himself in the one-man field, not only as an actor, but as a director and producer. Give 'em Hell, Harry! was the first of the three solo portrayals he was to perform, but in none was he as effective as he was with the first. It was based on the private life of President Harry S. Truman and the solo approach gives his point of view. Whitmore gave a wonderfully spiky, energetic performance in the part from its first opening, but increasingly was at loggerheads with the writer, Sam Gallu - so much so that he walked out of the production just before it opened on Broadway. *It is the* perennial quarrel between author and actor as to whose play it is. It seemed to have been Whitmore's in this case, because when another actor took over the role it flopped on the road and it never came into New York, which, in terms of Whitmore's original performance, was a pity.

His second solo in 1977 was about another President (Theodore Roosevelt) in Bully by Jerome Alden. This was the public, not the private view of President, although it is the private voice that speaks. Neither is an objective historical

document and in both cases the myth of the public figure is preferred to the portrait of the real man. There were some, however, who still could not approve the single-person play, no matter who was in it. As Martin Gottfried wrote:

'- to create maximum box-office at minimum expense. One set, a famous figure and a well-known actor. In their own way, these shows (in this case, Bully) are as cynical as the cheapest sex comedies. Any play, no matter how bad, deserves a break, but I cannot, in all good conscience, wish any such to such merchandising of the theatre.'²⁶

This did not seem to deter Whitmore, and in 1979 he was Will Rogers in Will Rogers - USA, adapted and directed by Paul Shyre (a rare writer-specialist in the solo convention). Once again this was suggestion rather than duplication, but the character of Rogers was too well-known to American audiences to allow for the 'photographic portrayal', yet the performance held. The present writer saw it in Chicago and was most impressed by the way in which Mr Whitmore managed all the trick stuff with the rope. 'Just rehearsal,' he told me when I met him afterwards. But this was the professional speaking. 'It's just you out there,' he said, as if that explained everything. Nonetheless, his was a well-qualified opinion. He looked tired in the dressing-room. 'Hell, I feel tired,' he said. 'When you're alone on the stage for two hours you must keep that weight of attention. It's like driving a team of horses as big as there are members of the audience. You must hold all the reins. If you do that you've succeeded in the elements of a one-man show. But the weight of all that attention is exhausting.' Whitmore also mentioned that both James Stewart and Henry Fonda had been offered the Will Rogers show before him but each had turned it down, even though Fonda had rehearsed for a week. By this time, Whitmore had joined up with specialist production team, George Spota and Frankie Hewitt, together with actress, Eileen Hackert, in Four Star International to present one-man shows in America, beginning with Miss Heckart's own solo as Eleanor Roosevelt written for her by Arlene Stadd. Although as the actress puts it:

'It was more re-written than written.'²⁷

In March 1978, a headline in 'Playbill' read:

'THEATRE'S NEW GROWTH INDUSTRY.

Monodrama - Broadway's Answer to the ME decade.

- and in the subsequent article, Ellen Cohn wrote of the one-person show:

'A work in which the lone actor presents a biographical portrait in the subject's own words; or gives a lecture reading or performance as that notable might have done. It is the actor's dream machine. In the monodrama, he knows the loneliness backstage and the absence of company camaraderie - but he also knows that moment on-stage - of power, control and the joy that total responsibility brings.'

Whichever, it is a position of some responsibility. In some cases, part of that responsibility belongs to the producer. George Spota, himself a successful producer with Four Star International in America, commented in an interview:

'There is no clear-cut formula for success. If you have any respect for the actor at all you can only do 6 shows a week. The first week pays for the production, the second for the backers and the third - if there is a third - for the producer! Some of these shows succeeded some did not. The 'nut' or 'get-out' for a solo show is only a third of that for a company production and it can be mounted for half as much, and even, in cases like Fonda's Clarence Darrow and Julie Harris' Belle of Amherst which have made millions of dollars, no fortunes are made in the end. One-man shows are only valid in terms of the limited engagement. The mainstay of all solo production is the extended national tour, after a London or New York opening.'

This seems to be borne out by Pat Carroll's remark on the Dick Cavett TV show on PBS in 1980, that she only did the Gertrude Stein on Broadway as a tryout for the University Lecture Circuit! Some American actors, though, however skilled, did not take to the medium. Robert Vaughn was one such. In 1976, he realised FDR, as seen by playwright, Dory Schary, (yet another presidential solo!) and called it - 'the hardest work I've ever done'.²⁸

In 1978 Vincent Price essayed Oscar Wilde in Diversions and Delights by John Gay, not only in the United States, but in a world tour, and afterwards showed no great desire to repeat the experience. In 1979, the present writer

saw black actor, James Earl Jones, present a sonorous Paul Robeson in a one-man show in Chicago, but only for a limited season. It would seem that there was still an element of doubt in some actors' attitude, a residual fear.

Writers like Schary, Paul Shyre and Marty Martin continued, however, to write for the medium for other artists to perform, although Shyre himself played in his own H.L. Mencken programme for a time. It is easy to see why most writers were uncertain about the genre. It was a convention too bound up in the person and personality of the actor to encourage the conventional writer. Also, in the Seventies the audience was not as ready as it is today for such direct and unembellished confrontation as the one-person demands. Of course, the reaction to any performance is affected by the quality of the script. For the actor, a play is not a play until it is performed. For him, the play is still the thing. To the performer, the script is not a literary work at all, but what might be called a architectonic assist towards his performance. A blueprint or guideline for him to build the author's imaginative structure before an audience. A play ultimately is not the author's or the director's or the actor's - but the property of the audience at the time of the performance. This is often overlooked by even the best-intentioned protagonists in the theatre, so intent, engrossed and absorbed are they by their own particular function in the theatrical process.

It is quite understandable that a script, because it exists as an ostensible piece of literature is also an accessible manuscript and lends itself easily as a basis for academic discussion and interpretation. It is nevertheless, considered objectively, only the pretext for the actor's performance. Recent American writers have understood this and many now make a practice of writing for particular actors. Herbert Mitgang, for instance, wrote Mister Lincoln for Englishman, Roy Dotrice, to perform in America. Coals to Newcastle, perhaps, but it was significant that it was exactly two hundred years after Tony Aston had brought the first English speaking actor's voice to the new world.

However, in the following year, when American actor, John Forest Ferguson, came to the Edinburgh Festival in his one-man show as Robert Burns! It would appear that lease-lend still obtains! Except that it is now perhaps lend-lease, since the traffic across the Atlantic is now west to east instead of east to west. The balance of performer, for so long weighing in the old country's favour, not only from Aston, but through to Mathews, then Macready, to Dickens and finally to Emlyn Williams, was now increasingly counter-balanced by the steady stream of solo artists emanating each year from the United States. Any examination of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe programmes over the last decade, will substantiate this. It was at an Edinburgh Festival too, that one American actor emerged, who not only reflected contemporary trends but did so in the character of an American institution - Mark Twain. McLinn however, did not perform the characterisation institutionally. On the contrary.

William L. McLinn

This is the actor who has taken over the Mark Twain white wig and moustache now left off by Holbrook. McLinn started at Berkeley University, California in 1975, with a straightforward impersonation of Mark Twain a la Holbrook and gradually a more contemporary style took over with its presentation at the Smithsonian Institute. In 1983, he came to the Edinburgh Festival with Mark Twain, Himself - Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope also Mark Twain up in Arms as well as Mark Twain Smitten with Presidential Madness. By 1985, on his return to Edinburgh, the formal rehearsed section of the play gave way in the second half to a question and answer exchange, improvised with the audience. This version he called, Mark Twain on the Issues of the Eighties, and performed it with great success at the Netherbow Arts Centre during the Edinburgh Festival of 1986. In this presentation he remains in the persona of Mark Twain, and answers as Clemens himself might have done, any question put to him. The audience in fact created the dialogue with the actor. This was the ultimate in historical impersonation and virtually the last word in the biographical form.

Performers in the United States appear to have made the solo genre something of their own, as not being overweighted with a classical or traditional style indigenous to them, they feel free to experiment. They have made their own tradition in this form, finding in the singular and highly personal voice, a more compatible echo of their national and individual aspirations. It would seem then at this time that the biographical drama had reached its full extent with the improvisations of McLinn and the rest. The heretofore preoccupation with famous and historical figures was diminishing as an attractive playing form with solo players and playwrights alike. Dramatic biography was now not the only way to present one-person theatre.

The only mandatory ingredient was the one-person involved, and it mattered less and less how he (or she) arrived on the stage before his audience. He could work closely with the writer (as did Hunter with Smith), or with the director (Dotrice and Garland), or with the producer (Whitmore and Spota), or he could be hired as the acting hand, like Fonda or Vaughn. More generally, the initiative came from the performer himself as we have seen in the cases of Holbrook, Barnes, MacLiammoir, McKail, and others of the solo majority who found a character to play and presented themselves as that character in a structured and scripted solo play.

The causality was almost casual in that it was a very loosely-based linking of the idea or concept of the piece to the physical likeness of the player to the given subject to the attainment of a working script to the availability of a suitable platform from which to present it at the time. So many factors had to be taken into account, that it took a decided will to see all these things through and a very real determination to want to do it in the first place. Some actors have harboured an ambition to do a solo performance for years but something was always turning up to prevent it - a film, a TV series, a chance of a better offer perhaps. Or they needed the right director, or writer or designer - there was always a good reason. The real reason was that they were afraid to try.

This is quite understandable. Actors are vulnerable enough, and their fragile position in the market-place is not conducive to heroic statements like putting one's self on the line for a solo project that might never materialize after months of solitary work, and even if it did, might misfire to such an extent that one's conventional opportunities could be placed in jeopardy. It is a brave thing to go it alone. Some might even say, foolhardy. Alec McCowen certainly thought so.

Alec McCowen

In 1976, he was appearing in The Family Dance in London, and confesses to the fact that he was bored. As a hobby, he began to consider ideas for a one-man show and investigated several subjects like Kipling, Chesterton and Belloc. These were in the 'famous literary figures' syndrome, which, far from being the archetypal solo form was now almost a stereotype, if not already a cliché. There had been so many biographical one-man shows in that mould that it seemed that all the obvious material had been already used up. The question was, what, if anything, would sound better spoken aloud rather than read? The Bible, of course! It seemed so obvious that the actor wondered why had no one ever done it before? The truth is, that many had. John Stuart Anderson, a full-time soloist, based his one-man show on the Gospels, as did David Kossoff, but both performers used it only as a basis, as indeed have other soloists in the 'Bible Belt' as it were, but Kossoff paraphrased with good effect, he didn't tell his Bible stories in the Bible's actual words as McCowen did. Until he did so, no one had ever considered a straightforward, simple telling of the Gospel as if in fact it were a story - and this is what McCowen did. This is the salient difference between McCowen and Biblical raconteurs such as Kossoff. The English actor told his audience the story of The Gospel According To St Mark -verbatim.

His was a very tentative solo debut at Newcastle. He admits he was more than usually 'actor-nervous' on the first night. Mainly, because it was a very atypical opening. He was going to tell a Bible story, not in a church but in a theatre, and not to a congregation but a paying audience. It was a brave

idea. However, like all good theatre ideas, there was an inevitability about St Mark, despite its obvious risks. It was not unlike playing an instrumental solo without the orchestra, or singing a complicated song unaccompanied. He had no scenery, no props, no light or sound effects - nothing except a table to lean against. This was the one-man-show 'au naturel', as it were; just one man and his words - or the Word, if you prefer - St Mark's Gospel. He just walked on, in sports jacket and flannels and began his story right away. McCowen made no theatrical concessions whatsoever. Perhaps that was its secret?

He had begun preparing this simple, yet compellingly effective one-man show, by reading the Bible in the King James Authorised Version, written at the same time as the later Shakespeare. This was a language he understood and he could certainly speak it from the stage. It had its own nuances, its own music, and audiences would recognise it and respond to it. He studied all the Gospels in turn before selecting St Mark, and after sixteen months, and two hours of 'word-swot' each morning, he knew the whole thing by heart, and could recite it word for word in a Kentish accent, (which he decided on after getting drunk in Sandgate!)

He had tried out the show for the first time at the Newcastle University Theatre for only two nights in 1978, but was at once asked to bring it to the Riverside Studios in London, from which it transferred to the Mermaid Theatre and instant commercial success. The present writer attended one performance during the first week and, by chance, found himself sitting beside Emlyn Williams. Both went backstage afterwards to congratulate Mr McCowen and all three were suddenly aware that standing together in that small room were three actors in three one-man shows - Dickens, Burns and St Mark. 'No,' said Mr Williams, to McCowen's huge delight, 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost!'

After a triumphant London season, he opened in New York at the Marymount Theatre, and on the first night, before beginning his script, he paid a fulsome tribute to a famous

American solo player, Ruth Draper, acknowledging the influence and the encouragement he owed to her solo appearances in London. Then, on November 22, exactly one year after he had recorded it, full of wine at Sandgate, Kent, he played it, in a special performance, before President and Mrs Carter at the White House in Washington. He has since performed it more than 200 times all over the English-speaking world.

It may seem an arid concept, to stand, hands in pocket and vocalise the Gospel in an English regional dialect, but McCowen made it work because he remembered that Gospel means 'Good News' and he told it exultantly. Its appeal was in its apparent simplicity, but to the actor the doing of it was in itself an act of faith, even though he himself was not a practising Christian. He was, however, a good and proved actor, and as such, he could easily have read it in the recital convention, but he learned it by heart, so that he might speak it from the heart. He was working as an actor of today in today's terms for today's audiences, not as a theologian in a Biblical robe. One can only wonder what the earnest Methodists of the early Chautauqua Lecture Circuit might have made of it.

In 1980, McCowen directed American actor, Michael Tolaydo, in the part for an extensive U.S. tour. In Scotland, two actors have performed St Mark successfully in Scots, Jamie Stuart and Sandy Neilson. Such was the world-wide success of St Mark, that it was not until 1984 that McCowen was free to do his next solo. This was in fact his original choice of eight years - Kipling. This time, it was not a project prepared in long and loving, if hesitant, solitude but a full West End production with the full production team - Patrick Garland, (Director), Pamela Howard, (Designer) plus lighting and sound technicians, stage management and wardrobe, publicity and front of house staff as well as complicated technical effects involving rear-projections and audio-visual screens. All to put one actor on the stage. And it failed. Despite all the high-quality professional assistance, the piece did not work as well for the actor as the simple Gospel story told with his hands in his pockets. There is a moral there.

The Place of Design in the Solo

The contrast between the two solos offered by the same actor gives the opportunity to consider the importance of setting in the one-person show. In McCowen's case, the St Mark show was from the heart, and one had the feeling the the Kipling was from the head and there was no disguising which the audience preferred. In the same way, we can compare the prepared empty space offered Macliammoir for his Wilde with the suffocating realism given Dotrice for his Aubrey. It would appear to different courses for different horses! There was a calibre of soloist who needed nothing more than his audience - Ustinov, Allen, Connolly etc. Even so, there was an increasing tendency to cloak the solo performer in a variety of technological assists, not recognising that the very simplicity and directness of an approach like McCowen's was its very strength. It was an act of faith indeed - faith in theatre.

McCowen was himself in the St Mark, but was pretending to be Kipling. This was an interesting difference, and it suggested to some that the dramatised biography might give way to the autobiography whereby the actor, for the purposes of an audience's entertainment, might use the story of his own life as a vehicle on which to mount his performance. To create a one-person show from his own person in fact and hang his anecdotes, illustrations or songs on the armature of his own personality. This has a proved theatrical pedigree for it is only to echo Dibdin and Bannister from the eighteenth century, Leno and Chevalier from the nineteenth, and Barry Humphreys today, although he relies less on a set than on make-up and costume. Nevertheless, the conversational style is underlaid by a scenario or scripted structure so as to give the tension and continued interest of the conventional play. Thus, thanks partly to the courage and example of Alec McCowen's conversational St Mark, the ground was prepared for the next harvest from the solo seed - the oral autobiography. In much the same way as Holbrook had been inspired by Emlyn Williams in the biographical drama, so later actors took heart from McCowen and began to make their own 'conversations' with audiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUTOPERFORMANCE

'The actor who would build a solid fame
Must imitation's servile arts disclaim
(and).....act from himself.'
Charles Churchill-'The Rosciad' (1761)

There may be continuing curiosity about great lives, but in an age of doubt, the Hero is Anti-Hero, or Iconoclast. With the general devaluing of the public figure today, there is less stress on the dramatised biography of the famous and consequently, a greater concentration on the positive re-emergence of the private man as public character - or at least, as seen in public. This is yet another instance of the variety of attempts to examine the human predicament in terms of theatre as evinced in the mono-performance. At the same time, it poses provocative questions about the limitations as well as the possibilities of the solo form. An emerging expression of this enlarged output is the field of the oral biographer, or more particularly, autobiographical drama, where the performer's own story is used as the basis for the playscript, and incidents in his own experiences become the buttresses on which he lays his bridge to the audience. Can the actor however, given the falsity of the theatrical performance, be genuinely true about himself before an audience? Can any life be told in two hours?

Modern ethical and social values are in a state of flux, and audiences are relieved to take refuge in cosy nostalgia; a living again of times past. Where the future is uncertain or unpromising, a recourse to the past is understandable, but where this is also unacceptable or held to be sentimental and merely escapist, then the contemporary artist tends to look into the self. This is a vertical, rather than a lateral exploration and requires than the performing artist give himself entirely to the performance, in every sense, and draw the audience to himself, and the interior process that is the autobiographical approach to the one-person performance. Like any art, it is a constant searching for form. This is also part

of the contemporary attraction to extreme religious cults. Present day cultures do not offer sufficient spiritual alternatives and for many, the aesthetic climate is cold and its fruits barren. The outlook for the arts is generally unpromising. If it is pointless to look forward, one may as well look in or look back. Our heroes have been diminished and in any case, to some, the literary figure is more real. Current addiction to TV soap operas is proof of this. Similarly, our ease with the television 'talking head' of the newscaster has familiarised us even more to the single propensity and the solo voice. These are only some of the attitudes which may underlie the present vogue in the one-person show.

The present writer, since extending his programme of solos to include Stevenson and McGonagall, as well as Robert Burns, has found that a solo evening comprising the best moments of these, makes for a very acceptable theatre evening, and indeed one that he has toured extensively since 1975. However, with the experience and confidence of continued solo playing, the actor can become more and more anecdotal and reliant on spur of the moment improvisations on the very basic scenario of personal experience, so that his performance becomes, in fact, a heightened conversation with an audience from the stage. It may seem unstructured, but beneath a deceptive layer of casualness, there is a rich seam of experience from which the actor draws, allowing him to deploy his material via his own self as the audience-penetrating projection. This is one-man as the show. It may also be seen as a form of presentational theatre.

Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1943), after work at the Moscow Art Theatre Studio in 1905, was the first to experiment with presentational theatre, concentrating as it does, on the 'act' of acting as opposed to the 'art' of acting. This was a form of 'abstract' theatre, which attempted to realise Gordon Craig's ideal of the actor as puppet or uber-marionette. In 1921, the Russian director had his own Theatre Workshop where he developed his 'bio-mechanics' theory of acting - the concentration being on the 'person' of the actor and not on traditional expectations. Meyerhold's credo was purity of style

in an attempt to clear the actor of any unnecessary 'weight', so that he could act in the natural way, that is, by expressing emotion not experiencing it, and not 'to' the audience but 'for' them, as they are also an integral component in the play. This could be the credo of any solo player.

His primary focus is the audience, and their fusing is the ultimate in the actor-audience relationship. They/it become his partner in the enterprise, his co-performer. Their encounter is their actuality. The persona adopted by the actor engages the audience at an intimate level, in the 'I - Thou' relationship, as Martin Buber terms it, where dialogue is maintained even in mutual silences. His posture towards them is direct and non-tangential. He speaks as character to audience instead of character to character, as in the conventional, ensemble play. By being especially attuned to his audience throughout, the solo actor works with them, and through them and not 'off' them. Together, actor and audience create all the tensions, rhythms and conflicting emotions that make for the dramatic experience, and it is this that makes the one-person play a legitimate performance in the theatre. This is the key to understanding the essentials of monodrama. The actor in himself is the play, and never more so than when he appears only to talk about himself. Far from being an exercise in egomania, it is a self-exposure full of risks and not without some danger.

Warwick tells us in Shakespeare's Henry 4 Pt 11, that 'there is a history in all men's lives'. We all have a story to tell but not everyone can tell it. When they can, can they tell it interestingly, dramatically or wittily? This is the challenge that faces the solo player turned autobiographer - can he make his own life a script? To what degree will he edit events, however subconsciously? To what extent will he point or exaggerate for theatrical effect. How far is the lie justified when acting itself is a kind of lie told in public? These are the questions that beset the solo autobiodramatist, and his or her success depends on how he arrives at the answers.

David Kossoff

Kossoff was among the first actors to venture into the highly personal area of dramatic auto-biography with his One Eyebrow Slightly Up at the Arts Theatre, London, in 1956. In this, he used his acting skills in conjunction with his Jewish gift for story-telling and ~~also~~ that race's wry humour. This was especially apparent in the Old Testament stories in which he first made his name on radio. He later adapted these as public readings, under the titles The Kossoff Story-tellings, and as According to Kossoff. Another programme was added, A Funny Kind of Evening, which he performed at the Edinburgh Festival of 1981. Pathos and personal tragedy were added when, in another one-man show, The Late Great Paul, he told the story of the life and early death of his talented musician son. Mr Kossoff performs this latter show for charity and makes a particular practice in playing for schools and audiences of young people.

Bruce Mason (1921-1982)

This elegant actor was also among the first to use the incidents of his own life in order to tell his theatre story. This writer-actor was also a playwright, a critic, a scholar and a pianist and exemplified neatly the protean qualities so desirable in the solo performer. Dr. Mason (he was made Doctor of Literature by Victoria University in Auckland in 1977), began as an actor and producer for Unity Theatre, Wellington, in 1948 after war service with the New Zealand Army and Navy. When the first professional theatre was started by Richard and Edith Campion in 1953, as the New Zealand Players, he toured with them until it was disbanded in 1960. He then decided to go it alone.

As he said in 'Contemporary Dramatists':

'I tried to turn my country's greatest advantage - that whatever you try there is no one to say no - to good purpose by writing for solo theatre and arrogantly taking all the parts.'

The most successful of these 'essays' as he called them, has been The End of the Golden Weather, a voyage into a New Zealand childhood which he brought to the Edinburgh Festival

in 1963 and then to London. He performed this piece more than 700 times by 1976. In 1965 he opened at Downstage, Wellington's cafeteria theatre, in Counsels of the Wood later entitled, To Russia With Love, based on his experiences as a cultural delegate to the USSR. A third play, The Waters of Silence translated from Le Silence de la Mer by Vercors (Jean Bruller) was also added to the Downstage season. He played the latter in both English and French for schools in 1967. These last two plays were combined as another programme, Men of Soul in 1975.

Mason, like so many solo artists, was encouraged to venture into the field by the example set by Emlyn Williams, whom he saw when the latter toured New Zealand in 1958 with his double-bill of Dickens and Dylan Thomas in the same programme. It proved that a solo evening need not necessarily be one play or be confined to one subject. (NOTE: The present writer also performed Stevenson and McGonagall as one evening under the title - Not So Eminent Victorians.) Two halves can make a whole, in the way that two one-act plays often make up a conventional double bill (Rattigan, Fry, Coward etc). This is yet another permutation open to the soloist.

In 1976, Mason brought his complete Solo Cycle (The End of the Golden Weather, The Silence, Not Christmas but Guy Fawkes and Courting Blackbirds), to the Maidment Theatre in Auckland and enjoyed a much-deserved and long-awaited public and critical success. Bruce Mason, in a way, was the first to bring complete professionalism to the New Zealand stage. He proved that a living, however tenuous, could be made from it, even with a population as small as New Zealand's is - only 3,000,000 people. His was a total theatre commitment, in Eric Bentley's sense of the word, and there is no doubt Mason's emergence as a man of theatre was not only to New Zealand's credit, but to a general theatrical advantage there and in the United States. He was not a thinker in a Stanislavskian sense, but a theatre man more in the mould of Edward Gordon Craig, and in his time, as well as being a solo player in his own right, he was to all intents and purposes, a one-man New Zealand theatre. Not only was he that country's first native actor; he was its ambassador.

Peter Ustinov

This very idiosyncratic actor, playwright, mimic and professional talker seems, like Macliammoir, to be almost a natural exponent of the one-man-play. Given his fund of multi-national anecdotes, he has a virtual mine of script material to hand and this he uses deftly in his disarmingly titled An Audience With Peter Ustinov. This is, in effect, a cultural excursion through his own whimsical life-style, a unique mix of East and West and Middle-European. Occasional use too, is made of musical satire in mock-Lieder and spoof-arias, but both delivered in excellent language characteristics. He invites, or deliberately provokes, questions. Everything that he talks about has happened to him - or he says it has - but he says it so deftly and wittily that his audience is captivated and charmed as much as they might have been by Jack Bannister. This London-born Russian raconteur is a professional foreigner, and the world suggested by him is a very specialised one of international celebrity. An audience might be at a disadvantage in not knowing his points of reference.

Spalding Gray

Gray is arguably the most eminent actor today working in the autobiographical field, and his work in what he terms 'oral history' has done much to make this form of solo performance acceptable to contemporary audiences. This American actor's methods are quite antithetical to say, Bruce Mason's, yet his end results replicates the New Zealander's almost exactly. Both involve the auditor in the smallest details of their own stories. Gray indeed, calls himself an autobiographer rather than an actor. He is obsessed with the idea of the stage monologue as oral history and thinks of himself as a chronicler of his own times by means of his own story told in his own words to an audience, who will often join him on-stage to tell of their own experiences. In this way, he builds with them in the course of the evening a whole fabric of memories, experiences, and emotions that, being shared and enjoyed, complete the theatrical catharsis for his audience

Gray began as a member of Joyce Aaron's Open Theater in New York in 1967, and in 1970 joined the Performance Group under director, Richard Schechner, who first advised him to be himself on stage before he became the character. Work in docudrama followed in which he 'expressed himself' in improvised stories relating to his own life. These gradually extended and shaped themselves as formal monologues which he performed as prologues and inserts. In 1978 he went to the University of Santa Cruz to teach a summer workshop in Performance, and attended a class on 'The Philosophy of Emotions' given by Amelie Rorty. It was this teacher who mentioned that, 'During the collapse of Rome, the last artists were the chroniclers.'²

This remark gave Gray the idea to 'chronicle his life' in a series of original monologues which he never wrote, but spoke each time in performance. From these oral improvisations came his unique solo style - first with Sex and Death to the Age of 14, which was staged at The Performing Garage, New York in, 1979. A second followed, Booze, Cars and College Girls, which led to eight more, and all presented under the title Retrospective in 1982.

He continued his 'autobiographical monologues' with the Performance Group (now the Wooster Group) in Los Angeles, still basing his performances entirely on his own experiences. This was the Monologue used in its proper First Person Voice, which is in the very oldest tradition of story-telling, but the actor now inserts anecdotes, comments and ironies all relating to his own participation in the events he describes. Sitting in shirt and slacks at a table with a microphone and a glass of water, Gray's apparent rambling about the war in Swimming to Cambodia (1985) is deceptively structured into a poignant rumination on the human consequences of international thuggery.

Gray tells his own story of his first appearance in a motion picture, The Killing Fields, which dealt with the American involvement in Cambodia, but in so doing tells all our story. He tells it for all of us, but tells it his way, and for it was honoured in 1985 with several fellowships including the Guggenheim. He has also attracted considerable press comment:

NEW YORK TIMES - 'One of the most candid American confessors since Frank Harris. Virtuosoic. A master-writer, reporter, comic, playwright...Spalding Gray is a sit-down monologist with the soul of a stand-up comic. A contemporary Gulliver, he travels the globe in search of experience and finds the ridiculous.'

MINNEAPOLIS STAR AND TRIBUNE - 'A New Wave Mark Twain.'

NEWSWEEK - 'He has re-invented the oral tradition'.

VILLAGE VOICE - 'A cartoonist of the self'.

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE - 'What Gray has done is to shape his life as art. Everything he sees, does, smells, thinks, becomes grist for his monologue mill'.

WASHINGTON POST - 'Talking about himself - with candour, humor, imagination....he ends up talking about all of us'.³

At the beginning of his book, he states that 'Stories seem to fly to me and stick.' At the end of the same book he writes, 'Now, where do I go from here?'⁴ Between the two sentences is not only the narrative of much of his life but the key perhaps to the new direction solo theatre might take - a direct, unambivalent stance to the audience in order to tell a very personal story. So much has this particular actor made the solo convention almost a classic of dramatic narrative, that his Swimming To Cambodia, which is his telling of his experiences while making a film in that country, has itself been made into a film. This is the first instance of a solo performance's being filmed as opposed to televised.

Spalding Gray himself insists on regarding the solo form as just a means of expression, a way of story-telling for modern times. Like Emlyn Williams, he enjoys the sense of complete control. As he said, 'I can make all the choices.'⁵ Like Williams too, his is a seminal name in the register of solo players, for no one has caught the imagination of player and playgoer alike more than this diffident, Jewish-American and theatrical New Yorker. Thanks also to the success of his book of his solo and the film of it, he has reached an audience almost as large as that which Dickens enjoyed, but in a manner which Dickens might not have understood or appreciated. The writer/dandy turned actor might have been bewildered by the confessional style of the actor/writer turned self-story-teller, who, single-handedly, it seems, invented the autobiodrama.

The next step, and the latest stage of this actor's auto-dramatic biographical evolution, is the one-person show which is improvised entirely at the time of performance. And to some extent, that is already happening. In his latest solo performances he has experimented with this technique. He now considers his evenings as interviews with the audiences in non-performance areas. He seeks them out in stores and supermarkets, drill halls, factory spaces and retirement homes - anywhere in fact where an audience might congregate. He makes them talk to him as he talks to them, and so creates the sustaining dialogue from a direct exchange. The present writer in his own current Conversations is also involved in a similar area of playing technique, which is virtually 'non-performance', relying more on audience reaction than dramatic content. This is a further attempt to stress the 'liveness' of the theatre experience as it happens at the moment.

Pat van Hemelrijk,

This Belgian performing artist, in his one-man show has extended the theatrical communication possibility with his madcap excursion into a fantasy world of mechanical sound, guided only by his own commentary, muttered absent-mindedly in broken English, as he deals with a miscellany of objects around his piano, drums and cymbals. His latest show, Tout Suit is literally a load of old rubbish - a 'theatre' where objects are the main characters. His play does not require an actor as such. Direct speech is eschewed as he comperes his own bizarre concert under flashing lights, utilising any of his various recycled artefacts against the contrapuntal sound of adding machines, vacuum cleaners and a miscellany of lost objects. Goggles and a false nose give a superficial characterisation, but it is his cunning re-defining of mechanical potential that so surprises and delights an audience. A mass performance is gradually built up from things which he calls his 'called to life' actors, and from behind his keyboard he orchestrates a highly original creation - a kingdom of images. The key is the key-board. Van Hemelrijk sees himself as the creator of endless

key combinations that make a sound and call forth an image, which in turn provoke a feeling or emotion - and all before words are used. It is a kind of 'music'. Critic, Mary Brennan, in her notice for the Glasgow Herald next day best summed it up:

'In the same way as French poets of the surreal sought to give vowels colours or sounds or tastes, so the Belgian van Hemelrijk looks to find the images within sounds and the sounds within objects.'⁶

Such presentations may be more properly considered as Performance Art, although incongruous versatility is not rare in the solo field - Cissie Loftus could sing duets with herself! But is Performance Art really One-Person Theatre? Rose English, for one, would think so. Her kind of solo evening exactly exemplifies the unique talents required to entertain an audience by direct challenge and uncompromising confrontation. This is the key element in Performance Art. The first intention is to break down all barriers and find new ways.

Performance Art

Since Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' in 1935, modern theatre practice has been infused with the idea of the director or 'metteur en scene' in the theatre as a magician, priest and maker of myths. Artaud wanted to recover a 'sacred theatre' involving the actor and audience within a rite. These theories greatly influenced directors like Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook in Europe, as well as leading to the formation of American companies like Julian Beck's Living Theatre, Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre and Richard Schechner's Performance Group in New York, from which soloist Spalding Gray emerged. Charles Marowitz' Theatre of Cruelty experiments in London in 1963 took place in the era of Happenings and Events, and ever since then, performing artists have been encouraged to experiment, to reach beyond the conventional boundaries of conventional dramatic presentation and involve themselves with their audience. This is especially marked in Performance Art.

American actor, Jack Smith, presents a gallery-based performance, whose intention is located 'in that gap between art and life', and is delivered in five hour sessions with no

intermissions and with occasional use of radio recordings. The idea is to take the audience beyond the stamina threshold and ordinary theatrical expectations.

Italian, Gianni Colosimo, in his English-spoken, Freud, Mein Freund spends most of the action pouring one glass of milk into another. He calls his one-man company Teatro Ludico Libidinale (Ludicrous Libidinal Theatre), and speaks his Personal Poetics in an infantile, imitation English. All speech to him is non-verbal, and emphasizes the primacy of the performance over the literary text.

Another avant-gardist, Stuart Sherman, on the other hand, sees literature in the most literal sense as his starting point. He begins by opening a book, selecting a word on the page and improvising from there. He writes down all its accumulated associations, unhindering the flow of ideas. He then adds drawings and pictures and objects to create his Spectacles. He explains:

'Through visual idea-music, retinally heard, seeing and thinking become duplicate metaphors for a language world whose actions and objects remain un-named.....I wanted to deal with the objects themselves - to make a series of arrangements. I didn't think of performance, it was the last thing on my mind.'

For him, the solo space is supercharged because of its intense focus and objects were used in order to concentrate on their function, which implies use, demonstration and manipulation. He was, in other words, an actor in action. 'I began to let these actions resonate intellectually. What are the psychological and emotional implications (of actions)?' His other solo is Portraits of Places - mainly cities (Paris, Toulouse, Lyons, Cairo). He insists that one invents oneself in a city, and sees his fellow citizens as a multiplicity of oneself. This is a pressure we all feel. Some escape this pressure by sleeping. 'Sometimes I take refuge in bed. The pillow becomes the starting point for images - a rose on a newspaper.'

These experimenters, in their different ways, are trying to break through all barriers that traditionally lie

between the performer and his audience, but they forget that such barriers are often there for a mutual protection! Experimentation within the mode, however, is ongoing as is the search into all theatrical ways and means in every age.

Florida State University and the Asolo Conservatory of Actor Training have jointly presented each year since 1974, an original, one-person show conceived, written and performed by students in partial fulfilment of the Master of Fine Arts Degree, and this annual exercise has yielded presentations and performers who have gone on to take their class-work into the professional circuits, much as Holbrook did nearly thirty years before. It was a similar academic preoccupation which prompted a further experiment in solo technique and resulted in a very different kind of one-person performance.

Vidar Eggertsson

Vidar trained at the Icelandic Academy of Dramatic Art and founded EGG theatre there in 1976. He adapted Samuel Beckett's Not I...either, later called (Nor I...but...), as a performed script based on his classroom experiments. In this instance, it was to investigate the nature of the actor-audience relationship during performance. He first 'performed' this as a public improvisation for actor and an audience of one, every fifteen minutes from 6 to 10p.m. daily at the Edinburgh Festival of 1983. Each show was considered as a separate and unrepeatable experience for both, which is of course, the ideal aimed for in any kind of dramatic representation. Thus, from an original academic experiment was evolved a very different kind of one-man show which Eggertsson repeated at the Dublin Festival in 1986. It may be seen as the ultimate in minimalism in its direct one-to-one approach. Ironically, this was the very title (One To One) used by Julian Chagrin in his one-man show at the Arts Theatre, London in 1967. Nor I ...but might be considered as the last word in any discussion of the one-man show. Especially as it offers to the performer the certainty of playing to capacity at every performance - an expectation not normally within the lot of many actors!

There were legitimate grounds for taking the form to this extreme. After all, the intention of any playing experience is to re-create that one-to-one situation between actor and his audience where each becomes one in the oneness of the playing moment. That is the dramatic ideal. Perhaps, too, it was no accident that Eggertsson chose Beckett, as his writer. Beckett, the terse, the taciturn, the mono-syllabic, the rigidly economic, whose ideal scenario is an empty stage where nothing happens - but then something might...? We must wait and see.

Even in something ostensibly as small as mono-theatre, the issues it raises can be large. As Marty Martin has made Pat Carroll enquire as Gertrude Stein in the very last lines of her one-woman show - "What happens to identity and memory when they are confronted by eternity?" What indeed?

Autoperformance

This was the term coined by the School of Arts at New York University in March 1979 to act as a title for a special issue of their Theatre Arts Magazine which on that occasion was devoted to different aspects of the one-person show in the theatre. The word neatly suggests the performance emanating from the self in the autobiographical form and is especially apt in any discussion of the new autobiodrama.

Today, the solo approach is being extended more and more into this personal area. At the Edinburgh Festival of 1985, Welsh actor, Brian Thomas entitled his one-man show, How Green Was My Volvo, significantly sub-titled: 'An Auto-Biography'. I am sure the pun was intentional, but what may not have been was the unwitting association of the word 'auto' and the pointer it gave to this latest, and rapidly-growing area of staged autobiography. In performing this way, the actors are more than selling themselves. They are using every part of their actor's equipment to tell their own story via their own presence. This is not always easy to do, and could easily be offensive - hence, the danger referred to earlier.

The fresh approaches being sought via the field of Performance Art had an influence on Performing Art, especially as it applied to the female performer. With the growth of the feminist consciousness, there was a strong sense of liberation in women's immediate harnessing of the solo techniques with its direct, frontal audience address. Actresses, or as they now preferred to be called, actors, seized the opportunity, as if the one-person play had been made for them, and much of its present vogue is due to their pioneer efforts.

It was in the United States that the autobiographical female 'one-man-show', as it were, first tried to find new ground, particularly with the more intellectual and questing actress, who did not go solo because they were bored, or needed a career filip, or could not get conventional work, but because they were stimulated and excited by the solo challenge. These women embraced the monologue form for its own sake and as the best means of expressing their very individual dramatic intentions. Following the lead given by Spalding Gray's kind of anecdotal, mono-biography, many actor/actresses explored the same route in the solo performance. The very events of their own lives now formed the play.

In Autoperformance as it is understood today, the object-performance of Performance Art has now become the Autobiography of Dramatic Art, or as it also termed - the AutoDrama, and among female soloists today, several have made a speciality out of this very personal area. It is appropriate to consider now the ladies of the solo, or more particularly, to address in this chapter specifically, the female of the autobiodramatic species.

Amy Taubin

In The Solo Self, Amy Taubin sees the solo psychologically, as the quintessential form of performance; an autoperformance, or means of presenting the self to others; a significance often shielded by the performer's very virtuosity. In other words, as Meyerhold's Moscow experiments tried to prove, the acting, however good, can get in the way. Sometimes,

because it is so good. The audience can never forget that they are in a theatre and that they are watching an actor. The good actor, of course, never forgets that he is performing to an audience, but the trend among many of the solo avant garde is to strip the performer and the performance of all inessentials. It is virtually a return to the self.

Since 1975, Taubin, in her three solo pieces has been examining the relationship of performer to spectator, characterising the feelings of distance and division evident similarly in the self-encounter, when it, too, is trying to comprehend itself. Pimping For Herself begins with a filmed Taubin repeating 'I see you, I hear you,' to the audience. As she explains, she does so because 'This literises the condition of the performer - i.e. as one whose object is to be seen.'⁸ In other words, this is her starting point. She enters and describes each member of the audience in the front two rows. This might be considered as the performer's revenge on the audience, but its main thrust is a dialectic between them - or, in simpler terms, something to get things going between performer and audience. Very often, the most susceptible moment in any performance is the virgin possibilities of the opening. The audience is never more receptive again.

Double Occupancy offers an alternative to the live whisper from the performer to a loudspeaker version of the same text in the next room, thus subverting the performer's normal need to be seen in performance, and in Taubin's instance, eschewing the normal, attractive woman's pleasure in being looked at as an object of male desire. In this reading the voice is in one place, the person in the other (shades of Mathews' ventriloquism!), and this transforms the playing area into a symbolic field. The actress can also intrude into the loudspeaker room, and so give the audience yet another alternative. Marathon might just as easily describe the title of her third solo, which reads:

'The performance which began with a train ride on which the rider realised, but not until the last moment, that she had been seated backwards - or, half of an unbalanced situation.'

As her article in the 'Autoperformance' issue of 'Theatre Arts' describes:

'For this, the audience is seated in two rows. Each is given a script and any may be shown at any time on either of two monitors fed by video cameras. The stage area is dark, with one antique red chair just visible. The manner of the performance is highly mediated. The non-demonstrative, detached delivery deliberately engenders a feeling of self-alienation which correlates to the estrangement her kind of theatre evokes in the spectator. She has an infatuation with salient, non-structural relationships, with only a superficial resemblance to structuralist theatre, but is not minimalist. Clearly, she is influenced by Levi-Straus and his ideas of female identity with the male exchange and embraces the metaphor of self as a position. It is self-expression trying to define itself'.

This definition also extends to women themselves as their own subjects in the autobiographical one-woman play. They have shown a very ready response to the particular demands of the solo and some of the finest players of today are among these women of the mono-performance, who use nothing more than themselves to create an evening of theatre.

Linda Montana

Ms Montana has specialised in autobiographical performance since 1973, using her own life, past and present, as material for her show. Her principal intention is self-exploration, and in one year in San Francisco she photographed everyone who visited her at home, documented food intake, recorded telephone calls and listened to her own heart beat with a stethoscope. Everything she did was to be art. When her husband died she created three portraits of mourning under the title Mitchell's Death, in which she recounted the events exactly as they had happened. The audience is aware that the events recounted actually took place - that everything being said by the actress is true, but it is still told as a story. The narrative was performed in a monotone into a microphone without pause, without inflection, in a rhythmic chant and at the end there was no applause - only silence.

This very stark presentation has similarities to the word-sound experiments of Dame Edith Sitwell in the twenties, but at least the latter had William Walton's music!

Norma Jean Deak

Norma Jean has been writing, staging and performing her own work, Passé Simple and Travel Log since 1976. She sees her theatre performances as vehicles for character built up from notes of her own private experiences. She performs seated, like Spalding Gray, reading quietly from the script on her lap after introducing and setting the scene. These two artists are indebted to their own lives for their material, but theirs are auto-performances, that is unscripted, extemporised conversations with an audience in certain given situations that are not always theatrical - such as galleries and classrooms, in the manner more of Performance Art than Drama. In the meantime, autodrama had come to Britain.

Claire Dowie,

Ms Dowie is an English actress. In her Adult Child, Dead Child, she unashamedly draws on her own life and her own story, but insists that it is not 'true' for all that. The very act of performance, in her view, makes it a dramatic fiction since it has been selected by remembering it and edited by the performer, in the telling of it. The very remembering is an act in itself, and its artistic expression.

As the McLuhanism has it - the medium is the message. For this new wave of solo expression, there was no hiding place; neither in the performer's artifice, nor in her text. It was open, candid, and uncompromising - therefore, was it art? Honesty is not always congruent to artistic truth, and did these new searchers create a Pilatian dilemma for themselves in their demands for a complete and unstaged, untheatrical truth in the one-woman show of today women no longer have any need to apologise for being women in the theatre, and there is nowadays less and less requirement for them to proselytise vehemently for their equal right to a stage. Their place is now firmly recognised and today's world of the drama is by no means a man's world - even for those men pretending to be women! There is a long tradition in theatre of what is commonly called 'drag acts' - ie, men acting as women, but among soloists it is much rarer.

Bill Paterson, a very fine Scottish character actor, entered the solo lists by playing Ella, in 1985 in a production designed by his wife, Hildegard Bechtler. One might have thought that was the last word on the one-man as woman show, even allowing for Danny la Rue, but that was to reckon without Barry Humphries.

Barry Humphries

A builder's son, Humphries was born and brought up in Melbourne in 1934, where he attended Melbourne Grammar, and won a scholarship to Melbourne University. In 1952 he founded Melbourne Dada, which outraged Melbourne society at that time, but laid in Humphries the foundation for the subversive style, which is the hallmark of his solo performances today.

As the Observer Profile on him pointed out:

'His comedy began as a satire on the affectations of suburbia in the vein of John Betjeman's How To Get On In Society and Osbert Lancaster's Homes Sweet Homes.

Humphries came to Britain in 1959 to work for Joan Littlewood at Stratford East, but first created interest in London with his appearances at the Establishment Club from 1962 in the first of his ten one-man shows, beginning with Sandy Stone, going on to the scatological Sir Les Patterson and culminating in the surreal Dame Edna Everage. Humphries created this monster 'woman' as a suburban joke figure during the early seventies, but since then it has grown into a one-person show of monumental proportions. He does not consider it a drag act. As 'The Observer' properly remarks:

'The music hall tradition of travesty made its effect precisely by playing on the audience's awareness that an actor is impersonating a woman or an actress a man. Humphries, on the contrary, has submerged all male traits in his performance. This is what gives its disconcerting charm. 'Edna' has become a vehicle for surreal comic imagery'

Obviously, Melbourne Dada had not been a waste of time for either Humphries or 'Dame Edna'. The same article concludes:

'At a certain point, the show cuts loose from reality and seems to float up into a realm in which logic has melted like a Dali clock.....when it does happen, when whole sections of the auditorium are weeping with laughter, handkerchiefs wet with tears, you recognise that you are in the presence of a great artist and a generous spirit.'

This amiable, eccentric, erudite (he is a distinguished writer on Symbolist and Expressionist Art) actor has come a long way since he attracted what the Observer called 'a coterie of aficionados' (which included the 'Private Eye' crowd) to the Establishment Club. Nearly thirty years later 'she' again returns to the West End in 'her' own show at the Strand Theatre, and more than a hundred years since Fanny Kelly drew the town as 'Mrs Parthian' on virtually the same site. But Miss Kelly was a real actress and a real woman and 'Dame Edna' is palpably not. Yet people flock to hear 'her'. In fact 'she' as Michael Billington commented in 'Performing Arts':

'can command an audience to fill the largest auditoria in England with middle-aged matrons anxious to be insulted in their Englishness by this strident, ostensible Sydney housewife.'¹²

So much has Humphries gained in British affections that he can really say what he likes to his audience - and currently does in his latest foray in obstreperousness, Back With A Vengeance at the Strand Theatre, London. In this show he utilizes the services of a non-speaking, on-stage, female listener - a device which echoes Beckett, and even further back in solo history, the German, Brandes.

Nothing is ever completely new in any art, everything derives from something. Humphries' one-person presentation may not be a legitimate exercise in dramatised biography, but it is certainly a supremely acted performance, which draws on the actor's personal experience and on how he thinks a woman behaves in public. What Billington called 'The towering characterisation and apogee of female impersonation' may have its pantomimic roots, but today, as he further suggests,

'it is the supreme example of the audience's yielding to the lure of the magnetic outside personality of one man - who is pretending to be a woman.'

The role assumption is uncanny. The dichotomy is absolute. Seeing Humphries on stage it is impossible to believe he/she is not a woman. Ironically, bearing in mind Barry Humphries' astonishing success, it was also an Australian,

Jeremy Ridgeman, who made the astonishing claim in his thesis on solo actors: '(that) our present lack of information would make it foolish to posit a tradition of solo performance.'¹³ Yet Australian soloists have included Gordon Chater (Duke of Windsor and Benjamin Franklin), Roger Leach, (The Colonial Boy), Charles Lewson, (Robert Fitzroy), Robyn Archer, (Judy Garland) - not to mention, Paul Hogan? And he could surely not have failed to have known of 'Dame Edna' herself? But then 'she' is somewhat outside the norm and may be best described as her own tradition. It is interesting to consider that a real woman, or a real actress, would probably not be as effective a 'dame' as this mega-star of the monologue, Barry Humphries, but could any solo actress do it? Is there really a woman in the world like Edna Everage?

It is almost impossible to be sexist or discriminatory given today's social climate and in some cases the balance has swung the opposite way. One New York actress, Ethel Eichelberger, insisted on calling Belle, her solo effort in Greenwich Village, a 'One Man Show' - and had it billed as such! It would appear that human nature, in whatever gender, will still continue to assert itself and even in the one-woman show it is every man for herself!

Let us consider then, the one-woman show.

SECTION FOUR

The One-Woman Show
Contemporary Expressions of the Solo Mode
Notes on a Solo Performance

CHAPTER SIX

THE ONE-WOMAN SHOW

'Actresses - it seems absurd at first sight that we should despise these persons and yet reward their talents with a most profuse liberality.'
Encyclopaedia Britannica 1797.

The very first actress, as such, is said to have been the daughter of a glazier named Dediet. In 1468, she played St Catherine in the Chronicles of Metz, a role which consisted of no less than 2,300 lines.¹ In 1611, women had appeared on stage in Venice, and in 1629 some French actresses, who had appeared at the Red Bull in London, were pelted off the stage by the shocked audience. It was not until 1662 that Charles II signed the Royal Patent that allowed women to appear legitimately on the stage - (thus leaving the way clear for Nell Gwynn in 1667!):

'Whereas the women's parts in plays have hitherto been acted by men in the habits of women, at which some have taken offence, we permit and give leave for the time to come, that all women's parts be acted by women.'

It took courage for the first women-actors to overcome the label, harlot, and become accepted on the Restoration stage, yet Mrs Bracegirdle (1673-1748) a pupil of Betterton's, was famous for her virtue and lived long enough and famously enough to be buried in Westminster Abbey. Elizabeth Barry (1658-1713), who had played opposite Betterton, was another early actress to gain a memorial (although to see hers in Acton Church one needs a ladder and a lamp!). Ellen Terry (1847-1928) made her debut in 1856 at the age of 9, but did not become a Dame of the British Empire until 1928 - 33 years after Irving's knighthood.

Mention has already been made of Miss Scott and her 17-year tenure of the 'Sans Pareil' in London from 1806, but apart from this fact, little else is known of her, yet hers is the accepted first name in the distaff catalogue of solo female performers. Women's names are rare in this field at this stage,

even though the great actresses had always given their solo readings, especially in their retirements.

Sarah Siddons (1755-1831)

Siddons was the greatest tragic actress of the English stage, ('If you ask me what is a queen, I should say Mrs Siddons' - Tate Wilkinson, 1739-1803) - despite her 7 children, was known to have sung a comic song, as her brother testifies, and gave private readings while on tour, but could never be said to be a soloist in the absolute sense.

Fanny Kelly (1790-1882)

Miss Kelly, on the other hand, has undeniable claim to be considered as the first genuine theatrical female soloist. This Scottish-born actress had been a child performer at Drury Lane with her singer-uncle, Charles Kelly, - 'her Saturday pittance was her family's only chance of Sunday meat'², - but under John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) became a considerable actress in her own right from 1810, retiring after 36 years with a fortune of £16,000. In her time she had been 'the brightest ornament of the British stage - the darling of nature', as Charles Lamb (1775-1834) averred in his essay Barbara S which was based on her story.³ He loved her, and in 1825, four years after he had proposed to her, he wrote in the London Magazine:

'You are not Kelly of the lower strain
That stoop their pride and female honour down
To please that many-headed beast, the town
And bend their lavish smiles and tricks for gain.
By Fortune, thrown amid the actors' train
You keep your native dignity of thought,
The plaudits that attend you come unsought
As tribute due to your unnatural vein.
Your tears have passion in them, and a grace
Of genuine freshness which our hearts avow;
Your smiles are winds whose ways we cannot trace
And please the better from a pensive face
And thoughtful eye, and a reflecting brow.'

She never married although, in 1816, had a daughter in Edinburgh by a 'Mr Greville' (who, it has been suggested, might have been the Earl of Essex). Kelly had great success at the Strand Theatre, London, and in 1832 founded at the theatre, a school for young actresses. In 1833, to help finance the project, she gave the first of her one-woman shows as 'Mrs Parthian' in Dramatic Recollections. These solo performances were loosely based on the model of Charles Mathews' At Homes. The material included extracts from plays in which she had performed, original material by Tom Hood and by Charles Lamb, who, with J.H.Reynolds, was probably responsible for the most successful item - Mrs Parthian, or The Recollections of An Aging Actress.

Despite her many great successes, her modesty is evident in her letter to Sergeant Talfourd in 1848:

'Should my readings deserve any popularity in London, I shall then avail myself of the kind advice and assistance of Mr Dickens.'⁴

Their success encouraged her to build her own theatre with the patronage of the Duke of Devonshire. The Royalty in Dean Street opened on 25 March 1850, but mechanical failures, bad planning and poor health forced her to yield the building to 'Mr Isaacson and friends' by the end of the year, and she retired to Bayswater to give private tuition. Years before, at the height of her fame, she had organised a benefit for Grimaldi to give him financial help in his old age. Now in her own seniority, she was in the same need. Dickens organised A Final Retirement Benefit for Miss Kelly for 16 June 1853, but it was cancelled due to the illness of both parties. Before long, she became destitute and she and her daughter moved to Rose Cottage, Fulham, with the help of a Government grant of £150 received at the instigation of Mr Gladstone. She was 92. A few days before her death, she was visited by Henry Irving, who had known her 'in her wild, gypsy days'. She died just before Christmas 1882. Her retarded daughter, Miss Greville, survived by being persuaded to put up for sale all the letters written to her mother by Charles Lamb, on which capital she was cared for. There was no doubt he had loved her and he inscribed

on her tomb in Brompton Cemetery:

'The world recognised the great artist
Those who best knew her loved the woman.'

Fanny Kemble (1809-93)

Fanny Kemble was not only a reluctant actress, but a soloist despite herself. (It is worth noting that in the 1987 Edinburgh Festival, Anne Small entitled her one-woman show on Fanny Kemble as The Reluctant Actress.) Being from the Kemble family, Fanny could hardly avoid going on the stage, which she did nonetheless with great success in 1829 at Covent Garden, in order to salvage her father's fortunes at that theatre. In 1832, she went with him to America and was acclaimed, and for the rest of her life she was to be popular there. In later years, she travelled throughout the United States with her sister, the singer, Adelaide Sartoris. She retired from the stage to marry Pierce Butler of Philadelphia, but the marriage was unhappy and she resumed work in 1857 with the first in the series of solo readings from Shakespeare that were to occupy her for the next ten years in England and America.

She gave her final performance in New York in 1868 and retired to London with her daughter, just as Fanny Kelly had done, but much more happily. The beautiful young girl who became the lovely woman remained so into her old age, where, in a series of autobiographical books, she wrote perceptively and critically, as befits a niece of Mrs Siddons, about the calling she had followed for nearly forty years, yet so actively disliked. In the Cornhill Magazine (1863) she discussed the Kembles, and in the same year wrote On the Stage, which George Arliss described as 'Perhaps the most careful analysis of the actor in juxtaposition with his art that one is likely to find in dramatic literature.'⁵ Fanny Kemble preferred a quiet life at home - which incidentally was the title of Constance Cummings' award-winning solo play about the actress, produced by Peter Wilson for the Edinburgh Festival of 1986. Perhaps it is then AT HOME that this gracious, talented and reluctant actress would prefer to be best remembered.

Another famous actress-writer of the time was Anna Cora Mowatt, and to a lesser extent, Helen Potter, a lecturer and actress, who impersonated other actresses, and also transcribed Wilde's American lectures in phonetic shorthand!

Charlotte Saunders Cushman (1816-76)

Charlotte Cushman was another matter. She made her first appearance in opera before her acting debut in 1836 as Lady Macbeth at the Park Theatre, New York. She played opposite Macready, who was very impressed, and advised her to go to London where she was well received in 1845. As well as Lady Macbeth, she played Romeo to her sister's Juliet at the Haymarket. In 1852, she returned to America to give the first of her many farewell performances, which included Hamlet, Phedre and in 1857, Cardinal Wolsey. Her final years on the stage were given over almost entirely to her solo readings of Shakespeare, which proved very successful on the Lecture Circuit for the Redpath Bureau between 1871 and 1875. In addition to her Shakespeare programme she also 'read' Tennyson, Browning and Robert Burns. Even though she was an actress with an established reputation, she was, like Kemble, uncertain about becoming a soloist, but her immediate success encouraged her, although she still had doubts. 'I hate to read, except to six people, and I won't read to the public if I can help it.'⁶

She did, however, seated at a table, acting out the characters with chameleon skill and with great personal charisma despite continued ill-health. Her 'readings' stand as a paradigm of the popular professional presentation of the time. After her final performance, she was presented with a laurel wreath and in 1907, *thirty* years after her death, a Charlotte Cushman Club was founded in Philadelphia, and theatrical relics, paintings and material relating to her career and times are displayed. It still exists today.

These, then, were some of the first ladies of solo theatre, as it was in their times, but it was due to another woman, not an actress, Ann Eliza Young, that a further stage developed. In 1873, an American Army officer, Major Pond, had

been ordered to escort Ann Eliza, the 19th wife of Brigham Young, round a lecture tour she was giving throughout the United States. The interest shown in this convinced Pond that there was a commercial future in selling human interest and cultural programmes to the huge American public. When he retired from the army, he followed the example set by Redpath in Boston and developed a speakers' circuit repeating the itinerary originally planned for Ann Eliza Young.

By 1895 theatre practice in America had set into two strands - the commercial or big business sector, as exemplified by the Theatrical Syndicate (organised by the Frohman brothers), and the artistic or cultural, catered for by the Lecture Circuit, and the 'new' theatre of '47 Workshop' at Harvard. The vaudeville or variety tradition had also nurtured a whole generation of comic performers, many of whom were women.

This female solo line continued into the new century with names like Gertrude Hoffman, Elsie Janis, Ina Claire, Phylis Newman and even Mrs Richard Mansfield (Beatrice Cameron). They all had their particular subjects and styles. Then of course, there were the eccentrics; like Mrs Maud Minor's solo Barber of Seville, and Mrs. M.C.Hutchison and her one-woman versions of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and The Importance of Being Earnest:

'(she) astounded and delighted her unsophisticated audiences by changing her voice, making love to herself, breaking in as a great, blustering villain, resuming as a mild, shrinking maid, creating and maintaining the illusion to the last curtain - and finally, taking the bow alone, on behalf of the entire cast !'

By 1903, the Pond circuit had become the Pond Bureau Inc., and even the lecture circuit had become big business - and is even bigger business today. The American Program Bureau in Boston is a very powerful organisation in present-day American culture. In 1986, it took over Keedick Lectures (for whom the present writer has worked), which in 1935 had absorbed the Pond Bureau, that had grown from the pioneering path set a hundred years before by Ann Eliza Young and her escort, Major Pond. The female preponderance not only applies to the vast majority of

the audience today, since many of the hiring organizations are Ladies' Clubs, but also to the bias in female performers and lecturers in this field. The lessons of their earlier sisters had been well learned and there appeared to be a special burgeoning of the solo convention in America throughout the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

The Famous Five

Around this time another kind of pioneer appeared. A handful of women emerged from the hundreds of speakers, mimics, impressionists and elocutionists to become a very select band indeed - five women, all very different in style, but recognised now as the foundation core from which a whole generation of solo players grew and took their example. This group is the great quintet of the solo recital, and they are Beatrice Herford, (a monologist), Cissie Loftus, (an impressionist), Ruth Draper (who called herself a character actress), Dorothy Sands (mimic and diseuse) and Cornelia Otis Skinner (actress).

Each succeeded the other and extended their influence on each other in some way, but individually they represent the evolution of the old solo entertainer into the accomplished artist of modern one-person theatre.

Beatrice Herford (1868-1952)

Beatrice was born in Manchester and began her career as a society entertainer with monologues, as it was not then considered proper for a young lady of her background to think at all of a professional career in the theatre. She gave her first solo performance at the Salle Erard, London, and in the following year repeated the performance in the Association Hall, Boston, and the year after that at the Waldorf Hotel, New York. She was highly eccentric and built in her garden 'the smallest theatre in the world', where she gave occasional performances until 1904, before giving it as a gift to the Vokes Players of Wayland. She continued as a monologist until 1912 and then became a player in company productions, thus reversing the

normal trend, which was to go solo after a conventional career as an actress.

Thereafter, she was to alternate her own career between playing the solo comedienne in vaudeville and acting in comedies, and towards the end of her very long life she directed the Vokes Players in comedies only. Like any good professional, she knew her own strengths and played to them.

As a monologist, humour was her forte (as in the style of Stanley Holloway later with his comic ballads) and she only played in comedy plays or occasionally in a double bill with mimics and impersonators like her friend Cissie Loftus.

Cissie Loftus (1876-1943)

Cissie, or Cecilia, was a Glasgow-born daughter of an Irish mother (variety artist Marie Loftus) and English father (comedian Ben Brown). Her first appearance was at the Oxford Music Hall in 1893 as a singer and then at the Gaiety as an impressionist. She made her American debut at the Lyceum, New York, in light opera and in 1900 appeared in plays with Madame Modjeska. In 1901 she worked with Beatrice Herford, but returned to London to play Margaret in Faust with Irving. She played Peter Pan and was also Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House. She returned to America to continue in vaudeville, where she impersonated Caruso, Harry Lauder - even Will Fyffe. She also sang, composed music, illustrated books and appeared in early films as an actress.

In 1924, she presented her own one-woman show Impressions and Impersonations described as a Concert Recital, at the Henry Miller Theatre, New York, then as a theatrical one-woman show in Chicago in 1932 and finally as An Evening with Cissie Loftus on Broadway in 1938.

The final name in the quintet is perhaps its greatest, or at least that which springs readily to mind when one considers the place of women in the one-person theatrical performance. No other female had such a lengthy solo career or exerted such a meaningful influence on generations of audiences

as well as on her fellow-actors. She remains today a legend in the theatre. She was her own kind of theatre - a particular phenomenon of her times which has lasted till now - Ruth Draper.

Ruth Draper (1884-1956)

Like Fanny Kemble and Beatrice Herford, Draper was at first reluctant to become a professional actress, but like them, once begun, showed an immediate empathy for performance and sympathy towards an audience that are the hall-marks of the 'natural' in whatever area of the performing arts they work. As a New York doctor's daughter, she first performed her solo sketches for society friends just as Beatrice Herford did and it was not until 1920, when she was 36, that she made her first professional appearance in London. From then on she devoted her whole professional life to the solo performance. 'I saw Beatrice Herford perform her monologues and I saw what could be done,'⁷ she said.

She also saw a play, The Yellow Jacket in 1916 in New York, which had an Oriental theme, and was done in the 'new style' with the minimum of setting and stage effect. All was left to the imagination. This made a great impression on the young Ruth Draper, and, together with the Herford example, set her on her own way as a future soloist. When she first came to London, in that same year, she did play a small part in a play with Marie Tempest, but that was the only time she ever appeared with a company.

She made her own company in the monologues and sketches she wrote and performed for 20 years. She composed orally, as Spalding Gray now does, and only for performance. She never worked from prepared scripts in the conventional sense, but improvised before the audience on ideas thought out on the given situation. There is no doubt that it worked superbly in the theatre, but it is difficult to define exactly just what it was she did. 'Disease, Recitalist, Monologist - I am not any of these. I am a character actress,'⁸ she insisted.

Her lack of scripts in any literary form proved an obstacle, when, in 1954, she was proposed for the American

Academy of Arts and Letters by Thornton Wilder and Brooks Atkinson. She was refused membership because they could not recognise her as an oral composer in words nor her dramatic work as 'plays' in the accepted sense.

Solo theatre was not popular as a theatrical genre when she began, and it might be said that it was her determined solo work over two decades internationally that did much to influence public opinion towards the convention. She preferred to work alone, and in her presentations the monologue became the mono-polylogue, as it had done with Mathews the Elder. Instead of the single character speaking to the silent listener in the first person, in Ruth Draper, multiple characters speak through her and in their own voices, and so make their own 'play'. She was the medium of her own creations. This was genuine monodrama and there is no doubt, it was also genuine theatre.

Draper demanded that the audience use their imagination. Set simply against plain drapes, her 'plays' came to life in the minds of her hearers. She created her own world and invited them to join her in it. It was total illusion. She could alter her whole appearance by the change of a scarf or a hat. She could also suggest a whole crowd on the stage. Critic Kenneth Tynan wrote, after one of her many London showings, 'I watched her perform her thronging monologues... the best and most modern 'group acting' to be seen in London theatre!'⁹ So real was this 'supporting cast' that fellow-American solo artist Cornelia Otis Skinner insisted that Draper ought to pay them! John Gielgud called her 'a consummate artist' and described one of her performances:

'the curtain stage was empty save for a few pieces of essential furniture; a sofa, a couple of chairs and a table. Ruth Draper walked on, a tall, dark-eyed woman in a simple brown dress, beautifully cut, and looked out over the auditorium with grave composure. Her authority and concentration were absolute. How swiftly she transformed the stage into her own extraordinary world - transporting us to a boudoir, a garden, a church, a custom shed - creating in each of these imagined settings, a single dominant character, surrounding it, as and when required, with an attendant crowd of minor figures - children, animals, servants, husbands, lovers.... Her wit and imagination could not fail to fascinate and never palled.'¹⁰

Despite her repeated protestations over the years that she was merely a character actress acting alone, she was, without doubt, in the tradition of the diseuse, that is she told her story by words in characterisation, using original songs and sketches, rather than by re-creating a specific character throughout. In other words, she worked as an actress rather than an entertainer. She once said in an interview:

'Long ago, a man who knew a great deal about the theatre once told me that the old advice to actors - that you must put it over - was wrong. What is really important is not to put anything over, but to bring the audience up on the stage and into the scene with you.'

She performed her own monologues with much use of irony and understatement and as true to life as possible; whether it was an English lady, Opening A Bazaar or, sitting in her rocking chair, On A Porch In A Maine Village she was, as Morton Zabel said, 'at heart a realist, a recorder of social and moral fact, a reader of the common human destiny.'¹² Although recognised for her skills, she was often not taken seriously, and tolerated as a mere novelty on the fringe of theatre, yet she was principally responsible for the recognition of the monologue as an art form between the two world wars.

It can be stated emphatically, that like Emlyn Williams, Ruth Draper influenced every soloist who was to follow her, particularly in Britain. There have been many female soloists but as Micheal Macliammoir had exclaimed: 'Who could follow Ruth Draper?'¹³

Dorothy Sands (1893-1980)

Miss Sands was also American, born in New England. She too, was a diseuse - that is a 'sayer' of stories in sketches or monologues - but in her case it was within the format of a supposed lecture. She herself was a student at Harvard University attending George Pierce Baker's drama class, known as the '47 Workshop'. When she graduated in 1915 she then attended the Curry School of Expression before gaining experience as an actress in summer stock. She learned her solo

techniques as a mimic in the Follies and before long made a speciality of being an 'imitrix'. She maintained her academic interest by making a special study of acting techniques down the ages and re-creating examples on stage.

Her first solo programme was in fact called Styles In Acting, which she gave as a lecture recital in 1932. It dealt with acting in Greek, Elizabethan and Restoration plays. In 1933, her programme at the Booth Theatre was a revue - Our Stage and Stars. By 1939, it had become Stars of Today and Yesterday and the following year it was Tricks of the Acting Trade and in 1949, the presentation had become American Theatre Highlights. At the end of her active career she taught acting at the American Theatre Wing for which she was awarded an Antoinette Perry Award in 1959.

Her whole career had been the application of a natural pedagogical instinct to the matter of her professional demands as an actress, and by applying academic methods of research to her theatre work she made the history of drama live for her audiences in her presentations. Dorothy Sands was among the first to realize the potential of the monodrama, not only as a didactic aid, but as a genuine entertainment in the theatre. This was an element which was becoming more evident as the number of solo performers increased, and this was never more so than in the case of the soloist who came next.

Cornelia Otis Skinner (1901-79)

As befits the daughter of a famous actor (Otis Skinner, 1858-1942), Skinner had a rare ease and composure before an audience despite being very tall. She began as an actress, but became best known for her own Monologue Dramas, based on historical figures which she performed after the manner of Ruth Draper, but in contrast to her, Skinner did so in complete set and costume. The first of these singular play productions was The Six Wives of Henry VIII in 1931, in which she played the wives. In 1932, she was The Empress Eugenie at three different ages and in The Loves of Charles II in 1934 she was all six mistresses. Mansion on the Hudson (1935) was the

first of her monologue dramas to be based on fiction, which style she repeated again in 1937 with Edna, His Wife written for her by Margaret Ayer Barnes, in which she played 7 characters in 11 scenes. This was the only script she did not write herself.

After the Second World War, in 1952, she appeared in Paris 90, a solo drama in 3 acts, in which she played 13 parts. This was a realistic, representational drama in elaborate sets, original music, full lighting, and costume and make-up. It ran for 2½ hours, playing at the Booth Theatre, New York for 7 months before touring 63 cities in the United States.

None of Skinner's monologue dramas is published and G. Bruce Loganbill had to obtain the artist's personal copies for his study of her work in 1961.¹⁴ The actress had set down her own views in an article for the New York Times in 1931:

'Monologue to Theatre - An exponent of a solo art discusses its rise from the ranks of the amateur. There is no reason why the 'one-man' or 'one woman' show should continue in the fusty tradition of the dramatic recitation. The character sketch or monologue has for so long been regarded as a so polite form of entertainment that it seems lamentably remote from drama and the theatre. Instinctively, one associates it with the gifted amateur. The idea recalls an army of artistically inclined ladies calling themselves 'readers' (a word as incomprehensible as it is distressing) who present on the stage of their local parish house a programme of 'school of expression' recitations.....my argument is that the monologue should approach more and more to theatre until is recognised as the legitimate offspring, and not the left branch of the concert stage.....I see no reason why this form of dramatic presentation should not, in its collateral way, develop in proportional measure with the modern theatre.'¹⁵

In her last years, she became a very successful author and playwright and toured as a Speaker on the Lecture Circuit in America, particularly to the Women's Clubs, till her death in 1979. By then she had, with the others in the great solo quintet, by splendid example, laid the foundation for the one-woman show as we know it today.

Joyce Grenfell (1910-1979)

Mrs Grenfell, unlike Miss Draper, always insisted she was an entertainer, not an actress, and even then was one despite herself. Daughter of an international architect, she

was much travelled as a child and after finishing school in Paris, spent a year at RADA and the Westminster School of Art before marrying R.G.Grenfell at St Margaret's, Westminster, in 1929. After contributing verses and illustrations to Punch Magazine she was invited to become Radio Critic of the Observer in 1936. Then, on the night of Friday 13 January 1939, she went to dinner at Stephen Potter's, and during it, described to the guests her recent election as President of her local Womens' Rural Institute. This so amused fellow-guest and revue-producer, Herbert Farjeon, that he asked Mrs Grenfell to write it all down for one of his artistes to perform in his next show The Little Revue at the Little Theatre in London. She did so and read it all out for him again. So funny was she that he persuaded her, much against her will, to perform in the show herself the following April and was an immediate success.

She always claimed she didn't write her material, it was all true to life. 'I only embroidered on it,' she said.¹⁶ During the Second World War, she toured military hospitals in Britain as well as North Africa and Italy with her pianist Viola Tunnard and was awarded an OBE for her services.

In 1955, she developed her one-woman variety show (shades of Tony Aston!) under the title, Joyce Grenfell Requests the Pleasure, which she played in London and New York. In this, and in subsequent productions, she performed more than 40 solo items, ranging from The Vice-Chancellor's Wife to Shirley's Girl Friend to English Lit 111 and the charming Nativity Play. In addition, like Ruth Draper, she wrote many of her own songs, from the delightful absurdity of Stately As A Galleon to the exuberance of I'm Going To See You Today. She wrote more than 50 songs for instance, with Richard Adinsell (the composer of the Warsaw Concerto), then with Donald Swann (himself a soloist), and also with her accompanist William Blezzard, and her Old Tyme Dancing recording has become a classic of its kind.

An accomplished writer of prose, she wrote two volumes of autobiography and published a collection of her songs and monologues in 1977. Nicolas Bentley said of her:

'There could have not been anyone less like a trouper than Joyce...but if you know of anyone with more professional aplomb; of sharper perceptions or wit; with a mind as pliant, as original and well-disciplined as hers - well, I shall still prefer my Grenfell.'

Ill-health dogged her later years and she was forced to give up her solo work for occasional films.

Beatrice Lillie (b 1898)

Bea Lillie, or Beattie, as friends called her, filled theatres with her one-woman compilation of strange songs and sketches, which she first tried in her native Toronto before bringing it to New York, London, and the Edinburgh Festival in 1952. Principally a revue artiste rather than a straight actress, she had starred in Noel Coward's Set to Music in London in 1939, and after the War performed in solo cabaret at the Cafe de Paris in London, as Coward himself was later to do. By 1955, the presentation had grown to An Evening With Beatrice Lillie. Noel Coward said of her:

'She cannot act at all, she cannot retain more than a few sentences at a time, has no idea of moving from one side of the stage to another and yet contributes a curious quality of genius.'

He later described her as 'having the star mixture of assurance and humility'.¹⁹ Coward, himself an 'original', recognised true professional genius when he saw it and was never less than magnanimous in telling the world. Lillie was always to have difficulty with 'the words' as actors call them, but she compensated by being able to improvise easily, and had the additional sure basis of a brilliant performing technique and superb timing added to a sure comic instinct. As Margaret Bruce writes:

'She comes right downstage as it were man to man with the house. The effect is like an exchange of confidences; she lays herself wide open and naturally everyone responds. There is an astonishing absence of barrier between actress and audience; no arriere-pensee on the stage and consequently very little effort needed on the audience's part. This is another trick Beatrice Lillie shares with Sid Field. They are both naturals; both can just stand and smile at the audience.'

Kenneth Tynan wrote:

'Her gift is to produce on the stage the idiocy with which people behave when they are on their own: humming and mumbling, grimacing at the looking-glass, perhaps even singing to it...looking definitely batty.'

She herself was by no means 'batty' and proved it by marrying a lord and retiring gracefully as Lady Peel. Lillie may be considered as the last of the great female soloists who had their beginnings in the London and New York theatre scenes of between the wars. The post-war breed was now emerging.

British women-players were no less forthcoming in the single-person play than were their trans-Atlantic sisters, nor were those of the old Commonwealth, particularly at the Edinburgh Festival, which had been instituted in 1947. It was time for the new wave, but there was one soloist who spanned the pre- and post-war generations. She was totally in the Draper tradition, but she survived into the day of the biographical drama, still playing all her characters through herself in her own sketches and monologues.

Elspeth Douglas Reid (1898-1967)

Miss Reid was a Scots-born solo performer, who trained as an elocutionist in South Africa before the war, and, after it, started to entertain in concerts of selected pieces, which gradually evolved into an original programme under the title of One Woman Theatre. It was this kind of programme which she brought to the Edinburgh Festival in 1955 and every year thereafter until her death in 1967. Elliot Williams, himself a soloist as The Last of the Barnstormers was her manager for a time and wrote the following as a press release in 1965:

'Here is where Elspeth Douglas Reid is different. She is all the women you will ever meet, and also some you don't want to meet! At times she can be every man's dream woman - or his mother - or his grandmother, because she can, with the slightest ease, be any age from 20 to 95, and all from the pen of a gifted artiste...I've just seen her die on stage, catching snow-flakes in her hand so realistically that one watched for snow-flakes that are not there. Now she is talking to two old ladies who have just seen her, tidying up her dressing-room as she does so. How can one describe her? She is more than a talent - she is sympathy, love, affection and divine sense of humour, as witness her 'Actress on Holiday'. Now she sits at her dressing-space, cleaning off her make-up, completely alone,

this solitary woman who has given us fire, beauty, magic, all the colour of the theatre in her One-Woman show, by making a vivid call on our imagination. The whole world of theatre in herself and three suitcases. She has woven her spell of words and will now move on to the next train and the next town (and the next audience) with her wonderful gallery of women.'

Since 1967, the Elspeth Douglas Reid trophy has been awarded for the best female performance on the fringe. Winners in recent years have included Julie Covington and Elizabeth MacLennan.

Maria Corven

Maria Corven describes herself as a contemporary actress manager. She has toured since 1967 with her portrayal of Karen Blixen in Out of Africa, and on her own admission, does everything herself as a genuine one-woman band. Hers is an instance of one actress finding one part and playing it consistently over a long period - solo type-casting, as it were. This contrasts with the majority of female soloists who normally have programmes based on the miscellany or medley tradition and featuring solo sketches, which vary from performance to performance.

Beryl te Wiata uses much the same format with her New Zealand-based Mrs Kiwi Arthur presentations since 1978. Anglo-American, Margaret Webster, anticipated the biographical school with her evocation of the three Bronte sisters a decade earlier. In more recent times, for the most part, the ladies of the theatre have chosen to go solo with this biographical format, for example, from the Edna St Vincent Millay (Dorothy Stickney) in 1960 to Mother Jones (Eileen Pollock) in 1987. More prominent among earlier performers in this genre, however, was yet another American actress-turned-soloist who made her name in Europe - Nancy Cole.

Nancy Cole

Miss Cole played Gertude Stein first in Paris in 1966 and thereafter through every Edinburgh Festival until 1985 as Gertrude Stein's Gertrude Stein, making her perhaps the longest running solo in Festival history. In 1978/'79, she

added Ladiespeak (written with F.Scott Taylor), and in 1982, presented With Love, John Lennon (written with Stewart Vaughan), which she repeated in 1983 and 1984. A recognised stalwart of the Edinburgh Festival, Miss Cole's place in the acceptance of the solo genre is an honoured one.

A new generation took over in the seventies and the image of the lady in the one-woman show gradually changed from the benign middle-aged lady in the hat, to the more forceful, presumptive, younger school represented by such as Alannah O'Sullivan's Dorothy Parker (a favourite subject with soloists since) and the Katherine Mansfield of her fellow-New Zealander, Cathy Downes, which won the latter the Best Actress Award at the Edinburgh Festival of 1979. By this time, however, the most successful one-woman show to date was already touring in the United States.

Julie Harris

Harris made her debut as Emily Dickinson in The Belle of Amherst in 1976 at the Longacre Theatre, New York, and played her for 4 months before going out on her first national tour. She said at the time,

'Emily is like a dear friend.....I've spent 18 years training for this part.....She's marvellous, unique and she doesn't see everything gloomily..... I feel close to her (and) I love her more and more. I love her as a great artist. A genius.'²²

Miss Harris received a Tony Award as Best Actress for her solo performance and has since toured the production many times nationally and internationally. So much so, that it is the highest-earner of any one-woman show ever, having grossed more than 3,000,000 dollars at the box-office.

Author, William Luce, adapted all the writings of Emily Dickinson (1830-86) to, in Emily's own words - 'tell all the truth but tell it slant', but it is her own truth from inside herself, and delivered via imaginary dialogue scenes. The audience is asked to see and hear what Emily sees and hears, and mentally supply the other half of the dialogue. There is a double focus of past and present in Emily, She acts as hostess

to the audience in the present to tell her story from the past. As she says in the play, 'This is my letter to the world that never wrote to me.' The set comprises two rooms of the Dickinson home, the parlour and Emily's bedroom, and the action takes place during one afternoon in 1883.

The English actress, Claire Bloom made a television version of the role for Thames TV in 1986 and won an 'Emmy' Award for it in 1987.

Estelle Parsons

Miss Parsons did not make the same impact in Miss Margarida's Way, the one woman harangue, written by Robert Atheyde, and directed by him in 1977. It had first been performed in his native Rio de Janiero in 1973 by Brazilian actress, Michael Learned, but it was not until Miss Parsons performed at the Public Theatre, New York, that it achieved its commercial success. She later moved to the Ambassador Theatre, where it won her a Tony Award and a Drama Desk Award, for what the citation termed, 'a unique theatrical experience'.

Miss Margarida is a spinster school teacher taking her class in the eighth grade (the audience) and deliberately insulting and provoking them, so as to arouse a response and reply from them. This is the audience as antagonist, playing an active part in a very close relationship with the performer, whose script is deliberately structured to involve them. There is considerable risk here, as rehearsal is only possible with the audience, but their reaction to her existential tirade only indicates their acceptance of theatrical convention, rather than their accepting it as a real occurrence in society. They are always aware they are at a play.

This, nonetheless, does not detract from the extraordinary effect of the performance. Howard Kissel writes,

'The problems Miss Margarida poses to an actress are somewhat akin to those Ravel faced when orchestrating his bolero. The notes are always the same but the colours have to be constantly different.'²³

Miss Parsons herself has the last word:

'Miss Margarida's Way is not a one-woman play. It's got the biggest cast in the world - 1100 people screaming, hollerin', talkin', doing whatever they do.....in a sense, I'm right on the edge of a night club act.²⁴ It's a piece that can't be directed. Except by the audience.'

Estelle Parsons was attracted to the one-woman possibility because she had found, on her own admission, work as a conventional actress, 'getting duller and duller and duller...'. So, as she wanted to work to people and not to cameras, she went into clubs. To her 'Theatre is a theatre,' and there was no substitute for the live experience.

Pat Carroll

Pat similarly felt her career was in the doldrums. She had performed her own solo show - An Evening With Who? since 1976 but with no great success, until she commissioned Marty Martin to write Gertrude Stein Lives for her. The result was a performing script which conveyed the essence of the person, rather than reporting the facts chronologically, as in the usual dramatised biography. It suggested the famous salons, rather than replicating them, allowing the actress a greater freedom in dealing with the audience 'at the moment'. The action takes place on the day of Gertrude Stein's removal from her flat at 27 Rue de Fleur, Paris, in 1939, and is in the form of a continual conversation with the audience. The play has the very minimum of physical action. The audience figures as a co-protagonist and they select from the performance what they want. She demands the same close relationship with the audience as that enjoyed by Julie Harris and Estelle Parsons in their characterisations. For her, like them, the audience is the other actor. Carroll's is the monologue as dialogue. Carroll, as Stein, shares her vulnerability with the audience in a deliberate exposure of self. Being fat, for instance. As her character says:

'Being fat is a state of mind. It keeps you from having to fulfil certain frightening expectations and gives you a chance to live in your own little world.'

Carroll brought Stein to Broadway in 1980 and won the Drama Desk and Critics' Awards for her role. Her recording of the show on Caedmon Records also won her a Grammy.

As Marilyn Stasio reported:

'Unlike the grim doyenne we meet in art history class, Carroll's 'Stein' is garrulously charming....She welcomes the audience that has crept into her legendary salon, and generally shares the turbulent thoughts and feelings that bubble up as she prepares to close an era in international arts and letters.'²⁵

Now, in the eighties, the one-woman show continues to evolve, so that it is no longer even required that a woman play a woman. Elizabeth MacLennan (an Elspeth Douglas Reid award winner in 1971) in her husband, John McGrath's, The Baby and the Bathwater plays George Orwell. And taking the possibility even further in 1984, Olwen Fouere in The Diamond Body by Aiden Carl Mathews for the Operating Theatre of Dublin, was a woman playing a man being a woman. Such androgynous versatility is almost taken for granted in today's complex society.

Theatre only reflects what it sees around it. Women in the theatre have come a long way since Shakespeare's boys, but even after more than 300 years theatre women still had a lot of catching up to do. It was another theatre Dame, Lilian Braithwaite (1873-1948), who called acting for women - 'A lovely broad slope down which we galloped to perdition.'²⁶

Women do not find it easy in the man's world that is theatre. For more than a thousand years, plays were written by men for men, and it has taken a long time for women to be admitted as equal persons in all aspects of stage practice. It is only with the modern assertion of militant feminism that actresses appear to have felt sufficiently free to present themselves as themselves and as people in their own right - to write for, produce and present themselves in the theatre before the public in a play. Female companies such as Monstrous Regiment are doing this now as a matter of course, and as a counter to traditional sexism, so what more natural than that women should find a further platform with the one-woman play? It might even be said they have made a corner in it.

In 1981 at a drama festival in Louisville, Kentucky, director, Jon Jory, in an attempt to attract new writers, as manifestations of theatre talent in whatever direction,

presented a programme of one-person playlets by one author, Jane Martin. Under the title, Talking With, no less than eleven actresses were presented as eleven separate characters in a solo cycle presented as a complete performance. Jory commented:

'The work with the monologue is fascinating, if a dangerous undertaking, because you are asked to regenerate your interest every few minutes. It's like the weather. Nothing lasts for too long.'

One of the actresses involved, Lisa Goodman, played a drum majorette in a star-spangled swimsuit in Twirler, during which she had to twirl a baton, throwing it high above her head. 'Twirling is more than a physical feat, (she said), it is a parallel of revelation. You can't think if you're not inside the baton. It's like throwing yourself up to God. I've seen His face thirty feet above the air, and I know Him!'²⁸

At the end, all 11 actresses took their bow together. Solo en masse one could say. It also must be pointed out that none of the 11 playlets presented took longer than 15 minutes, so it was minimalist drama in more senses than one.

Solo theatre, nevertheless, is not generally offered in such multiple presentations. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is, as its name implies, a genre which emanates from, and centres on, the single property evinced in the person of the player - a player who can win and control his or her audience single-handedly. One such player is Annie Griffin.

Annie Griffin

Ms Griffin very much plays the woman's role in both her solo pieces, which both take a presentational form devised from story-telling as popular entertainment. In Blackbeard the Pirate: A Melodrama in Several Parts, she is in an elegant, black velvet dress and tells the story of Edward Teach, an 18th Century pirate, murder and rapist, also known as Blackbeard. As the script states - 'What is a woman to do?' Critic Mary Brennan reports:

'Whatever theme she explores in her performances, Annie Griffin starts out with fundamentally superb material - herself. Her body, lean and gracefully flexible, keeps up with - and illuminates - her wonderfully darting imagination so that

ideas, images, facts, or even incidental phrases are given memorably physical expression....she arrives on stage, brandishing a pistol but firing facts at us instead. Round and round she prowls, her strong voice occasionally carressing a word that appeals or has piquancy. She is, from the first, utterly compelling, partly because she understands how and when to give either humour or theatricality full rein.

At other times, she allows moments to crystallise unexpectedly, suddenly.....Teach himself, she conjures brilliantly in spotlit darkness through clenched teeth, a scatter of spent matches, and ultimately a wraith of spiralling cigar smoke - all a macho subtext to her considered reportage of his sexual profligacy and vicious cruelty. From there she takes us, in a series of subliminally cross-referenced scenes, into a male-dominated world where greed and violence are the norm.....There's no overt, tub-thumping message, only a building sense of how fragile our definitions of civilised behaviour can be, alongside a warning for women to recognise masculine aggression as an evil, no matter which side it's on. The sheer, visual poetry, the exuberant wit, the finesse and stimulating outreach of her concepts, allied to her own eminently watchable stage presence, make Annie Griffin, one of the outstanding practitioners in the field of live art.²⁹

Praise indeed, and fully deserved for an artist in full control. In her second solo, Almost Persuaded, her one-woman show about 'hurtin' an' lovin' an' hurtin' again...' it is a very different Annie Griffin. In this piece, she uses the language and the songs of country and western music, and in particular, that of the women singers who sing frankly of the unromantic experiences of their lives as women. Wisely perhaps, the programme exhorts the audience, or at least the women in it - 'Don't bring your kids. Don't bring your husband either.' As 'The Scotsman' neatly defined it during the 1987 Edinburgh Festival - 'It is an excellent theatrical meditation on the underside of love.'

It can be seen then, that Ms Griffin, even by her versatility alone, is a considerable conventional actress, who, given her appearance and presence could have made a splendid career in films or in any of the big companies. That she chooses to tread the solo path is compliment to her steadfast individuality and to a mode of working that shows her many talents to best advantage. These presentations utilise every inch of the stage and every technical effect possible, so that within the miniscule of her one person is the majestic expression of her histrionic range. This actress's work might justifiably

justifiably be considered as an example of the finest solo work being performed today - in whatever gender.

The solo performance was now another available drama recourse for women, and one which is growing annually, according to figures realised in this survey. In the early fifties there were less than a handful of female soloists extant - Ruth Draper, Joyce Grenfell, Cornelia Otis Skinner, Elspeth Douglas Reid - but thirty years later, there are hundreds. It is already obvious that every year new names are added to the roster of actresses (or actors) who have gone solo in the one-woman show. Recent Edinburgh Festivals are further proof of this fact.

Tilda Swinton

Of the 12 solos registered as having been performed in the 1987 Edinburgh Festival, the most successful was undoubtedly Tilda Swinton in Man to Man (in which she played a man) by Manfred Karge at the Traverse Theatre. In an interview given to Drama Magazine, she made the following comments:

'(I) had to bite the bullet, to meet this thing head on; what it is to be a performer. There's a kind of bullet to be bitten at the moment - not before time. I wish every performer could have this opportunity to work alone because it's just so tough - and so wonderful. You've got to make friends with all kinds of things you're encouraged to forget; power, trust, and not underestimating your audience at any moment. It's about knowing your material through and through. You've got to be fully committed to the dialogue you are having with your audience because that's who you are communicating with and if you do not make sure they're with you, then pretty well all is lost. Men have found it difficult to take a woman using her own voice without interruption for an hour and a quarter, being dressed like a man, but not in any erotic way - they are not allowed to fancy this person. This is a tough image. A woman on her own, not looking for help, is threatening to men. They don't like it. It doesn't allow them their role. They sulk with me. Because I'm playing a man I can't plug into my natural rhythms as a woman - I am changed by the things I have to say, by the boots I'm standing in, by the socks in my Y-fronts. A man's rhythm is assertive, a woman's receptive, but a woman can learn to be receptive and creative at the same time.

What is particularly fascinating about doing a one-person play is that your rhythm has to be centred somewhere, so that you can spring to something every time - like the high jump. You set up that springboard. You must get that spring

right. When there's only one of you you've only got yourself to fall back on. If you're not in the role, nothing is happening. It's so fascinating. I can't remember a time when I haven't been on the stage alone. For a performer, it's a most wonderful privilege, and a most extraordinary event. I just love this play coming out of my mouth in all its brilliance.³⁰

Like any sensitive artist, she was worried by the fact of being entirely responsible for the performance. At the time of the press show, she had a crisis of confidence, but the director, Steve Unwin encouraged her to 'make the show her own'. She was further vulnerable because of her own high standards. She was determined to have no reliance on technique or her own good looks, or her rising reputation. As she has said, she had to do it 'at the moment' and on her own. She bit the bullet.

Early in 1988, Ms Swinton enjoyed the same success in London as she had known at Edinburgh. Only a few days later, yet another one-woman show opened in the West End, without the precaution of a preliminary Festival try-out. This was Shirley Valentine by Liverpool playwright, Willy Russell. It must be said that this piece had its premiere at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, in 1986, directed by Glen Walford, who had, in fact, commissioned it. During its sell-out run, the actress originally playing the part fell ill, and the author himself stepped in to read the performance for the remainder of the run! For London however, a real actress was engaged - Irish-born, Pauline Collins, and hers was the latest triumph of contemporary actresses in the one-woman show. After her performance, the critic of The Daily Mail reported on 22nd January 1988:

'I count Mr Russell's achievement.....among the most generous, graceful and authentic pieces of drama to adorn the capital today. For a drama it is indeed, despite the fact that it takes the form of a two-and-a half-hour monologue.....If drama is to be judged, as it should be, on how the experiences we witness change the characters who undergo them, then this has to be counted among the most adroit and memorable...'

Miss Collins' personal notices were uniformly ecstatic and the continuing full houses at the Vaudeville can only be further proof, if any were needed, that the one-woman show, dealing with modern woman in a modern situation, has firmly taken root in our theatrical times.

It could be said that a more extended, or at least

more conventional, approach to the fashionable feminism was that made by Franca Rame, wife of Dario Fo, in her one-woman satirical piece based on the female as supposed subordinate in It's All Bed, Board and Church at a previous Edinburgh Festival (1984). However, it must be noted that as long ago as 1905, the Actresses' Franchise League had echoed the sympathies of the then Suffrage Movement, showing that women in the theatre were well aware of their putative status and propagandist value. This still applies today, and vigorous, assertive solos, such as Ms Swinton's, show this. She was a woman being a man, yet remaining woman, an acting accomplishment far removed from Vesta Tilley's Burlington Bertie!

The one-man show had now become the one-woman-man show and to whatever permutation therein! What could women do now in the one-person show - to reflect her post-Victorian, post-Edwardian, post-Georgian, post-Elizabethan attainments? Except perhaps to go out and find still newer means within it of contemporary expression?

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF THE SOLO MODE

In fairness, it must be stated that not everyone enjoys one-man shows, as they are still commonly called. Some American critical attitude has already been referred to, but British opinion has been no less forthcoming. Michael Billington neatly defined the genre as 'a reed with ambitions to becoming a tree', but admitted its branches were spreading!¹ He worried that the monologue was not a play but was still, in its eighteenth century definition - 'a performance by one who loves to hear himself talk'. The ego/vanity question is one which is constantly recurring in attitudes to the performed solo. The late John Counsell, founder-director of the famous Windsor Repertory Theatre, in conversation with the writer some years ago, made it quite clear that his customers did not like one-person productions - 'They don't feel they're getting their money's worth,' he said, "no matter how good the actor or how interesting the script.'

Drama critic, Allen Wright, however, recognises that the actor in the one-man show is now a fact of contemporary theatre life, but despite this, in an article for 'The Scotsman' in the summer of 1970, he examined the phenomenon unfavourably contending that 'many associate a monologue with monotony despite all the evidence to the contrary'. Like Edinburgh playwright Donald Mackenzie, who himself has written two successful solos (for Callum Mill and Geraldine Newman), Wright considers - 'there can be no conflict where there is only one person on the stage, and conflict is the stuff of drama'. Mackenzie's further view was that many one-man shows get by on the strength of their performance, but Wright added:

'No matter how well-written or performed, there is something hollow about a one-man play.....but at least it is more rewarding than a recital - a form of entertainment which bears little relation to theatre, and yet which is surprisingly popular.'

Mr Wright may reach his very proper conclusions by comparison and analysis and in the light of his considerable experience, but he admits that the good solo can draw. He wishes though that the solo actor would forsake his solitary furrow and rejoin the throng, but it is a fact of the one-man show that it is the actor that people come to see.

The solo form is also accused by many of being small-scale, and limiting in being only written for one performer, but to quote Arnold Wesker, a well-known conventional playwright, but writer of several one-person plays, (including Annie Wobbler for Nichola McAuliffe):

'Is a Beethoven sonata any less a work of art for having been written for one instrument?'²

It remains a fact, nevertheless, that some audiences can still be shy of the solo figure on stage, and no matter how effective he or she might be, they feel themselves short-changed in terms of theatrical entertainment value in being obliged to listen and watch one person for the whole evening. This is not always the fault of the audience. Some solo actors, especially in the dramatised biography, are so carried away by their zeal for authenticity and a 'camera likeness' to the historical or famous figure portrayed, that they fall short on the the first ingredient of any performance - that it should entertain as well as edify.

When reviewing Donal Donnelly's George Bernard Shaw solo on Broadway Clive Barnes asserted:

'The one-man show is fundamentally anti-theatrical. Theatre is not a lecture-room, however theatrically that lecture may be used.'

But he also added -

'A good one can be as good as a pension to the actor.'³

Bernard Engel, in addressing the American Southwest Theatre Conference in 1981, called them, 'Talking historical exhibits'. They are reputed to be difficult to sell to the public, yet two have made millions (Fonda, Harris). Both may have been sold on the names of the artists involved, but it must be borne in mind too, that the solo can also make the artist's name - Draper, Holbrook, Dotrice, McCowen, for instance.

Whichever it is, there is no reason behind the success of one show and the failure of another, only the public fact.

No matter how the one-person show has come about - either by the actor's fluke of resemblance, his economic situation, career stagnation, fortuitous casting or academic experimentations in drama, the form is steadily gaining respectability as a scholastic subject, although as yet no full-scale research into the genre has so far been undertaken.

It is significant perhaps, that according to the Guinness Book of Records, (30th edition, 1983), the most popular one-man show of any kind - at least that which had the longest consecutive run - was that given by Irish comedian, Jimmy Young, in his own show Comedy Tonight, which ran at the Ulster Group Theatre, Belfast from 7 April 1969 to 22 March 1970 - a total of 327 performances. It would appear that he who laughs, laughs longest, because yet another comedian (and pianist) the Danish-American, Victor Borge, at the John Golden Theatre in New York from performed from 2 Oct 1953 till 21 Jan 1954! However the last laugh must still be with Roy Dotrice and his record-breaking run at the Mayfair Theatre, London. (See P77).

It may be that the front-cloth comedian as soloist has been accepted by audiences for so long that they are completely at ease and relaxed with him. Since Danny Kaye at the London Palladium in 1947, audiences have been receptive to congenial, comic solo performers who have personality and charm.

Dave Allen

Allen's approach is basically as a comedian, but he plays his various one-man shows very much from his own point of view, a view which is highly aware of the ludicrous. Like Spalding Gray, Allen has a disarming way of talking about it to an audience, as was shown when he essayed his first theatrical one-man show at the Court Theatre, London in 1972. Allen is an actor/comedian in the Bannister mould, who manages to straddle that fine line between performing artist and performance art, between the act of seeming to be himself and the art of projecting prepared material through his own on-stage

personality. His kind of 'free' evening in the theatre is more than a personality tour de force. It is a totally acceptable one-man show in the modern sense of the term, being done from a prepared and organised script and with that sense of improvised spontaneity that all good, well-rehearsed acting has. This comedian/actor has no trouble in filling a theatre, or holding an audience alone for an evening. Now, nearly 25 years later, he has only recently completed yet another successful season at the Albery in London (a favourite theatre for soloists) with his Dave Allen-Live. In this, as the programme states, he:

'expresses more of the thinking man's inhibitions while reflecting on life and the bizarre'.

His manner is that of the front-cloth comedian, but without the formal jokes. He relies on his empathy with the house and its recognition of his allusions and comments. There is a strong social and satirical vein in his material and it hides the fact that he is improvising skilfully on a sound armature - working a prepared seam. To do this he falls back on well-trying formulae honed in years of talking directly to a camera. He stands on stage, or sits on a high stool, glass in hand, and simply talks to his audience, but as he does so, he uses all the techniques of the good actor he is.

Billy Connolly

Billy is not an actor, well, not in the orthodox sense, but there is no doubt, that he is a solo performer of some magnitude and his one-man shows are astonishingly successful wherever they are performed - be it the Albert Hall, Stirling, or the Albert Hall, London. He was originally a guitarist with a folk group in his native Glasgow and was greatly influenced by the folk revival of the late sixties, particularly by the work of fellow-Glaswegian, and fellow-genius, Matt McGinn. I use the word genius advisedly, because no other word can explain the emergence of these two working-class men of succeeding generations, who could, by sheer personality, capture an audience, and by what they had to say or sing, hold them. Connolly was not a singer as such, but around

perceptive wit, but with a strong awareness of current affairs. This sharp and intelligent player has a keen ear for today's political foibles. During 1986/87 he toured Britain with his new solo Stand Up.

John Sessions,

In December 1987, yet another one-man show was drawing the crowds in the West End of London (at the same Albery Theatre where Dave Allen so recently scored), in a special, sold-out, six-week season featuring a Scots-born actor and impressionist, John Sessions, in his own Life of Napoleon. This further underscores the point already made - that a good solo can be a solid, commercial hit in the theatre. Until 1979, Sessions was a full-time University lecturer in Canada, having earned his doctorate in Edinburgh with a study of the works of John Cowper Powys. While in Canada, he performed several one-man shows, and in 1979 he gave up his post to take a scholarship to RADA. As he explained in an interview with David Belcher - 'I couldn't continue to cheat by doing amateur dramatics. I had to see if I could earn my living at it.'⁴

He left RADA in 1981 and almost immediately made his mark at the Edinburgh Festival in various original solo performances over the next five years, culminating in My Name in 1986, which was also filmed. This highly intellectual actor is also a gifted impressionist and his use of many voices in his solo presentations is in the very oldest tradition of the one-man show, harking back as it does to the impersonations of Samuel Foote and later, Mathews the Elder. The mimicry is allied to acute observation coupled with arcane literary allusion. In Gramsci, the helter-skelter progress by association of ideas is dramatised by means of film star impersonations and comic comment and much use of the pun. Iconoclastic, irreligious, he makes an apparently whimsical progress through his peroration. The former lecturer is always evident in the academic base, but the emergent actor very much in control and the presence of music and light cues indicates a meticulous rehearsal.

1977 suddenly found his voice as a comedian. Tall and personable, he is hardly the archetypal Glaswegian, yet he embodies much of that city's spunky resilience and stoic humour. To this he adds a particularly original point of view which makes his frequent 'conversations with an audience' not only bitingly funny, but socially acute and philosophically true. Connolly's is contemporary commentary of relevance. From a folk singer he has become something of a folk hero to his fellow-Glaswegians. This is Mark Twain or Will Rogers in a Clydeside accent, but with the look of Franz Hals' Laughing Cavalier. In his laugh, though, there is a mocking irony.

Mention of folk singers brings also to mind that many solo presentations today, are musically based, and rely more on the performer's particular skills and personal charisma than on an ability to impersonate character via a prepared script. While this musical segment is not a major area of solo performance, and may be on the borders of this present discussion, it nevertheless represents a considerable arm of the solo corpus and can trace its solo ancestry from John Gould today, through Noel Coward and Albert Chevalier, all the way back to Dibdin. A similar exponent today is Donald Swan, (formerly of Flanders and Swan), who calls his accompanying script to his mainly musical evenings 'a levitating commentary.' The late Alan Jay Lerner also performed a very conversational one-man show from the piano, as did Larry Adler with his harmonica at an Edinburgh Festival, but none of these men can be said to be part of one-man theatre as now being considered.

Today, there are also solo performers like Rowan Atkinson, Alexei Sayle, Quentin Crisp, Shelley Berman. Lenny Bruce; all of whom have done one-man shows with great success, but they are solo cabaret performers, and are not, in the terms being discussed, solo actors - although Lenny Bruce has himself been the subject of a solo performance by two American actors in recent years. (See Index.) These satirical commentators, or comedians, are capable of holding an audience, but with observation and anecdote rather than script. They are still, basically, front cloth comedians. They are near to the solo

actor in the respect that they have to, like him, embrace and control an audience from the moment of their first appearance until their exit - a formidable task.

It is now found that the solo play today may take any form, but what remains a truism is that in the end result the solo actor makes his own theatre out of what he himself has to offer his audience. The solo actor peddles his wares today much as the strolling player did 400 years ago, and with the same illogical and irrepressible optimism. Perhaps, in the end, nothing really changes, it is only that the wheel keeps turning. There are also soloists who, whatever the current fashion, lean heavily, if not intentionally, on personality, or at least, on being personable. They possess such charm and ease of manner on stage, that whatever the material presented, autobiographical or propagandist, one feels the audience would accept it entirely without reservation. One such performer who comes to mind in this category is Jack Klaff.

Jack Klaff

Klaff is another soloist who exploits the same personal technique, but with a greater emphasis on the social-satirical and the political. This is perhaps not wholly surprising, considering that he is a South African - a white South African. In his various solo offerings, he tells versions of his own story, albeit on a more political and polemical plane. He relates more to Spalding Gray than to Dave Allen, for example. Klaff first presented his solo programme of The 50-Minute Hour and The Survivalist at the Louisville Festival, Kentucky, in 1981, directed by Michael Morriss, before bringing it to the Edinburgh Festival in 1982, with Cuddles and Never Mind. He also appeared at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in 1983 to great acclaim. In 1985, he performed Nagging Doubt in London, and also prepared a version for television. He returned to the Edinburgh Festival with Kafka and what he called 'the deeply personal' Letters Alone. Jack Klaff has an immediately engaging and charming personality - no disadvantage in any solo performer. In Klaff's case however, it is laced not only with a

Ian McKellen Acting Shakespeare opened at The Playhouse, London, on Monday 14 December 1987, and had a Royal Gala Performance on 15 December in the presence of Her Royal Highness, the Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon. The solo has come a long way from the Fair! As far a distance as McKellen himself has come since his first tentative solo recital at the St Cecilia's Hall during the 1977 Edinburgh Festival. He had been asked to talk about his work, and from it developed a seminar on Shakespearian acting, from which, in turn, has now come a solo entertainment of the very highest order. The critical reaction has been increasingly effulgent. Not that it matters generally, as McKellen's show, which is in aid of charity, is invariably sold out. The latest limited London run has already been extended for a month. This says something, not only for a very talented actor and a compassionate man but for the public's attitude to the one-person show. Ann Donaldson reported on the Playhouse performance for the Glasgow Herald:

'One man, one chair, a bare stage - and from the moment McKellen leaps on to it he has the audience spellbound... A shared joy in acting inspires this performance - he brings Shakespeare to life. Casual switches punctuate...He brings the audience to the heights with a brilliant cameo, turns his head and begins to chat...Touching lightly on Shakespeare over the centuries...it becomes a mind-expanding tutorial, lasting in effect.

After London, McKellen embarked on a long tour of Britain and Ireland which included the Glasgow Mayfest 1988. It is ironic to remember that after his Broadway run in 1984, Mr McKellen had locked his solo script in a drawer and thrown away the key! Fortunately, the key has been found again - thanks to this actor's commitment to a cause. In this case, an AIDS Hospice in London, towards which most of the proceeds from this remarkable solo will go. Critic Giles Gordon comments:

'I had assumed that the evening would be akin to Gielgud's Seven Ages of Man (but) Acting Shakespeare is part promotional exercise and part master class...and is based on the actor's own experiences...McKellen, an actor to treasure, must bring his show back. It could outrun The Mousetrap...One-person shows are the order of the day. It has to be said that those I saw were terrific. Pauline Collins in Willy Russell's Shirley Valentine (directed by Simon Callow at the Vaudeville) was a revelation.

Belcher further explains the effect that Sessions has as Napoleon:

'Spell-binding, hyper, manic, staggering and Monty Python are some of the words that have been used to describe his current, London West End stage one-man success. For two hours Sessions paces the stage as Napoleon, and as the show's narrator, (for which he adopts the voice of Sir Laurence (sic) Olivier, as a cast of 38 other voices and characters nightly fights for possession of the rest of his mind and body. He has lost a stone during the run at the Albery and can only physically sustain the show, which he researched and wrote in a month, in six-week bursts. "It is so exhausting" he said, "Like a rock concert - like Bruce Springsteen."

In the same article, he concluded -

'I'd like to do more one-man shows, more plays, be more inventive, more profound, more funny. In ten years, I may not have the energy for one-man shows...'

This points the fact that whichever way one chooses to do a one-man show, it is, on the physical level at least, and in terms of mental exertion, about the hardest work one can do in the theatre. Mr Sessions, MA, PhD, would surely agree, even if he feels, like any successful actor, it is certainly worth it. But he never plays safe -

'I'm not really bothered about putting on something everybody knows all about. Give people a programme which is different, and you never know, they might just get a taste for it. If you suggest something to (their) imagination you can never tell what kind of reaction you will get.'

While Sessions enjoys his well-deserved London triumph, about 400 miles to the north, in his native Scotland, a totally unknown Mexican actor and film extra, Jose Garcia, failed to attract anyone at all to see Tito, his one-man play in two acts, set in the American desert, which he presented at the Languages Theatre of Glasgow University. There is more than a world of difference between Senor Garcia's Tito and Mr Sessions' acclaimed Napoleon. There are the continuing factors of luck, talent, experience, determination, contacts and individual flair and talent, which make one man's one-man show the talk of the town and another's not even a whisper in a lecture room. That, as they say, is show business, but is also, sad to say, a hard fact of the theatrical life.

Traditional theatre will survive, alternative theatre of every kind will continue to explore, there are many voices in Drama's siren chorus, but the sound of one voice has an elemental primacy when it speaks for all. And in our own time that voice is clearly heard in the theatrical phenomenon that is the one-person show. Given that the solo form is the play for today could it be that it might be gone tomorrow? Is this merely another facet of theatre's revolving mask? Or is it, in fact, a firm platform from which the modern actor's voice might be heard? Only time will tell, but in the meantime, it might be apposite to consider its future?

A Future for the One-Person Show?

The solo presentation is a performance based on a open and exhilarating expression of the modern mode. What was formerly seen as a skeletal and reduced theatrical form - the one-man show - is now universally regarded as a theatrical norm - the one-person play. If therefore it has been shown to have a legitimate theatrical pedigree, how can it further develop? Is there a future for one-person theatre?

There is nothing more contemporary than the story of any man or woman but the medium involving the self in theatre cannot help but be itself contemporary for the only tense in the theatre is NOW. Today is now, and today's message requires today's methods, and there are several good reasons why the solo format answers today's needs. These may be briefly considered under their respective headings: economical, historical and philosophical

a) Economical

One is the least by which one can multiply anything but it has been shown by practice, that the solo play, being comparatively cheap to assemble, prepare and present, is, in some cases, capable of returning enormous profits. Even in the loss situation, it is survivable because the loss is relatively slight. Furthermore, its portability lets it travel well, and

There's nothing like a one-person show to test the limitations - vocal range, ingenuity of characterisation, stamina, versatility - of an actor. I have never seen Miss Collins so stretched, and her performance ranks beside that of Brend Bruce in Happy Days.

Almost by definition, one-character plays have the resonance of short stories. This is Liverpool Becket sans sub-text. (It was originally played by a local actress in Liverpool who found it exhausting. The author himself took over and finished the run at the Everyman as a rehearsed reading!) It is a lovely piece, brimful of compassion, humanity, and observation, toughly played.

Back With A Vengeance at the Strand is less one-person show than Barry Humphries exploding the stage for an exotic three hours with Australians...the show is a memorial to its begetter's intelligence. His genius is shown in the way he coaxes the audience...the antithesis of the usual, winsome drivel of 'entertainers'...and two astonishing coups de theatre make the evening even grander than a Palladium pantomime. I missed the anarchic intensity of Tilda Swinton's performance in Man to Man, but Humphries vies with McKellen for having delivered the show of the quarter!

Significantly, Mr Gordon here uses the term 'show' and not 'one-person show', and he discusses a London season which features no less than ten solo successes (if one includes Dave Allen, Billy Connolly, Jack Klaff and John Sessions, who have been on at, or around, the same time. There is a key here in more ways than one. Modern demand has found the key perhaps, to the new, direct drama of the future; to the restoration of the actor in the forefront of the dramatic experience; to the primacy of performance, where one man in his play - and one woman in hers - may be seen as a dynamic counter to adipose theatrical conventionality?

A Vehicle for Experiment

It may be that in the economic climate of today the one-person play lends itself particularly to further exercises in theatre styles and practice, as previous examples cited may have shown. Experiment is always possible in monodrama. Within the larger ensemble it would be prohibitive in terms of costs and time. Indeed, the large companies are only able to exist by subsidy, whether national, regional, local or private, but solo theatre is able to invest its main resource - the player - as far as his time, availability and stamina can last. It might well be that the lessons learned from his micro-efforts could well be found to have value when applied also to conventional

macro-theatre - particularly when one considers the almost symbiotic relationship between the solo performer and the technical assist offered by sound and lighting.

One has only to remember the clown Popov and his famous sketch involving the single spotlight, or Spalding Gray's use of a battle sound-track in Swimming to Cambodia, Alec McCowen's use of back-projection in Kipling. From a visual point of view, Brief Lives (Roy Dotrice) showed how much can be crammed around the solo player, as The Importance of Being Oscar (Macliammoir) showed how little. Almost anything goes in the solo play, providing of course that it works! Indeed, some solo shows today, especially the most recent variety, utilize every known solo technique to 'sell' the performance to an audience.

The very latest trend is for the solo player to lend his special performing skills to seminars and exhibitions. Commercial and industrial firms have been quick to see this advantage for work involving promotion and publicity. Bearing in mind, his origins as a strolling player at the country fair, it might be seen now that the actor has been returned to the market place.

In a sense, the one-man play then had come to its inevitable conclusion as a scripted form in Eggertsson's exercise of absolute inaction, where performer and auditor sit and stare at each other, in silence. There is nothing more to say perhaps? But of course there is - much more.

The increasing acceptance of the solo mode around the world makes it ideal 'product', to use the jargon of the accountants, for festivals and special events, and in the case of historical biographical drama particularly, of special adaptibility as a commemorative vehicle on any anniversary. With the solo piece as basis, programmes can be prepared and mounted in minimum time and with little relative cost, so that a specific character may be realised on stage on a specific day in a specific place. At the shortest of notice, the artist can be fitted to the character, the character given a dramatic frame. The solo is an instance of response to a market demand.

as a result it is good international fare as the logistics involved are attractive to promoters, the differential between cost of mounting and possible return, in most cases, being extensive. Money still matters. Managements will always be attracted to anything that might return a profit.

b) Technical

Theatre has always been a multi-purpose activity, whose effects are attained on several levels simultaneously - artistic, altruistic, didactic, propagandist, instructive, religious and so on. In addition, it is required that it should entertain. To do all this the theatre act has always been the result of teamwork - first between poet and performer, then writer and actor, then writer and director and actor, then writer, director, designer and actor. As the team has burgeoned, so the actor has stepped further back in the assembly line, and the play did not become his until he took it on stage before an audience. But now in the solo, it can begin and end with him. His is now the direct, wholesale approach. He can, if he likes, cut out the middle men and sell immediately to the audience just as a comedian does - which often is no bad thing. As Joan Littlewood once remarked in a rehearsal at Stratford East, - 'Every good actor is a comedian'. No actor would disagree.

c) Educational

The actor is as every man - vulnerable, fallible and occasionally heroic. And like every man he is circumscribed by his own strength and weaknesses, which are under even greater scrutiny in the monodramatic convention. It is here that the one-person performance can provide a valuable service. Not only does it show man to himself in its singular mirror, but in the subjects illustrated in biographical drama, it shows him his own history in the parade of famous figures. In this way historical fact is made palatable and a greater knowledge gained of the person under review. A country's heritage can be shown in living form via the portrayal of the men and women on stage,

whose acts determined that heritage. The legacy that is any nation's art and culture can be animated in this way by living artists. This can then be seen by all generations, not only as entertainment, but as didactic theatre with a genuine educative validity. The addition of modern aids such as video cassette recording, means a permanent record may be kept for posterity.

d) Historical

The history of dramaturgy tells us that the original impulse towards the dramatic act grew out of a mystical desire to please the gods. The modern actor still desires to please. Even if his gods are now in the Upper Circle and not on Olympus, he is still the ancient sayer. In his solo performance, whatever it may be, he tells his story with all the authority of his pedigree. He is the herald of yesterday giving his message in the manner of today and offering his audience the same hope for tomorrow.

e) Philosophical

The current one-person vogue represents a reaction against the machine. The actor, in the technological language of our day is the 'live-ware' in the electronic reaction activated by his confronting his audience in performance - except that he cannot be started by the press of a button or wiped by the flick of a switch. He is actually there. He is the human factor. He is real. Fortunately, despite so-called technological progress, the actor-robot is not yet with us, nor the theatre-clone. It may not be too long before the actor will be able to 'phone-in' his performance to a central casting bank, but in the meantime let us rejoice in his very humanity and salute the service he offers to an audience.

The Audience

The importance of the audience in the dramatic act is self-evident. As has been pointed out, the first fact of the drama is that it requires an audience, otherwise the play might as well be a tract read by consenting adults in private.

Without an audience the actor is irrelevant, but to the soloist they - or 'it' - is the other member of the cast. By no means the passive receiver in the contract, the audience, to the mono-performer, is an active participant. This continuing contact can, of course, be evaluated in terms of semiotics or cybernetics, but that is to be too scientific about a process that is highly complex and largely indefinable. The audience may also be thought of as a concelebrant in the mystery of the artistic experience, but that, in turn, is to be too aesthetic. Somewhere between is the professional balance, and it is that balance the actor seeks. In his solo performance, they become one, as he is one. Their union is mandatory if the theatre intention is to be realised at all. It does not depend on the actor alone, not by any means. In any case, in the broad sense, his is a very minor art. At best, some still think of the actor only as the interpreter of interpreters, but more importantly, he is the catalyst working on the audience mass, by whose alchemy they are changed from an ad hoc gathering of elbow-strangers into a cohesive wholeness, which enters into his play. By him, they are made one. This is a considerable metamorphosis, and no mean feat for any artist, minor or no. As they are a microcosm of their society the actor is a microcosm of his audience. They are often changed by what they see and may leave the theatre as different people, but the reassurance still obtains, for they know they have been to the play, and have safely survived the experience. In other words, they know they can weep, but will not be wounded. As Artaud first indicated, people too often discount the healing properties of theatre .

The actor, by his performance, can enter into the auditor, but something of him, or his performance, remains with the spectator for an hour afterwards, even a year, or years. This is the true catharsis, and it is this, an audience comes to the theatre to find, something of themselves as they see it in the solo actor. He is of them, as they are of him, and their common ground is the base from which all communication is made, whether cerebral, emotional or spiritual.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOTES ON A SOLO PERFORMANCE

MR RLS by JOHN CAIRNEY

Finally, in this survey of Solo Theatre, some notes on the anatomy of a specific one-person show may be of value. These are based on the present writer's own experiences in adapting the life and works of Robert Louis Stevenson for the stage in 1974. He had his first experience of the process in working with writer, Tom Wright, and director, Gerard Slevin, on There Was A Man in 1963/64 in which he played Robert Burns. In 1971, he developed McGonagall on his own for the Edinburgh Festival of that year, and it was for the same Festival in 1973 that novelist, and Stevenson authority, Alanna Knight suggested he might adapt her book about Stevenson, The Passionate Kindness as a play. This was duly done, and in the following year, the material was converted, after further research, into a one-man show for Edinburgh, a Scottish Theatre tour and for performance on the Lecture Circuit in the United States.

There is a long history of interest in the Scottish Stevenson in America and his American links are strong. He married an American (Fanny Vandergrift Osborne) in San Francisco and lived for some time in California before embarking on his travels in the South Seas, but Robert Louis Stevenson never forgot he was a Scotsman.

Indeed, his Scottishness increased the further he was away from his beloved Edinburgh, which he left on the death of his father in 1887, and he was never to see Scotland again. He was not the typical exile however. Even if he took his Scotland with him as he went round the world, he gave it back to the world again in the form of essays, articles and novels, for he was, as the Samoans called him, 'Tusitala' - the teller of tales. More than anything else, that is exactly what Stevenson was - a story-teller. He relished the spoken word, as was evident in the readings of his work which he gave every evening at sundown from the verandah at Vailima to the family.

He was indeed the 'teller of tales' He loved an audience, and, like a true Victorian, he enjoyed reading aloud. So what more natural that he should be presented on stage as his own narrator and reader of his own work.

In this way, all sides this extraordinary man may be seen - the novelist, poet, talker, drinker, joker and Scotsman. He can take his own time and make his own rhythm as he weaves his way through the prose and poetry in the text to reveal the many sides of his complex nature - the dreamer, the sensualist, the philosopher, the artist, all parts of the prism that was Mr R.L.S. Each one of these 'expressions' catches the light, as it were, reflecting at least part of one of his many private and public faces.

Yes, he was a complicated man, and while not all of his life and character may be seen within the two hours of a stage performance, it was hoped, that by setting his work against the main incidents of his life, as related by the man himself so to speak, something of the essential Stevenson might be realised. Fortunately, there was a great deal of the actor about him in real life - his long hair, his studied 'sensitivity', velvet jackets, moustache, brocade shirts, red sashes and high, lace-up boots, not to mention his Inverness cape! He was his own actor-manager in the drama that was the Life and Death of R.L.S. No one knew better than he how 'theatrical' any life could be made to seem - with a little help from an artistic imagination. The role, (or life) 'whatever it was was given one', as he said, had to be played to the hilt, and Stevenson certainly played his part until his own very sudden and dramatic final curtain. In any dramatisation of his story it was up to the actor to find that role for ~~him~~ himself so as to reveal the subject to an audience.

In this particular one-man show, it was obvious that Stevenson himself, this zany, picturesque, witty, courageous, eccentric Scottish bohemian, who smoked as incessantly as he wrote, and drank as much as he talked, was the ideal figure to tell his own story. The narrator figure is the commentator, suggesting the subjective or inner Stevenson. The objective or

outer Stevenson is illustrated by direct quotation from the stories and letters in the playing text. The device is deliberately ambiguous, as it presents, in a tangible and dramatic form, the central dilemma of Stevenson himself - and of many Scots going out into the world - that is, the question of which face or front to show that world. We must remember that we are dealing with the author of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

The essential problem is always the identity of the two selves in one - and the paradox remains - which is the real self? It is a situation every actor playing a part knows too well - the struggle between the self he is and the self he portrays via the given text. The contradiction between self-doubt and self-assurance in the presented personality is not only very theatrical and inherently dramatic, it is also very Stevensonian and very Scottish. In many Scots, past and present, Calvin vies with Harry Lauder - William Wallace with Ramsay Macdonald - John Hume with John Buchan, and so on. Scottish history abounds in such native personality contrasts. Each, however, is a relevant side of the Scottish psyche and the question is which gains the supremacy at any given time. Since the given time in any theatre is that between Curtain Up and Curtain Down, everything pertinent and germane to the character and his story must be presented between these happenings. However full the programme notes, they must only prepare an audience for the play, not act as a substitute for it.

It is not entirely inapposite to see Stevenson as an 'actor' in his own staged life, in this case, a one-man play. All his life he was fascinated by the stage. He received a model theatre for his sixth birthday, and it became an obsession with him throughout his childhood. He devoured the play-texts of Skelt's juvenile drama in order to put on his own pasteboard plays at home. This was, on his own admission - 'one of the dearest pleasures of childhood'. At sixteen, he wrote an allegorical dialogue, The Charity Bazaar, and during his student days at Edinburgh University, prepared a list of no less than eleven titles for plays he was going to write. He only acted on a stage once - as 'Orsino' in Twelfth Night. This was for an

amateur production in Edinburgh, and learned from that experience that he was a better talker than actor. Only later did he learn that he was a better writer than talker. As a newly-qualified lawyer, he reviewed Salvini's Macbeth, when the famous Italian actor came to Edinburgh's Theatre Royal in 1876, and despite its great success, Stevenson was not impressed, although he ends his review in a disarming Italian quotation - 'O siam nell'opra ancor fanciulli' (We are young ~~again!~~)¹

He was no writer for the stage however, despite half a dozen plays to his credit. These were all written in collaboration with, or perhaps it is nearer the mark to say, on the instructions of W.E.Henley, a friend and literary editor. He also wrote Monmouth, with his cousin, R.A.M.Stevenson and The Hanging Judge, (which he wrote with his wife) and at least another dozen titles, all begun and abandoned. All the Henley collaborations were in fact professionally presented, and in one of ~~these~~, Beau Austin, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree appeared. Even so, all of them, without exception, failed with audiences. Ironically, more success has been found on stage by those who adapted his stories as plays after his lifetime, and in modern times most of the famous novels have been made into very successful feature films. Two have become operas. Significantly, after he died, a fragment was found among his papers, only eleven pages, comprising Act 1, Scenes 1-4, of an untitled play. Who knows, this might have been the dramatic masterpiece he had always promised?

It was his Scottishness, it seems, prevented him. As he said himself in The Passionate Kindness:

'You must bear in mind the peculiarity of the Scottish attitude to the artist, especially in Scotland, and to the kittle art of the drama. In the theatre, we never forget we are in a theatre. We sit wavering between two minds, whether to watch and admire, or whether to let ourselves go and, in our imagination, take an actual part in what is going on. But the pleasure we take is critical. Whether we laugh or cry at the activities of the characters on stage, the characters still remain themselves, they are not us. The more clearly they are depicted, the more they stand back from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our proper place - as spectators.'²

That is what Stevenson always remained - a spectator of his own play, his own life, a detached observer who was able to comment pithily and wittily on the ups and downs of a very eventful, if comparatively short, existence. After a lifetime as an invalid due to congenital tuberculosis, he died suddenly at 44 from a brain haemorrhage and was buried, at his own request, in Samoa. On his tombstone were the words he had written in Requiem:

'Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie,
Glad did I live, and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will...'³

While he lived however, as his own Narrator, he was only reluctantly brought into his own life/drama:

'It is bad enough to live by an art, but to think to live by an art combined with commercial speculation - that way madness lies.'⁴

Although he did admit, in a letter to his father:

'Theatre is a gold mine; and⁵ on that I must keep my eye. Motley, I count the only wear.'

Like many Victorian writers, Shelley, Browning, Coleridge, Thackeray, Tennyson, names that come immediately to mind, Stevenson was a poor dramatist - perhaps because he was, despite Henley's badgering enthusiasm, a reluctant one. He certainly had a strong, dramatic instinct but he lacked the true, theatrical flair. Writing for the stage was more than a matter of fine writing and flowery speeches. Stevenson, as Sir Arthur Pinero pointed out, based his writing style for the stage on the inferior and outmoded playwrights of the transpontine dramas and never took time to learn the tricks of the trade.⁶

In a lecture given to members of the Philosophical Institute of Edinburgh at the Music Hall on 24 February 1903, Sir Arthur went on to say that a dramatic talent, or instinct, was born not made, and could only be developed into a theatrical talent by practice and experience. It is a matter of strategy and tactics. There is no mystery about it. The only mystery, according to Sir Arthur, is how the result is received by the audience. Eloquence is not always good theatre. There is a

difference between the beauty of words and the fitness of words in the theatre. Stevenson never learned this distinction. The truth was, he had imagined that writing for the stage would be easy. It was not, and, being somewhat misled by Henley as to what was required, he became discouraged and gave it up. Real theatre was not a cut-out toy anymore, it was a living thing that demanded its own life. Writing a play is more a matter of building than writing and Stevenson was denied a proper training and apprenticeship in dramatic construction. He could write dialogue and portray character as his novels show, but a play is more than described action. It is action itself, and Stevenson never really fathomed its artistic mystery.

He never saw a play of his performed on the stage. Had he done so, he might have learned much and we might have had a major dramatist, but instead, he returned, almost with relief, to his novels, essays and letters.

'No, I will not write a play for Mr Irving.'

He had written from Vailima,

'Nor for the Devil. Can you not see that the work of falsification which a play demands is, of all tasks, the most ungrateful. I have done it a long time and nothing ever comes of it. And nothing comes of nothing!'

Not unlike Wilde, he kept the best drama for his life, and it was the first aim of the one-man performance to illuminate this aspect of the artist and the man.

Given the material to work on, it was easy for the adaptor (in this case, the actor) to assemble the main structure of a playing vehicle. Much of the text was actually read, so at first it was a case of ordering the sequences and deciding how to introduce them seamlessly as it were.

The main facts of the life are dealt with more or less chronologically, and the major works, or selections from them, were inserted where considered most appropriately, or what is much more important to the actor, more effectively. In this way, theatrical demands were met before literary values. In some cases, as with the story of the Solan Geese, full dramatic impact was possible on stage as this section was a complete

short story within the main narrative and it lent itself easily to effective performance. To a lesser extent, the story of Thrawn Janet which was read and not performed earlier in the text, had similar value. In a way, these pieces have brackets around them and can be treated as separate entities within the dramatic structure and apart from the general narrative. They also serve as a valuable punctuation with the main framework.

In the telling of Stevenson's own story, the audience learns of his dependence on women at all stages - his nurse, his mother, his wife and there are hints of a shadier liaison. The sickly child developed the sturdy stamina of the professional invalid, and the irony is that his whole life was spent dreading the collapse of his lungs, yet he died suddenly, and quite unexpectedly of a cerebral haemorrhage. He liked nothing better than sailing under a tropical sun, yet all the time he carried with him the long shadow of his homeland - a dark, mysterious nurseryland of his own, which he called Scotland. In a sense, he never left it. Like all exiles, his homeland became more and more real to him the longer he was away from it, but his was a Stevensonian reality which owed much to his imagination.

The play ends almost elegiacally, in the half-light of a Samoan sunset and with the words of the famous epitaph spoken against the sound of a Scottish folk song played on a flute. All the elements of his life are in this mix. Its very theatricality makes a fitting conclusion to the performance.

Much use is made in this adaptation, of tape-recorded effects, particularly pre-recorded spoken voices. This is a device much-used in many solo plays to offer vocal variety to the presentation, and to extend the narrative range and dimension by the inclusion of other 'characters'. This also allows the performing actor a necessary respite from the continuous direct-to-audience approach, basic to any solo. In this particular case, three loud speakers were used, one at rear-centre for special effects and the voice of R.L.S. himself, and one at each side to represent his parents, for instance, and all other members of the 'cast'. This apparent multiplicity also offers a welcome vocal variety to the audience.

In addition, with the judicious and concomitant use of special lighting effect, sound can be used, not only to introduce other characters, but to suggest an atmosphere or ambience and to make a change of scene. Further, a combination of sight and sound in the audio-visual convention may be used if available, and in conjunction with sound tape sequences as scripted. No matter the permutation of technical effect, and whatever the device used in the production of any solo show, it is always the actor on stage who remains the continuing and essential focus for any audience.

On a subsidiary and auxiliary level, technical effects, allied to the value of a good set, and effective costume, can create the whole world in which the character he portrays exists, but it is the actor, in his own person, and by force of his own imagination, who creates that world into which the audience is induced to enter.

In this instance, the world of 'MR RLS'.

See Appendix B

(Annotated Manuscript of RLS Solo Play Text.)

CHAPTER NINE

FINAL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

No real conclusions are possible in an art form that is still evolving, still adapting itself to its generation, still finding new means to tell its story, but one thing has certainly been proved - that there is now a universal acceptance of the one-person performance in the theatre. It has been seen to have a theatrical completeness in itself, and its growing audience is further testimony to its validity as a dramatic art form for today. The evidence of this survey indicates that the solo mode is now a recognised fact of contemporary theatre.

In the last two decades, the one-man play has gradually wrested theatre away from the director and given it back to the actor, who, in his turn, has passed it on to the audience, for whom it was always intended, and to whom it has always belonged. In the solo fashion today, the audience is the new chorus and the solo actor, the new Thespis. In dealing with their questions in his one-man play, the modern soloists like Sessions and Spalding, give their audiences an opportunity to respond, much as the original Thespis had done with his chorus more than two thousand years before.

Whether singing, or dancing, or playing the piano, or doing rope tricks, or just sitting telling his own story, the solo player has become once again the story-teller of the old sagas dealing intimately with, and directly to, his auditors. We are in the cave again, and the very first story-teller is making his sounds from whatever is to hand in order to create the required images in the audience-mind and transmit a feeling to its soul. The solo is performance ab origine, as it were, but it is its own kind of theatre, however absurd or non-conformist, and it is continuing proof that it has a continuing validity and vitality today. If it is a living art, it must be subject to change and evolution as all living things are in the universe.

To use a theatre metaphor, the development in solo theatre over the last two hundred and fifty years, can now be seen as a play in three acts. Allowing for the fact that in the mono-drama the medieval fool or clown may have conducted the overture, act one really begins with the strolling player. The actual beginners may be said to be Aston, Foote, Stevens and the rest, as illustrated. What they initiated culminated in the theatrical At Homes offered by Mathews the Elder. He can be said to end Act One.

The solo performance, however, had not as yet found its context in the theatrical mainstream. Up till this point it had relied heavily on the individual skills and personal popularity of the players concerned. A kind of baton-change occurs here, between the mono-polylogues of Mathews and the emergence of the performer/recitalist in Victorian times. Thus began the 'second act' of solo theatre. This study has been at pains to emphasise that Charles Dickens was as fine an actor as he was prolific a novelist, as it was this fact which gave added emphasis to his performances as a reader. What he called his 'lectures' were in fact, performances, at least from his point of view. This point was neatly taken up by Emlyn Williams when he came to re-create the readings as theatrical performances nearly one hundred years later. The whole of the second act in the evolution of one-man play belongs to these two names and to these two different kinds of Dickens - the writer who could act and the actor who could write.

Emlyn Williams may be said to have introduced the third act, that is, the phase of the dramatised biography, which became the hallmark of the one-person play throughout the sixties and seventies, and the way the public thinks of the one-man show in the theatre. However, as now can be seen, there is a world of difference between the Mark Twain of Hal Holbrook in the middle fifties and the Mark Twain of William L. McLinn in the middle eighties. The first was an unashamed impersonation of a real figure using all the original material to present an historical character today. The second uses this same character as a pretext for improvisation and open discussion with the

audience, yet both players have the same goal in mind - the amusement and entertainment of an audience. As soloists, they have little in common with the Victorian lecturers, whose prime purpose, until Dickens, was to educate and instruct. Dickens entertained by reading aloud from his own works, using all his actor's skills to bring those works alive in the words of the characters speaking, to an audience who would have known nearly every word from the books and their newspaper serialisations. Emyln Williams did likewise, with the difference that, by performing the readings as Dickens himself did, he recreated an historical event. He also impersonated Dickens, or rather, he re-created the theatrical event that the readings were, and so set the scene for the rise of the biographical dramatic solo.

This category, as has been shown, further divides itself into character impersonation and autobiography, whereby the actor is always himself, and his performance tells his story. This last device might be considered as the 'post-script' - and has become increasingly acceptable to contemporary audiences, due perhaps to their televisual familiarity with the solitary figure or 'talking head', that speaks directly to the viewer from the television screen.

Modern viewers are perhaps more conditioned to accept a solitary figure on the stage, speaking directly to them without the normal conventions of the ensemble production. This is the direct, confrontational approach, freed from the impedimenta of the traditional ensemble directed for production as a company, and directed entirely towards total audience contact. Nothing, not even the performance, should stand between the actor and his audience.

In the artifice of the drama, if it is to be an art it requires the actor's human scale. Living theatre has to be seen to live, not only in the imagination, but in the person of the actor, as he stands before his audience. The actor's human availability is at the core of the theatre act, where he is at once, both servant to, and master of, his audience. This dichotomy is at the heart of the mystery of drama as much as his pretence is the basis of his craft as a science.

We have come, then, at the end of this study, to the point made by Charles Macklin, which was quoted at its very start - that whether acting be science or art, all people judge of it, and merely for the pleasure they receive. The paradox remains. No more need be said.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaires and Index of Players
with
Tabulated Miscellaneous Facts
As Available

NOTE: The index is not intended as a complete or comprehensive list of historical and extant solo players as information on each entrant is variable, but in the case of the present thesis is intended only as an indicator and record of the range and extent of the many kinds of soloist over the past two hundred years.

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Please Complete and Return

Soloist
Title of Show
Character Played
Writer
Director
Designer
Company
First Performance
Date and Place

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Please Complete and Return

Soloist
Title of Show
Character Played
Writer
Director
Designer
Company
First Performance

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
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DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Please Complete and Return

Soloist
Title of Show
Character Played
Writer
Director
Designer
Company
First Performance



UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

FLORENTINE HOUSE, 53 HILLHEAD STREET, GLASGOW, G12 8QE TELEPHONE 041-339 8855
041-334 6831

My dear fellow player,

As a professional actor for thirty years and a solo player for the last eighteen, I am now working on a thesis for the University of Glasgow, based on a 'Study of Solo Theatre' for the degree of Master of Literature.

I am very aware of your own special status in this field, and would beg the favour of your attention, or that of your representative to the enclosed questionnaire, in the hope that you will complete it as far as possible, and return it to me at my home as soon as it is convenient.

As you will see, it deals entirely with 'facts relating to the one man show in the theatre', and it is my intention, when all the papers are returned from all the artists surveyed, to compile statistics relating to the genre of the solo play, and in so doing, record a catalogue of famous solo players and their performances.

I trust you will allow yourself to be so featured by answering the questions put.

I hope to present my thesis in 1985, and have it published thereafter as the first studied work on the phenomenon of the one man show and its players.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

John Cairney.

INFORMATION TOWARDS A STUDY OF THE ONE MAN SHOW IN THE THEATRE

INDEX OF SOLO PERFORMERS WITH COMMENT AND GENERAL STATISTICS:

Name.....

Contact Address.....
.....
.....

Nationality.....

Professional Training.....
.....

Stage Debut: a) Date
b) Production.....
c) Place.....

Conventional Theatre Experience to date - Outline only
.....
.....
.....
.....

Solo Debut: a) Date.....
b) Production.....
c) Place.....

SUBJECT:

FictionalYes/No	Historical.....Yes/No
Contemporary....Yes/No	As Self.....Yes/No
Biographical....Yes/No	Other.....

Did you play as:

a) single character within the solo play?.....
b) several characters within the script?.....

Was it a) original work?.....
b) adaptation?.....
c) compilation?.....

AUTHOR/S:

To what degree were you involved with the author in the actual writing?

.....
.....
.....

Did you commission the work?.....

Was the script especially written for you, or were you selected to play
the part by the writer or director?.....

.....
.....

Has the work been published?.....

Has the work been translated into other languages?.....

If so, please give details?.....

.....
.....

DIRECTOR/S:

To what extent were you involved with the director in realising the production?

.....
.....
.....
.....

DESIGN:

To what extent were you involved with the general design concept
including Setting, Costume, Properties, Lighting?.....

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

PUBLICITY:

Type of publicity used: Press Ads/ Posters/ Fliers/ Subscription Notices
Any particular selling theme?

.....
.....
.....

MUSIC:

Title(s).....
.....
.....

Was the original music composed or published music?.....
.....
.....

Name of composer/arranger?.....

Other musical or tape effects used?.....
.....
.....

Production Company or original presenting body?.....
.....

Address.....
.....

Agent or Representative.....
Address.....
.....

Type of Venue Played including Theatre, Club, Hall, Theatre Club, Private
Function, Hotel, Restaurant, Other.....
.....
.....

Number of performances to date.....

Tours: National.....
International.....
Other.....

Other solo subject played.....
.....
.....

Other solo subjects planned.....
.....

What were your reasons for going solo as a performer?

.....
.....
.....
.....

What effect did this have on your professional career?

.....
.....
.....
.....

General Comments.....

Please complete below:

I agree to the use of any comments given above as part of a University thesis or a future publication on the subject of the theatrical one man show.

Signed

Date

NOTE: It would also be of great help in this survey if you were able to include a programme of your show, a portrait photo or production still, or any relevant publicity material. Thank you sincerely for your co-operation.



UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

FLORENTINE HOUSE, 53 HILLHEAD STREET, GLASGOW, G12 8QE TELEPHONE 041-339 8855
041-334 6831

For the favour of publication

Dear Sir,

As a professional actor for thirty years and a solo player for the last eighteen, I am now working on a thesis for the University of Glasgow, based on a 'Study of Solo Theatre' for the degree of Master of Literature.

This will deal entirely with facts relating to the one man show in the theatre, and it is my intention to gather all information possible, so as to compile statistics relating to the genre of the solo play and make a record of famous solo players and their performances.

I hope to present my thesis in 1985 and have it published thereafter as the first studied work on the phenomenon of the one man show and its players.

If any of these players or their representatives would be kind enough to get in touch with me at my home address, as above, I would be glad to absorb their contributions in the completed dissertation, or that of any of your readers who might have something to say about the one man show, or share their memories of notable solo performances.

Thanking you and your readers in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

John Cairney.

APPENDIX A

A CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX OF SOLO PERFORMERS

(Alphabetical Order Within Period)

HISTORICAL (18th century):

Anthony Aston (Circa 1682-1750)

English

Stroller and adventurer, he was also in a hectic life, lawyer, poet, playwright, buccaneer, soldier, sailor, exciseman and publican. Played fairs as a mountebank and in the first four decades of the 18th century was an actor/manager in London, but is known best for his 'Medley' performances from which he derived the soubriquet Matt Medley.

Jack Bannister (1760-1836)

English

Comedy actor - 'Bannister's Budget' - Drury Lane (1807). A tour de force of character and personality.

John Collins

English

Monologist - 'Collin's Brush for Rubbing Off Care!' 'Lecture On Heads', Liverpool, c.1770.

Charles Dibdin (1745-1814)

English

Actor / Singer / Songwriter in his own one-man 'table entertainments' at 'Sans Souci', London - 1788-'93. An all-round showman, he conducted his 'performances' from the piano. Went into circus.

Samuel Foote (1720-77)

English

Actor/Writer - 'The English Aristophanes'. Presented his 'Diversions of A Morning' at the Haymarket in 1747. To evade the Licensing Act, admittance was by invitation-card only.

Charles Lee Lewes (1740-1803)

English

'Lecture On Heads', London, 1774

Charles Mathews (1776-1835)

English

The founding father of the theatrical one-man show.

Actor / Impressionist / Singer / Ventriloquist - influenced by Bannister. 'The Mail Coach Adventure' as solo performance - Hull - 1808. Coined the term 'mono-polylogue' for his one-man 'At Home' first presented at Brighton in 1817 and brought to London in the following year to be presented by S.J. Arnold at the English Opera House. Format a device to escape the new Licensing Laws. Played a soloist for the rest of his career, including several tours of America. Was the comedian of the age. His son, Charles Mathews, the Younger, followed him in 'Mr and Mrs Mathews At Home', which was presented with his wife, but with nothing like the success of the Elder.

Miss Scott

English

Original solo entertainments at the 'Sans Pareil', London, 1806.

Ned Shuter (1728-1776)

English

'Lecture On Heads', Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, 1764

George Alexander Stevens (1710-84)

English

Actor / Song-writer / Playwright - 'The Lecture Upon Heads'. Little Theatre, Haymarket, London - 1764. Extensive tours in Britain and Ireland - also Canada and America. The first real solo tour de force. Much copied by other actors of the time.

The Early Victorians (1832-1870)

Charles Dickens (1812-70)

English

Journalist / Novelist and Amateur Actor, he enjoyed a great vogue as a Recitalist in his 'Lectures', which were dramatised readings of his own works in public halls and theatres around Britain, Ireland and America from 1857 until the year of his death.

Fanny Kelly (1790-1882)

Scottish

Actress and singer, began as a child at Drury Lane with her uncle, the singer Michael Kelly, 1797. Step-sister to Anne 'Nancy' Jackson, wife of Charles Mathews. 1807 - Provincial theatres. 1810, Drury Lane with John Kemble. Remained for 32 years. 1816, illegitimate daughter in Edinburgh. 1819, proposal of marriage from Charles Lamb. Declined, never married. 1825, Lamb's 'Essay on Barbara S' based on Fanny Kelly. On retirement in 1832, founded school for 'female candidates' at the Strand Theatre. Gave a series of one-woman shows as 'Mrs Parthian'. Built the Royalty Theatre in Dean St Soho with £16,000 life savings. Theatre lost to financiers. Took private pupils but died destitute in Fulham.

Fanny Kemble (1809-93)

English

Actress daughter of famous theatrical family. Tours of Shakespearian Readings from 1857-68 in America then retired to London.

Albert Smith (1816-'60)

English

Journalist/Novelist and Lecturer of enormous popularity in his time. Travelogue entertainments with painted scenery by Beverley at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly - 'The Overland Mail'(1850) concerning a journey to India, and 'The Ascent of Mont Blanc'(1852) which ran for 6 years.

Late Victorians (1870-1900)

Sir Squire Bancroft (1841-1926)

English

Actor / Manager and Dickens Reader.

Albert Chevalier (1861-1923)

English

Actor / Singer / Comedian / Author / Playwright performed solo evenings after the manner of Mathews the Elder.

Charlotte Cushman (1816-76)

American

Actress and Shakespearian Recitalist for Redpath Lecture Circuit 1871/75. Club founded in her honour in Philadelphia 1907.

Dan Leno (1860-1904)

English

Clog-dancer, Pantomime Dame and Solo Comedian

Richard Mansfield (1854 - 1907)

American

Actor and monologist

Anna Cora Mowatt (1819-70)

American

Actress and playwright ('Fashion' - 1845). Platform reader and writer. 'Autobiography' (1884)

William McGonagall (1830-1902)

Scottish

Poet and Recitalist in Dundee.

Helen Potter

American

Reciter in costume on Chautauqua Circuit, 1870. Specialised in Shakespearian excerpts.

Leland Powers

American

Mono-actor. Solo playreadings, eg. 'The Rivals'. Chautauqua Circuit, (1889-1898). Founded Acting School in Boston

Ellen Terry (1847-1928)

English

Actress in solo Shakesperian readings and excerpts from famous roles, anticipating her famous descendant, Sir John Gielgud.

The Edwardians (1900-1914)

William Sterling Battis

English

The Dickens Man. 'The Christmas Carol' as told by Scrooge.
U.S.Tours.

Benjamin Chaplin

As Abraham Lincoln in a four scene monologue, New York, 1906.

Robert McLean Cumnock

American

Elocutionist and reader of Dickens and Scotch Literature.
Founded School of Oratory

Beatrice Herford (1868-1952)

English

English actress and society entertainer - Monologist - Salle
Erard, London 1895. Association Hall, Boston, USA 1896.
Waldorf Hotel, 1897. Comedienne in vaudeville and studied
eccentric. Built 'Smallest Theatre in the World', Wayland, USA,
- 1904 Founded Vokes Players.

Taylor Holmes

American

Monologist and Character Impersonator.

Sydney W. Landon

American

Impersonator of authors reading their own works.

Tom Terris

English

Platform recitalist and monologist - USA c1910/15 before
becoming director of silent films in California.

Bransby Williams (1870-1961)

English

Actor/Mimic/Impressionist/ in music halls since 1896. Solo
dramatization of Dickens' 'Tale of Two Cities' in 1898, 'David
Copperfield' in 1899 and 'The Pickwick Papers' in 1900. Known
throughout Britain as 'The Dickens Man'. Command Performance
before King Edward VII in 1903. Various one-man shows from 1918
- 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', 'Vicar of Wakefield', 'The Passing Show,
'Bransby Snaps', 'The Seven Ages of Man' etc. Several world
tours including Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand and South
Africa. Ended career as monologist in Variety bills and as a
story-teller on television.

Inter-Bellum (1914-1945)

Noel Coward (1891-1973)

English

Actor / Playwright / Songwriter / Author / Director / Composer. One Man show in South Africa at the invitation of General Smuts in 1944. Raised £20,000 for Mrs Smuts' Comfort Fund. Norman Hackforth at the piano. Repeated this show as 'Noel Coward At Home' for theatrical garden party and at Cafe de Paris, 1951. Accompanied himself for Las Vegas, 1955.

Ruth Draper (1884-1956)

American

Character actress in a series of non-linked sketches in which she plays the central character in 'dialogue' with other unseen personae in the action. An element of improvisation possible. First performance in London - 1920 - and final performance, New York, in 1956. Occasionally assisted by son, Paul Draper, but strictly speaking, she was the first great solo diseuse.

Joyce Grenfell (1910-'79)

English

Diseuse/Monologist and singer with strong satirical element. Gained great fame as a comedy actress in films. First appeared as a soloist at the Little Theatre, London, in 1939, and her final season in her own show was at the Bijou Theatre, New York, in 'Joyce Grenfell Requests the Pleasure...' in 1955.

Cissie Loftus (1876-1943)

Scottish

Marie Cecilia, Glasgow-born mimic, singer and composer. Oxford Music Hall, London 1893. American vaudeville 1894/1900. Worked with Herford 1901. Concert Recital - Henry Miller Theatre, New York, 1924. 'Impressions and Impersonations' Chicago, 1932. 'An Evening With Cecilia Loftus' - Broadway, 1938.

Bernard Miles

English

Monologist - Players' Theatre, London 1939c.

Dorothy Sands(1893-1980)

American

Studied at Harvard '47' Workshop under George Pierce Baker 1915. Attended Curry School of Expression. Actress in stock companies. Developed solo techniques as mimic in 'The Follies'. Studied history of acting to create 'Styles in Acting' as lecture/recital 1932. 'Our Stage and Stars' as Solo Show 1933. 'Stars of Today and Yesterday' 1939. 'Tricks of the Acting Trade' 1940. 'American Theatre Highlights' 1949. Taught acting styles and history of acting at the American Theatre Wing. Antoinette Perry Award 1959 for services to Drama Teaching

Cornelia Otis Skinner (1901-79)

American

Daughter of famous actor-father. Trained by Jacques Cousteau. Toured her native America in her own sketches. One-Woman Show 1928. Monologue-dramas based on historical figures.(1931/4) Fictional monologues - 'Mansion on the Hudson'(1935) 'Edna, his wife' by Margaret Ayer Barnes(1937) 'Paris 90' - solo drama in 3 acts (1952) On Speakers' Lecture Circuit from 1956.

Post-War (1945-59)

John Stuart Anderson

English

Actor and Compiler - 'The Living Word' - Edinburgh Festival and subsequent tours. Whole career in One-man-shows.

Sybil Atwell

Scottish

'An Evening with R.L.Stevenson'- Edinburgh Festival 1957

Brian D. Barnes

English

Series of Solo Performances since 'Boy With A Cart', Berlin - 1958. Repertoire of 15 Solo programmes such as Wilde, Byron, Pepys, etc. and One Man 'Under Milk Wood' Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1966. A full-time solo performer. Extensive tours for the British Council around the world to date.

Maurice Chevalier (1888-1973)

French

Actor/ Singer and Revue Artist. 'An Evening With....'. Dallas State Fair - 1950 and world tour in 1951-'52.

Alison Fiske

English

At the Everyman, Liverpool

Rosalind Fuller

English

In 'Subject To Love' Edinburgh Festival, 1958/59.

Sir John Gielgud

English

'The Ages of Man'. Compiled by George Rylands. Arts Council, London, 1957. Edinburgh Festival. Also Broadway and British Council tours worldwide.

Hal Holbrook

American

As Mark Twain. English class exercise at Dennison University, Ohio, 1951. 'An Encounter with an Interviewer' by Mark Twain, 1952. Solo at State Teachers' Training College', Pennsylvania, 1954, presented by James B Pond. 'Mark Twain in Cabaret', Purple Onion, Greenwich Village, 1954. 'An Evening with Mark Twain', Holyoke Playhouse, Mass., 1957. 'Mark Twain Tonight', produced by John Lotas in association with Bunker Jenkins, 41st Street Theatre, New York 1959 National tours/TV/LP Edinburgh Festival 1960. Broadway season 1966. Tony Award Winner.

David Kossoff

English

In 'With One Eyebrow Slightly Up', Arts Theatre, London 1956, as 'The Kossoff Storytellings', 'As According to Kossoff' and 'A Funny Kind of Evening' P&O Cruises and Edinburgh Festival, 1981. Also, 'The Late Great Paul' since 1977.

Charles Laughton (1899 - 1962)

English

Bible Readings - Broadway 1952 and US Tour.

Beatrice Lillie

English

Actress / Revue Artist. 'An Evening With...' Toronto - 1952. New York, London. Also Edinburgh Festival, 1960, Howard Goodwin (piano). Directed by Gerard Slevin. Produced by John Philip.

Patrick Magee (d.1982)

Irish

In 'Krapp's Last tape' by Samuel Beckett - Arts Theatre, London, 1959

Elsbeth Douglas Reid(1912-67)

Scottish

Disease - 'One Woman Theatre' - Concert tours, South Africa 1943-46. Continuing tours throughout Britain to clubs and societies. Edinburgh Festivals 1955 -'67. Festival Award for Best Actress instituted in her name in 1967.

Anna Russell

American

Singer/Comedienne and Musical Parodist. Solo satire in song. Re-telling of the great operas with asides and comment. Accompanied by Eugene Rankin. Directed by Gerard Slevin, Edinburgh Festival, 1957. Also, 'Making Fun of the Festival', Edinburgh Festival, 1958.

Emlyn Williams (1905-1987)

Welsh

Actor / Playwright / Author. Dickens Readings - Drury Lane (8 minutes) 'Merely Players' Production 1951 Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Lyric, Hammersmith. Directed by Peter Woodthorpe. Plymouth Theatre, Boston and John Golden Theatre, New York 1952 prior to extensive tours throughout USA and around the world. 'Dylan Thomas Growing Up' - Connaught Theatre, Worthing - 1955, and 'Playboy of the Week-End World' (Saki) Lyric, London. Continued tours with Dickens till 1985.

MODERN

The Early Sixties (1960 - 1964)

Dame Peggy Ashcroft

English

In 'Some Words for Women - and Some Men, and Some Women's Words'
Senate House, London University 1961. Zurich, Basle 1962.

Israel, Greece 1965. Oslo 1978. Recitals for Amnesty
International.

Brenda Bruce

English

As Winnie in 'Happy Days' by Samuel Becket, Royal Court Theatre,
London 1962. Director George Devine. Designer Jocelyn
Herbert. Stephanie in 'Yardsales' and Betty in 'Whatever
Happened to Betty Lemon'. Written and Directed by Arnold Wesker.
Designer Jacqueline Pilford. Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, 1987.

Bramwell Fletcher (1904-88)

English

As Bernard Shaw in 'The Bernard Shaw Story'. Gate Theatre,
Dublin, 1964 and U.S. Tour 1965.

Stanley Holloway

English

In 'Laughs and Other Events' - Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New
York. 1960.

Barry Humphries

Australian

As Sandy Stone, the Establishment Club London, 1962. Sir Les
Patterson and Dame Edna Everage' Melbourne (1972) Sydney (1974)
Globe Theatre, London (1976), Piccadilly Theatre (1978) and
Albert Hall, London (1986). Also 'Back With A Vengeance' Strand
Theatre, 1987 and Playhouse, Edinburgh, 1988. Also TV series.

Micheal Macliammoir (1899-1978)

Irish

Actor / Author / Novelist / Scene-painter / Director / Manager.
Oscar Wilde in 'The Importance of Being Oscar', written and
designed by Hilton Edwards, Directed by Peter Ashmore. Script
edited by Emlyn Williams. Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1960. Also in
London and New York. Also as W.B.Yeats in 'I Must Be Talking To
My Friends' in Dublin, London and USA (1966).

Bruce Mason(1920-82)

New Zealander

Actor / Playwright / Critic / Author / Pianist.

'End of the Golden Weather', 1960 and '63 Edinburgh Festivals.
'Counsels of the Wood' - 1965. 'The Waters of Silence' - 1967
(in English and French), combined with 'To Russia With Love' to
make 'Men of Soul' 1975. 'Solo Cycle': 'The End of the Golden
Weather', 'The Silence', 'Not Christmas but Guy Fawkes' and
'Courting Blackbirds'. Also issued as four double album discs.
Tours in USA / Canada - 1969. Awarded Doctorate - 'in honoris
causa' -by Victoria University, New Zealand 1977.

Lennox Milne (d.1980)

Scottish

In 'The Heart is Highland' by Robert Kemp. Directed by Victor
Carin. Production by the author - Edinburgh Festival, 1964.

Alex McCrindle

Scottish

'Geoffrey' by Stanley Eveling, Pool Theatre, Edinburgh.
Directed by Phil Emmanuel - 1962.

Jack McGowran (d.1973)

Irish

'Beginning To End' by Samuel Beckett.

Nel Oothuit

Dutch

Disease - Solo version of 'St Joan' at Pitlochry Festival 1960.
Also solo version of Brecht's 'Caucasian Chalk Circle.'

Peter O'Toole

Irish

Haydn in 'My Pleasures in London' - Festival Hall (1963)

The Speaker in 'Judgement' by Barry Collins as experimental
reading at Bristol Old Vic - January 1974.

Dorothy Stickney

American

Edna St Vincent Millay in 'A Lovely Light' - 1960.

The Late Sixties (1965 - 1969)

Larry Adler

American

Musician/Raconteur. As himself in 'One Man's Show', directed by George Mully. Edinburgh Festival, 1965.

Max Adrian (d.1973)

Irish

Diseur/Actor as George Bernard Shaw in 'An Evening with G.B.S.' by Michael Voysey, directed by Ronald Hayman - Edinburgh Festival, 1966. Transferred to Criterion Theatre, London as 'By George'. Production later performed as 'My Astonishing Self'.

Steven Berkoff

English

Reader - 'The Tell-Tale Heart' by Edgar A. Poe (1983)

Richard Blake

American

As Abraham Lincoln in School Assembly and University circuits (1967-81). Promotions for Lincoln Insurance Company.

John Cairney

Scottish

Actor / Director / Playwright / Author / Lecturer

Robert Burns in 'There Was A Man' by Tom Wright Directed by Gerard Slevin. Music by Frank Spedding. Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 1965, and subsequent tours in Britain, Ireland, Canada, USA, Australasia, Russia and Far East. Arts Theatre, London 1969. 'McGonagall' at Edinburgh Festival, 1971, 'Mr RLS' at Edinburgh Festival, 1974, 'At Your Service' - Calgary, 1975 and 'All My Own Work - An Evening With...' for Arts Council, British Council and P&O Cruises until 1985. 'A Robert Burns Experience' 1986, for Shanter Productions, Glasgow. Also, 'A Conversation With Cairney' Crawford Theatre, Glasgow and Scottish tour, 1987.

Author - 'The Man Who played Robert Burns' (1987)

and 'East End to West End' (1988)

Victor Carin (1932-1982)

Scottish

As Robert Burns in 'There was a Man' by Tom Wright. Directed by Gerard Slevin for Scottish tour (1968)

Nancy Cole

American

In 'Gertrude Stein's Gertrude Stein' in Paris, 1966 and USA, 1967. The Edinburgh Festivals of 1968 to 1985. Also 'Ladiespeak' co-written with F.Scott Taylor, 1978/'79, and 'With Love, John Lennon' co-written with Stewart Vaughan 1984/'85.

Maria Corven

American

As Karen Blixen in 'Out of Africa' - a monologue or dramatic recital. Edinburgh Festival 1968 and Dublin Festival 1969.

Brian Cox

Scottish

Robert Burns in 'There Was A Man' by Tom Wright. Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1966.

Roy Dotrice

English

As John Aubrey in 'Brief Lives' Compiled and Directed by Patrick Garland from sketch, Centennial Gala, Stratford-on-Avon (1964), Hampstead Theatre Club (1967), Mayfair Theatre, London and New York. Featured in the Guinness Book of Records as the most performed solo show - 3,000 performances as John Aubrey. Also solo as Abraham Lincoln, (in New York and American tours) directed by Peter Coe for producer David Suskind 1979 till 1981.

Tony Drake

English

As Shakespeare in 'Exits and Entrances' Edinburgh Festival 1965

Hubert Gregg

English

In 'Beating About Shakespeare'

Dorothy Rose Gribble

Scottish

In 'A Pride of Writers', for Plantagenet Productions at the Edinburgh Festivals 1967-1969 Readings from various authors.

Cliff Hanley

Scottish

Journalist / Author / Scriptwriter / Lyricist. As himself - Close Theatre, Glasgow, 1967.

Russell Hunter

Scottish

As 'Cocky' by Jack Ronder Directed by Antony Kearey for Bonaly Productions, Edinburgh Festival 1969 and Arts Theatre, London, 1970 produced by Victor Spinetti. Also 'Jock' - A Solo Tatoo by W. Gordon Smith for Cacciatore Fabro Productions (1972) at the Clyde Fair and Edinburgh Festivals in 1972 and 1973. Also, at the Edinburgh Festival - 'Xanadu' (1981) 'What A Way To Go' (1983) 'Carnegie's Lantern Lecture' (1985) 'Vincent By Himself' (1986) 'Mr Jock' - a sequel by W. Gordon Smith, (1987). Scottish Ballet Theatre, Glasgow, 1988.

Sally Miles (d 1987)

English

'Love To Kill', Horseshoe Wharf Club - 1966. 'The Ruined Maid' - 1968. Composer / Arranger, Colin Tarn. 'And So To Brecht' - 1970. 'Bed And Sometimes Breakfast' - 1972, and Edinburgh Festival, 1975. 'I Am My Father's Daughter' 1985.

Rose McBain

Scottish

Fanny Burney, adapted by Annie Inglis, Attic Co., Aberdeen (1969), and at Traverse, Edinburgh. Also 'Mary Garden Story'.

Jane Marla Robbins

American

As Fanny Burney in 'Dear Nobody' 1968.

Andy Stewart

Scottish

As Himself. Lyceum Theatre, Dumfries, 1967. Australia/NZ 1987.

Fredd Wayne

American

Benjamin Franklin in 'Go Fly A Kite' - Tambelini's Gate Theatre, San Antonio, Texas, USA 1969.

Margaret Webster

English

Actress / Teacher. 'The Brontes' - A dramatic portrait of Charlotte, Emily and Ann, arranged and adapted by Margaret Webster. Arts Theatre, London. 1964. 'Seven Ages of Shaw' US Tour 1965.

Richard Wordsworth

English

William Wordsworth in 'The Bliss of Solitude' by Richard Wordsworth for tour of Scottish Highlands (1969).

Early Seventies (1970-74)

Dave Allen

Irish

One man show at the Court Theatre, London (1972) Also, season Albery Theatre, London (1986)

Winifred Bannister

Scottish

As Charlotte Bronte on 'Charlotte Bronte and her Scotsmen' - a deduction in drama for Acolade, Scotland, at the Edinburgh Festival 1974.

Michael Burrell

English

As Thomas Gray in 'Gray of Gray's 'Elegy'' at the Edinburgh Festival, 1971. Also Hess in 'Hess'. Directed by Philip Grout. Young Vic Theatre, London, 1978. Shelter West Theatre, New York, 1979, 18th St Playhouse and Entermedia Marquee Theatre.

Richard Carey

English

In 'Royal Circular' or 'Kings, Queens and Concubines', Edinburgh Festival 1972.

Julian Chagrin

English

In 'One Is One' Arts Theatre, London 1970.

Gordon Chater

Australian

Duke of Windsor in 'King Edward' - Sydney (1971). Also, 'The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin' by Steve J. Spears (1976).

Jeremiah Collins

American

As President Kennedy in 'JFK' by Mark Williams. Directed by Walt de Faria (1971).

Shay Duffin

American

Brendan Behan (1973)

Jack Emery

English

In 'A Remnant of Samuel Beckett' Edinburgh Festival 1970, US tour 1971 and Adelaide Festival 1972.

Pat Evison

New Zealander

In 'An Evening with Katherine Mansfield', Downstage Theatre, Wellington, Court Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand. (1973)

Henry Fonda (1905-1982) American
 As 'Clarence Darrow' by David Rintell, directed by John Houseman. Designer, H.R.Poindexter. Producers, Don Gregory and Mike Merrick Chicago, Cleveland, and Helen Hayes Theatre, New York, (1974). London (1975).

John Galyean American
 In 'An Evening With Edgar Allan Poe' (1974). Chappellear Drama Centre, OWU, USA.

David Gooderson English
 William Cowper in 'The Castaway', directed by Paul Hayley. Merton Festival, 1974. Centurian Theatre, Carlisle.

Victor Henry (d.1985) English
 In 'Diary of A Madman' by Gogol at Kennington Oval, London and Cardiff - 1972

Gordon Honey English
 As Gilbert and Sullivan in 'Gilbert and Sullivan a la Carte'. Edinburgh Festival, 1972.

Peter Kelly Scottish
 'I Am A Cabaret' by Archie Hind Close Theatre, Glasgow (1972).

Jeffrey Kisson West Indian
 As Vaslow Nijinsky in 'The Nijinsky Diaries' 1972.

Viveca Lindfors Swedish
 In 'I Am A Woman' by Paul Austin (1972) Seattle, Cleveland, Washington, Theatre of Space, New York. Also, 'Anna' - A Swedish Immigrant' (1982) Founder, Strolling Players USA.

Bill Maynard English
 Comedian/Actor as Charles Dickens in 'A Man For All Occasions' Devised and Compiled by Micheal Darlow and Christine Fox.

Linda Montana American
 In 'Mitchell's Death' - An autobiographical performance. San Francisco (1973).

Callum Mill Scottish
 Actor/Director/Adjudicator.
 As Charles Mackay in 'The Baillie' by Donald Mackenzie
 Directed by Tom Fidelo for Scottish Arts Council Tour (1971).62

Ron Moody English
 'My Altered Ego' in 'Move Along Sideways' written and composed
 by Ron Moody, Westcliff, (1972).

Allan Maclelland Irish
 As George Moore in 'George Moore's Celibate Lives', comprising
 'Wilfrid' and 'Nobbs', also 'More Moore' - The Act Inn, Soho,
 the Bush Theatre, London and the Pool Theatre, Edinburgh, 1973.

Siobhan McKenna Irish
 As Sarah Bernhardt - US Tour and 'Here Are Ladies' - Dublin.

Tony Parkin English
 Edgar Allan Poe at 'The Pindar of Wakefield' (1972). Also 'The
 Tell-Tale Heart' at The New End Theatre, London.

David Ponting Welsh
 'Dylan Thomas, Man and Myth' - Bristol Arts Centre, 1972.
 Edinburgh Festival 1974.

Margaret Rawlings English
 'Empress Eugenie' by Jason Lindsay - Arts, Cambridge (1974)

Jerry Rockwood American
 Edgar Allan Poe in 'A Condition of Shadow' (1973)

Ted Schwartz
 As Lenny Bruce (US Tour)

William Shust American
 As Checkov in 'Anton Checkov's Garden Party' by Elihu Winer for
 Roundabout Theatre Company (1972)

Robert Somerset Irish
 As W.B.Yeats in 'The Foul Rag and Bone Shop'
 Edinburgh Festival 1971.

Frank Speiser American
 In The World of Lenny Bruce (1974)

Huw Thomas

Welsh

'Diary Of A Madman' by Gogol, adapted by Richard Stroud. Close Theatre, Glasgow (1973).

Peter Ustinov

English

As Himself in 'An Audience With Peter Ustinov'.

James Walker

English

As Richard Slader in 'The Dickey Slader Show' by John Wilkie, directed by Andrew Noble, Orchard Theatre Company, 1974.

David Wayne

American

As H.L.Mencken in 'An Unpleasant Evening with ...' by Paul Shyre. (1972)

Margaret Wolfit

English

As 'Octavia Hill - the woman who cared' Edinburgh Festival 1972. Also 'The Mill on the Floss' dramatised from the novel by George Eliot, at the Horseshoe Wharf Club, Puddle Dock for Sally Miles Directed by Powell Jones - Theatre Royal, Lincoln, Cheltenham and Edinburgh Festivals, 1972. Also 'George Eliot - a portrait' and 'Strange Contrasts' in Nairobi and the United States. Fortune Theatre, London - directed by Richard Digby Day - design by Mark Negin - Lighting by David Whitehead for Magstan Productions in arrangement with Paul Gane - February 1985.

Late Seventies (1975-1979)

Susana Alexander

Argentinian

As the voice of the women in South America in 'If You Allow Me To Speak'. Directed by Roberto d'Amico. Edinburgh Festival 1978

Pam Ayres

English

In 'An Evening With...' WRI and rural clubs and P&O Cruises. TV.

Joan Bakewell

English

In 'The Private Brontes'. Edinburgh Festival 1979

John Banas

New Zealand

As Speaker in 'Judgement' by Barry Collins. Directed by Nonnita Rees. Downstage Theatre, Wellington, N.Z. 1977.

Frank Barrie

English

'Macready' - directed by Donald McKechnie, the Northcott Theatre, Exeter, London. Tours (1979) Circle Repertory Theatre, USA (1980)

Richard Basehart

American

As General George Patton in 'Dammit Ike, I Was There!' (1979)

Ann Beigel

American

Isadora Duncan in 'Isadora Lives' by Jerry James (1978)

Colin Blakely (1932-87)

Irish

As Speaker in 'Judgement' by Barry Collins. Directed for National Theatre at ICI by Sir Peter Hall.

Derek Bolt

New Zealand

In 'Scenes from Dickens' and other literary figures. NZ tour.

Peter Boyden

American

Alexander Woollcott in 'Smart Alec' by Howard Teichman (1979), American Place Theatre, New York.

Tony van Bridge

English

G.K.Chesterton - Niagara Festival (1978)

Simon Callow

English

'Juvenalia' by Richard Quick. Directed by Simon Stokes (1977), Bush Theatre, London. 'Melancholy Jacques' (translated Christopher Logue) Edinburgh(1984). Author 'Being An Actor'1984.

Pat Carroll

American

In 'An Evening With Who?' American Dinner Theatre Circuit 1976
Gertrude Stein in 'Gertrude Stein Lives' by Marty Martin
Directed by Milton Moss, produced by Mary Ellyn Devery for
Sea-Ker Inc. State College, Pennsylvania 1979 New York 1980.
Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards.

John Cassady

American

As Lenny Bruce in 'The Gospel Accoring to Lenny, at the
Edinburgh Festival, 1978

Santo Cervello

Canadian

As Hemingway in 'Hemingway'. Also 'Diary of a Madman' by Gogol,
directed by Tom Kerr for Erewhon Theatre of Canada. Toured in
Canada and the United States and Edinburgh Festival, 1975. 'The
Metamorphosis' by Kafka, directed by Ray Logie, Ed. Fest. 1976.

Gianni Colosimo

Italian

In 'Fred, Mein Freund' or Personal Poetics for Teatro Ludico
Libidinale of which he is founder and sole member. Performance
Arts Festival, Bologna, Italy.

Billy Connelly

Scottish

Folk Singer, Guitarist, Comedian, Playwright. Extensive
international tours since 1977. BBCTV Albert Hall, London 1987,
and Australasian tour, 1987.

Richard Crane

English

As 'Gogol' by Dostoievsky. Directed by Faynia Williams at the
Brighton and Edinburgh Festivals (1978)

Quentin Crisp

English

As himself in 'A Cure for Freedom', Edinburgh Festivals,
1976/79.

Norma Jean Deak

American

In 'Passe Simple' (1976) and 'Travel Log' (1977)

Thom Delaney

Irish

'The Importance of Being Irish' - the Irish Club, London (1979)

Margaret Dent

Scottish

Musical biography. 'Our Marie' (Lloyd), 'Shakespeare's Wonderful Women', 'The Sweet Songs of Sophie Rogovsky', 'Fanny' (Brice), 'Last of the Redhot Mommas' (Sophie Tucker).
Edinburgh Festivals 1975 - 1983.

Donal Donnelly

Irish

As G.B. Shaw in 'My Astonishing Self' by Michael Voysey at Bromley Rep (1977) Niagara Festival (1979) New York and University Tour USA.

Cathy Downes

New Zealander

Katherine Mansfield in 'The Case of Katherine Mansfield' - 'adapted, using only the author's words'. Utrecht, Holland, (1978) and Edinburgh Festival (1979). Adelaide, Perth and Auckland Festivals. Pram Factory, Melbourne, and Nimrod Theatre, Sydney (1980) and N.Z. tour. Music - Michael Houston. NZ Mansfield Centenary Tour (1988) Sponsor Electricorp Marketing

Ethel Eichelberger

American

As 'Belle - A One-Man Show', Greenwich Village (1979)

Jack Elliott

In 'The Man Himself' by Alan Drury, National Theatre, 1975, and Edinburgh Festival, 1983

Karen Fernald

English

As Fanny Burney in 'Of Kings and Sealing Wax' Directed by David Rush for Blythe Productions, the Edinburgh Festival 1978 and BBC Also 'The Famous Fanny Burney' - Edinburgh Festival (1982).

Tom Fleming

Scottish

'Van Gogh' in 'Vincent' - The Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh (1978). William Soutar - Poet and 'A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle', Lyceum Studio (1978) and Edinburgh Festival.

Peter Glaze

English

In 'A Word in Your Ear' at the Edinburgh Festival 1978.

Julian Glover

Scottish

Robert Graves (1975). Also 'Beowulf' - A reading. Bristol Old Vic Studio (1981) Produced by Peter Wilson, UK and USA tours.

Mike Goddard

English

Comedian. Tony Hancock in 'Hancock' - New End Theatre (1976)

Cy Grant

Jamaican

In 'Return to my Native Land' by John Berger, Edinburgh Festival 1978.

Spalding Gray

American

In original autobiographical monologues as oral history. 'Sex and Death to the Age of 14' - Performing Garage, New York, 1979. 'Retrospective' (10 Monologues) 1982. 'Swimming to Cambodia' - Wooster Group, Los Angeles and Edinburgh Festival 1985. 'Terrors of Pleasure' - Mitzi E Newhouse Theatre, Lincoln Center, New York, 1986. 'Swimming to Cambodia' monologues published in book form 1986.

Helen Handley

American

In 'Lie Down and I'll Put a Little Something Under Your Feet' (Texas story-telling) Edinburgh Festival 1978.

Jonathan Hardy

New Zealand

'Diary of a Madman' by Gogol - Melbourne Theatre Company, Australia.

Chris Harris

English

Will Kemp in 'Kemp's Last Jig' - An Elizabethan Road Show (1977). Directed by John David. Designed by Louise Belson. Royal Command Performance - Badminton(1979). World Tour including Hong Kong, Adelaide, Sidney and Auckland Festivals and Shakespeare Festival, Dallas, Texas. Also Punch and Judy in 'That's the Way to Do It.' A full-time solo player.

Julie Harris

American

Emily Dickinson in 'The Belle of Amherst' by William Luce Directed by Charles Nelson Reilly.(1976). Moore Egyptian Theatre, Seattle, Washington. Produced by Don Gregory and Mike Merrick. Tony Award Winner. IBM Television Special. Phoenix Theatre, London and Edinburgh Festival. Also 'Currer Bell' (Charlotte Bronte) - (1984)

Eileen Heckart American
'Eleanor' (Roosevelt) by Arlene Stadd. Produced by James Whitmore, Greensville, North Carolina. Directed by Michael Kahn.

Harold Herbstman American
As Theodore Hertzl in 'Hertzl!' by Dore Schary and Amos Elon (1975)

Linda Heynes South African
In 'The Security Police' Edinburgh Festival 1979

Celeste Holm American
Janet Flanner in 'Paris Was Yesterday' by Paul Shyre. (1979)

Elric Hooper New Zealander
As Cole Porter/ George Gershwin Downstage Wellington 1975.

James Earl Jones American
Paul Robeson, by Philip Hayes Dean. (1978) Directed by Lloyd Richards. Designer, Noel Taylor. Producer, Don Gregory. Also as Nelson Mandela (TV) 1979.

Maggie Jordan Scottish
in 'Guinivere' by Pam Gems for the Scottish Woman's Company, Edinburgh Festival, 1976.

Miriam Karlin English
As 'Lisolette' by Frederick Bradman, based on 'The Letters of Lisolette' by Maria Kroll, directed by Peter Watson. Designer, Kit Surrey, at the Edinburgh Festival of 1975.

Roger Kemp English
Winston Churchill

David Kwait American
As John Barrymore in 'Confessions of an Actor' or 'Prelude to the Last Entrance', Bristol Revunions, Edinburgh Festival, 1977

Lloyd Lamble English
In 'Make Way for Yesterday' and 'Wendelebury Day' for Brantra Ltd. The Edinburgh Festival, 1976

Robert Lansing

American

As John L. Lewis in 'Disciple of Discontent' by James A. Brown,
Presented by the United Labor Agency (1977)

Leslie Lawton

English

'My Turn', directed by Derek Killeen at Liverpool Playhouse,
(1977)

Roger Leach

Australian

'The Colonial Boy' (Australian) at the King's Head, Islington.

Lily Lessing

American

As Elene Schweitzer in 'I Am His Wife'.

Patricia Leventon

Irish

As Molly Bloom in the monologue from 'Ulysses' by James Joyce
Night thoughts of a Dublin woman (1904.) Edinburgh Festival 1978

Elliot Levine

American

In 'From Shalom ~~Ala~~icham With Love'.

Jimmy Logan

Scottish

Comedian. Harry Lauder in 'Lauder' - Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh,
(1976). Orchestrations - Richard Holmes. Produced by Cameron
Mackintosh. Also Edinburgh Festival, 1986 and St Andrews
Festival and Scottish Tour for Byre Theatre and Logan Theatres.
Pavilion Theatre, Glasgow Mayfest 1987.

Edith Macarthur

Queen Mary in 'Mary of Scotland' by W.Gordon Smith. Directed by
Ann Stutfield. Perth Festival 1978 Edinburgh Festival 1979.

Leonard Maguire

Scottish

In 'An Evening of Scottish Horrors', (Part One - The Body, Part
Two - The Soul) Lyceum Studio Edinburgh Festival, (1975). 'The
Wasting of Dunbar', Edinburgh Festival, 1976. 'The Navigator of
the Seventh Circle' Edinburgh Festival 1977. Fringe First 76/77.

Maxim Mazumber

Canadian

'Lord Alfred Douglas Remembered', Stratford, Canada, 1975.
Directed by William Hutt, designed by Gayle Tribick, Edinburgh
Festival, 1976. 'Runbeand' 1977. 'Dance For Gods' - Montreal,
1978.

Michael Del Medico

American

As Maxim Gorky in 'Maxim Gorky - A Portrait' written and directed by Paul Shyre (1975)

Warren Mitchell

English

As Alf Garnett in 'The Thoughts of Chairman Alf' by Johnny Speight at Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London. (1975) and Criterion Theatre, London, 1976.

William Mooney

American

As e.e.cummings in 'e.e. as is, or damn everything but the circus.' (1975)

Elizabeth Morgan

English

In 'Beloved Emma' (Hamilton) at the National Theatre, London Edinburgh Festival and US tour 1979

Pauline Myers

American

In 'Mama' and 'The World of My America', Edinburgh Festival 1979 and 1981.

Alec McCowen

English

As himself in 'St Mark's Gospel' - Mermaid, London (1978). As 'Kipling' - Mermaid. Also Broadway. Directed by Patrick Garland. Author of 'Young Gemini' and 'Double Bill'.

Ian McKellen

English

'Acting Shakespeare' at Edinburgh Festival (1976). And in New York by Arthur Cantor and Bonnie Schwartz. Also, 'Words, Words, Words...' Cleveland Playhouse, Ohio. 1987. Playhouse Theatre, London, in aid of The London Lighthouse AIDS Hospice 1987.

William L. McLinn

American

'Mark Twain Himself' - The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope'. Berkeley University, California, November 1975. And on college circuit till the Smithsonian Institution and the Edinburgh Festival 1983, with 'Mark Twain Up In Arms' and 'Mark Twain - smitten with Presidential Madness'. Also 'Mark Twain - USA' at the Edinburgh Festival 1986 on 'Issues of the Eighties'.

Leonard Nimoy American
As Theo van Gogh in 'Vincent' - Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis and US Tour (1979)

Michael Orphelin French
As St Francis in 'Poor Man, Rich Man', Edinburgh Festival (1979)

Alannah O'Sullivan New Zealander
'As Dorothy Parker Once Said...' directed by Elric Hooper, Downstage Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand. (1975) Reworked as 'Dorothy Parker and Friend', written and directed by John Cairney (1980). British and North American tours, (1981-83) and P&O Cruises (1984). With John Cairney in 'At Homes' 1986.

Edith Owen American
As Abigail Adams in 'The Second First Lady' - Cleveland Playhouse, (1975)

Gareth Owen Welsh
In 'The Confessions' of Jon-Jak Crusoe for the Ad Hoc Theatre Company at Birmingham and at the Edinburgh Festival, 1977/1978.

Stuart Patterson
As 'The Dominie' (The Scottish teacher from John Knox till today) Dalkeith Arts Guild. Edinburgh Festival 1979.

Barbara Perry American
'Passionate Ladies' - directed by Edmund Balin. Theatre East, Los Angeles (1979). Also Montreal and New York.

Eric Peterson Canadian
'Billy Bishop Goes to War', Toronto, 1979.

Conrad Pomerleau American
As Edgar Allan Poe in 'Poe in Person' for Pary Productions (1979)

C.R.Portz American
'Jack London: The Man from Eden's Grove' (1979)

Vincent Price American
As Oscar Wilde in 'Diversions and Delights' by John Gay (1978) U.S. and Australasian Tours.

Stephanie Rich American
As Sarah Bernhardt (1976)

Maurice Roeves

Scottish

Robert Burns in 'There Was A Man' by Tom Wright. Directed by Gerard Slevin, Edinburgh Festival, Demarco Gallery (1977).

Kenneth Robinson

English

In 'The Worst of Kenneth Robinson' - Cheap laughs at the Environment with some music at the piano. Platform Performance, National Theatre 1978. Westminster Theatre 1979.

John Rotham

American

'The Impossible H.L.Mencken' (1979). Also performed by the author, Paul Shyre, as 'Blasts and Bravos - An Evening with H.L.Mencken'.

Michael Rothwell

English

Lewis Carroll in 'Crocodile Tears' by David Horlock at New Vic, Bristol (1976)

Stuart Sherman

American

In 'Singular Spectacles' and 'Portrait of a City'.

Paul Shyre

American

As H.L.Mencken in 'Blasts and Bravos' by Paul Shyre.

Noname Smith

American

As the dockside minstrel in 19th Century America
Edinburgh Festival 1979

Henry Stamper

Scottish

As Hugh Macdiarmid (Christopher Grieve) in 'Recollections between the wars', adapted from the autobiography - 'Lucky Poet'. A Fringe First Award, Edinburgh Festival 1977.
Repeated Edinburgh Festival, 1985

Sylvia St Clair

English

In 'The Way to a Man's Heart', The Scottish Woman's Company, the Edinburgh Festival, 1976.

Jill Sumner

English

As 'Satan's Daughter' at the Edinburgh Festival 1979.

Amy Taubin

American

In 'Pimping for Herself' - Anthology Film Archives, New York City (1975) and 'Double Occupancy' - Artists' Space, New York (1976) also: 'The performance which began with a Train Ride on which the Rider realised, but not until the last moment, that she had been seated facing backwards - or, Half of an Unbalanced Situation.' 1977.

Tommy Taylor

American

As Woody Guthrie in 'Child of Dust' (1975) Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Neil Titley

English

As Oscar Wilde in 'Work is the Curse of the Drinking Classes' for Paranoid Productions at the Edinburgh Festival 1979.

Antonio Nodar Tome

Spanish

'Squerzos on a Democratic Requiem' The Edinburgh Festival, 1978.

Robert Vaughn

American

'F.D.R.' by Dore Schary, Seattle, USA. (1978) Producer, Don Gregory with Mike Merrick.

Eliza Ward

English

'Alive and Kicking'. Musical anthology of Brecht's women, devised by John Willet, directed by Max Stafford Clark at the Demarco Gallery, 1978.

Moray Watson

Scottish

Max Beerbohm in 'Max' by Peter Ling. Director John Sorrie. Gardiner Centre, Brighton and Edinburgh Festival 1978.

Fritz Weaver

American

'Lincoln' by Saul Levitt (1976)

Peter Whitbread

English

In 'Exit Burbage' at Theatre Royal, Norwich (1976). And 'Kipling's Kingdom' in association with National Trust.

James Whitmore American
Actor/Director/Producer - As President Truman in 'Give 'em Hell, Harry!' by Sam Gallu (1975). Directed by Peter H. Hunt at the Community Theatre, Hershey, Pennsylvania. Produced by George Spota. (Later played by Ed Nelson). Also, as Theodore Roosevelt in 'Bully' by Jerome Alden (1977) (Director, P.H.Hunt) and Will Rogers in 'Will Rogers - USA' (1979).

Jack Whyte Canadian
As Robert Burns in 'Rantin', Rovin', Robin' - a night with Robert Burns, sponsored by The Calgary Burns Club of Alberta, Canada. (1975) 'A Burns Biography in Song' with commentary. Piano accompaniment by Jo Hanson.

Beryl te Wiata New Zealander
'Mrs Kiwi Arthur' at Mercury Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand (1976)

Faynia Williams English
In 'The Passion Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race,' by Alfred Jarry, Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh Festival, 1976

Richard Williams American
'Byron' (1976)

William Windom American
As James Thurber

Leueen Willoughby American
In 'The Dorothy Parker Papers' (Original music by R.Ouzounian) Edinburgh Festival 1979.

Walter Zerlin English
In 'Running Around Crazy in Clocks'.

CONTEMPORARY

Early Eighties (1980-82)

Paul Alexander

English

As 'Beau Brummell', Edinburgh Festival 1982.

As Jesus Christ in St John's Gospel, Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Jack Aranson

As Dylan Thomas

Brigid Armstrong

New Zealander

Frances Hodgkins by Maurice Shadbolt. Theatre Corporate,
Auckland, New Zealand,

Leo Ayles

American

In 'Speck of the Universe', Edinburgh Festival, 1982. 'The
Rhyoceros', Edinburgh Festival, 1984

Dick Bagwell

English

As Will Kemp in 'Shakespeare's Clown', Edinburgh Festival 1982.

John Bardon

English

As Max Miller in 'Here's A Funny Thing' by R.W.Shakespeare -
Directed by William Gaunt at the Liverpool Playhouse 1980 -
Edinburgh Festival 1981 - Royal Exchange, Manchester - Lyric,
Hammersmith and Fortune Theatre, London for Victor Glynn and
David Porter Ltd in January 1982.

Anna Barry

English

As Ann Hathaway in 'Mistress Mine' for Coquelin Co-productions,
Edinburgh Festival, 1981/1982

Jeremy Beadle

English

'An Evening in Bed With Jeremy Beadle' Edinburgh Festival 1982.

William Karl Blom

American

As Samuel Pepys

Eric Bogosian

American

'Men Inside' from Public Theatre, New York, Edinburgh Festival,
1982 and 'Voices of America' in the Wonderland of Radio,
Edinburgh Festival, 1983. Scripts as Faber Paperback 1988.

Michael Bridger

English

As James Naylor in 'The Second Coming' for Drama Plus, Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Juliet Cadzow

Scottish

In 'Female Parts' (Three one-woman plays: 'A Woman Alone', 'Waking Up' and 'Same Old Story') by Dario Fo and Franca Rame, at the Edinburgh Festival 1982 (after the Tron Theatre Club, Glasgow) ~~then~~ at the Mitchell Theatre for Mayfest, 1983 and 1988. Directed by Morag Fullerton for Borderline Productions.

Peter Cheevers

English

As Mickey in 'Harry Carpenter Never Said It Like It Was' for the Institute Company, Edinburgh Festival, 1981. Also, 'Aftermath', Edinburgh Festival, 1982.

John Clegg

English

As Rudyard Kipling in 'In the Eye of the Sun', Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh Festival, 1981

Andy Colley

English

In 'Krapp's Last Tape' by Samuel Beckett for Exeter University Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1982.

John Cullum

American

As Carl Sandberg. Also as James McNeil Whistler

Neil Cunningham (d 1987)

Scottish

As Dali in 'Hello Dali' by Andrew Dallmeyer, Edinburgh Festival Fringe First Award, 1982 and Edinburgh Festival, 1983.

George Curry

American

As Charles Dickens in 'The World of Charles Dickens' also a one-man 'Great Expectations' in two parts. Adelaide Festival 1982 and Edinburgh Festival 1983. Directed by Donald Smith.

Peter Dennis

English

As A.A.Milne in 'Bother! An hour with Pooh'. Edinburgh Festival, 1982 and 1984

Sir Anthony Dolin

English

Diaghilev in 'Conversations' by Maxim Mazumdar, directed by Wendy Toye. Duke of York's, London.

Paul Dooley

American

As Casey Stengel in 'The Amazin' Casey Stengel' by Shelley Altman and Michael Zettler - American Place Theater, New York (1981)

Jim Dunk

English

As 'Dirty Dick' or 'Richard III' for 'On the Road, Edinburgh Festival.

Charlie Durning

American

As 'Casey Stengel'

Gordon Fleming

English

In 'Soldiers in Love and Death'. Compiled for Fenus Theatre Company. Also, 'A Celebration of Hope' (1982)

Trader Faulkner

Australian

As Federico Lorca in 'Lorca - An Evocation' - Royal Court Theatre, London, 1981. UK Tour and British Council tours in Denmark, Poland and USA.

Peter Florence

Welsh

As Wilfred Owen in 'The Pity of War'- Directed by Norman Florence for Peter Florence Projects - 1982 - Edinburgh Festival, 1982/1983. Also, 'Death in Custody' by John L Hughes - Edinburgh Festival, 1983. and 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Dog' by Dylan Thomas for the Cheltenham Festival 1984 also 'Revolting Rhymes' by Roald Dahl in 1985 and 'War Music' by Christopher Logue, translated from the Iliad of Homer, with choreography by Peter Kyle. Music by Terence Sinclair and Directed by Norman Florence for Projects, Edinburgh Festival, 1986 and national tour, 1987.

Ian Frost

English

As Byron with Carol Rosen (soprano) and Antony Saunders (piano). Edinburgh Festival 1982. Also 'Byron in Hell' by Bill Studdiford, directed by Bosco at the Calton Studios, Fringe First Winner, Edinburgh Festival, 1984.

Lisa Goodman American
 In 'Twirler' by Jane Martin. Directed by Jon Jory.
 Solo Festival, Louisville, Kentucky - 1981.

Philip Guard English
 Whistler in 'I Came Here to be Insulting' by Philip Guard.
 Directed by Denise Hurst, Belgrade, Coventry.

Uta Hagen Swedish
 As Charlotte von Stein by Peter Hacks. Director Peter Berghof
 for Eugene Wolsk (1980)

Ray Henwood Welsh
 Dylan Thomas - Circa Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand. Sydney
 Festival.

Laura Hicks American
 In '15 Minutes' by Jane Martin. Directed by John Jory.
 Solo Festival, Louisville, Kentucky - 1981.

Brian Howard English
 In 'Poor Dear Brian before his suicide in 1958', Edinburgh
 Festival 1981.

Rob Inglis Scottish
 In 'The Lord of the Rings', Edinburgh Festival, 1980, and 'The
 Hobbit' at The Playhouse, Edinburgh Festival, 1981. 'Dr Jekyll
 and Mr Hyde', directed by Deborah Bestwick, Edinburgh Festival,
 1983.

Isabella Jarrett Scottish
 'The Human Voice' by Jean Cocteau. Queen Margaret College,
 Edinburgh. Directed by Alan Dunbar.

Ray Johnson English
 In 'Semi-detached Superstar' (Solo Musical) Edinburgh Festival.

Ian Kearney English
 As 'A.J.Wentworth, BA', by H.F.Ellis. Songs and music by Ward
 Baker for Scott-Wardian Enterprises, Edinburgh Festival.

Scott Keely American
 As Edgar Allan Poe in 'Goodnight Mr Poe'

Edmund Kente

English

As Wilfred Owen in 'All the Arts of Hurting' by Roger Stennet, directed by Michael Gaunt for the Insight-Out Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1981.

Ben Kingsley

English

'Kean' by Robert Fitzsimmons. Directed by Alison Sutcliffe. Harrogate Studio (1981), London and New York (1982)

Jack Klaff

South African

'The 50 Minute Hour' and 'The Survivalist' by Robert Schenken directed by Michael Morriss at the Louisville Festival, 1981. 'Cuddles', and 'Nagging Doubts', Edinburgh Festival, 1982. 'Never Mind' and 'The 50 Minute Hour' and 'The Survivalist' by Robert Schenkan. Directed by Michael Morriss *Tron Theatre Glasgow (1982)* - Glasgow Citizens Theatre (1983). Also, 'Kafka' and 'Letters Alone' Edinburgh Festival, (1985). 'Stand Up' Edinburgh Festival and Tron Theatre, Glasgow 1987.

Tom Kneebone

N.Z./Canadian

As 'T.K' in 'Kabaret', directed by Brian McDonald. Theatre in the Dell, Toronto, Canada. Designed by Mary Kerr - Magenpics Ent. Ltd.

Karen Kuykendal

American

Sarah Bernhardt in 'Farewell Performance' by Marty Martin

Charles Lewsen

Australian

As Robert Fitzroy, Captain of HMS 'Beagle' during Darwin's Voyage of Discovery in 'The Seventh Circle' by Charles Lawson. Also 'How Pleasant to Know Mr Lear', Demarco Gallery. Edinburgh Festival 1981

Kim Licks

English

As Jane Austen in 'Courtship', with music by Abigail T. Synge Perrin. Edinburgh Festival, 1981. As Dorothy Parker in 'Couples' Edinburgh Festival, 1982

Peter Lincoln

Scottish

As Robert Burns in 'There Was A Man' by Tom Wright, directed by Russell Boyce for Act One Productions at Edinburgh Festival, 1982/'83. And 'Talk of the Devil' by Tom Wright, Edinburgh Festival, 1984.

Patti Love

English

As Colette.

Hugh Manning

English

As C.S.Lewis in 'Song of the Lion' by Daniel Pierce, directed by David William for Aldersgate Productions at the Collegiate Theatre, London, Ludlow and Chichester Festivals 1980/81.

Patrick Malahide

English

In 'Judgement' a monologue by Barry Collins, Edinburgh Festival.

Michael J. Mathews

English

Lord Byron in 'A Moderate-Minded Bard' - Archway, Horley.

Jeannine Moore

American

In 'To Be'. Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Jonathan Moore

English

As Thomas Chatterton in 'I Die for None of Them', New London Actors Company, Edinburgh Festival, 1980/'81. Fringe First Award, 1980. Also 'Treatment', Edinburgh Festival, 1982.

Neil Munro

Scottish

As Robert Burns in 'Burns Out of Print' at the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, Canada. Directed by John Wood, designed by Jack Symon with lighting by John Munro. Also at Truck Theatre, Toronto and Canadian tour.

Joseph Mydell

American

As Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906) in 'Lyrics of the Hearthside', Edinburgh Festival.

David McKail

Scottish

James Boswell in 'Bozzy' by Frederick Mohr, directed by John Carnegie at the Playhouse Theatre, Edinburgh Festivals 1981/2/7.

Geraldine Newman

English

In 'Louise Michel' by Donald Mackenzie, Tron Theatre, Glasgow. 1981

Eileen Nicholas

Scottish

'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik' by Hector McMillan - Tron Theatre, Glasgow, 1987. And 'Request *Concert*' by Franz Xavier Kroetz, Edinburgh Festival, 1986. Festival First Award. Donmar Warehouse and Bush Theatre London, 1986 and Tron Theatre, Glasgow, 1987.

Jeremy Nicholas

English

'Three Men In A Boat', Adapted by John David - Directed by Anthony Matheson Edinburgh Festival 1980. Also at Mayfair Theatre, London for Rhombus Productions 1981. British Tour 1982.

Patricia Norcia

American

As Ruth Draper in 'A Cast of Characters'

Elise Ogden

Scottish

'Request Corner' by Franz Xavier Kroetz, directed by Greg Giesekam, Tron Theatre, Glasgow

Bill Paterson

Scottish

'Ella' by Herbert Achternbusch, directed by Tim Albery at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London .

Anne Pitoniak

American

In 'Lamps' by Jane Martin. Directed by John Jory. Solo Festival, Louisville, Kentucky (1981).

Carl Pritner

American

As Martin Luther in 'Apostle of Defiance' by John Kirk. Director Dennis Zacek for Ad Hoc Productions, 1980.

Michael Pultonen

Canadian

As Lew Welch in 'Ring of Bone for 'On The Road', Edinburgh Festival.

Denis Rafter

Irish

'The Remarkable Oscar Wilde' - Edinburgh Festival (1981). And 'O,Shakespeare' - Edinburgh Festival (1984). Amateur. (Manages Aer Lingus Office, Madrid, Spain.)

Douglas Rain.

Canadian

As John Aubrey in 'Brief Lives' by Patrick Garland. Stratford-on-Avon, Ontario, Canada.

Eugenia Rawls American
As Tallulah Bankhead. Also as Fanny Kemble.

Pauline Rees American
In 'The Dorothy Parker Show', Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Tony Robinson English
in 'The Third Ham' by Bill Stair, Edinburgh Festival.

Raymond Ross Scottish
'The English Gentleman' , adapted from the book by Douglas Sutherland. Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Alan Rothwell English
As 'The Prophet' by Kahlil Gibran, Edinburgh Festival.

Derek Brian Scott English
In '"The Wreck of the Hesperus" and other Victorian Disasters' - a solo musical revue. Edinburgh Festival.

John Sessions Scottish
Toured solo in Canada 1981. 'Off Both Cuffs' by John Sessions, MA, PhD, (On Works of John Cowper Powys) Edinburgh Festival, 1982. 'Farting Around' by John Sessions, Edinburgh Festival, 1983. 'Lives of the Great Composers'. 'Salute to Dr Johnson' and 'At the Eleventh Hour' Donmar Playhouse, London' 1985. 'My Name' 1986 (Also as solo film) Life of Napoleon' Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Designed by Alexandra Byrne Renaissance Theatre Company at Riverside Studios and Alberty Theatre 1987.

John Shedden Scottish
In 'A Lecture on the Harmfulness of Tobacco' by Anton Checkov at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow, 1981.

Marlene Sidaway English
In 'Alice and Other Reflections' by Sheila Yeger, for Wendy house Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festivals, 1981 and 1984.

Ray Speakman English
As Thomas Betterton in 'Memoirs of a Sad Dog', Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Lewis J. Stadlin American
As Groucho Marx in 'Groucho' US Tour (1981)

Pamela Stephenson

New Zealander

In 'Small but perfectly formed', directed by Joe McGrath, Edinburgh Festival 1980 and 1985.

Arlene Stern

American

In 'Final Curtain', Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Carolyn Stein Stillman

American

One Woman Theatre (Chicago, USA). In 'Special People' (Maria Callas, Kiri Te Kanawa etc). Womens Lecture Circuit, USA. Also, 'Change Lobsters and Dance'. Drama in book review style - 1985 'Pass the Apple Please.' (The comic evolution of woman) 1986.

Michael Tolaydo

American

St Mark's Gospel, directed by Alec McCowen, US Tour.

James Walker

English

As Dicky Slader, in 'Tinker' by John Wilkie. U.K. Tour.

Marius Weyers

South African

South Africa's premier actor in 'Report to the Academy' by Franz Kafka for M and M Productions, Edinburgh Festival.

Anna Welsh

Scottish

As Queen Victoria in 'Yr Loving Mama VR' - Adapted and Directed by David Stuart by arrangement with Sir Roger Fulford. Set by Richard Porter at The Railway, Brighton and British Council and United States Tours.

Ian Williams

English

In 'The Cocktail Trilogy' 7-hour performance in 3 sections over 1 day.

Jean Wintrop

Scottish

As Mrs Dunlop in 'Oh, Robert, Robert' for guest artistes, Edinburgh Festival 1982.

Iain Wotherspoon

Scottish

In 'Reasons for Resignation' by Bob Bridges. Directed by Colin Mortimer at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow and King's Head, London. 1982. Also Scottish Tour and Edinburgh Festival.

Mid-Eighties (1983-84)

- Edward Atienza English
In 'When That I Was' (Shakespearean Readings) for Virtuoso Performances, Stratford, Ontario (1983)
- Michael Atkinson English
As Oscar Wilde (South Africa.)
- Suzanne Baxtresser American
'Calamity Jane' for the Keedick Lecture Bureau, New York.
- Linda Beckett English
In 'Anyway You Want Me' by Lesley Clive, Everyman Theatre, Liverpool and Edinburgh Festival 1983.
- Michael Breck Scottish
As 'Erichie' by Neil Munro - Glasgow Arts Centre 1984.
- Ruth Brinkman American
In 'The World of Ruth Draper'
- David Brooks English
In 'Monologues and Silliness', Edinburgh Festival 1984.
- David Buck English
As Sir John Falstaff in 'Falstaff' - Dramatised by David Buck from the novel by Robert Nye - Directed by John Tydeman - Design by Mick Bearwish - Settings by Kate Burnett and Kevin McCloud - Lighting by Jon Swain - Produced by Bill Kenwright for Hopdance Productions in association with Paul Gane at the Fortune Theatre, London - October 1984.
- Geoffrey Burridge English
As Thomas Chatterton. Directed by Lucy Bailey for New End Theatre, London and National 1984.
- Douglas Campbell Scottish
As William Blake in 'Blake' for Virtuoso Performances, Stratford, Ontario (1983)
- Walter Carr Scottish
In 'The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin' (South Africa)

Chris Craig

Scottish

'The Fetishist' by Michel Tournier, directed by Francis Aiqui.
AICO Theatre Co, at Edinburgh Festival 1983

Donald Davis

Canadian

In 'That Time' by Samuel Beckett. Directed by Alan Schneider at
the Churchill Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Pauline Devaney

English

As Dr Stopes in 'To Marie, With Love'. Directed by Kate Harwood
for the Edinburgh Festival 1984 and Third Eye Centre, Glasgow.

Ellie Dickens

English

As Kate Dickens in 'My Dearest Kate' for the Crummies Company,
Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Martin Dimery

English

In 'Archie Ferguson's Application Form'. Directed by Neil
Barndon. Medina Theatre Productions, Isle of Wight and Prince
Consort Theatre, Ryde. U.K. Tour. 1983

Edward Duke

English

As Jeeves

Vidar Eggertsson

Icelandic

In 'Not I....either' later called 'Nor I....but', by Samuel
Beckett, for actor and audience of one every fifteen minutes
Edinburgh Festival 1983. Dublin Festival 1984.

Marcella Evaristi

Scottish

As Morag Milton in 'The Works' directed by Jenny Killick,
Traverse Theatre, for Edinburgh Festival, (1984) and the Third
Eye Centre, Glasgow (1985). Also, 'Visiting Company' Directed
by Tony Roper, Tron Theatre, Glasgow Mayfest, 1988.

John Forrest Ferguson

American

As Robert Burns in 'Rab, the Rhymer' by Jim Peck for Theatre
Gael, Atlanta, 1984 and Edinburgh Festival, 1985

Bess Finney

English

Ellen Terry in 'Harum Scarum Girl', by Montague Haltrecht for
Charteris Productions, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Dario Fo Italian

In 'Mistero Buffo', Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Olwen Fouere Irish

In 'The Diamond Body' by Aiden Carl Mathews Director Brendan Ellis. Music Roger Doyle. Designer John Cominsky. Operating Theatre, Project Arts Centre, Dublin 1984. Bush Theatre, London. Hawarth NJ 1985. Avignon 1986. Glasgow Mayfest, 1987.

Frank Galati American

Professor of Performing Studies at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. In 'Pale Fire' by Vladimir Nabokov.

Peter Gale English

As Gerard Manley Hopkins, Wilde Theatre, Bracknell and Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Lewis Gordon Canadian

As Damien for Virtuoso Performances, Stratford Ontario 1983

Marius Goring English

As Samuel Coleridge Taylor in 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner'.
Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Gabrielle Hamilton English

As Mrs Thrale in 'Dr Johnson, Mrs Thrale' by Kathleen Danziger for Courageous Enterprises, Edinburgh Festival 1984. Also as Virginia Woolf in 'A Vision of Virginia' by Michael Andrews.

George Harland English

In Dickens Readings - (P&O Cruises) 1984-86.

Lloyd Harris American

As W.S. Gilbert.

Jim Hayes Irish

In 'A Horde of Ventriloquists' by Flann O'Brien. Gate Theatre Club, Dublin, 1984 and the National Theatre, London.

Martin Heathcote English

In 'The Fall' (Milton's 'Paradise Lost') Edinburgh Festival 1983

Andrew Holmes English

As Evelyn Waugh in 'The Secret Waugh' Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Ray Jones

Welsh

As Dylan Thomas in 'Dylan - Portrait of a Poet' by Cyril Royston for Cyray Productions, New End Theatre, London. Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Fergus Keeling

Irish

In 'Your affectionate Friend, Oscar Wilde' for the Burst Spectrum Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Barry Killerby

English

As Houdini - 'A One-Man Classic', Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Jack Klugman

American

Lyndon B. Johnson in 'Lyndon' by James Prideaux at the Kennedy Centre, Washington and U.S. Tour 1984

Stefan Kuntz

German

Theatre Dilldop - A One-Man Show for Children.

Heather Lindsay

New Zealand

In 'Faint-hearted Feminist' - Circa Theatre, Wellington and Court Theatre, Christchurch 1984. Sydney Festival 1985. Auckland festival 1986.

Christopher Logue

English

As 'Melancholy Jacques' (Rousseau), directed by Jean Jourdeuil, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Elaine Loudon

English

Mitzi Wildebeest in 'Mitzivision' Directed by John Muirhead. Produced by David Jones. Designer - Rose Coutts Smith. Tron Theatre, Glasgow 1984.

Ross Mackay

Scottish

As Eddie in 'Living It Down' by Eric McDonald. Directed by Greg Giesekam for Liveware Theatre for the Garret Theatre at the Arts Centre Glasgow 1983. Also at the Tron Theatre and Scottish tour

Polly March

English

As Lilian Baylis in 'Beauty and the Bounders' by Brian Sibley for Crummies Company, Edinburgh Festival 1984. Also, as Irina Ratushinskaya, devised and directed by Michael Fox. Oxford Theatre Group, Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Kay Michaels American
 As Edna St Vincent Millay in 'Millay' (in her own words),
 Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Robert Morley English
 As himself in 'The Sound of Morley' (Australian Tour)

Elizabeth Mullenger American
 As George Sand in 'Most Womanly Woman'. Music by Chopin and
 Liszt for Camphill Company, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Nichola McAuliffe English
 In 'Annie Wobbler' written and directed by Arnold Wesker at
 Birmingham ~~Rep~~ July 1983 Designed by Pamela Howard. Also
 Edinburgh Festival for Annie Productions and at the Fortune
 Theatre London - Produced by John Gale and Peter Wilson in
 association with Paul Gane - November 1984.

Tom McCabe Irish
 As Flann O'Brien in 'Yer Man and the Brother', Edinburgh
 Festival 1984.

Christine MacDonald American
 As Amelia Erhardt in 'Amelia Lives' by Laura Shamas for the
 Colorado Stage Company, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Geraldine McEwan English
 As Jane Austen. US Tour 1986/87

Elizabeth MacLennan Scottish
 As The Imperial Policeman in 'The Baby and the Bathwater' by
 John McGrath. Music by Carlos Arrendondo. Cumbernauld Theatre
 and Scottish Tour 1984.

Jim McManus English
 Tony Hancock in 'Hancock's Last Half Hour' by Heathcote
 Williams. Directed by Mark Piper Harrogate Theatre 1984.

Sandy Nielson Scottish
 In 'Mark's Gospel', the New Testament in Scots at the Edinburgh
 Festival 1984. 'Clapperton's Day', Edinburgh Festival 1985.

William J. Norris American
 Director Beacon Playhouse, Chicago. As Lord Byron in 'His Satanic Majesty' and Adolf Hitler in 'The Hitler Mask'.

Aileen O'Sullivan New Zealand
 In 'Mary Magdalen' Written and Directed by Linden Wilkinson. Mercury Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand 1983.

John Otway English
 As 'The Lunatic Bard of Aylesbury', directed by Lou Stein, Edinburgh Festivals, 1983/'84/'85.

Lena Philips English
 In 'Upstairs, Downstairs', Edinburgh Festival, 1984 and 'Among Your Souvenirs', Edinburgh Festival, 1985

Franca Rame Italian
 In 'It's All Bed, Board and Church', the subordinate role of women, Edinburgh Festival, 1984. And 'Female Parts': four monologues; 'Waking Up', 'The Same Old Story' 'A Woman Alone', 'Medea', Edinburgh Festival, 1985.

Clare Rosen English
 In 'Mother Cade' (Jack Cade's Mother) for the Wide Angle Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Jane Sharp Scottish
 In 'Barry' by Frederick Mohr Aspect Theatre New Jersey, USA.

Laura Sheppard American
 Lady in 'Still Life with Stein' (Solo Works, USA). Adapted by Laura Sheppard. Director: Mickey Coburn Beaman. Mobius Theatre, Boston, USA and Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Victor Spinetti Welsh
 In 'Thoughts From a Very Private Diary' Edinburgh 1983.

Gerda Stevenson Scottish
 As James/Miranda in 'Barry' by Frederick Mohr. Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Nigel Stock (d.1986) Scottish
 As Dr Watson in '221B' by Martyn Read, directed by Jack Emery for Acclaim Productions at Theatre Royal, Bath 1983.

Daniel P. Stokes

Irish

As James Stephens in 'God, Men and God Knows What' for Spur Productions, (Dublin), Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Ray Stricklyn

American

As Tennessee Williams in 'Confessions of A Nightingale' by Charlotte Chandler and Ray Stricklyn, Beverley Hills Playhouse, Hollywood, 1987 and Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Ian Stuart

English

In 'Krapp's Last Tape' by Samuel Beckett, National Student Drama Festival Final, Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Jamie Stuart

Scottish

In 'A Scots Gospel'. Directed by Donald Smith - Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh and Scottish tour. 1983. (Amateur)

Feroza Syal

Indian

In 'One Of Us' by Jacqui Shapiro, Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Darian Tackle

New Zealander

As Sylvia Ashton Warner.

Tim Thomas

English

In 'Single-handed' Edinburgh Festival 1983.

Mervyn Thomson

New Zealand

In 'Coaltown Blues' Auckland University Theatre, New Zealand

John Tordoff

English

In 'Heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad, Edinburgh Festival, 1983. Produced by Peter Wilson 1985 Tour. Also 'One Fine Day, Edinburgh Festival, 1986

Tom Troupe

American

In 'Diary of A Madman' by Gogol. Adapted by Don Ettner for American Theatre Arts, Hollywood, USA.

Max Wall

English

Comedian. 'Malone Dies' by Samuel Beckett. Directed by John Elsom. Also as Professor Wallofsky in 'Aspects of Max Wall', London and UK Tours.....'

Nick Ward English
In 'Metamorphosis' by Franz Kafka, Cambridge University Theatre Group, Edinburgh Festival 1983. 'Eastwood' (D.H.Lawrence) 1985

David Warrilow American
In 'A Piece of Monologue' by Samuel Beckett. Directed by Alan Schneider - Churchill Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1984

Peter Wear Irish
In 'The Legend of Robin Hood' Edinburgh Festival 1983. 'Our Man In Marzibah' by Tony Osborn, Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Finlay Welsh Scottish
In 'Howard's Revenge' by Donald Campbell. Directed by Sandy Nielson. Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Billie Whitelaw English
'Happy Days' by Samuel Beckett.

Irene Worth American
In 'Letters of Love and Affection'. Also 'Venus and Adonis', Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Susannah York English
'The Human Voice' by Jean Cocteau. Directed by Simone Benmussa Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival Produced by Richard Jackson.

Anthony Zerbe American
As e e cummings in 'It's All Done With Mirrors' Emmy Award Winner. Produced by Peter Wilson Edinburgh Festival 1984.

Mid-Eighties (1985)

Robin Bailey English
'Tales From the Long Room' by Peter Tinniswoode.

Peter Barkworth English
Reads Siegfried Sassoon. Edited and directed by Peter Barkworth. Designed by Kevin Knight and Andrew Empson for Freeshouter Productions and Astramead Ltd Theatre Royal, Bath 1986 and pre-London tour.

Doyne Bird English
 As 'Rochester' Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Zoe Caldwell American
 As Lillian Hellman in 'Lillian' by William Luce - Directed by Robert Whitehead at the Cleveland Playhouse -1985 and the Washington Kennedy Centre and Ethel Barrymore Theater, New York for Ann Shanks and Ronald S Lee - 1986

Donald Douglas Scottish
 James Hogg in 'The Ettrick Shepherd' by Frederick Mohr. Directed by Morag Fullerton for Borderline Productions and Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. Ettrick Festival 1985 and Edinburgh Festival 1986

James Duke English
 In 'Report To An Academy' by Franz Kafka. Best Actor - London Student Drama Festival 1985.

Jenny Eclair American
 In 'The Perry Como Hour' for 'Women At Work', Edinburgh Festival.

Rose English English
 In 'The Beloved' - abstract vaudeville. Edinburgh Festival 1985 Also In 'Thee, Thy, Thou and Thine' for Mike Dixon Productions - Third Eye Centre, Glasgow.

Mike Finesilver American
 As Ralf Cutler in 'Woman' by Rosamond Freeman-Attwood. Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Jeannie Fisher Scottish
 As Stephanie in 'Yardsdale' by Arnold Wesker. Directed by Eric Standidge. Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh.

Deborah Fortson English
 In 'Baby Steps'. Director Steve Seidel. Edinburgh Festival

Tony Haygarth English
 As Edgar Allan Poe in 'Into a Mad Man's Rags' - Edinburgh Festival 1985 and Tron Theatre, Glasgow.

<u>Marcel van Heerden</u>	<u>American</u>
In 'Dirty Work'. Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Julian Hough</u>	<u>English</u>
In 'Hough's Half Hour', Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Elizabeth Huddle</u>	<u>American</u>
As 'The Second Lady' by N.Kilbergreddy. Edinburgh Festival 1985	
<u>Cavada Humphrey</u>	<u>American</u>
Elizabeth I in 'Henry's Daughter' and 'Cavada Humphrey's Walking Papers' - directed by Sarah Sanders for London Connection, Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Sue Ingleton</u>	<u>English</u>
In 'Strip Jack Naked'. Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Arthur Kincaid</u>	<u>American</u>
John Wilkes Booth in 'Tell Mother I Died for my Country' by Deirdre Barber. Oxford Chamber Group. Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Bob Kingdom</u>	<u>Welsh</u>
As Dylan Thomas in 'Bob's Dylan'. Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Bridge Lane</u>	<u>American</u>
As Zelda Fitzgerald in 'Lost In Exile' by Paul Ryan, directed by Terry Adams. Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Tom Lee</u>	<u>English</u>
As the story-teller in 'Grimm' (Fairy Tales) Edinburgh Festival 1985.	
<u>Michael London</u>	<u>American</u>
As Charlie Chaplin for American Theatreworks.	
<u>Kevin Moore</u>	<u>English</u>
As Lewis Carroll in 'Crocodiles in Cream' by David Horlock Salisbury Playhouse 1985. Also National Theatre. Norwegian TV.	
<u>Richard Morris</u>	<u>English</u>
As the one man 'King Lear' - New Zealand tour	
<u>Phelim McDermott</u>	<u>Irish</u>
As 'The Cupboard Man' by Ian McEwan. Adapted from Conversations with a Cupboard Man and directed by Julia Bardsley for Dereck Productions. Edinburgh Festival 1985	

Wallace McDowell Scottish
As 'Vincent' for Pelican Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Barry McGovern Irish
Actor - 'I'll Go On' by Samuel Beckett. Cork Festival, Eire.

Una McLean Scottish
In 'Good Night Ladies' by Roy Bouchier Falkirk Town Hall 1985.

Oscar McLennan Scottish
The Scottish Orator in 'The Serpent's Tooth' Edinburgh Festival, (1985). 'Drip Drip' - a surrealist monologue - (1986). 'Waiting On The Kiss of the Chicken King', 'Helicopter Man', Third Eye Centre, Glasgow. (1987)

Sigrid Nielson English
As Vita Sackville West in 'Vita', Edinburgh Festival.

Kevin O'Keen Irish
In 'One Man Show'. Edinburgh Festival 1985

Kate O'Mara Irish
As Mary Queen of Scots

Michael Pennington English
As Anton Chekov.

Barbara Perry English
In 'Passionate Ladies' directed by Edmond Bain Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Edward Petheridge English
As Edward Gordon Craig - National Theatre, London.

Tim Pigott-Smith English
'The Bengal Lancer' by William Ayot, directed by Michael Joyce at the Haymarket, Leicester 1985. English tour.

Alex Renton Scottish
As H.H.Munro in 'The Stories of Saki' for the National Student Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Abigail Reynolds English
As Ada Byron in 'Wandering Wayward Deluded' for London Connection, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Beth Robins

Scottish

As Elsie English in 'The Doctor's A Woman' by C.S.Lincoln.
Edinburgh Festival 1985

Jennifer Rose

English

As Joyce Grenfell in 'George, Don't Do That'. Richmond Theatre,
London. Crummles Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Miriam Rundle

English

As Dorothy L. Sayers in 'Oh, no, you don't, my poppet' by Rex
Walford Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Renu Setna

Arabian

As 'The Prophet'(Kahlil Gibran) Commonwealth Institute, London.
Edinburgh Festival 1985. Almeida Theatre, London, 1988.

Malcolm Seymour

English

In 'Men, Women and Things' (Duke of Portland)
Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Julia Sharon

English

In 'Just a Tick' by Jean Binnie, directed by Chris Wallis.
Theatre Royal, York 1985. BBC Radio 4.

David Skipper

American

As Robert Burns American Dinner Circuit

Patrick Smythe

New Zealand

As A.R.D.Fairbairn.

Retta Taney

Italian

As Catherine of Sienna in 'Io, Catherine', designer, Martin
Ferrand. Demarco Gallery Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Brian Thomas

Welsh

In 'How Green Was My Volvo' - an auto-biography. Backdoor
Theatre Company, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Lily Tomlin

American

In 'The Search for Signs Of Intelligent Life in the Universe' by
Jane Wagner, designed by Neil Peter Jampolis. Sound by Otis
Wunderloh. Edinburgh Festival 1985.

Bonnie Walsh

American

As Nelly Bly. Edinburgh festival 1985.

Thomas Wheatley English
As 'Beethoven' for Raptus Productions, Edinburgh Festival 1985.
Amanda Wolzak English
As Hendrickje Stoffels in 'A Talent to Influence' for London
Connection, Edinburgh Festival 1985.

TODAY
(1986-1988)

David Abbott American
In 'A Sonata for Rimbaud' - Edinburgh Festival 1988
Robyn Archer Australian
Actress/Singer/Writer/Composer. As Judy Garland, Janis Joplin,
Marilyn Monroe, Billie Holiday, Diana Washington, Edith Piaf in
'A Star Is Torn'. Script issued in book form, Virago Press.
Anthony Atherley English
In 'Dirk Bogarde - A Life Struggle'.
Deborah E. Baber American
As Susan B. Anthony at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington and
Edinburgh Festival 1986.
Neil Bartlett English
In 'A Vision of Love in Sleep Revealed' - London 1987.
Third Eye Center, Glasgow 1988.
Maureen Beattie Scottish
As Queen Mary in 'Marie of Scotland' by W. Gordon Smith
National Portrait Gallery Edinburgh Festival 1987.
Claire Bloom English
As Emily Dickinson in 'The Belle of Amherst' by William Luce.
Adapted for television by Micheline Wandor - Directed by Adrian
Brown - Produced by Peter Griffiths for Thames Television 1987.
Emmy Award Winner 1987.
Jacques Bourgaux French
As Don Quixote - Edinburgh Festival 1988

Meriel Brook Canadian
 In 'Shakespeare's Women'. Directed by John Holloway.
 Edinburgh Festival 1987.

John Buckeridge Irish
 As Bram Stoker in 'The Journal of Mr Stoker'

Debra Burton English
 As Siobhan in 'Fallen' by Polly Teale - Edinburgh Festival 1986
 and Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 1988.

Desmond Carrington English
 As the Duke of Windsor.

Sarah Cathcart Australian
 In 'The Serpant's Fall' - Edinburgh Festival 1988

Peter Cleall English
 As Gerard Winstanley in 'The World Turned Upside Down'- Written
 and Directed by Chris Stagg and Paul Hodson. Gardiner Centre,
 Brighton and Tron Theatre, Glasgow 1987.

Pauline Collins Irish
 As 'Shirley Valentine' by Willy Russell, Directed by Simon
 Callow for Bob Swash Productions. Designer - Bruno Santini.
 Lighting - Nick Chelton. Vaudeville Theatre, London, 1988.

Robbie Coltrane Scottish
 As Doctor Jonson in 'Yr Obedient Servant' by Kay Eldridge
 Directed by Andrew Dalmyer. Designed by Roger Glassop.
 Producers - Harry Ditson/Lyric Theatre at the Studio 1987.

Pat Connell English
 As Nijinsky in 'A Clown of God' by Romola Nijinsky adapted by
 David Hopkins for Basicks at the Edinburgh Festival of 1987.

Karen Cooper English
 In 'Tears Before Bedtime' by Elinor Day. 'The Joys of
 Motherhood'. Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Don Cosgrave American
 In 'A Cold Day In Hell' by Jan Quackenbush. All Rare Seeds Co.
 Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Constance Cummings American
 In 'Fanny Kemble At Home' by Laurier Lister Tony Award Winner
 Produced by Peter Wilson Edinburgh Festival 1986.

- Julian Curry English
 In 'Company' by Samuel Beckett. Directed by Tim Piggot-Smith.
 Edinburgh Festival 1987.
- Sorcha Cusack Irish
 As the 'Baglady' by Frank McGuinness. Directed by Jude Kelly.
 Designed by Tim Reed. Lighting Dave Bryant. Sound Nic Jones.
 Baglady Productions and the Bristol Old Vic 1988. Also
 Edinburgh Festival and Tron Theatre, Glasgow.
- Frederick Davies American
 As Truman Capote in 'The Great Capote' directed by Morna
 Murphy-Martell for Star Power Productions at the Edinburgh
 Festival 1986 and Fortune Theatre, London for Casper Baker Gary
 and Star Power Records.
- Claire Dowie English
 In 'Adult Child, Dead Child' King's Head, Islington. (1987)
- C. Dumas American
 As Booker T. Washington in 'Up From Slavery' Edinburgh 1986.
- Michael Elder Scottish
 In 'Whalers'. Directed by Tom Fidelo for Eldon Productions,
 Edinburgh Festival 1986 and Scottish Tour. Byre Theatre, St
 Andrews and the Third Eye Centre at Glasgow Mayfest 1987.
- Ronald Fernee English
 As Sir Herbert B Tree, in 'Tree', Edinburgh Festival 1986.
- Susan Fleetwood English
 In 'Grandfather Was A Soldier' by Marilyn Bowering.
 Directed by Patrick Raynor for BBC Radio3, November 1987.
- Gil Foreman English
 In 'The Life of Aphra Behn' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.
- Julie Forsyth Australian
 In 'Kid's Stuff' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.
- Jose Garcia Mexican
 In 'Tito' - a 1-man play in 2 acts, set in the American desert.
 Modern Languages Theatre, Glasgow University, 1987.

Ruth Glaser

English

As Sylvia Plath in 'Sylvia Plath on Sylvia Plath' for the Northern Production Company at the Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Robert Goodale

English

'Luncheon With Bertie' (Wooster). Adapted from P.G. Wodehouse. Edinburgh Festival 1986 'Righto' and 'Stiff Upper Lip' - a solo Wodehouse double bill. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Pat Gordon Smith

Scottish

As 'A Woman Warrior' at the Edinburgh Festival 1988.

James Anil Graham

English

As Charles Dickens, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Sam Graham

Scottish

In 'The Prowler' by Enzo Corman. Translated by James Kelman. Directed by Jeremy Raison. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

John Gray

Canadian

In 'Billy Bishop Goes To War' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Annie Griffin

English

'Almost Persuaded' and 'Blackbeard the Pirate - A Melodrama in Several Parts' Edinburgh Festival and Traverse Theatre 1987.

Ben Haggerty

English

Story-teller. Brentford Festival of Story Telling 1987.

Dean Harris

American

As 'Sammy' by Ken Hughes for Kick Back Productions, Academy and Emmy Awards Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Tim Heath

English

As John Betjeman in 'Summoned By Bells' by John Betjeman.

Martin Heller

English

Sheridan in 'Uncorking Old Sherry' by John Cargill Thompson. Directed by Sandy Nielsen for Prime Productions, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

- Pat van Hemelrijk Belgian
 'Echafaudages' and 'Terracotta' - experiments in sound and images created from the keyboard. A Radies production by Josse de Pauw and Dirk Pauwels. Also 'Tout Suit' at the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow Mayfest 1987.
- Nick Herrett English
 In 'A Man Trapped in a Man's Body', directed by Howard Barker for Big 3, Edinburgh Festival 1986.
- Mark Holland English
 In 'Out Of Control'.
- Roy Hutchins English
 In 'Whale Nation' a Poem-Performance by Heathcote Williams. Third Eye Centre, Glasgow and Edinburgh Festival 1988.
- Kathleen Hutchison English
 As Colette (solo musical), Bobock Theatre Company Music by Terry Cathrine. Lyrics by Christopher Bacon, Tron, Glasgow, 1987.
- Billie Ibidum English
 As Billie Holiday in 'Ain't Nobody's Business'. Written and Directed by Jim McNulty. Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1988.
- Richard Ingham English
 In 'Iliad - the Battle for Troy' for the Ingham Theatre Company Edinburgh Festival 1987.
- Demon Jackson American
 As 'Malcolm X' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.
- Carolyn James English
 In 'How Can You Catch the Moon?' - A Blind Woman's Story. Edinburgh Festival 1987.
- Bryan Johnson Irish
 As Oscar Wilde in 'The Importance of Being Oscar'. Directed by Patrick Galvin. Ulster and Edinburgh Festivals 1988
- Don Kawash American
 As Scott Joplin. Edinburgh Festival 1987.
- Michael Kearns American
 In 'Dream Man' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Ben Keaton Irish
 In 'The Intimate Memoirs of an Irish Taxidermist', Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Susie Kennedy American
 Singer/Actress - 'Would the real Judy Garland please....' 'You can't deep freeze a red hot mama' Smock Alley Dublin 1986.

Sharon Kennet English
 As 'Edwina', Countess of Mountbatten, for Abbotsford International, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Bruce Kuhn English
 In 'The Gospel According to Luke', Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Mary Kurowski American
 In 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman South Side International Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Anne Lacey Scottish
 In 'Four Portraits'/'The Bothy' - Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh 1988.

Beth Lapidés American
 In 'Entertaining the Troops' - Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1988.

Liz Lees English
 In 'Aside Lines' - A Mix of Monologues Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Richard Leggatt English
 As Wastway in 'The Swanson of Ivan Wastway'. Oxford College Players. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Anna Lica Danish
 Actress - Sally in 'Madame Bovary Downtown', directed and devised by Lage Larsen OdinTeatret Copenhagen Coventry Festival

Peta Lily English
 In 'Frightened of Nothing' - Edinburgh Festival 1987 and also 'Wendy Darling' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Sonja Lyndon English
 In 'Now, and at the hour of our death.'

Michael Mackenzie Scottish
As James Boswell in 'Bozzy' by Frederick Mohr.
Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Michael McEvoy Irish
As Van Gogh in 'Portrait of Vincent' by Patrick Hayley for
Camelia Productions - Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Elizabeth Mansfield English
As Marie Lloyd in 'Marie'. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Christopher Morgan Welsh
As Richard Burton In 'Burton' for Chrysalis Theatre, Edinburgh
Festival 1986.

Simon Morley English
As 'Pilate' by John Cargill Thompson. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Charles Mugleston English
In 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens for the Charles
Dickens Theatre Company at St Paul's, Covent Garden, London 1987.

Kenneth McCrae Scottish
As 'The Laird of Lundy's Fool', directed by Annie Inglis,
Aberdeen Arts Centre.

Rohan McCullough English
As Vera Brittain in 'Testimony of Youth', directed by Alan
Benson Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Michael McGrory English
As Zeus in 'Perseus'

Janice O'Brien English
In 'Face Values', directed by Paul Barlow.
Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Steven Owens English
In 'Confessions of a Justified Sinner' by James Hogg, for
Demarco Productions, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Janice Perry English
As GAL in a one woman comic contemporary cabaret at the Third
Eye Centre, Glasgow Mayfest 1987.

Wendy Peters English
 In 'Talking Story' - Edinburgh Festival 1988

Eileen Pollock English
 As Mother Jones in 'Fight Like Tigers' Adapted by Jonathan Neale for Pollock-Foot Productions (Sponsored by TASS) Glasgow Mayfest 1987.

Lance Pierson English
 In Acts of God.

Stewart Preston Scottish
 As Lord Dundas in 'Dundas' or, 'How They Murdered Robert Burns' by Alastair Campsie. Director - Bryan Elsey. Edinburgh 1987.

Peter Pringle Canadian
 As Noel Coward in 'Noel Coward - A Portrait'. Directed by John Lucas for Donald K Donald Productions at the Charlottestown Festival Nova Scotia 1987 and Bathurst St Theatre Toronto 1988.

Christopher Quinn English
 In 'Bud' by Nick Darke. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

David Ian Rabey English
 In 'Don't Exaggerate', directed by Howard Barker for Big 3, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Mary Jo Randle English
 In 'Dearly Beloved' - details from a girlhood diary. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Kija Raphael English
 In 'Yours Ever, Jane Austen' Directed by Alan Bowerman. Justus Theatre Company. Sound by Hal Jeayes. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

John Reason English
 In 'Requiem'.

Roger Rees English
 Reader - 'Revelations' St John's, London and St George's, Edinburgh.

Angus Reid Scottish
 As Keith Douglas in 'Deserving Mention'. Oxford Speakeasy Productions. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

- Sheila Reid Scottish
 In 'As Dorothy Parker Once Said'. Compiled: Leslie Lawton
 Songs: Sandy Wilson. Director: John Dane. Designer: Gordon
 Stewart/ Andrew Wood. Piano: Nigel Lillicrap. Edinburgh 1987.
- Michael Roberts English
 In '100% All-Talking'. Edinburgh Festival 1987.
- Tom Robinson English
 In 'A Very Private View' - Anecdote, Recital and Song.
 Edinburgh Festivals 1987/88.
- Sue Rock English
 In 'An Audience With Dorothy Parker' for the Northern Production
 Company at the edinburgh festival 1988.
- Patricia Routledge English
 In 'Come for a Ride' - Glenda Jackson Theatre, Birkenhead, 1988.
- Deborah Rowbottom English
 In 'The Theory and Practice of Belly Dancing', directed by
 Howard Barker, for Big 3, Edinburgh Festival 1986.
- Debra Salem Irish
 In 'Danny Boy' for Edinburgh Festival 1986.
- Nadim Sawalha Arabian
 In 'Love in Andelucia' (Adapted from 'The Ring and the Dove')
 Songs by Ruth Sylvestre. Leighton House, London 1987
- Prunella Scales English
 As Queen Victoria. World Tour for British Council (1987).
- Kerry Shale American
 As Ignatious J. Reilley in 'A Confederacy of Dunces' by John
 Kennedy Toole. Also 'Dreaming of Babylon', by Richard
 Brantigan, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1986.
- Andy Sherlock English
 In 'Good Night' for the Northern Production Company at the
 Edinburgh Festival 1988.
- Anne Small English
 As Fanny Kemble in 'The Reluctant Actress'.
 Directed by Philip Dart.

Arthur Smith English
 In 'Arthur Smith Comperes Himself' - Edinburgh Festival 1988.

Ellie Smith New Zealand
 As Lillian Hellman in 'Lillian' by William Luce.
 Directed by Cathy Downes. National Library Theatre, Wellington
 New Zealand, 1988.

Ian Smith English
 As 'The Vagabond King'

Robin Sneller English
 In 'Mayakovsky', A Tragedy, for Demarco Productions, Edinburgh
 Festival 1986.

Jerry Strickler American
 In 'My American Family' - Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Tilda Swinton English
 In 'Man To Man' by Manfred Karge. Translated by Anthony Vivis.
 Directed by Stephen Unwin. Traverse Productions.
 Edinburgh Festival 1987 and London 1988.

Andrew Tansey English
 In 'The Greatest Ape' (based on Franz Kafka's 'Report To An
 Academy'). Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Michael Toner Irish
 'Harping on Beckett' - harp music by Mary Tooke. Edinburgh
 Festival 1986.

Frank Topping American
 In 'An Impossible God' (3 one-man plays) Edinburgh Festival 1986

Frances de la Tour English
 As Lillian Helman in 'Lillian' by William Luce - Designed by
 Shelagh Keegan - Lighting by Leoanard Tucker - Directed by Corin
 Redgrave for Robert Burns Ltd and Ronald S Lee at Lyric Theatre,
 London 1986 and Fortune Theatre, London 1987.

Alexander Waechter German
 In 'Tumult' by Botho Strauss 1987. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Sally Wainwright English
 In 'Hanging On' for Cry Havoc, Edinburgh Festival 1986.

Rob Wallace American
 In 'The Letter From James' (The Bible) Edinburgh Festival 1988

Amy Warner American
 In 'As the Wind Rocks the Wagon' - The Diaries of an American Pioneer Woman. Loaves and Fish Theatre Co. Edinburgh 1987.

John Watts English
 As Lord Byron

Caroline Weaver English
 In 'Down The Clinical Disco' by Fay Weldon and Rebecca Brown Leeds and Edinburgh Festivals 1987.

Clive Webster Welsh
 As Dylan Thomas in 'Words'

Michael Wilcox English
 As Robert Schumann in 'Schumannic' (Pianist - Penelope Roskell) Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Oenone Williams English
 As Hester Thrale in 'Thraliana' Directed by Alan Dunnett Surprise Pink Theatre Company. Edinburgh Festival 1987.

Robin Williams American
 In 'Good Morning Vietnam' - a One-Man Film by Mitch Markovitch, directed by Barry Levinson and produced by Mark Johnson and Larry Brezner for Touchstone Pictures in association with Silver Screen Partners III (1988). Golden Globe Award nominee.

Gabriel Woolf English
 Anthologist and reciter (with music or choirs). The Elizabethans, the Victorians, Vivaldi, etc, for National Trust.

Bernard Wright English
 As Wilfred Owen in 'No Mans Land'. Directed by Chris Fisher for the Apple Island Theatre Co, Latchmere Theatre London 1987.

David Young English
 In 'Regressions'.

Rick Zoltowsky German
 In 'Coming Home' London International Theatre Festival 1987 and Glasgow Mayfest 1988.

SOLO STATISTICS

Appendix A

Number of Solo Artists Recorded from all fields:

Actors	339
Actresses	195
Personalities	024
Miscellaneous	<u>032</u>
Total -	<u>590</u>

Categories of Solo Form:

Dramatic Biography	319
Autobiography	026
Mono-Polylogue/Sketches	022
Miscellaneous	<u>223</u>
	<u>590</u>

English-Speaking Varieties:

English - 247.....American - 150.....Scottish - 82....Irish - 34
New Zealand - 17....Welsh - 12...Canadian - 11....Australian - 9
South African - 2....West Indian - 2 and Others - 25

NB: Others have included French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Danish, Indian English-speaking artists recorded as having performed their solos in English but in general non-English-speaking solos have not been considered, although two have been performed in Britain - Dominique Placquet as Colette (in French) and Suzanne Rocquet as Marlene Dietrich (in German).

Solo actors with more than one solo programme:

Brian D. Barnes (English) - Boy With a Cart and Solo Subjects:
Dickens, Wilde, Pepys, Browning
plus solo versions of 'Under Milk
Wood' and 'Murder in the Cathedral'

Russell Hunter (Scottish) - Cocky, Jock, Xanadu, What A Way To
Go, Carnegie, Vincent, Mr Jock.

Jack Klaff (South African) - 50-minute Hour, Nagging Doubt,
Kafka, Letters Alone, Stand Up.

Peter Florence (English) - The Pity of War, Portrait of the
Artist as Young Dog, Death in Custody,
Revolting Rhymes, War Music.

John Cairney (Scottish) - Burns, McGonagall, Stevenson, Service.
Conversation With Cairney.

Bruce Mason (New Zealand) A Solo Cycle (4 plays)

Sally Miles (English) - 4 original solo plays.

Emlyn Williams (Welsh) - Dickens, Dylan Thomas, Saki.

James Whitmore (American) - Truman, Roosevelt, Will Rogers.

David Kossoff (English) - Eyebrow Raised, The late Great Paul.

Leonard Maguire (Scottish) - Scottish Horrors, Coleridge.

Roy Dotrice (English) - John Aubrey, Lincoln.

Alec McCowen (English) - St Mark, Kipling.

Gordon Fleming (English) - Soldiers in Love, Celebration of Hope

Simon Callow (English) - Juvenalia, Melancholy Jaques (Rousseau)

Chris Harris (English) - Will Kemp, Punch.

Dennis Rafter (Irish) - Oscar Wilde, O'Shakespeare

Full-Time Solo Artists:

Brian D.Barnes, John Stuart Anderson, Chris Harris.

Solo Playwrights: (More than one title)

W. Gordon Smith (Scottish) 6.
Samuel Beckett (Irish) 4.
John Cairney (Scottish) 4.
Marty Martin (American) 3.
Paul Shyre (American) 3.
David McKail (Scottish) 3.
Dore Schary (American) 2.
Donald Mackenzie (Scottish) 2.
Tom Wright (Scottish) 2.

Artists as Solo Playwrights:

Brian D. Barnes (9), Bruce Mason (4),

John Cairney (4), Emlyn Williams (3)

David McKail (3), Paul Shyre (3).

NB: The majority of other solo work is written or compiled by the performing artist or in association with a writer or director.

Solo Directors; (More than one production)

Patrick Garland (English) - 3.

Paul Shyre (American).

John Cairney (Scottish).

Simon Callow (English)

Solo Subjects: (More than one version)

Dickens (7) Wilde (6) Dylan Thomas (5) Beckett (5)

The Bible (5) Fanny Burney (4) Dorothy Parker (4)

Gertrude Stein (3) Byron (3) Poe (3) Shakespeare (3)

Lincoln (3) Shaw (3) Burns (3) .

NB: 5 actors have performed 'Request Concert'

5 actors have performed 'There Was A Man'

3 actors have performed 'The Impossible Mencken'

3 actors have performed 'Judgement'

2 actors have performed 'Benjamin Franklyn'.

2 actors have performed Billy Bishop Goes To War

Solo Plays Performed: (Artists unknown)

'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' by Arthur Scholey (1974)

'Schreiner' by Stephen Gray.

'The Killer's Hand' by Sam Shepherd.

'Rochester' by Nick Vivien (1986)

'To Be Shaw' (G.B.S.) Empty Space Theatre (1986)

'Blind Ambition' (John Dean).

Also solos based on the following:

Sir Philip Sydney - Martin Luther King - Rocky Marciano - Belle Starr - Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield.

Solo Artists (Subjects unknown)

Sir Donald Wolfitt - Sonia Dresdel - Dora Bryan
Anthony Booth - Fenella Fielding - Judith Ivy
Tony Randell - Richard Harris - Nicol Williamson
Kaye Ballard - Simon McCorkindale - Julaba Valdya.

Musical

In 1972, Peter Kelly said I Am A Cabaret at the Close Theatre in Glasgow, in the same year that Gordon Honey was both Gilbert and Sullivan a la Carte!

Louis Berkman (Baritone) played Denys Feather in 'One Man Show'

an opera for one by Nicholas Maw.

Harrison Birtwhistle withdrew his modern opera 'Monodrama' from public performance. No reason was given. (Heard on BBC Radio3)

Miscellaneous Solos:

Alberto Vidal in 'Homo Sapiens Urbanis'(1985) performed in a cage at London Zoo.

Possible Solo Projects (In discussion and/or preparation)

Robert Urquhart as 'Para Handy' by Neil Munro.

Phil McColl in 'How Hitler Must Have Trembled' by Don Sexton.

Ellen McIntosh as 'Gertude' by Tom Wright.

Director - Geoffrey Nethercott.

Alan Bates as Philip Larkin.

Director - Patrick Garland

Alannah O'Sullivan as Jane Austin..

Director - John Cairney

General Notes:

Titles matter in the one-person performance. Many are witty, pointed and apposite. -EG:

One to One (Julian Chagrin 1970). The Man Himself was Alan Drury's choice for Jack Elliott at the National Theatre in 1975. Tim Thomas was Single-handed at Edinburgh in 1983, and at the same Festival in 1975, Kevin O'Keen called his production simply - One-Man Show. Which title lent itself to the pun in One-Man-Shaw! and To Be Shaw! Similarly, the pun is evident in Hello Dali! Perhaps however, Ron Moody spoke for all solo players when he called his 1972 one-man show at Westcliff Pavilion, - My Altered Ego. As any actor knows, who has stood alone on stage for the entire show, one is never the same again!

Of the total number of actors involved in world-wide in monodrama the majority are English followed closely by Americans. New Zealand has produced a high number in relation to her very small acting population.

America, or rather, the United States, has produced more writers of solo pieces but no writer as yet has devoted full-time application to the genre so as to write for it entirely.

The dramatised biography remains the most popular form of solo expression but an increase has been noted recently in the autobiographical aspect of solo performance.

Dickens is still the favourite subject, followed by Oscar Wilde and Dylan Thomas, although more artists each year appear as themselves. The most rapid growth however is among the women. Actresses are pursuing a vigorous and challenging attitude to the solo play, seeing it as an available and amenable platform.

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than at the Edinburgh Festival, and to a lesser extent the Dublin Festival and the Glasgow Mayfest, both of which are now widely regarded as starting points and forcing grounds for every kind of international one-person show.

It is to the American Universities however, that one must look for further developments in the genre. Both in the field of academic research and performing practice, the work being done there will carry the convention towards the end of the century, and it is likely to be in the United States that the first Centre for the Solo Performance will be founded, finally bringing the mode into a permanent focus for the future.

ORIGINAL: NOVEMBER, 1973.

REVISED, FEBRUARY, 1986

"MR R.L.S."

BY

JOHN CAIRNEY

A SOLO PLAY
BASED ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
(1850-1894)

DIRECTED BY DOUGLAS GRAY
FOR THE SOLSGIRTH THEATRE CLUB,
16 NOVEMBER 1973

AND PERFORMED BY JOHN CAIRNEY
ON A SCOTTISH ARTS CLUB TOUR 1973
CANADIAN AND USA TOUR 1973-1974

THIS SCRIPT IS THE PROPERTY OF:
SHANTER PRODUCTIONS,
44 ST VINCENT CRESCENT,
GLASGOW G3 8NG
SCOTLAND.

TEL: (041) 221-2785

"MR R.L.S."

A Solo Dramatisation in two parts.

PART ONE: "SON AND LOVER"

SETTING:

The place is Vailima on the island of Samoa. A rather grand establishment built by Robert Louis Stevenson to house his large family of relations, retainers and frequent guests. It is, on the outside, a large Samoan dwelling place, but, inside, as far as is possible, it is the Victorian interior of an Edinburgh bourgeois home - solid furniture, solid pictures, solid books, and every appearance of having been lifted intact from 17 Heriot Row.

Only the blue cyclorama at the rear reminds us of the Pacific Ocean outside, and the suggestion of a verandah tells us of how much time is spent out of doors. Every available surface has a book or a newspaper or a sheaf of papers on it. Stevenson could and did write anywhere.

But for the purposes of setting, a large desk is upstage left, with a drinks table nearby. At centre right, a couch before a large cane screen, and downstage right, an armchair with work table beside. Various carpets link these areas and where possible, colourful flowers spring from vases littered everywhere. A token tartan shawl (Royal Stewart) is obviously displayed. Two practical oil lamps.

It is 3rd December 1894 - early evening. The action takes place within the last hours of his life.

LX:

Houselights to black out.
A spark of light upstage centre.
It is a match being struck to light a cigarette.

*blackout as audience
'wipe' - to bring them
from real world to
stage world*

FX 1:

The sound of jungle drums in the distance.

*very slow light build
at opening as help
towards tension*

LX:

Lights build to reveal a figure standing in silhouette looking out to the rear.

FX:

Drums give way to the sound of a flute.

*music to lower light
changes and to set
atmosphere*

(He turns. It is Robert Louis Stevenson.

He is dressed in a velvet jacket, white, open-necked shirt with red cummerbund, white drill trousers and high, lace-up boots. He seems to smile to himself as the music fades, and still smoking, he comes forward slowly.)

*giving audience time
to take in actor's
appearance and
personality*

LX:

Lights build at centre. Spotlight the figure.

spot as extra focus

R.L.S.:

"Thin-legged, thin-chested, slight, unspeakably neat-footed and weak-fingered: in his face, lean, large-boned, curved of beak and touched with race, bold-lipped, rich-tinted, immutable as the sea, the brown eyes radiant with vivacity - there shines a brilliant and romantic grace, a spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace of passion, impudence and energy. Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck, most vain, most generous, sternly critical, buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist, a deal of Ariel, a streak of Puck, much Anthony, Hamlet most of all, and something of a shorter Catechist!"

Is that so now?

I wonder!

(He draws on his cigarette.)

*introductory verse
or preamble gives
audience and actor
time to settle and
'find' each other*

from 'poems' (1876) W.G. Hemley

*Smoking is always
good acting business, like drinking
it helps in... and... time*

review of
Shakespeare's
Barlow's
official
biography
(1901)

Dear old Henley took a view of me that was not quite my own, and declined to be concerned with this seraph in chocolate - this barley sugar edifice of a real man. He might be right. But, I must agree with him that I am something of a tame celebrity, though liable to purple in emergencies. I regret, too, that I smoke so much, except when kissing, and I must confess, I play very badly on the flute!

(The flute music fades out).

(He goes to the drinks and pours himself a glass.

He toasts the audience.)

Scotch, sir - Scotch!

(And drinks.)

*drinking is also valuable
as a lubricant and to
cure a dry throat due to nerves*

Perhaps the best and most interesting part of my life will never be known - not even by me - and the shorter Catechist of Vailima, however authorised and acceptable as an artist in morals, is not the old, notorious, intrepid, scornful Stevenson at all?

We'll see.

It is a singular thing, is it not, that I should live here in Vailima, in Samoa, in the South Seas, under conditions so striking -

(he waves his hand around him)

yet my imagination continually inhabits that old, cold huddle of grey hills, from which I came, what seems a hundred years ago.

Those Pentland hills, and the Lammermuirs, and further still, that Border Country where my Elliot ancestors had shaken a spear in the debatable lands, and old ballads recorded the tragic deeds of fighting men, and the women who loved them, and whom they loved, all those years ago.

I have come so far, yet the sights and sounds of my youth still pursue me, and it is Edinburgh, that venerable city, I still think of as home. Yet I know, even as I stand here, I shall never see home again. here I am until I die. The word is out, the doom is written, and I bow my head to the romance of my own destiny.

I am not as young as I was, but I have a relish of time in me.

(He coughs)

I am now a person with established ill-health, a certain reputation, though it is a very fluctuating fame, and very obscure finances. But

drawn from
We Henley's
from
(1878)
puevisque
from 'virginibus

commerce has found that the private life of 'MR R.L.S.' is at least a marketable commodity.

I hope so.

(He moves up to desk for newspaper and reads:)

'The Scotsman', a twice-weekly newspaper, carried in its Birth Columns, an announcement:

*This is a newspaper
as assisting property
actual announcement*

"On 13th November, at 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, the wife of Thomas Stevenson, of a son" - Robert Louis Balfour....

(He moves down left and sits)

Though now past forty, I have dwelt in delicious vagueness since boyhood. It's the best way to get through the green sickness of maturity. The individual is never altogether quit of his youth, even when he is already old and full of honours. We advance in years, somewhat in the manner of an invading army in a foreign land. The age we have reached, we hold but as an outpost. We still keep open our communications with the rear, and the first beginnings of our march. There is our true base. Not only the beginning, but the perennial spring of all our faculties, where familiar things become the shadow shapes of memory, and we can return, upon occasions, to the still enchanted forests of our childhood ---

FX 2:

Tape Voice: (Boy) "The Land of Counterpane"

When I was sick and lay abed

I had two pillows at my head,

And all my toys beside me lay

To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so,

I watched my leaden soldiers go,

With different uniforms and drills,

Among the bedclothes, through the hills.

And sometimes, sent my ships in fleets,

All up and down among the sheets,

Or brought my trees and houses out,

And planted cities all about.

*The taped effect
whether of sound
or music or voice
is an established
device in the one
man play
convention*

*both actor and
audience can
listen*

a child's garden of verses (1886)

Picturesque
Notes (189)

R.L.S.

In Edinburgh, the delicate die early.

As a survivor among bleak winds and plumping rains, I was sometimes tempted to envy them their fate.

For Edinburgh weather is raw and boisterous in winter, shifty and ungenial in summer, and a downright meteorological purgatory in the spring. Yet, no situation could be more commanding for the head city of a kingdom. For, in its very midst, stands Edinburgh Castle, a bass rock upon dry land, rooted in a garden, blackened by train smoke, but still carrying its crown of battlements and turrets, still describing its warlike shadow over a terraced valley set with trees. And, in that valley, gardens and streets set out, regular as verses, - child's verses

(He rises, and moves to the front centre)

"I was the giant, great and still

That sits upon the pillow hill

And sees before him, dale and plain,

The pleasant land of counterpane..."

(He turns and faces upstage, listening.)

FX 3:

Tape Voice: (Boy) "The Lamplighter"

My tea is nearly ready, and the sun has left the sky,
It's time to take the window and see Leerie going by,
For every time at teatime and before you take your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the street.

Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker and as rich as he could be;
But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you.

For we are very lucky with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more;
And O, before you hurry by with lantern and with light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him tonight!

R.L.S.

(He wheels round to face audience.)

a quick change of mood

But once upon a time, and not so very long ago, from yon dark outlet and down this very same street, clattered Graham of Claverhouse and his thirty dragoons.

FX 4:

Wind noise.

*actor used effect
to continue in change
of pace and atmosphere*

windy night from C.G.V.
"Whenever the moon and stars are set,
Whenever the wind is high,
All night long in the dark and wet
A man goes riding by.
Late in the night, when the fires are out,
Why does he gallop and gallop about?
Whenever the trees are crying aloud,
And ships are tossed at sea,
By, on the highway, low and loud,
By at the gallop goes he..."

*opportunity here
for shadows
and effective
lighting*

(The wind rises to a peak.)

*extreme lighting
much play made
of shadows and
contours*

(He breaks off, and calls)

Cummy! Cummy! Where are you? I cannae sleep for the storm!

(The 'storm' effects fade. Silence.)

*Silence can make
its own effect and
comment*

LX:

He continues in a tight spot.

*bedding the area makes
an additional emphasis*

And Cummy would come to me, like the good nurse she was. Yes, Cummy. Alison Cunningham, a young girl then, not so much older than I was myself - but old in the ways of women - Scottish women. She knew what was good for me. She would take me in her arms and croon to me of graveyards and tombstones - such reading on them - and angels on them, that looked as if they might rise on the very spot with a great fluttering of their stane wings, but there was one place in the

Greyfriars Kirkyard we made sure to avoid - the mort-safe. It was that part of the cemetery ringed with iron railings, locked fast against "The Bodysnatcher".

(He rises in the sombre light)

"-and it came to pass that on the midnight, the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt. From the first born of the Pharoah that sat upon the throne to the first born of the captive that was in his dungeon - and there was a great cry throughout the land. For there was not a house where there was not one dead..."

(He moves to the lectern at left)

LX:

Lights fade to lectern only.

(He reads.)

"In the sunken woods that traverse the neighbourhood of the burying-ground, the last glimmer of light failed them, and it became necessary to kindle a match, and re-illuminate one of the lanterns of the gig."

(During this, he has struck a match to light the candle before him.)

LX:

Add light as he continues.

The lighting plot at this stage is only that which might be supposedly achieved by an actual candle, but it discreetly builds as the story progresses

"Thus, under the dripping trees, and environed by moving shadows, they reached the scene of their unhallowed labours. McFarlane and Fettes were both experienced in such dark affairs and powerful with the spade. They had scarce been twenty minutes at their task, before they were rewarded by a dull rattle on the coffin lid. A stone or two which had been dislodged rattled away into the darkness. And then, silence, like the night, resumed its sway. And they might bend their hearing to its utmost pitch, but naught was to be heard except the rain, now marching to the wind, now steadily falling, over the miles of open country. The coffin was exhumed and broken open, the body of the farmer's wife inserted in the dripping sack, and carried between them to the gig. And by a faint, diffused radiance, which they hailed like daylight, they

from 'the bodysnatcher' pall mall gazette 1884/85

pushed the horse to a good pace, and began to rattle along merrily in the direction of Edinburgh.

They had both been wetted to the skin during their operations, and now, as the gig jumped among the deep ruts, the thing that was propped between them, fell now upon one, and now upon the other. At every repetition of the horrid contact, each instinctively repelled it with the greater haste, and the process, natural though it was, began to tell upon the nerves of the companions. McFarlane made some ill-favoured jest about the farmer's wife, but it came hollowly from his lips, and was allowed to drop in silence. A creeping chill began to possess the soul of Fettes. All over the countryside, and from every degree of distance, the farm dogs accompanied their passage with tragic ululations, and it grew and grew in his mind, that it was in fear of their unholy burden, that the dogs were howling.

The rain still poured as though the deluge were returning, and it was no easy matter to keep the light in such a world of wet and darkness. The rough sacking had moulded to the outline of the body underneath - the head was distinct from the trunk, the shoulders plainly modelled. Something, at once spectral and human, riveted their eyes upon the ghostly comrade of their drive. A nameless dread was swatched, like a wet sheet, about his body, and tightened the white skin upon the face of Fettes. A fear that was meaningless, kept mounting to his brain. Another beat of the watch, and he had spoken. But his comrade forestalled him - in a hushed tone.

"That's not a woman!" he said.

"It was a woman when we put her in!" replied Fettes.

"Haud the lamp" said the other. "I must see."

So Fettes took the lamp, while his companion untied the fastenings of the sack, and drew down the cover from the head...."

(He yells loudly)

"A wild yell rang up into the night. Each leaped from his own side into the roadway, and ran blindly away. The lamp fell, broke, and was extinguished, * and the horse, terrified by the commotion, bounded off toward Edinburgh at a gallop, bearing along with it, the sole occupant of the gig - a late, young man, one of their own previous victims - now a murdered, and long, dissected body...."

* dim to spot only

slow to blackout
then resume light
effect from window
area with logo pattern
and 'street lamps'

LX:

General lights resume, as he blows out candle.

(He moves up to centre rear and looks out.)

LX:

See 'window' effect with lights, as he looks out into the night.

R.L.S.

from es say 'Pictinesque notes'
Sometimes, Cummy would lift me from my bed, still wrapped in blankets and carry me to the window, where I would look out into the street, as the lamps began to glitter and lights would go on in high windows, where gas lights burned in other sick rooms and other sick little boys would watch with their nurses for the morning. Edinburgh, for all its profusion of eccentricities is more than a dream of masonry. It is not a drop scene in a theatre, but a city in the world of everyday reality connected by railway and telegraph wires to all the capitals of Europe. And inhabited by citizens who keep ledgers and attend church, and sell their immortal portions to a daily newspaper.

Usually the Scotsman!

(He moves to desk and picks up a small book.)

Dear Cummy. She never read a newspaper. She only read the Bible, and only those parts of it which dealt with death and famine and disaster - all of which she would read aloud with gusto. She would read the psalms as if she were in a play. Dear old Cummy. Sometimes, she would tell me of the 'sweet singers', those dismal fanatics, haggard from long exposure on the Moors, waiting with tearful psalms to see sinful Edinburgh consumed with fire from Heaven, - like Sodom and Gomorrah. And how, in the Grassmarket, stiff necked Covenanters offered up eloquent farewells to earthly things, or died, silent, to the roll of drums.

Yes, Cummy knew what a book-minded wee laddie wanted to hear.

And I wanted her to hear from 'her boy' -

"A Child's Garden of Verses"

(He reads from the book)

For the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake,

For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land,
For all the story books you read,
For all the pains you comforted,
For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore,
My second mother, my first wife,
The angel of my infant life -
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, Nurse, the little book you hold.

*general lighting states
resumes to indicate
change of scene.*

memories and portraits (1887)
I never learned to read till I was seven, and then it was only the Bible. At first, I remember wondering if I should read to the horses in the stable and to the family pets who, since they could not read for themselves the Word of God, would not be saved and get to Heaven. Would I get in myself, I wondered then, since I could not play the Harp? I am happy to say I have largely kept my great fund of simplicity. (He sits at desk)

It is good to have been young, and to have grown older as the years go by. Many are already old before they are through their teens, but to travel deliberately through one's ages is to get the best out of a liberal education.

letter to Charles Baxter
Times change, opinions vary, and still this world appears a brave gymnasium full of sea-bathing, horse-riding and other bracing manly virtues. Our affections and beliefs are wiser than we. The best that is in us is better than we understand, for it is grounded beyond experience, and guides us blindfold from one age to another. A certain thread of memory binds it all - memories of childhood - of youth, and of all those who have gone before us in the battle of this person of today.

However, I wish to keep the secret, not because I have anything to hide, but only because I am, as one might say, still in business partnership with him, and cannot divide interests ---

But, as I look back like this, I see certain events as milestones on the waysides of my life, but I hope that by sympathy and with God's help, we shall survive these - revolutions.

We are busy in the world building our towers of Babel. The child of our imagination is always a changeling.

letter from
Stevenson, b' month
(July 1888)

(He indicates papers on the desk)

*the desk should be seen
as a working desk in use*

Thus, I began to write these pages with a definite end.

I was to be the advocatus, not, I hope, diaboli, but juvenus. I was to state temperately the beliefs of youth, as opposed to the contentions of age. But times keep changing, and I shared in the change. I saw indeed that the game was up. With the best will in the world, no man can be a boy forever.

(He rises)

So, let us crown ourselves with Sunday hats as with laurel, and singing and praising God, and under the influence of champagne -

(He pours another drink)

and all the finer feelings, go leaping towards that secular drawing room, from whence we might startle mankind.

(He drinks)

There should be left in our native city some seed of the elect. Some long-legged, hot-headed youth must repeat our dreams of all those years ago. He will relish the pleasures that should have been ours.

(He moves centre)

I see like a vision the youth of my father and his father before him and the whole stream of lives flowing down with the sound of laughter and tears. My father?

Did I say my father?

(He sits on the stool and listens)

FX 5:

TAPE: Voices of The Stevensons:

*a welcome change
of pace and rhythm
almost a play within
a play which actor too
can enjoy.*

Thomas Stevenson: O.P.Side

I think our boy day dreams too much, always mooning about in a world of his own, and he doesn't even have the excuse of being a scholar to account for it. His last school report was deplorable.

(RLS turns to other side)

(Tape 5 Continues - voice of Mrs Margaret Stevenson)

*script text for this section devised
from ascribed and apocryphal
comment according to character.*

Mrs Stevenson:

But he seems quite happy, our wee Smout, dear Lou, with his reading and his writing. I know he should be studying something useful, but he's so romantic. You see, he's a Balfour.

MR STEVENSON:

He's a Stevenson, and he'll be an engineer like his father, and his father before him. Boarding school is the answer.

MRS STEVENSON:

Oh Thomas!

MR STEVENSON:

It'll make a man of him.

MRS STEVENSON:

But he's only twelve.

MR STEVENSON:

Thirteen.

MRS STEVENSON:

But to go to England?

MR STEVENSON:

He'll enjoy the journey.

MRS STEVENSON:

Yes, he enjoys travelling - especially by train.

(Gradually fade up noise of train.

Voices continue in unison, reciting softly.

RLS rises to join, making vocal trio

Tape 5: Continuing)

C.G.V.

R.L.S.:

"From A Railway Carriage"

TRIO:

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows, the horses and cattle;
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as the driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

*taken as fast
as possible
or in a rush
to achieve vocal
tour de force*

Here is a child who clambers and scrambles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes,
And there is the green for stringing the daisies.
Here is a cart run away in the road,
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill, and there is a river;

R.L.S.:

Each a glimpse and gone forever.

(NB: The tape cuts off on the penultimate line leaving RLS to say the last line alone)

(He returns to desk)

*another instance of the unexpected
so as to take audience by surprise
and maintain their interest.*

Yes, boarding school - at Spring Grove, Middlesex. But it didn't stop me reading - or writing. At all times I had two books on my person, one to read, and one to write in. From my earliest times, I was drawn to stories, to words. I loved words, and their arrangements, and the way they gave the appearance of life. I read everything and anything. Whenever a passage pleased me, I must sit down and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, of course, but in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony and construction, and in the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, Defoe, Montaigne and Baudelaire. I already had my own determination to be a writer, and everything in me was pointed to this

drawn from content of diary comment

end, but what consternation it caused to my parents in Heriot Row - this Heine with the Scotch accent!
(He indicates 'tapes' at each side.)

FX 6:

TAPE: Voices: The Stevensons

MRS STEVENSON:

I'm so pleased that Louis is to go to the University - and here in Edinburgh, too.

MR STEVENSON:

To be an engineer like his father and his father before him.

MRS STEVENSON:

Or a lawyer perhaps Thomas? To be an advocate. It's such a respectable profession.

MR STEVENSON:

To build a lighthouse as sturdy as the rock at Skerryvore, flashing with intermittent light - 'caelum non solem!' *optional light effect.*

MRS STEVENSON:

Oh, Thomas, you and your lighthouses. Remember that our Louis has never been a well boy. That terrible cough of his.

MR STEVENSON:

You women will make an invalid of him. A bit of good hard work will make a man of him.

MRS STEVENSON:

But what about his writing?

MR STEVENSON:

Well, it can be a pleasant wee hobby for him! Like stamp collecting.

(Fade tape.)

(The actor goes to the lectern and reads:)

*formal effect
lighting restricted
to lectern area.*

R.L.S.:

"The Tale of Tod Lapraik"

from 'Catharine' (1892)
It was in the year seventeen hunner and sax, that the Bass Rock cam into the han's o' the Da'rymples, an' there was twa men saucht the chairge o't. The first o' them was Tam Dale, my faither, an' the second was ane Lapraik. Folk ca'd him Tod Lapraik maistly, but whether for his name or his nature, I could never hear tell. Weel, Tam gaed tae see Lapraik on the business, and took me, that was a toddlin' laddie by the hand. Tod had his dwallin' in the lang loan beneath the kirkyaird. A dark, uncanny loan and Tod's house was in the mirkest end, and little liked by some that kenned the best.

Tod was a wabster to trade; his loom stood in the but. There he sat, a muckle fat, white hash of a man like creish, wi' a kind o' holy smile that gart me scunner. The hand o' him aye clawed the shuttle, but his een was steeked. We cried to him by his name, we skirled in the deid lug o' him, we shook him by the shouther. Nae mainner o' service! There he sat on his dowp, an' cawed the shuttle and smiled like creish.

"God be guid to us," says Tam Dale. "This is no canny!"

He had just said the word, when Tod Lapraik cam to himself. "Is that you, Tam?" says he. "Faith, man, I'm blythe to see ye. I whiles fa' into a bit dwam like this," he said, "it's frae the stomach."

Weel, they began to crack about the Bass and which was to get the warding o't, and they cam to very ill words, and twined in anger. As my faither and me gaed hame again, he said how little he likit Tod Lapraik and his dwams.

"Dwams! I think folk hae brunt for dwams like yon."

Aweel, it was my faither got the Bass and Tod had to go wantin'. It was remembered sinsyne what way he had ta'en the thing.

"Tam," says he, "ye hae gotten the better o' me aince mair, and I hope ye'll find at least a' that ye expeckit at the Bass."

Which have since been thought remarkable expressions.

But then, the time came for Tam Dale to take young solans. This was a business he was weel used wi' and hung whaur there was naething but the craig, and the sea below, an' the solans skirlin' and flyin'. It was a braw spring morn, and Tam whustled as he claught in the young geese.

Then it chaunced that Tam keeked up and was awaur of a muckle solan, and the solan pyking at the line. He thocht this by-ordinair and minded that ropes was unco saft things. The solan's neb and the Bass Rock were unco hard, and that two hunner feet were raither mair than he would care to fa'.

"Shoo!" says Tam, "Awa' bird! Shoo - awa' wi' ye!".

The solan keekit doun intae Tam's face, and there was something unco in the creature's eye. Just the ae keek it gied, an' back to the rope. But now it wroucht and warstl't like a thing deementit. There never was solan made that wrocht as that solan wroucht; an' it seemed to understand its employ brawly; birzin' the saft rope between the neb o' it an' a crunkled jag o' stane.

There gaed a cauld stend o' fear intae Tam's heart.

"This thing is nae bird, an' his een turnt backward in his heid an' the day gaed black aboot him. "If I get a dwam here," he thocht, " it's a' by wi' Tam Dale." An' he signalled the lads to pu' him up.

An' it seemed the solan understood about signals. For nae sooner was the signal made than he let be the rope, spread oot his wings, squawked oot loud, took a turn flying, an' dashed straucht at Tam Dale's een. Tam had a knife, he gart the cauld steel glitter. An' it seemed the solan understood aboot knives, for nae' sooner did the steel glint in the sun than he gied the ae squawk, but laigher like ae body disappointit, and flegged aff and Tam saw him nae mair, for they pu'd him up like a deid corp, daddling on the craig. A dram of brandy brocht him to his mind, or what was left of it.

"Rin Geordie, rin to the boat - rin man! - or yon solan'll have it awa!"

And naething would satisfy him till ane o' them had startit on aheid to stand sentry by the boat, but before they reached North Berwick, Tam was in a crying fever. So he lay a' the summer, an' wha was sae kind as to come speiring for him but Tod Lapraik! Folk thocht afterwards that ilka time Tod cam near the hoose the fever worsened.

While my faither was lyin', my grandfather took me to the white fishing wi' him. One day, after a grand take, we foregathered by the Bass wi' anither boat that belanged to Sandie Fletcher.

"What's yon on the Bass?" says he.

"On the Bass?" says grandfather.

"Ay," says Sandie, "on the green side o't."

"Whatten kind o' thing?" says grandfather. "There canna be naething on the Bass but sheep."

"It looks unco like a body," quo' Sandie, who was nearer in.

"A body!" says we, and nane o' us likit that. For there was nae boat that could have brocht a man, an' the key o' the prison yett hung ower my faither's heid at hame in the press bed. Grandfather had a gless and sure enough there was a man in a crunkle o' green brae, a week below the chaipel, a' by his lee lane, an' he lowped and flang an' danced like a daft quean at a wadding.

"It's Tod," says grandfather, and passed the glass to Sandie.

"Ay, so it is."

"Or ane in the likeness o' him," says grandfather.

"Sma is the differ," quo Sandie. "De'il or warlock, I'll try the gun at him," and he brocht up a fowling-piece that he aye carried, for Sandie was a famous shot in all that country.

"Haud yer hand, Sandie," says grandfather, "we maun see clearer first, or this may be a dear day's work to the baith of us. Ay, let me that has the fastest boat gang back to North Berwick and let you bide here wi' the laddie an' keep an eye on thon. If I cannae find Lapraik, I'll join ye and the twa o' us'll have a crack wi' him. But if Lapraik's at hame, I'll rin up the flag at the harbour, and ye can try Thon Thing wi' the gun."

An' my grandsire gied Sandie a siller tester to pit in his gun wi' the leid draps, bein' mair deidly again bogles.

The boat set off while we lay and watched the wanchancy thing on the brae-side. A' the time it lowped and flang and capered and span like a teetotum, and whiles we could hear it skelloch as it spen. I hae seen lassies that would lowp and dance a winter's nicht, and still be lowping and dancing when winter's day cam in. But there would be fowk there to hauld them company, and lads to egg them on, an' a fiddler diddling his eblock; but this thing was its lee-lane with nae music but the skirling of the solans. And the lassies were bits o' young things, and this was amuckle, fat, creishy man. Say what ye like, there was joy in the creature's heart; the joy o' hell, I daursay - an' mony a time I have askit mysel' why witches and warlocks should sell their sauls and be auld, duddy wrunkl't wives or auld, feckless, doddered men. Nae doubt they burn for it in muckle hell, but they have a grand time here of it, whatever - and the Lord forgie us!

Weel, we saw the wee flag yirk up to the mast-heid on the harbour rocks. It was the signal that Tod was at hame. Sandie up wi' the gun, took a deleeborate aim, an' pu'd the trigger. A bang and ae waefu' skirl frae the Bass - an' there were we rubbin' oor een and lookin' at each ither like daft folk. For, wi' the bang and the skirl, the thing had clean disappeared. The sun glintit, the wund blew, and there was the bare yaird whaur Thon Thing had been lowping and flinging but ae second syne.

Sandie said naethin' but the name o' God! The harbour rocks were fair black wi' folk waitin' us. It seems my grandfather had fund Lapraik in aone of his dwams, cawing the shuttle and smiling. He sent a lad to hoist the flag and, wi' the rest o' the folk, abode there in the wabster's house watching thon awesome thing as it cawed the shuttle. Syne, upon a suddenty, an' wi' the ae dreidfu' skelloch, Tod sprang up frae his hinderlands and fell forrit on the wab, a bluidy corp.

When the corp was examined, sorrow a leid drap was to be fund; but there was grandfather's siller tester in the puddock's heart o' Tod Lapraik.

LX: *Snap black out as clap trap.*

Lights fade as tape on prompt side is heard.

up slowly

279

*necessary pause
here to change
'gear' and
gather forces for*

(The actor is slowly drawn to the sound)

FX 7:

TAPE: Voice: A GIRL'S VOICE SINGING: (Unaccompanied)

"O, the summer time is coming,
And the leaves are sweetly bloomin',
And the wild mountain thyme
Grows around the bloomin' heather,
Will ye go, laddie, go?
And we'll all go together
Over wild mountain thyme,
All around the bloomin' heather,
Will ye go, laddie, go?
Will ye go, laddie, go?

*Song gives for the
change of tone
and atmosphere
variety of aural
and visual effects
mandatory in
the solo performance
by this time
the actor is usually
free of performing tension
and communicates
without inhibition*

(She continues to sing the song as he moves to the side. As he speaks the tape level drops but continues under his voice.)

R.L.S.:

(Almost in a whisper)

That girl - I remember her. It's Kate! Kate Drummond! Seventeen she was, and beautiful! What was she doing here, in a place like the 'Gay Japanee'?

(The singing fades gradually)

Oh, Kate - I am weary of living on the skirts of life. All my life bounded by four thick walls. I want to break free, Kate - to travel, to live. Oh, kate - with you I might have been an archangel!

(His voice rises almost hysterically, then silence.)

She vanished in the sounding town,

Will she remember too?

Will she recall the eyes of brown

As I recall the blue?

ballads (1890)

learning heavily on
dramatic licence in
this section.

It is a speculative
voice for RLS, as the
story is apocryphal
but valuable theatrically
at this juncture
and therefore justified.

(He sits at centre)

Yes, Kate Drummond - a street walker. They say she was seduced by a Laird's son somewhere in the Highlands, and was thrown out of home by her father because of the disgrace, and now here she was in Auld Reekie, earning her living in a brothel.

She was a good cut above the other girls, and she could sing - a country lark in a cage of city sparrows. And God, she was beautiful. I loved her at first sight, and even had a wish to marry her. She was only a little less surprised at this than my friends were.

What? Marry a whore? A prostitute? Even if she is beautiful. But they did not know her as I knew her. She was kind, and in her own way, she was good. Yes, that's what she was, and she repaid the world's scorn with service. God works in his own mysterious ways, does he not? And who knows what he meant by Kate Drummond. I can never forget her.

(He rises angrily)

Bloody hypocritical Edinburgh! How would it know?

Edinburgh, despite its formidable face, has only an apparent virtue. In Edinburgh, the young man has to cram all his vices into the few years before a profession claims him. Thereafter, everything is denied him - even life itself. For he must at all times remember he is a professional man, for whom the slightest scandal is as death.

I preferred to live, and to know what you prefer instead of what you ought to prefer, is to keep your soul alive and seeing. It is a pitiable blindness, the blindness of the soul. And no one is more blind than he who will not see.

I wonder if Edinburgh society really knew what went on in their own city right under their very noses. Just a walk down Queen Street, over the Stockbridge at the end of Leith Walk? And you didn't have to go that far. Just a step itself from Heriot Row. Discreet - but expensive.... See them on the Sabbath morning. Respectable heads of respectable families, leading their crocodile of well dressed children, all in their best for everyone to see. After Kirk and before a late Sunday lunch. But where were these same men on Saturday night? I always believed things were good rather than evil, but I set myself to learn about the world. But truth was, I was given the keys to the cellars, rather than the Halls of Babylon. I was pointed out as an idler, but I was about my own ends, yet, what consternation I cost my parents, especially my dear, wild, noble, angry father.

(He sits centre facing upstage.)

FX 8:

Tape - Voice: Thomas Stevenson

MR STEVENSON:

You will be punished for your sins, Louis. Make no mistake about that. Divine retribution is inescapable.

(R.L.S.)

(Our Father which art in Heriot Row!)

a tricky effect to combine taped and live speech but worth it for effect actor requires exact timing

MR STEVENSON:

You will remember how I pleaded with you to turn from the ways of wickedness.

(R.L.S.)

(He doesn't mind if I lie with harlots as long as I remember to wear a collar and tie!)

or ability to act lips if any cue is missed

MR STEVENSON:

May God in his goodness forgive you!

2 Feb 1873 - gleaned from letter from Heriot Row to Charles Baxter

(R.L.S.)

(I prefer not to believe in God!)

(Tape fades.)

(He rises and turns.)

Then there was a silence. And my father would rise slowly and walk to the door. "I cannot be dishonest, Papa. But there was no answer.

"I must go to your mother," he said.

(He turns upstage.)

Oh, you cannot tell how much I want to stand on my head! God, I'm in a helluva state - venal in mind and body. That walk down Queen Street has made a fine sore of my burning... It's so very inconvenient to be unchaste.

And to be at home, night after night, dinner with the family. And as the port was passed, Papa would light his pipe and speak his mind, and dear Mama kept an ever-ready presence, straining not to overhear, as I dared to disagree with my father.

What a cross parents are to their children, and when the child grows up and becomes himself instead of that pale ideal they had pre-conceived, they blame themselves for this most natural result. They tell themselves that had they lain more closely, the swan would have been a duck, and home-keeping. Yet, they will insist on loving us.

"Love, what is love?

A great and aching heart,

Wrung hands and silence,

And a long despair."

Poor Papa was in a devil of a taking. I should have lied to him as he wanted me to do, thus saving both our faces. This was the rule of the game. You can do as you like as long as you don't say anything. The only crime is to be found out. But I couldn't play that worldly game. If I lied now, my whole life would be a falsehood. But I do love my dear father. As for Mama, this is the heaviest affliction that has ever befallen her.

chato / wanchus
(1896)

(He moves to desk)

Songs of travel

"I have trod the upward and the downward slope.
I have endured and done in days before.
I have longed for all and bid farewell to hope,
And I have lived and loved -
And closed the door."

use of verse
here as
another
'ear change'
for audience.

(He sits.)

It was thought safer by all concerned that I got out of Edinburgh for a time. I had abandoned engineering at the university and was now embracing law. I think I'll pass for the bar, just to please my mother, but I've no intention of ever practising - God forbid. I have no wish to be respectable or even to seem so.

Meantime, I fled to my cousin, Maud, in Sussex, where I met Sydney Colvin at her house, and also a Mrs Fanny Sitwell, the estranged wife of a minister from Ulster. I have no idea what he was like, but she was cultured, cool, beautiful and unattainable. I was twenty three. She was thirty five. Men of all ages fell in love with Fanny Sitwell. I was no exception. For only the second time in my life, I was in love. And unlucky again. She was later to marry Colvin. But, in the meanwhile, she kindled a dangerous flame in me that wanted nothing in a masculine combustion, but by tact and humour and honest kindness, she diverted both of us into the calmer waters of a lifelong friendship. She remained my Madonna, my Consuella - but what I really wanted was a mother. So, when I became ill again I was glad to return to my own.

Out of the Suffolk fires and into the Edinburgh frying pan. But I wrote to Mrs Sitwell as soon as I was able - and I was to write to her many times in the years to come. But then, being young, I wrote to her in verse. I still hadn't the nerve to call it poetry.

new poems (pub 1924)

"If I had wings, my lady, like a dove,
And knew the secrets of the air,
I should be gone, my lady, to my love,
To kiss the sweet division of your hair,
If I had wings, my lady, like a dove.
You ask me then, who is my love?
Who is this lady I love so well?
When I have wings, my lady, like a dove

I shall fly south to you and tell
All that you wish to know
If I had wings, my lady, like a dove.
But if I never saw you again
And lived all my days in Arabia,
I should be reminded of you continually.
You have gone all over the house
Of my mind, and left everywhere,
The sweet traces of your presence."

(He coughs into a handkerchief)

My mother was convinced every day of my earlier life that I would die.
My father was equally determined I should live. While Mama saw me only
as an invalid, Papa saw me as a sturdy companion to him in his working
jaunts around Scotland. Both made their very life over to me, and
between them, they saw that I survived.

Not that I ever feared death. To me, at times, it seemed nothing more
than a much-needed rest and freedom from this damned cough. Anyway,
it's not so much that death approaches, as life withdraws. But while
you have it - use it, and if you use it - enjoy it!

*life cannot be King Lear all the time
I wish it were more of an opera
I should like to live in an opera*
(He rises to the front as music is heard)

FX 9:

Instrumental: French Accordion Music.

*this is music used
to change location*

(He speaks over)

It is the summer of 1876.

LX:

Light change.

new colours to suggest France

A brass plate at the front door proclaims - "R.L.Stevenson. Advocate".
Everyone was so proud of me - except me. I could think of nothing else
but la belle France and a canoeing holiday I had planned with Cousin
Bob.

(1818)
first book

Now that I am a published essayist, there could be my first book in this summer frivolity. There was. (He picks up a small book)

"An Inland Voyage" - but much more important, that summer holiday of 1876 concealed the third, and luckiest love of my life -

(He goes to drinks and pours out wine)

Fanny vandergrift Osborne,

who entered the art world of Montparnasse with her beautiful daughter, aptly called Belle, to paint, be quiet, and enjoy nature. A respectable married woman (He drinks)

- and an American!

(He moves to the side as tape is heard.)

FX 10:

Tape: Voice: Fanny - (Over music)

FANNY:

My husband, Sam has gone back home and I can only say, thank goodness. I hate him. Yet, I know as soon as he beckons again, I will come running as I always do. Habit, I guess.

(R.L.S.)

(The hotel here is excellent. The food, the wine, the company, especially an American matron, Mrs Osborne, whose eyes are full of sex and mystery.)

*his response creates
an acceptable dialogue*

FANNY:

I am enjoying France more than I expected. The painter, Sergeant, a fellow American, introduced me to the Stevensons from Scotland. They seem - interesting, but they never leave me alone.

(R.L.S.)

(I've always been alone, but now I knew that without this American woman, I would be lonely for the first time in my life.)

FANNY:

Robert Stevenson is male, Scotch and very handsome. His cousin, Louis, is - well - interesting.

(R.L.S.)

(She has a face like Napoleon's and hands like a wee boy's. But Fanny Osborne is beautiful to me. I find myself waiting for her appearance each day.)

FANNY:

He makes a great fuss of me when I enter a room. He is kindness itself.

(R.L.S.)

(The essence of love is kindness. Kindness run mad and become importunate - a passionate kindness.)

FANNY:

I have never met a man who understood me so clearly. It is uncanny. He is - O God, - I think I'm falling in love.

Tape fades.

(He waltzes around the stage)

R.L.S.:

And so am I.

Isn't it wonderful?

And for the first time, it's mutual.

Oh, my dear Mrs Osborne.

(He stops)

"Bright is the ring of words

When the right man rings them.

Fair the fall of songs

When the singer sings them

And when the West is red

With sunset embers,

The lover lingers ---

(He sits)

And the maid remembers ---"

There is no greater wonder than the way a woman's face sticks in a man's mind and stays there. And he cannot tell you why.

Songs of Travel - P 41

It is inconceivable that love, the most masterful of our emotions, should occupy only the spare moments of a few years, yet makes us believe in immortality.

(He rises)

Falling in love is our one illogical adventure. The one thing we are tempted to think of as supernatural in our trite and reasonable world. Love should run to meet love with open arms. Indeed, the ideal story is that of two people who go into love, step for step, like a pair of frightened children venturing into to a darkened room. From the first moment when they see each other, with a pang of curiosity, through stage after stage of growing pleasure, they can read the expression of their own feelings in the other's eyes. Here is no declarations so called. The feeling is so plainly shared, that as soon as the man knows what is in his own heart, he is certain of what is in the woman's. Two persons meet, look a little into each other's eyes, and fall at once into that state in which the other becomes the very gist and centre-point of God's creation. And all our laborious theories are demolished with a smile.

Virginitous Pueresque

FX 11:

Tape: Instrumental (Skye Boat Song)

LX:

Lights change.

Now we were to return, like voyagers in the play, to see what rearrangements fortune had perfected, what surprises stood ready at home, and whither and how far the world had voyaged in our absence. But, as we know, it is perhaps better to travel hopefully than to arrive. You may paddle all day long, but when you come back at nightfall and look into the familiar room, you may find love or death awaiting you beside the stove; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek.

(The music continues as he moves to the rear and dons a cape from the hatstand, singing softly as he does.)

Speed bonnie boat
Like a bird on the wing,
Onward the sailors cry,
Carry the lad
That's born to be king,
Over the sea to Skye.
Loud the winds howl,
Loud the waves roar,
Thunder claps rend the air,
Baffled our foes
Stand by the shore,
Follow they will not dare.

*Song again used
to change tension
and locale.*

*The cape change
allows actor
to present new figure
the cape -----
allows actor
to present new figure*

(At the end of the song, the tape fades.)

(He picks up a paper from the desk with a flourish and advances with it to the front, and reads:)

actual text
"On the nineteenth day of May, eighteen hundred and eighty, married by me, William A. Scott, Reverend Doctor and Minister of St John's Presbyterian Church, at my residence, Post St, San Francisco City - Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson, white, bachelor, aged 30 years, of Edinburgh, Scotland, and Frances Matilda vandergrift Osborne, white, aged 40 years, styling herself 'widow', both residing Oakland, California. Certificated by me and witnessed by my wife, and Mrs Virgil Williams, of 719 Geary St, San Francisco, in the United States of America."

(He folds the paper and puts it in his pocket.)

Marry in May and rue the day.

Mine was a sort of marriage 'in extremis', and if I am what I am today, it is thanks to that little lady who took care of me when I was a mere complication of cough and bone. She thought we had parted in Paris, but I was as determined as she was unhappy, and thus it was, this amateur emigrant in a velvet coat vaulted the Atlantic on the steamship, 'Devonia', and pioneered the plains of America by train, - a journey

which broke my health for good.

(He coughs into hankie)

'Bluidy Jack' took up permanent residence and nausea, torpor, and insomnia were my constant companions. It was the merest wisp of myself wilted from the San Francisco ferry at Oakland to ask Sam Osborne if he would let me marry his wife! Sam didn't seem to mind. In fact, he rather liked the idea, and gave himself over to immediate and available compensations. And so, after the tangle and wrangle of a private divorce, whose reverberations were felt six thousand miles away in chilly Edinburgh, we were married at last. I can well remember the response that came from Heriot Row - by telegraph:

"Herewith advance draft for £250 sterling. Count on the same per annum."

My good old father. He always had the gift of pleasing. I had eighty pounds in the world. I wrote to my mother: (He picks up a paper.)

"Doubtless she is not the daughter-in-law you have always pictured for me, but nor is she the scarlet woman you fear. She is my wife, and if you can love my wife, it will, I believe, make me love both her and you the better."

My father was already failing. Nothing remained but his determined will and his desire to cling on to his only son. But his son was now a married man - with a family ready made. A son, already a large boy and a daughter, nubile and ready to flee the nest. But, I had the woman I wanted. Whether I wanted marriage and a family was quite another matter, and one which I hesitated to contemplate. (He sits)

Certainly, I love my wife. But love is too violent a passion to make a good domestic sentiment within a marriage. It doesn't matter whom you marry. Once you have made up your mind to it, it doesn't matter truly. If you wish the pick of men and women, take a good bachelor and a good wife. Marriage is a step so grave, it attracts only the light headed by its very awfulness and decisiveness. Most people would, if they were honest, prefer to be unwed. Marriage is terrifying, but so is a cold and lonely old age.

Marriages may be made in heaven, but they have to be worked at on earth, or they can quickly make their own hell. Mine was a fable, as strange and romantic as any of my stories, but Fanny and I worked at it - we adapted our notions to suit each other, and in the process of time

Letters to parents. (1880/81)
Vigorous prescience

conducted each other into new worlds. I was a very withered bridegroom, I can tell you. I was not so much interested in wedded bliss, but in survival. I couldn't resist a tendency to spit up blood. We have all dreamed on summer Sundays when the bells ring, and some nights we cannot sleep for the desire of living. Marriage then seems the royal road through life and the whole world keeps calling...calling... But this is a wile of the devil's. Passing faces leave a regret behind...

Those who have loved once or twice already are better educated to a woman's needs. The innocent needs a deal of civilising. I thought I could never marry a writer, and I was right. Fanny wrote!

Like peasants, Fanny and I gave each other a silver ring. We couldn't afford the gold. Men who fish make admirable husbands. They have learned patience and maintain hope at all times. A ship's captain is also a good man in a marriage. He is away most of the time, and absences keep a marriage bright and delicate. To marry is to domesticate the recording angel. At its lowest, marriage is a kind of friendship recognised by the police. It is like life itself, less a bed of roses than a field of battle. It is one long conversation, chequered by disputes. But fortunes are changed for those who marry. Once you are married, the road lies long and straight and dusty to the grave. Once you are married, there is nothing left but to be good. (He moves upstage)

"Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure,
Married in haste, we may repent at leisure."

I hope you will excuse me now.

Being legally married, we can now undertake our honeymoon. (He smiles)
A very personal and private matter, as many of you will know. And all of you will understand if I - draw the veil - shall we say?

LX:

Lights slowly dim

(He goes to rear and exits, to mark the end of first part.)

Stagelights to blackout.

Houselights.

I-N-T-E-R-V-A-L

title page from 'silverado squatters' (1883)

"MR R.L.S."

PART TWO:

"HUSBAND AND CELEBRITY"

LX: Houselights
Stage lights to full.

(Actor enters removing cape)

R.L.S.

The use of later is merely a piece of theatrical impudence into order to gain prompt attention after an interval when an audience is either slow, restless - or late.

"Vixerunt nonnulli in agris, delectali re sua familiari. His idem propositum fuit quod regibus, ut ne qua ne egerent, ne cui parerent, libertate uterentur; cujus propitium est sic vivere ut velis."

From Cicero's "De Officiis", which roughly translated, means:

"Some of them too, lived in the country and found their pleasures in the management of their private estates. Such men have had the same aims as kings - to suffer no want, to be subject to no authority, to enjoy their liberty, that is, in its essence, - to live just as they please."

Our honeymoon was spent in the Napa Valley, squatting in a abandoned silver min , a predication that was only too apposite, considering that both of us came down at once with a virulent diarrrohea, the charms of which were sufficient to make a good first test of a working married relationship. Yes, we were married. Now new ideas would be struck, new hopes shared. I had learned the mingled lessons of the world. That dolls are stuffed with sawdust, and that hope and love, however firmly held as the very salt and staff of life address themselves to a perfection never realised. But, I am now as she has made me, and she will take care of her 'little boy'.

Listen, here she is...

FX 12:

Tape: Voice: Fanny.

The audience now accepts the disembodied voice as a legitimate character in the play

I will make you brooches,
And toys for your delight,
Of birdsong at morning
And starshine at night.

songs of travel. p 138

I will make my kitchen
And you shall keep your room,
Where white flows the river,
And bright blows the broom.

I will make a palace,
Fit for you and me,
Of green days in forests,
And blue days at sea.

R.L.S:

Fanny nee Vandergrift, now Stevenson, violent friend, or brimstone
enemy, either loathed or slavishly adored. But, on her own admission,
takes a good photograph. (He studies photo)

She always insisted she was ugly - God had made her so ^{use actual photo} but to me she ^{her own mother thought her so.} was beautiful. Still, photographs can be flattering. Black silk stockings, boyish hair and chain smoking - a perfect match for me. Yes, she is my very antithesis, and for that reason, the woman in the world, best fitted to be my comrade and helpmate. Gifted with a mysterious over-intelligence, with a rich capacity for tragedy and comedy alike, her speaking voice was low and sweet, like the pleasantly monotonous flow of a brook under ice and in her talk, a play of character and feeling, and choice and colour of words. A personality as vivid as my own, but above all, she had a spectacular ability to roll her own cigarettes. Fanny is an entertainer - at least, she is entertaining. The woman I love is something of my own handiwork, and the great lover, like the great painter, is he who can embellish his subject so as to make her more than human. So forgive me. I'm sure you understand.
(He rises)

I got my little finger into a steam press called the 'Vandergrifter' (Patent) and my whole body and soul had to go through after it. I came out as limp as a lady's novel. It was time I took her home. We sailed within a month on 'The City of Chester' for the Port of Liverpool. I was bringing my new wife and son to meet my parents.

FX 13:

Tape: Voices: The Stevensons:

(He stands and listens)

MR STEVENSON:

He's merrit oan till a black wummin, ye ken!

MRS STEVENSON:

Thomas!

MR STEVENSON:

That's what the servants are saying. She strikes me as a sensible wee body.

MRS STEVENSON:

She's sallow, that's all - but I'm sure she'd not wish us to judge her on her looks. It's so small a thing to be disappointed in.

MR STEVENSON:

Our son's wife is peepy and dowie. She is a woman not without art - and she speaks English well - for a foreigner!

MRS STEVENSON:

She smokes!

MR STEVENSON:

So do I.

(Fade tape.)

(R.L.S. lights cigarette.)

R.L.S.:

So do I!

Thus it was that Tamatai, the witch woman, who could be in fifty places at once, came to Scotland with her stick of a husband. Even in that

cold climate she could spark, and we had what you might call our fleeting tragedies. There were moments when the casual looker-on might've felt it his duty to call for the police, but seasoned playgoers know that neither the daggers nor the arrows were poisoned, and we soon became cheerfully confident that our hero and heroine would live happily ever after. She is everything that can be irritating in a woman - but without her, I am nothing.

FX 14:

TAPE: Instrumental: Flute:

(He speaks over)

Songs of Travel
Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel-true and blade straight,
The great artificer
Made my mate.

voice over music is always effective - even if the actor 'dies' the music continues and providing he doesn't panic he can make a 'moment' out of

* Honour, anger, valour, fire;
A love that life could never tire,
Death quench or evil stir,
The mighty master
Gave to her.

Privately pumled (1899)
Teacher, tender, comrade, wife,
A fellow-farer true through life,
Heart-whole and soul free
The august Father
Gave to me.

talk woman! "A penny whistle from the land of counterpane," she called me, but at least she made me make the music.

I must not cease from singing
And leave their praise unsung,

The praise of swarthy women,
I have loved since I was young.
The hue of heather honey,
The hue of honey bees,
Shall tinge her golden shoulder,
Shall tinge her tawny knees.

Dark as a wayside gipsy,
Lithe as a hedgewood hare,
She moves a glowing shadow,
Through the sunshine of the fair;
And golden hue and orange,
Bosom and hand and head,
She blooms, a tiger lily,
In the snowdrift of the bed.

Tiger and tiger lily,
She plays a double part,
All woman in the body
And all women at heart.
She shall be brave and tender,
She shall be soft and high,
She to lie in my bosom,
And he to fight and die.

Take, o tiger Lily,
O beautiful one - my soul.
Love lies in your body,
As fires slumber in coal.
I have been young and am old
I have shared in love and strife,
And the touch of a dusky woman
Is the dear reward of life.

(Tape fades.)

C.G.V.
The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Happy hearts and happy faces,
Happy play in grassy places,
That was how, in ancient ages,
Children grew to kings and sages.
But the unkind and the unruly
And the sort who eat unduly
They must never hope for glory,
Theirs is quite a different story!

(He returns to desk) *Must try to change
mood and tempo here*

I think I did make mention that I had passed for the Scottish bar,
looking like a tipsy Irish tinker in my cap and gown. I did do some
work for Skene and Peacock,- now Skene, Peacock and Garson -a very
respectable firm indeed,- but on the one page I worked, there were four
legal errors! Both parties took the hint!

But, since I had to make a living, I took my father's advice, and
applied, not with much hope for the vacant chair of History at the
University. After all, it was a salary of £250 for summer work only,
and it would allow me to escape the killing Edinburgh winter. As I wrote
to Sydney Colvin:

(He reads from a paper)

"Great and glorious news:

'Your friend, the bold, unfearing chap,

Aims at a professional cap,

And now besieges do and dare,

The Edinburgh History Chair.

Three months in summer only it

Will bind him to that windy bit,

The other nine to range abroad,

Untrammell'd in the eye of God!

Mark in particular one thing

verse letter (1881) his initials 38

He means to work, that cursed thing
And to the golden youth explain,
Scotland, England, France and Spain!

In short, sir, I mean to try for this chair. I do believe I can make something of it. It will be a pulpit in a sense, for I am nothing if not moral, as you know. My works are unfortunately so light and trifling, they may interfere. But, if you think, as I think, I am fit to fight it, send me the best kind of testimonial stating all you can in favour of me, and with your best art, turning the difficulty of my never having done anything in history, strictly speaking. It would be a good thing for me, out and out good. Help me to live. Help me to work, for I am the better of pressure, and help me to say what I want about God, man and life."

I was not even called for an interview. Ah, well!

I am now author entire, though not likely to make a living at it. Family men with salaries ought to bear in mind the plight of those who have to keep others by their wits alone. By writing - writing - writing...

I've wakened sick and gone to bed weary. I've written in bed and out of it, in sickness, and despite of blood, torn by coughing, or with my head swimming. But, ill or well, the battle goes on. As long as I can remember I've been dying, but then so have we all.

So here we are, my Fanny and me, still living, still working, still seeking for glory in the bright world, still living happily ever after. There is no duty so underrated as that of just being happy. And I think we are that. Who would think to look at us now, a respectable middle-aged couple, that our illicit love was once the gossip of Grez, and rocked the drawing rooms of Heriot Row. We were the scandal of Monterey. We shocked all of San Francisco. That Oakland woman who lived openly with her Scotch friend, and both visited regularly by her husband. Our sleeping arrangements must have intrigued the neighbours. Oh yes, how the good and moral people were shocked! But then good people are always being shocked. The trouble with moral people is that they are never cheerful, and believe me, if your morals make you dreary, depend upon it, they are wrong. Anyway, what does it matter? I mean to make our ideas of morality centre on forbidden acts is to defile the

imagination. I do not say give them up, they may be all we have. There may be something in pornography, after all. If we were all good all the time, what kind of world would it be?

The New York World has offered me ten thousand dollars for a year of weekly articles - but I couldn't take their offer seriously. A very little American appreciation goes a long way. Anyway, it's only money, and what does money matter? Wealth is only useful for two things - a yacht - and a string quartet. (He rises)

FX 15: Tape: Instrumental: A string quartet (Mendelssohn)

(He listens for a moment, then speaks over.)

Know you the river near to Grez

new poems . P 159
A river deep and clear
Among the lilies all the way
That ancient river runs today
From snowy weir to weir.
The love I hold was borne by her
And now though far away
My lonely spirit hears the stir
Of water round that startling spur
Beside the bridge at Grez.

But one thing in life calls for another. There is a fitness in events and places. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of ships upon the ocean. These things call up in the mind a whole army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen, but we know not what. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder. Certain coasts demand a shipwreck. (He moves to the front) The old Hawes Inn at Queensferry makes a call upon my fancy. There it stands apart from the town, beside the pier, in a climate of its own, half inland, half marine. In front, the ferry bubbling with the tide, and the guard ship swinging to her anchor. Behind, the old garden with its trees - but that's not all. Within those walls, behind those old green shutters, some further business smoulders waiting for its hour. So it is with names and faces. The man or the hour had not yet come. But some day - I think - a boat shall put off from the Queensferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night, a horseman on a tragic errand will rattle with his whip on the shutters of the inn.....

And so begins a story.

And it became "Kidnapped".

(a novel - 1886)

(Fade tape.)

(He moves to the lectern and reads:) *Lectern lighting
for recital*

"By what I have read in books, I think few that have held a pen were ever really wearied, or they would write of it more strongly. I had no care of my life, neither past nor future, and I scarce remembered there was such a lad as David Balfour. I did not think of myself, but just of each fresh step which I was sure would be my last, with despair - and of Alan, who was the cause of it all, with hatred. Alan was in the right trade as an officer, and I dare say I would have made a good enough private; for it never occurred to me that I had any choice but just to obey as long as I was able, and die obeying.

Day began to come in, after years I thought, and never a word passed between us; each set his mouth and kept his eyes in front of him, and lifted his foot and set it down again. I say Alan did as I did. Not that I ever looked at him, for I had enough to do to keep my feet; but because it is plain he must have been as stupid with weariness as myself, and looked as little where we were going, or we should not have walked into the ambush like blind men. We were going down a heathery braw, Alan leading and I following a pace or two behind, like a fiddler and his wife; when suddenly the heather gave a rustle, three or four ragged men leaped out, and the next moment we were lying on our backs, each with a dirk at his throat.

And I don't think I cared - - - "

It was a summer in Scotland. A typical summer. And how it rained.

"The rain is raining all around,

It falls on field and tree,

It rains on the umbrellas -"

And it certainly rains on me!

I used to go to bed in my room in the day, just to give my mackintosh a rest. It rained with a patient fury. We were imprisoned by the downpour in the parlour of Mrs McGregor's lugubrious cottage near Braemar.

"The weather will be better in the spring perhaps," ventured Fanny to our landlady.

"The spring? Why this is the spring!" was the reply.

"Well, in the summer then?" persisted my wife.

"That'll depend on St Swithin's Day. If it rains, then it'll rain a' summer."

- And it did!

In order to amuse an intelligent schoolboy I let loose the frustrated schoolboy in myself, and drew him a map. Lloyd, needing something craggy to break his mind on, took a fancy to my island, and together we drew in harbours that pleased me like sonnets. I ticketed my performance, "Treasure Island."

The next thing I knew I had some paper before me and was writing out a list of chapters. It was to be a story for boys. No need for fine writing, and I had the boy at hand as a touchstone. So, on a chill September morning, by the cheek of a brisk fire, and with the rain - of course - drumming on the window - I began "The Sea Cook", for that was the name I gave first to what became "Treasure Island".

*and if this don't fetch the kids
why they've gone rotten since my day
(He reads)*

"Well, it's like this," said Silver. "We want that treasure, and we'll have it. You would just as soon save your lives, I reckon. You have a chart, haven't you?"

(1883) "That's as maybe." The Captain looked at him, and then proceeded calmly to light his pipe. It was as good as a play to watch them.

Treasure is land. "Now," said Silver, "You give us the chart to get the treasure by, and stop shooting poor seamen, and stoving their heads in while asleep. You do that, and we'll offer you a choice. Come aboard along of us, once the treasure's shipped, and I'll give you my affy-davy, upon my word of honour, to clap you somewhere safe ashore. Or, if that ain't to your fancy, you can stay here. We'll divide stores with you and I'll give you my affy-davy to speak to the first ship I sight and send 'em here to pick you up. Now, you'll own that's talking. Handsomer you couldn't look to get. And I hope, " - raising his voice - "that all hands in this here block-house will overhaul my words, for what is spoke for one

is spoke to all."

Captain Smollett rose from his seat, and knocked out the ashes of his pipe in the palm of his left hand.

"Is that all?"

"Every last word, by thunder!" answered Silver.

"Very good," said the Captain. "Now you'll hear me. If you'll come up one by one, unarmed, I'll engage to clap you all in irons, and take you home to a fair trial. If you won't I'll see you all to Davy Jones. You can't find the treasure and there's not a man among you can sail the ship. You're on a lee shore Mister Silver, and I'll put a bullet in your back when next I see you. Tramp, my lad! Bundle out of this, please, hand over hand, and double quick."

Silver's face was a picture. His eyes started out of his head with wrath.

"Give me a hand up," he cried.

"Not I," returned the Captain.

"Who'll give me a hand up?" he roared.

Not a man among us moved. Growling the foulest imprecations, he crawled along the sand till he got hold of the porch and could hoist himself again upon his crutch. Then he spat into the spring.

"There!" he cried, "That's what I think of ye. Before an hour's out, I'll stove in your old block-house like a rum puncheon. Oh ay, laugh by thunder, laugh! Before an hour's out, ye'll laugh upon the other side.

Them that'll die'll be the lucky ones!" "

*Treasure Island is the favourite book of our prime minister
my gladstone - he talks about it all the time
he were better to attend imperial affairs*

Then who should drop by 'ex machina' but 'Dr Japp' charged to find some new stories for 'young folks'. When he left a week later, he held in his portmanteau, the manuscript of "Treasure Island".

*LX. Pick up
(goes to clock)
change of tempo*

It flowed from me with a singular ease, but when the proofs came to be corrected, they had lost the map. With the utmost difficulty, I made a new one in my father's office, but it was never the same "Treasure Island" to me.

(He goes to couch, pours a drink, and sits.)

*a change of stage
position is good
for any change of
locale or situation*

A visit home is rarely made, seldom enjoyed, and never repeated. But the welcome we had! My parents were relieved to find me looking comparatively well and Fanny so ordinary. How wrong they were. About her, at least.

What a place for a honeymoon! Scotland! Even then I knew a winter there would kill me. Exile looked on the cards - but where?

Meantime, one last summer ---

at Braemar, looking up from "Treasure Island" to watch Queen Victoria driving past our windows each day from Balmoral, staring straight ahead, utterly regardless of the weather, with two frozen, unhappy looking ladies-in-waiting sitting stiffly mauve, and John Brown, stern and fierce, watching over her - a drip at the end of his long, beaked nose.

(He drinks)

But to be home again

All the old senses, all the old memories come flooding back. Colinton, Queensferry, Pittenweem, Beloved Swanston, and the end of innocence.

Kate Drummond....

(He sings softly)

"If my true love she were gone,
I would surely find another,
Where the wild mountain thyme,
Grows around the bloomin' heather,
Will ye go, lassie, go?"

I met her again, you know. Yes, I did in an Edinburgh tavern. She was older of course, - so was I. But she was still the same Kate. Still living on affronts, yet keeping the point of honour, a touch of pity. She repaid the world's scorn with service, still fighting her lost cause, still clinging under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks for the still-shining jewel of her soul. Heaven, if not posterity, will judge her mortality. But to me she was Kate, still singing, still beautiful, still good. We had a drink together,

(He drinks and puts down glass)

and shook hands on parting.

I was then what would now be called a feminist, I suppose. Women to me seem victims alike to men and nature. There would be no children if men had to bear them. But hardest of all is the need, it is supposed, for women to be attractive at all ages. My God, think of all those slab-sided, broken-backed old frumps having to paint their faces and stick flowers in their hats to go through the horrible affectation of being attractive? Even more impossible - desirable? But the accepted rights of man over woman fill me with loathing. What of the rights of woman? But what man, for instance, would have the courage of a street walker?

Of that zany Scot who once sparked through life bent on art and the pleasures of the flesh, only strong language remains. That at least, I shall take gravewards.

*I am still a slow study
and sit a long time silent on my eggs*
(He sits) *but -*

I was determined to write, and to write I had to stay alive somehow - hence the odyssey, that pilgrimage of health through country to country, spa to resort, bedroom to sun parlour, commuting with my fellow travellers in the eternal search for the miracle cure.

Davos - a place full of invalids. Even the shopkeepers were consumptive like myself, but the air agreed with me even if some of the regular patients did not.

FX 16:

colour changes for change of place

Tape: Instrumental: Flute

Hyeres - the only place I was ever truly happy. Had my hair cut short, but grew a little 'imperial', so that I look more like a Frenchie than a Briton. I was starting to work hard and well. Routine suited me, and I was beginning to make a name, and the beginnings of an income. At my desk all morning - a stroll in the afternoon, letters or a nap before dinner and good talk with good wine till bedtime. But work came first. It was my consuming joy and passion, and I am ashamed to say, I graded my friends by their interest in it. Yes, Hyeres! La solitude, that sweet corner of the universe. Autumn in the South of France. The most wonderful view into a moonlit garden. Angels, I know, frequent it, and it thrills all night with the flutes of silence. I was only really happy once, and that was at Hyeres. But cholera from Toulon drove us away, and we began to come into the trade winds of death.

(Tape fades.)

Bournemouth - that nest of Philistine dodderers. I was never wholly comfortable with the English. I don't know why, except that they insisted on treating me as a foreigner. Which perhaps I was - to them. Our house was called 'Skerryvore' after one of my father's lighthouses. He gave us it as a wedding present - the house, I mean, not the lighthouse - and £500 to help with the furnishings. I duly ordered a reasonable cellar of wine!

But I tried to be more sober, in what had been 'sea-view'. The happy-go-lucky Bohemian was no more. I was thirty seven - and the wanderers were now 'anchored', paying rates and taxes and gradually

dwindling into a burgher - or is it burgess. Whatever it is, I hate the word. And I was slightly uneasy with the thought that over our heads was our very own roof-tree. However, I lent myself to be converted into a householder, for Fanny was a born home maker - everything large of their kind - but soon we had a blue room, a miniature stables, a model and working lighthouse in the hall, and the whole place a veritable labyrinth of paths, bowers, arbours and escape rooms. When the vicar called, it took him hours to find us! But I was virtually a prisoner in the place, for as long as I lived in it. I could not even step on the lawn without a voice cautioning -

"Louis, you musn't get your feet wet!"

You can guess who.

But the drawing room, or yellow room, was beautiful. It was like eating just to sit in it. I blush for the figure I cut in such a bower. I left my youth at Bournemouth. Not that I minded. I was lucky to have it so long.

(He rises)

Then my father died in Edinburgh.

Of course, we returned at once.

FX 17:

Tape: A tolling Bell

*my father was a tragic thinker
and he always had his own ideas*
(He moves down left to sit.)

My father considered that dying in bed was indecorous. He had always seen life as a shambling sort of omnibus taking him to his hotel. He had a wish to die on his feet, or to meet death head-on, sitting in his armchair, in his best broadcloth and cravat, smoking his pipe. It was a terrible figure we saw sitting there, staring straight ahead, recognising no one but the approaching angel. His memory gone, reason shattered, he waited in the drawing room of Heriot Row, as if for a tradesman to call, then with the help of a sedative he fell asleep....

I must try to be a good Christian
(He bows his head)

otherwise I can never inherit his money.

He had the largest private funeral ever seen in the Capital, but my uncles forbade me to go. There was only room in the coffin for one. We

*the trick in
playing grief
is to play it
lightly but
sugget sweating
under it*

left a few days later never to return - and never to see Scotland again.
*I remember how much he had wanted a knighthood
I should have pushed for him a bit.*
(He rises)

We returned to Bournemouth. Henry James visited, but was mistaken for a tradesman and was shown to the back. Unruffled, he came in and took his favourite blue chair, which I'd brought from Heriot Row.

By this time, "Kidnapped" had been published, and I was becoming almost famous. My father's patrimony had almost made us rich, but my old friend, Henley, was convinced that real fame and fortune was to come to me as a dramatist - a writer of plays for the professional stage. I like the idea. I liked the theatre. I always had since my infant forays to the shop at the corner.

But a model theatre is quite a distance from that tinder box of egos and pretences that make the contemporary stage. Poor old Henley had come to make us all rich. Together we would write marvellous plays that would run for hundreds of nights, and earn thousands of guineas. The idea was a long time in dying. We wrote three or four plays together, and they were acted. We had titles for a dozen more, but gradually, I crept back to plodding authorship, and Henley took up the grind of editorship again. The irony is, other people took up the task of dramatising my work and made a first rate job of it.

They still do!

Skerryvore was to be our last house in England before the time of wandering began, and it was in Bournemouth I wrote the book that was to haunt me for the rest of my life. It wasn't "Treasure Island" that was to pursue me despite -

"fifteen men in a dead man's chest.

Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum.

Pieces of eight, pieces of eight."

No, it wasn't the Sea-Cook, fond of it, though I was. Nor "Kidnapped", nor "Catriona", nor "The Master of Ballantrae", but a Gothic gnome.

Interesting, I think, and it came out of a deeper mine, where he guards the fountain of tears. It is not always a time to rejoice. It might have been my work on the "Deacon Brodie" play that first started me on pondering the mysteries of the double life. Brodie, a respectable town councillor by day, a cat burglar by night. The two-faced pretension we

Letter to Will Low

all have in some situations. I don't know. Then again, it might have been the opium Fanny gave me to sleep. One way or another, I took to having bad dreams and woke one night, screaming, staring at my hands. The candle was still lit and I was sure they were claws or talons. I sat up staring at them. Fanny had to shake me by the shoulder to bring me out of it. I turned on her snarling. Neither of us got back to sleep again. But, in my head, I had the finest of all bogie tales. The dream was so vivid, so real. I was possessed by it. I couldn't rest till I had set it down. So, for three days hard, I scribbled, hardly pausing to eat or sleep, and the result was a book - a strange book: "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." (light/line effects) But Fanny didn't like it. We had words, long and bitter, loud and angry words. But she stood firm in being unimpressed, no matter how much I ranted. I had read it to her in my very best actor's manner, relishing the very sound of my own voice - yet her praise was constrained and her words came out with difficulty. I had missed the point, she said. I had missed the allegory, made it merely a story. I had made a magnificent bit of sensationalism out of what should have been a masterpiece. I was thunderstruck, but she was right. And, without a word, I took up the manuscript from the table, and threw it in the fire. Understand, I trembled as I did so. My hands shook as I picked up the papers. But into the fire they went. Fanny almost screamed. Lloyd jumped up and tried to retrieve them. But I just stood staring down at the flames, watching the pages blow away as chaff and turn to embers what had once been a finished book. I then turned and left the room.

(He goes to desk)

Never had I been so outraged, but I knew she had been right - she always was.

(He sits)

So, without more ado, I started all over again. I couldn't re-write. I had to start from scratch. So I did - page after page, hour by hour, day by day, a new book built up. I found the essence that was missing,

and I laughed as I wrote for another three days. And this was the book you all know today.

(he takes up the volume and moves to the lectern)

(He reads) lights fade to lectern setting for reading.

"My visitor, who had watched these metamorphoses with a keen eye, smiled, set down the glass and said:

"Now to settle what remains. Will you suffer me to take this glass and go forth from your house without further parley? Or has the greed of curiosity too much command of you? Think before you answer, for it shall be done as you decide."

"Sir," said I, affecting a coolness I was far from truly possessing, "you speak enigmas, but I have gone too far in the way of inexplicable service to pause before I see the end."

"It is well. You remember your vows, Lanyon? What follows is under the seal of our profession. Behold!"

He put the glass to his lips, and drank at one gulp. A cry followed; he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked, there came, I thought, a change - he seemed to swell - his face became suddenly black, the features seemed to melt and alter - and the next moment I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me, my mind submerged in terror.

"Oh, God!" I screamed, and "Oh, God!" and again and again; for there, before my eyes - pale and shaken, half-fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death - there stood Henry Jekyll!"

(he returns to desk) general lights resume

The writing of it was quite a feat, however you look at it. Nearly ten thousand words a day in all, where a thousand a day is fair out-put for any writer. But my blood was up. I was determined to get it right this time. "Jekyll" is a dreadful thing I know, but the only thing I feel is dreadful about it is that damned old business of the war in the members - pulling the body apart. The time it came out.

Let's hope in future it will stay in.

This invalid wouldn't like to face such sheer manual labour again. Some people, like theosophists and spiritualists, thought that I had received

spiritual guidance in the writing of it. I wish I had. No, I have to thank Fanny's honesty, that's all. I spent two days copying it out in a fair hand, and by the third, I had it in the post. After that, I went about refreshed and revitalised and uplifted, as though I had come into a fortune. In a way, I had.

Longman Green had it out in no time. It could've come out at Christmas, but it was hardly considered seasonal fare, so it came out in the January, 1886. It was hardly in print before they were preaching sermons about it in St Pauls. Luckily we were in the Gilbert Islands by then - a long way from St Pauls. The first edition sold out in weeks. So a second was started at once. A pirate edition sold out in America - a million copies, no less - which added greatly to my prestige, if not to my pocket. Americans have been fond of me ever since. Some of them think I am American.

But I am still myself - who is that, I wonder? "Jekyll and Hyde" as a phrase went into the encyclopaedias, but which was I? I hope Jekyll - I fear Hyde. Or like every man, a wee bit of both. The real Mr Hyde was a minister, and not at all a man of God. We didn't get on. So I put him in my book.

(He rises and moves to the rear)

LX:

Light effect on cyc at rear.

*much needed pause here
to rest the actor's voice
and to give the audience
some respite from his
continuous direct speech*

FX 17:

Tape: Instrumental: Guitar and native drums

Samoa!

That first sunrise, that first day, that first island, awoke a virginity of sense in both of us. Balm for the weary. Few who come to the South Sea islands ever leave them. They grow grey where they alight and the palms shade them till they die.

I could live till I was seventy, Dr Drummond told Fanny - "if only he'll stop this damned travelling about." So I've stopped. Though I've no

wish yet to see myself as an old man and a 'sit-by-the-fire'.

(Music fades.)

So here we are, my Fanny and me. I had survived where a stronger man would not. Pain draws a lingering fiddle bow.

On 22 August, 1887, we left Britain for the last time on the steamship,

"Ludgate Hill" for the USA. Though still in mourning for my father, I was stylishly dressed in velvet coat and black silk necktie, and less

like an unemployed Lascar than usual. I thought myself elegant and

refined as I pranced around in my panther fashion, talking all the time and feeling full of wit and charm. Fanny remained below - seasick.

Poor girl. She wasn't a good sailor, but for some reason, I was, so I

had little more sense of crisis than usual. A floating menagerie made

our cargo. Stallions and monkeys. The stallions stood hypnotised by

the motion of the ship, and stared through the ports at our dinner

table, winking whenever the crockery was broken. The monkeys scurried

about the ship, falling overboard or resting in my arms, much to the

detriment of my clothing. Fanny made the effort to come up for air, but

was met by a deputation of monkeys and hurried back below!

Saranac Lake was an isolated logging village high in the Adirondack mountains in upstate New York, where Dr Trudeau had founded a sanatorium

for consumptives and those troubled by congestion of the lungs and

kidneys. We rented a trapper's cottage in the middle of a forest, high

on the mountain, like a hatbox on a hill. Fanny took to camp life and

went off to Montreal, returning with bulky buffalo coats, which she

insisted we wear as it was 40 below. I found it difficult pacing the

narrow balcony for inspiration in buffalo coat, sealskin boots and a

monumental fur hat. I was rationed to a dash of 'sleighbing' and skates

were absolutely forbidden. Fanny went off to San Francisco next to see

relatives and to find a yacht for hire. She wired: "Have found "The

Casco" under Captain Otis," but hesitated until I could see it. I wired

back - "Blessed girl, take it. Expect us in ten days." *(actual wire)*

So here we are.

So far so soon.

From England, to the South of France, across the Atlantic and the whole broad face of continental America, and into the Pacific from the Port of San Francisco. In the process of time, the whole material of our lives was turned over and we conducted each other into the Pacific, following the sun and the route of a thousand islands in the year of 1889. And the family came too. Belle and Lloyd, Valentine Roch, a Swiss maid, - and my mother.

Yes, who would have thought it.

From chilly Edinburgh to tropical Samoa at 60. Like the old Queen herself in her mitch hat and starched apron. I wonder if Queen Victoria could have flitted from Balmoral with the ease my old mother moved from Heriot Row, bringing all her standards with her.

As a staunch Presbyterian, she mistrusted 'Popeys' - Roman Catholics, that is - and would not allow grace to be said in the presence of our Catholic boys, in case they were spies from Rome! She wasn't even sure about their wearing loincloths around the house - even if they were in tartan!

Still, she learned to ride a bike and a horse - which she would never have done in Edinburgh - and Fanny got on with running the house - leaving her free to congregate the whole island to the Church of Scotland. Aunt Maggie, she was called to everyone, but she was still the same old Mama to me. An essential part of the Vailima scene.

By this time, I was making what many people would think was a very large income from book royalties. And all of it went into Vailima. It was my Abbotsford. But I merely regarded it as an investment. Once built, it would last us for ever, and we could easily live on my royalties, and royally entertain any passing visitor. Of which, I may say, there were many, even though I still hadn't cured myself of swearing.

I sometimes chafed against my self-imposed exile, but Vailima as it rose beneath Mount Vaea and above the harbour below, filled my need for the dramatic and the grandiose. I may have failed as a playwright, but I

was the best dramatist of my own life, as it happened. And, here I cast myself as a Highland Chief, if not of a glen, then of a beautiful South Sea island in the sun. Yet, all my real writing is done in a shack in the grounds. Here, in complete content with my cot, my flagelot and ink bottle, I set myself to write, while centipedes wriggled at my feet, lizards darted after flies, and spiders, undisturbed, continued the weaving of their webs.

I was almost well - could ride, walk and dine out. The fire of disease was no longer in my eyes, and I wore my yachting cap at a jaunty angle. I looked the very picture of a famous author. I dressed the role to play the part like the actor I was. I often fancied myself at the door of the Saville Club - bronzed and lean, the returned sea-farer from the South Seas, yet I knew I should never see London again. But I did see the sea!

There is no better country I know than a schooner's deck! I was never ill at sea. By day, on our voyages, the sun flared, but the air had an indescribable sweetness as nimble as the cheek of health. And at night the whole world was still, and stars came out in regiments. There was nothing visible, only the stars and the helmsman in the light of the swaying binnacle lamp hardly moved in the milky, warm air. Suddenly I remember - I had a vision of Drummond Street of all places. It came to me like a flash of lightning, and simply returned me to the past. I pickled about Rutherford's in the rain. How I feared I should never have a friend, still less a wife, yet how passionately I hoped I might. How I hoped that one day I should write a book - just one little one....

I feel I should like the incident set down on a brass plate at the corner of that dreary thoroughfare for all students to read. Poor devils, when their hearts are down. What I would not give to steal this evening south under street lamps - but old time is dead never to be revived. It was a sad time for us, but it was hopeful and we had much sport with our low spirits.

I have endured some two and forty years without public shame and had a good time as I did it. If only I could secure a violent death, what a fine success. I wish to die in my boots, no more land of counterpane for me - to be drowned, to be shot, to be thrown from a horse - even to be hanged, rather than pace again through a slow dissolution by disease. There are the stirrings of unrest among the natives. The womenfolk are

Letter to Charles Baxter from the 'Caraca' (1888)

uneasy we have not a gun in the place. But we have friends - on both sides - all of whom could eat and drink me under the table - and all good cannibals in their time - who would walk home from an island affray quietly eating their enemies. I often wondered if they kept cold missionary on the sideboard - (He breaks off)

Oh, I must tell you a joke.

At least, I think now it was funny. Some time ago now, there was an alarm. It looked like family (you know what I mean?) frustration. I saw myself financially ruined. I saw the child born sickly etc. Then, said I, I must look at this thing on the good side. And proceeded to do so, studiously. And with such result, that when the alarm passed off - I was inconsolable. Poor Fanny - she cried for days.

It would have been no ordinary child, I can tell you that.

I remember once at Davos, while Fanny was inspecting one of the rooms, I waited downstairs. One of the staff came to me. "Your mother will be down soon."

Fanny wasn't very pleased when I told her. This blasted boy-blighted youth was kept young by sickness. Well, at least it kept me thin. And once in Nice, a doctor was called. He told Fanny to send for some English gentleman to make my funeral arrangements immediately. He died himself soon after. Though my pathetic body is my own, my legs are my father's and I'll always land on my feet. I am the last of Scotland's three Robbies - Robbie Fergusson, Robbie Burns and Robbie Stevenson. I don't include Robbie Bruce, because he was a Frenchman. Ay, the three Robbies - and I think I've been handed a better deal than the other two, despite being plagued by diseases. Fate has decreed that my battlefield should be a dirty, inglorious bed. I should have preferred a place of trumpeting. Yet I have never felt as well as I do now. It's almost a serenity. Fanny keeps mentioning a gloomy premonition. That I am going to die. Of course I am. I've known that since I was born. It will come when it comes. Meantime, I'm in no great hurry. Life is too good. But when I need a story I just go to sleep and dream one. This is how, as I said, I got the original "Jekyll and Hyde". For convenience, I call this creative device, "the brownies". These little people are near connections of the dreamers. Only, I think they have more talent. They tell him a story piece by piece, like a serial, and keep him in ignorance of where they aim. They do half my work for me while I am

*travels with a donkey in the caveana
Keegan
Paul
London
(1879)*

FX 18: Tape: Instrumental: Flute Music

LX: Light effect

Look at that glorious sunset.

How beautiful it can be here. Almost like Scotland. Strange how I was haunted by this place even before I came. When I was a boy, a New Zealander, a Mr Seed, as I remember, came visiting, and he told us first about Samoa. I think I fell in love with the name. It was so very unscottish.

(Tape: Mixes to Pibroch)

The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotsman. You must pay for it in so many ways, as for all other advantages on earth. You have to learn the paraphrases and the shorter catechism. You generally take to drink. Your youth, as far as I can find out is a time of loud war against society, of more outcry and tears and turmoil than if you had been born for instance in England. But somehow life is warmer and closer; the hearth burns more redly; the lights of home shine softer in the rainy street; the very names enshrined in verse and music cling nearer round our hearts ---

*"From the dim shieling
And the misty island,
Mountains divide us
And a waste of seas,
Yet still the blood is strong
The heart is Highland,
We, in dreams behold the Hebrides."
And Highland or Lowland, all our hearts are Scottish.
Yes, I am a Scotchman. touch me and you will find a thistle. I am a Briton, and have my being in the greatness of our national achievement.
But I often feel unable to continue with this horseplay we call human life, and I yearn for the great solitude of four and twenty mountain hours. But, am I to forget the long hospitality of beautiful France, and has not America done me favours to compound my gratitude? No, they are all my relatives! Wherever it is, a place doesn't exist in our imagination till we have moved elsewhere.
Ay, Scotland! My homeland. You know my sense of Scotland grows stronger in me the longer I am away from her. I can feel Scotland even*

fast asleep, and in all human likelihood, do the rest for me while I am wide awake. And still, I fondly suppose I do it for myself. Seriously, any success I've had is due in no way to any talent - but to industry. If I have any talent at all it is for work. I was able to develop what I had to the extreme limit. When a man begins to sharpen a faculty, and to keep on sharpening it, he can achieve wonders. Everybody knows it, but few do it. At least to the extent I did, and if one does it long enough, one must improve. I can touch an emotion now I never knew existed. We are all travellers in what John Bunyan calls, "the wilderness of this world" - and all with a donkey! The best we can find in our travels is an honest friend. He is a fortunate voyageur who finds many. Of what shall a man be proud if not his friends? They are the end and the reward of life. They keep us worthy of ourselves. When we are alone, we are only nearer to the absent. Every book is, in a sense, a circular letter to the author's friends. They find private messages in every corner. The public is the generous patron who defrays the postage. Though the letter is addressed to one it is directed to all.

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(Tape: Mixes to Pibroch)

this sound effect obvious but effective highly emotive of scots and Scotland

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Ay, Scotland! My homeland. You know my sense of Scotland grows stronger in me the longer I am away from her. I can feel Scotland even

as I sit here. Scotland, that poor little country with its long history that is nothing but a succession of brawls. Yet, it has an indescribable bite, deep in my very heart. It has so little to commend it. Yet, I can't think of the place but tenderly. Scotland - so far away - yet always so near.

Songs of Travel P168

"Blows the wind today
And the sun and the rain flying.
Blows the wind on the moors today,
Where waups are crying?
My heart remembers
Grey, cumbent stones of the dead
In desert places,
Standing stones and hills of sheep,
And the homes of silent,
Vanquished races."

Be it granted to me to behold you again on dying - hills of home....

(Fade music.)

Letter to Charles Baxter

Sometimes I feel wistful for the winds of Edinburgh. To wander again down Lothian Road along Princes Street with its commercial palaces, beflagged for a great occasion. To stand on the North Bridge and watch the trains steam into the sunset, white steam, black and tan smoke, red sparks against a parchment sky. The climb up the mound to the Canongate where from their smoky beehives, the great unwashed look down on the New Town and the gardens of the rich. Egyptian and Greek, Venetian and Gothic - all styles fit in my remembered Edinburgh all in an admirable disorder. And above it all, with a dignity that becomes a work of nature, Arthur's Seat looks down on these monuments to a man-made art. But this was my home town, my native city, Auld Reekie - are you smoking still? To amble again in Colinton, - half-town, half-country, - to walk again in wet heather, see where the burn runs at Glencorse, make an occasional appearance at the Kirk. I've never been very religious, despite a very strong Calvinistic boyhood. Perhaps, because of it. But I still cling to God. I wonder if I shall like God. I don't think I will. Yet, I must say, I've always found his son to be a perfect

gentleman. I'm afraid my Scottishness will never leave me. There are sayings in Scotch that have the very grain of language in them. You'll find them in all my books. With some of my books, I can't feel that I wrote them. With others, I think somebody else wrote them. But I'm glad nobody did. I have long had a desire to re-read "Treasure Island" - but I know I never shall. If I do, it will only make me want to re-write every word. And re-writing is always more pleasurable than original creation - the hard ploughing has been done. But it is a chore to pass through the disgust of the proof sheets. By this time, the poor author has lost all contact with his own literature. To him it speaks only of disappointment and failure - yet there is an intimate pleasure, hard to describe and quite peculiar to writers of imaginative fiction. It is, in one sense, the fulfilment of old childish daydreams that have now - here between the hard covers of a book - taken poignant and permanent shape. It is almost a living thing. Yet how can a book - a mere collection of papers with marks on the pages - compete with life? Life whose sun we cannot look upon whose passions waste us, whose desires claim our every waking moment. Life goes on before us - infinite in complication, the seat of wonder, appealing to every sense. Life is the beauty of the dawn, the scorching of fire, the bitterness of death. Here indeed are labours worthy of Hercules, armed only with a pen and a dictionary, and a limited experience in the cockpit of life. But the real thing can overwhelm - only its phantom reproduction can convey its meaning. Art is the essence of reality - its inner truth. I am my own art, and only in writing is life breathed into every fibre of me. And to write, I dig into my past. The past seems delightful to me - more and more - when I was drunk and sober and met missionaries from Aberdeen. But the future is fine too, in its way. It's all we have to come and go upon.

But as long as I can write I am happy. As long as the pen will scratch and the words will come. I rise at four on good days, writing by six, and go on till lunch drives me from one table to another. I write anywhere and at any time the word-fever takes me. I don't regard it as any kind of art - or, if it is, I sleep upon it like a pillow. I realise I must cut a preposterous figure on occasions. I have a general untidiness that is all my own, and while I may not have been given peace of body, peace of mind is less a stranger to me.

(He touches his temple)

In here, I have a surprising order. I wonder I don't ever tire it out. Funny - it seems - heavy somehow. I wonder --- how it will feel to be old. That's a luxury of thought I never ever gave myself before. I was always imminently dying. But my writing - what am I to say? I flatter myself it has a certain stamp, even though I'm only read these days by fellow-writers and wee boys, but I am in hopes that eventually some of my tales may yet please in frivolous circles. But I must confess rather than a writer of romance, I see myself more as a hero of romance. I believe in the magic you see. I am yet the man-made boy, R.L.S. - may the palm shade him till he die. Nothing is more pleasing to the writer than to let his pen move 'ad libitum' over the page, careless where he shall pass by or whither, if anywhere, he shall arrive. Whether it pleases the reader is another question. The author sees a very different book from the reader, but there is no doubt whose opinion is the more important. And it does not belong to that unhappy scribbler with the inky fingers. Yes, I know I shall have died when I can no longer write. Meantime, I am an impersonation of life, sick in mind and body, but have done towers of work. A disembodied intellect submerged in bedclothes. Yet, I don't know why. I'm uneasy. I don't find it all as easy as I once did. I seem to be developing a kind of block. "St Ives" has been abandoned and I have taken up again with "Weir of Hermiston". I have never felt better, and hardly cough these days. Sickness, so long my companion, appears to have deserted me. So too, it would seem, has my ease with the pen. Which would be a great irony. To have written so much through pain and discomfort and now when I am free of these troubles, I hesitate about what I am to say.

Perhaps it is my new respectability? Give me the old eccentric - he at least could work. But the fact is, I don't need to work now.

In a year or two, Vailima will be paid for, and I can live at last like a Highland Chieftain!

Meantime, Belle runs me like a baby in a perambulator - she not only buys me socks, but makes me wear them. She cuts my hair, trims my nails and dutifully takes down every second word I dictate to her. Lloyd is now six feet tall, blond and bespectacled, in British eye-glasses. Very witty, but keeps nothing of his youth. Can be coy at times. Known

round the house as "cold blasts from Holland" - because of some Dutch connections on his mother's side. His mother - my wife - my life in fact. She still runs the show. I remember an old uncle of mine, seeing Fanny for the first time, said, "Yes Louis, you've done well. I married a besom myself and never regretted it." Fanny Stevenson - the unique woman in the world to be my wife.

"To My Wife:

(1896)
I saw rain falling
And the rainbow drawn on Lammermuir.
Harkening, I heard again
In my precipitous city,
Beaten bells winnow the keen sea wind.
And here afar
Intent on my own race and place
I wrote.
Take thou the writing,
Thine it is,
For who burnished the coals,
Held still the target higher,
Chary of praise, prodigal of counsel,
Who, but thou?
And now,
In the end,
If this, the last, be good,
If any deed be done,
If any fire burn in the imperfect page,
The praise be thine."

dedication to 'weir of harnishen' (1896)

Tusitala, the teller of tales. The white man god made manifest!

actual last words
(He puts his hands to his head)
Oh, my God - my head - the pain!
What does that mean? I never have headaches. Yes, it's time to finish for the day. "My tea is nearly ready, and the sun has left the sky...."
Yes, I'll go down to the cellar and bring up a bottle of burgundy, and

Fanny and I will have dinner with the family and celebrate our immortality with a feast of food and fine conversation. Dear old Fanny, out there in her kitchen, bullying her black boys - that fearsome woman of the mountains with eyes in the back of her head. She doesn't know it, but "Hermiston" will be for her. Yes! "Weir of hermiston".

A young man kills the seducer of his loved one and is tried and sentenced to death by his own father. It will be my best yet. I know it.

(He reads)

"There arose before him the curtains of boyhood, and he saw for the first time, the ambiguous face of the woman as she is. In vain, he looked back over the interview - he saw now where he had offended. It seemed unproven, a wilful convulsion of brute nature-".

"Weir of Hermiston". It will be my best, I know. But let it be for now. The orange is squeezed quite dry. Time for dinner with the family.

LX:

The lights dim down to desk area.

The shadows are already closing in. It gets dark for all of us. Who knows when next we meet, the sun will have risen again.

LX:

Lights fade to single spot.

I have come to the place of the name. And I can see quite clearly the top of the mountain.

Let us only say goodnight.

Underwoods. (1807)

"Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me,
Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

Do I look strange?

(He rises, and moves to the rear, singing quietly)

FX 19:

Tape: Instrumental: Flute "Skye Boat Song"

Songs of Travel. P 167

Sing me a song
Of a lad that is gone.
Say could that lad be I?
Merry of soul
He sailed in a day
Over the sea to Skye.
Mull was astern,
Rhum on the port,
Eigg on the starboard bow,
Glory of youth,
Glowed in his soul,
Where is that glory now?

(Fade music.)

(He exits slowly)

LX:

Lights fade to black-out to end second part
and end of play.

Houselights.

*gradual diminution
of lights and sound
so that the end is as
the beginning - darkness
and general blackout*

*hold for slow 3. count
then gradually build
general state on stage
for calls if required.*

JOHN CAIRNEY

Curriculum Vitae

Education

St Michael's Primary, Parkhead, Glasgow	1935-1942
St Mungo' Academy, Townhead, Glasgow	1942-1947
Glasgow School of Art	1947-1948
(National Service - RAF)	1948-1950
Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama	1950-1953
Diploma in Speech and Drama	
Certificate of Dramatic Studies	
University of Glasgow	
Bachelor of Arts	1984

<u>Director</u>	Shanter Productions	Edinburgh	1970-1978
	Shanter Productions	Glasgow	1978-
	Theatre Consultants	(Scotland)	1969
	John Cairney & Co. Ltd	Glasgow	1985-
	Burns Musical Company	Glasgow	1987-

Professional

Wilson Barret Company	1953
Glasgow Citizens	1953-1954
Bristol Old Vic	1954-1956

Films

Rank Organisation	1954-1958
ABPC Ltd (Elstree)	1958-1960
Columbia Pictures	1960-1962
Hammer Films	1962-1964

Television

'Burns' (Solo)	Network	1960/1965
'This Man Craig'	BBCTV	1966-1968
'Burns' (Serial)	STV	1968-1969
'Burns' (Solo)	ITV	1977
'Mackintosh'	STV	1977
'McGonagall'	STV	1977
'Novello'	STV	1977

Writing

TV Play	'Another School of Thought'	BBC	1967
TV Series	'Burns'	STV	1968

Solos:	'The Robert Burns Story'	1969
	'McGonagall'	1970
	'Mr RLS'	1974
	'At Your Service'	1976
	'An Evening With...'	1976

Duologues:	'Byron's Women'	1979
	'Dorothy Parker - and Friend'	1980
	'Love Letters'	1981
	'The Brownings'	1981
	'Football Crazy'	1982
	'A Wilde Fancy'	1985

'Blackout' 1983
'Young Tommy' (With A.B. Paterson) 1986
'Scot Free' (With Geoff Davidson) 1988

Autobiography

The Man Who Played Robert Burns 1987
East End to West End 1988

In Preparation

Jane Austen - Duologue (With Alannah O'Sullivan
Toshie - A play.
The Hunter Brothers - A pageant
A Robert Burns Day Book

Third Volume of Autobiography

Miscellaneous

'A Taste of Theatre' Hotels and Restaurants 1978-
'Theatre At Sea' P&O Cruises 1979-85
'Two For A Theatre' Schools and Cabarets 1983-
'At Home' Entertainments 1986-
'Conversation With Cairney' TV/Theatre/Clubs 1987-

