

# How Phil Stine <sup>SMH</sup> 25/09/1982 copes with the bloody galahs at Kinselas

THE definition of cabaret is "an intimate entertainment, ... while audience eat or drink ... a very close relationship with the audience ... (permitting) considerably more biting and outspoken sort of humour than is possible in entertainment intended for general consumption ..."

"Cabaret in pre-Hitler Germany was closely linked with the most advanced political and artistic groups, exerting influence on the legitimate theatre of the time ... a training ground for many people associated with the popular boom in satire in the 1960s." (*Penguin Dictionary of The Theatre*).

How does that definition tally with Sydney's latest cabaret theatre?

At the top of the stairs of Kinselas you are halted by what looks like an embalmer turned bouncer in a baby blue poly-viscose non-crush suit with puce satin trim.

"Everyone orright 'ere ternight?" he inquires.

With his swarthy sideburns 1960s style, false hair chest piece bristling through tight Bri-nylon body shirt and gold chain, you wisely permit him to bulldoze you towards a Laminex-top table.

"Any tick of the clock we'll be getting it under way," he reassures everyone, giving the wind-up signal to patrons at the bar desperately fighting for foam plastic mugs of cappuccino at \$1 which includes getting service, if you're lucky, from art student and NIDA grad talent-ings on the other side of the counter.

Without warning the lights dim, the bouncer or embalmer is spotlight centre of stage and you realise there's been a terrible mistake. With his tumbler of red wine in hand (a concession to the trendies, this man would be more at home with a schooner), he thanks the ladies and gents for their warm welcome. Was there one?

Just as suddenly he gives the band a nod and with a series of

geriatric calypso gyrations he gallops through a version of *Quando Quando*, in a unique race-caller style.

"I've played to some of the biggest entertainment oases in the southern hemisphere," he says.

Who is this simian master of bad taste in Perma-press? His jokes are as off as his voice. Racist, chauvinist, sexist, you wish they'd remained buried in the late 1950s and 60s where they belong. Best we forget our redneck and red-under-the-bed tradition surely? No. This is Phil Stine played by Garry McDonald and he's here to bounce you right back to your roots, like it or not.

Finally even Phil can't keep it up. He needs a beer. The trendies are getting on his nerves. He announces Linda Nagle, "all the

## Cabaret

way from Caringbah" and slinks off to nuzzle a tinny in a dark corner.

The band rips into Linda's opening song, *Twilight Tone*.

Linda descends the fire escape stairs, a ninja in black taffeta out to smile her way into the hearts of the audience, which starts to thaw after Phil's philistine blasts from the past.

She's 23 years old, she's cute and raunchy. She sits on knees, plants her generous bulk upon laps, vaults tables and chairs, mike in hand, without missing a beat. She sings eyeball-to-eyeball with customers and she belts out *You May Be Right, I May Be Crazy*.

One minute she's the bikie next she's a Pierrot-like punk, then she slips into melt-in-the-mouth blues.

The sound pips, squeals, reverberates and screeches.

"This is not an RSL," growls Phil who has wandered on stage, in the middle of Linda's song.

"Bloody galahs," he mutters, very agitated.

"It's not the meat, it's the motion," sings Linda.

Phil jumps up again.

"I am sorry," he says. "I'm taking flu tablets at the moment.

By BERWYN LEWIS

They're making me very aggressive."

Finally Linda gets through to her last number, *Soar Me Like An Eagle* and Phil announces a break.

Next on the bill is a strange five-man act.

Hugh Wayland, Michael Shirley, Michael Wally Lake, Geoff Aldridge and Warwick Irwin call themselves *Funny Stories*. They specialise in speaking gobbledegook and studying peoples' obsessions.

"Being obsessive about being clean is OK. Flicking things off your clothes is OK," reassures Warwick.

*Funny Stories*' obsessions cover a pot-pourri of pop paranoid issues — love, power, uniforms, religion, death and social acceptance.

They move in strange, cock-eyed, Marx Brothers choreographed shuffles around the stage, scream at glasses and each other. They whisper, whimper and sing da-da da-da dada, make token art statements, smash beer cans into their heads. Their singalong love song is led by a man with the loaf of French bread tied to his head and one foot in a plastic bucket.

*Funny Stories* claim their show has no dingoes, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, coffee, tea, Bonox, tits or bums, but plenty of cleaning, preening and Gregorian chants like their Azaria sketch. In this, they hold up little white crosses and intone a liturgy of letters which spell out Azaria.

"We had to cut the show right back," says Michael. "People get bored very quickly at 2am."

One of their cuts included *Ear Piece*, an anxiety sketch in which the boys cut off their ears and placed them between two hamburger buns.

"They're fake ears," said Warwick.

They deny the idea was inspired by Van Gogh.

"He got it from us," says Wally.

In *Funny Stories*' 10 *Yellow Hands* piece they slip into rubber



The Conway Bros with Mick, the fire eater.

gloves and portray a world of sterility — disinfected, dehumanised, obsessed with clinical hygiene. This act is punctuated by repetitious flicking actions and inspired by whiter than white commercials for teeth and clothes.

*Funny Stories* see their clothes not so much as suits but more as suits of armour, protecting and distancing them from the contamination of the world.

"We wear the best collection of second hand suits in Sydney," said Wally.

"We've picked over the Smith Family, the San Francisco (sic) monks and the op shops."

But Wally's suit is different. It's encrusted with plastic pegs.

"I have been decorated," he said. "These are my medals. I wear them in a special arrangement. They're my power obsession."

Aroma Billings, *Exotic Artiste Ordinaire*, is another star appearing in the late show line-up.

Presented by Jan Cornall, she specialises in belly dancing and bargain basement, kitchen curtain spotted veils.

"I'm de-mystifying and de-veiling the artiste in society," says Aroma (Jan), who looks more like a suburban Nana Mouskouri than a Middle Eastern peccadillo, more a child of the hard-core coffee



Jan (Aroma) Cornall

"Why is a song of frustration. Aroma is a waitress who accidentally gets a job at Kinselas as a belly dancer. She can accept this ordinary side of herself but she's always aspired to something more than just schlepping food. She believes everyone should have access to the exotic," says Jan.

Jan describes Aroma as someone who has lived in Darlinghurst all her life.

"She's a native and she's worried that Darlinghurst is turning

straight. People think it's a dangerous place, full of drug addicts, gays, lesbians, chiropractors, pros and cons, and it's true. Let's keep it that way. Give Darlinghurst back to the darlings."

The Conway Bros is a cabaret band whose members describe themselves as "permanent wave with an unemployment sound."

The mobile, silent movie star face of Mick Microphone Conway reflects simultaneous multiple expressions — from angelic Valentino to vampire. He juggles, eats

fire, lights torches from his mouth and sings.

He picked up his circus skills during his years with Melbourne's APG Soapbox Circus, Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band and Circus Oz.

Mick, his brother Jim and other members of the band, play a wide variety of instruments.

Pete (Professor) Deane-Butcher who plays the jug, the tea chest bass and croons like Bing Crosby, was reared on Michael Flanders and Donald Swan.

"I became interested in depression music. I got into kazoo, jug bands, country blues, banjo and washboard as well as jazz jug bands with clarinet and violin," he said.

Dave (Gypsy) Smith, plays slide and acoustic guitar and Tony Burkys plays rhythm and lead guitar.

Their show includes a variety of powerful masks and crazy props which they use to highlight a song about Kerr, Fraser, Whitlam, Hayden, the Queen, Hawke, Thatcher, and a mutant peanut called Joe.

Most of their material comes from the 1930s and 1940s including their juggling song, *Crazy About You*, *Organ Grinder*, and some early blues and jazz and Jack Hylton material such as *Jollity Farm*.

The Conway Bros will return to Kinselas on Monday when they'll be teaming up with the strong man of Circus Oz and director of the Community Arts Board, Jon Hawkes.

A magician who performs magic at the table, *Fingers Demain*, will appear tonight with the Phil Stine revue and the *Globos*. On Tuesday a stand-up comic, *Austen Tayshus*, will appear. The Arthur Murray exhibition dancers will perform on Wednesday night. On October 12, Los Trios Ringbarkus begins a three-week season.

PICTURES BY JOANNA BAILEY AND GERRIT FORKEMA