



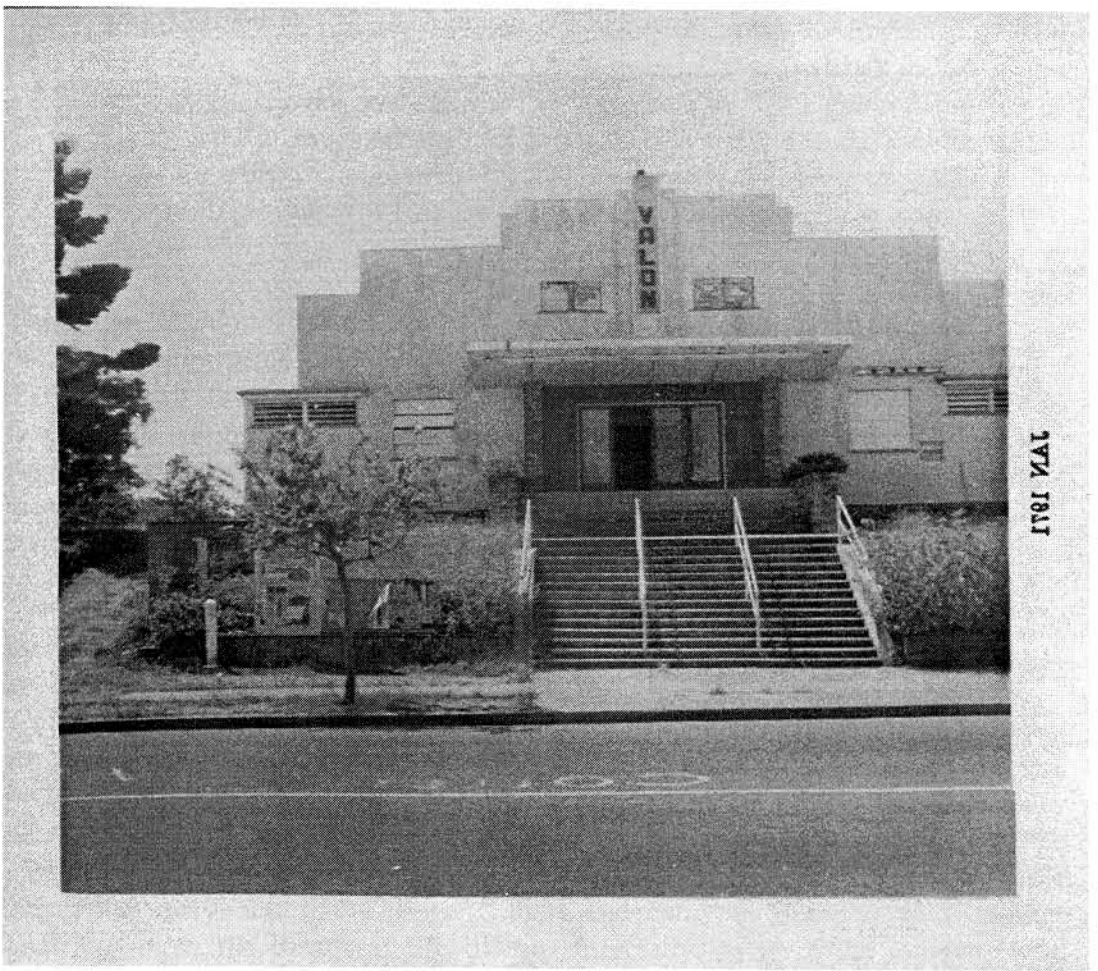
**THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND**
AUSTRALIA

**A HISTORY OF THE
AVALON THEATRE
1921-2007**

Compiled by

Nigel Pearn and Richard Fotheringham

2007



1. *The Avalon Theatre in January 1971* (Fryer Library, UQ Photographs, AE/P/1)

The Avalon Theatre

The Avalon Theatre is located on a high, level block of land in a residential area of St Lucia, about one and a half kilometres from the University of Queensland's main St Lucia campus and next to what was once the local rubbish dump but which has since been revegetated as Guyatt Park. As one of the highest points in the immediate vicinity, the Avalon site has served as a point of refuge for cars (and people) during periods of flooding, notably during the major 1974 inundation when Sir Fred Schonell Drive became part of the nearby Brisbane River.

According to a search done by the Brisbane City Council, the Avalon was built around 1921, possibly initially as a church hall, but was shortly afterwards purchased and used by the St Lucia Progress Association and was known as the "St Lucia Show Hall". Pictures were screened there during World War II, and in

May 1947 an application was received by the Council for its use as a picture theatre, the "Esquire Cinema":

In July 1956 the property was sold to Henry and Dorothy Endres. However in 1956 it was noted on the BCC Building Card, perhaps following an application by the owners, that the theatre was "Not granted for use of Land as a Theatre." An application was made in 1958 to extend the theatre and following an approval to relax the ordinance regarding the requirement of a ceiling to be 20ft (the theatre had only 18ft ceilings) an approval was given.ⁱ

The name "Avalon Theatre" seems to date from this time. The proprietors lived there, screening films until 1962 when the University purchased the theatre. For the next thirty-three years, the Avalon supported a wide range of University of Queensland cultural activities, most, but not all, theatrical in nature. The Avalon also contributed more widely to Queensland culture, with both local and visiting groups performing there, and many major Australian actors, playwrights, and stage and film directors starting their careers under its galvanised iron roof.

The early UQ years: 1963-1970

At the beginning of the 1960s, The University of Queensland's St Lucia campus was host to a wide variety of dramatic activity. UQ's Dramatic Society ("Dramsoc") dated back to 1912, the second year in which the University admitted students, and in addition there were various ad-hoc companies like the annual Architects' Revue, while college groups, particularly the King's-Women's Theatre Society and the College Gilbert and Sullivan Society, were regular contributors to the theatrical life of the University, as were the language and literature departments through the Modern Languages Society and the English Society. The third-year English students also traditionally performed an Elizabethan play as the culmination of their studies. Two film appreciation societies had been formed, reflecting the rise in interest in European and art-house cinema at this time.

A particularly lively group had been formed in 1958 by Lorna Bollman to raise funds to build International House at St Lucia. Its revue, called *Scoop*, raised annually as much as £1,000 (a room in that College is named in recognition of this assistance). Bollman was responsible for the first two *Scoop* seasons, and inveigled scripts from UQ staff and students including David Malouf. Law students (now Judges) John Helman and Tony Skoien devised *Scoop* 3, 4, 5, and 8, with Bob Greenwood and Bob Hart (later a *Courier Mail* journalist) responsible for 5 and 6. A group called the Staff Players was also active. It was led by Eunice Hanger (1911-1972)ⁱⁱ who lectured in dramatic literature and was a passionate supporter of Australian theatre. Her collection of early Australian play scripts is the foundation of the Hanger Collection named in her honour in the University's Fryer Library of Australian Literature. (The Fryer Library itself had been established in 1927 through a £10 donation from the Dramatic Society.ⁱⁱⁱ) Hanger

was also an active member of Twelfth Night Theatre, a leading amateur theatre group with its own tiny theatre, Gowrie Hall, on Wickham Terrace, and many UQ student actors and directors gained extra off-campus experience there. She was a particular champion of Patrick White and collected his plays in manuscript well before they achieved print publication. Hanger's central role in persuading Twelfth Night to stage *The Ham Funeral* in 1962, with White's permission and less than a year after its controversial premiere at the 1961 Adelaide Festival of the Arts,^{iv} would have particular consequences for theatre at the University.

Space on campus was limited, so theatre performances often took place in lecture theatres or at outside locations such as the front steps of the Forgan Smith Building. One university building used extensively was the General Purposes Hut opposite the Bookshop a wooden, ex-army building in which a simple stage equipped with a curtain and lights had been built. Wings and dressing rooms were non-existent but fashioned from curtains and stage flats as performances required. Another open-air space was the J. J. Stable Memorial Tree Theatre, a landscaped area of park land named in honour of the Professor of English from 1923 to 1952 which on his retirement was funded through public subscription and opened in 1955 by Dame Sybil Thorndike, and which was used extensively, particularly for the English III Shakespearean productions. Unfortunately it was near the car park for Union College, built in the mid-1960s, and the noise and car headlights rendered it unusable from that time onwards; to date the University has established no other memorial to one of its founding and longest-serving leaders, although he is the model for one of the Great Court grotesques.^v

According to Ian Gzell, the President of Dramsoc in 1962, the Students' Union had for some time been advocating that the University build a permanent theatre on the St Lucia site. In 1962 they retained architect Steven Trotter, from Fulton, Collin and Partners, to draw up a sketch of a theatre to be built next to the Union Buildings, and Gzell, as Union Theatre Committee Chairman and Dramsoc President, consulted and received assurances from three Brisbane amateur theatre companies of the time – Twelfth Night, Brisbane Repertory Theatre, and Brisbane Arts Theatre – that if the Union built a theatre at the University and organised bus services to each performance, these other groups would pay to use it. At that time Brisbane had no live theatre buildings available apart from the old, cavernous and expensive Her Majesty's Theatre in Queen Street, film theatres like the Rialto at West End which had raised stages large enough for live performance, and various public halls, particularly the Albert Hall in the city which was used by many theatre and music groups.

For capital infrastructure projects, university funding was limited and there were specific procedural channels to follow in order to obtain the monies required for major plans. Of these, the Australian Universities Commission (AUC) system of triennial funding was a critical component. In the early 1960s, Sir Albert Axon, the University's Chancellor from 1957–66, began marshalling support for a Great Hall. He held a meeting with Union representatives asking them to give their backing to his Great Hall project in exchange for his future endorsement of a University Theatre. The Students' Union did not agree to this reordering of

priorities and proposed an independent application for funding for a theatre in the next triennium. The response from AUC members was very encouraging; they took great interest in the submission and Gzell and other student leaders took them on a tour of the proposed site.

A short time after this, in October 1962, the proprietor of the Avalon Theatre, Mr Endres, wrote to the Secretary of the University of Queensland Union, Mr Baker, to indicate that he was “agreeable” to giving the Union the option of purchasing “the ‘Avalon Theatre’, land, building, seating and Projection Equipment for the sum of Nine Thousand Pounds (£9000)”. There must have been a context, or series of conversations leading up to such an offer, but its nature is not recorded in any University or Union file. In any case, the Union communicated with the English Department, and a day later, the Darnell Professor of English, A.C. Cawley, wrote to the then Vice Chancellor, Sir Fred Schonell:

The excitement of seeing the [Twelfth Night Theatre] production of Patrick White’s *The Ham Funeral* has inspired me to write and ask whether there is any possibility of the University buying the Avalon Theatre (which I hear will shortly be up for sale). This Theatre would serve as a theatre, lecture hall, or examination centre and would be a valuable asset to the University.

For the University, buying the Avalon offered an alternative to the Student Union’s more grandiose plans for a permanent theatre, and Schonell mentioned this aspect of the purchase in a letter to the Coordinator-General for Public Works at the time, Sir James Holt. From a purely practical position, the University also was in urgent need of further teaching space. Acquiring the Avalon would allow the University to regain control from the Union of the General Purposes Hut on the main campus.

A series of meetings were held between the Union and the Vice-Chancellor. The Union pointed out that the Avalon Theatre was presently unsuitable for theatrical activity and their architect, Mr Trotter, inspected the building in order to ascertain the extent of necessary alterations. After some negotiation, Ashby Utting, the Secretary of the Union, wrote to the University Registrar saying that the Union Council approved of the University’s purchase of the Avalon Theatre, but that they would continue “to endorse the Union’s policy to establish a permanent theatre on the University site as quickly as possible”.

On 13 December 1962, the University Senate gave official sanction to the purchase of the Avalon Theatre from Henry W. Endres of 174 St Lucia Road for the sum of £8,500, with settlement to take place on 1 February 1963. Taking the advice of the Union architect, the University decided to install a small stage at the rear of the building, to purchase new seating and to replace the existing toilets – wood and iron earth-closets requiring weekly “night soil” collection – with a modern septic system. These alterations were expected to cost £3,200, which would push the real cost of the building to the University much higher than the purchase price, but through the office of the Co-ordinator General, the

Queensland Government agreed to pay for the unimproved value of the land, estimated at £3,220. The remaining £8,500, the cost of the building and planned alterations, was to be borrowed from the Great Hall Fund as a loan upon which the University agreed to pay 5.5% interest.

From the date of purchase, the Avalon began to be referred to as the “University Theatre”, and almost as immediately, the University had to confront a question that it would struggle to resolve for the better part of the next twenty years: had it bought a university teaching space or a public theatre? The answer was never going to be simple, and had both legal and social ramifications. If the University was running a public theatre, it needed to satisfy Brisbane City Council ordinances to that effect. The advice given by the University’s solicitors, Chambers McNab, was that even though the University did not want to continue the registration of the Avalon Theatre as a public place, they would probably have to do so:

... for while there may be occasions on which the Ordinance does not apply, e.g. a party held by persons who are bona fide members of a club and attended only by themselves and their personally invited guests without charge for admission, it is more than likely, as you would be better fit to judge, that the public will be invited to functions or the like at the theatre and such that the license referred to above is necessary.

Nevertheless, in March 1963, the Registrar wrote to the Clerk of the City Council arguing that since the Avalon Building would only be being used “for general university purposes” – lectures to University students, public lectures, examinations, presentations of plays by University Language Departments, the University Dramatic Society and Revue Societies, screening of films by the University Film Society – there would be no need to license the building as a place of public entertainments.

As well as uncertainty about how the Avalon building was to function as a space to which the University invited the general public, the management of the building was the subject of a dispute between the University and the Students Union. Queries concerning the control of the Avalon Theatre, aired at a Buildings and Grounds Sub-Committee Meeting in March 1963, saw the Vice Chancellor assuring members that the theatre was “the property of the University and not the Students Union, and can be used for any University purposes. It will be controlled by a committee consisting of representatives of the Administration, the Senate and the students”.

In April 1963 a two-tiered committee structure was proposed to run the theatre, with a student-run Union Theatre Committee liaising between student groups using the Avalon. A meeting of all parties interested in booking the theatre in the following year would be called in November or December, and at that meeting attempts made to work out a booking schedule suitable to all parties. This was often a fraught process, prompting Bob Wensley, the Union Theatre Committee Chair in 1969, to term this the “annual bun fight” in official correspondence.

Above the Union Theatre Committee was the University Theatre Committee which was conceived of as a Board of Management for the Avalon. It was designed to represent a cross section of the University: the Vice-Chancellor, a member of the Senate, two Staff members, the President and Secretary of the Students Union, the President of the Drama Society, the Union Architect and the Union Manager.

The first UQ theatrical production to take place in the Avalon Theatre was Dramsoc's 1963 Orientation-week production for new students, or "Freshers": Robert Bolt's *The Tiger and the Horse*, a play about the conflict between personal and public conscience around issues of nuclear disarmament in the family of a university lecturer. At this time the Avalon was capable of seating just over 300 audience members, with about 260 canvas chairs and 50 upholstered ones set out in 17 rows with two aisles – 4 seats on each side and 10 seats in the middle of each row. The stage at the far end was raised about a metre but not sloped, so sightlines from the rear of the auditorium were not good. The stage had footlights in a galvanised iron trough which possibly dated back to the earlier picture theatre stage; certainly it was one of the last live theatres anywhere to install or retain this antiquated system of stage lighting.

Dramsoc's Annual Report for 1962/63 described the production as having been characterised by "insurmountable administrative and technical problems associated with the new theatre". The most pressing problem was the lack of dressing rooms and space for storage. At the rear of the Avalon, on property owned by the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, there was a small hall: the original Ironside State School, later used as a meeting house for the Church of England Boys Society. The Vice-Chancellor offered to write to the Dean of Brisbane, the Very Reverend William Baddeley, asking for student permission to use the hall:

The University was wondering whether it would be possible for the students to use this building for dressing rooms on such occasions as they presented plays, and I wondered whether you would be good enough to give me some indication of the course I should pursue in regard to this request. If you think I should come in and have a chat with you I should be only too pleased to do this. Do you think a first approach should be made to the Parochial Church Council?

However, Dean Baddeley wrote back saying that, while the hut was no longer used for Boys Society meetings, it was used by "the Order of St Luke, a religious Order devoted to the Ministry of Healing. That Order has furnished the building for use as a chapel and meeting room. The building is used for regular weekly services and meetings as well as for special services associated with annointings". The Dean added that, given these circumstances, he was unable to provide the hut as a dressing room for UQ purposes. This was the beginning of the University's ten year negotiation with the Diocese that would culminate in two further property purchases in 1970.

The lack of dressing room space notwithstanding, in its first year the theatre was heavily and continuously subscribed. Ian Hanger remembers that *Scoop 6*, the first to use the Avalon, got into trouble with the Fire Department because each of the sixteen performances was sold out, and students unable to buy seats paid to sit on the floor, blocking up the aisles. Hanger “played the flute and did the lights”, and was also in the orchestra for the Queensland University Musical Society (QUMS) presentation of Beethoven’s Mass in C. Later in the year UQ hosted the 1963 Australian Inter-Varsity Drama Festival for which David Clendenning directed Eugene Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*. Dramsoc’s Annual Report noted that: “the convention was impressed by our university’s number of Australian productions, and in this we seem to be unique in the Universities”; clear evidence of Eunice Hanger’s influence. A surviving timetable shows the effects of hosting a national festival: the booking register lists the Melbourne University Drama Company; Melbourne University Choral Society; Marlowe Society (Melbourne); Tin Alley Players (Melbourne); Trinity College; Queens College; Ormond College; Newman College; and the Melbourne University Film Society. In addition to Dramsoc, Scoop, and QUMS, other local users were the College Gilbert & Sullivan Society; UQ SRC Revue; UQ Russian Club-Dutch Club; UQ German Club–French Club; UQ Architecture Student Club, and the Conservatorium Opera School. As Hanger observed, “The lights were never out”.

Bryan Nason, a UQ student who had been involved in student productions since 1959, returned from Europe and began to develop the University College Opera Society into a semi-professional, touring organisation, The College Players. The first season in the Avalon by this pioneering Queensland cultural organisation, at the end of 1963, was of the enormously successful *Salad Days*, starring Jane Harders who went on the TV fame as the lead in the ABC series *Rush*.^{vi} In 1964 they presented *The Last of Lands* and *Oklahoma!* and in 1965 *HMS Pinafore* and *The Tempest*; the last bringing together Jack Thompson, Michael Caton, and Shane Porteous – all later major stars of Australian stage and screen. Of the College Players’ many later seasons, *Irma la Douce* was one highlight in 1967 and there was a revival of *Salad Days* in 1968. As will be mentioned later, in 1970 Nason was a logical and popular choice as director of the opening production at the new Schonell Theatre which was intended to replace the Avalon.^{vii} His outstanding contribution to the University and to Queensland cultural life was recognised in 2005 by the award of the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

In addition to theatre productions, the Inter-College Council (ICC) screened films at the Avalon on Friday and Saturday evenings during term and examination time whenever there were no live performances. For film purposes, there were two standard RCA sound projectors in the Avalon, a screen, a slide lantern for projection of slides and coloured backgrounds, an amplifier and a 3-speed gramophone with provision for tape input and output. The curtains in the proscenium were opened and closed by an electric motor as was the adjustable masking on the screen. The ICC President, John Hecker, reported to the Committee that film screenings had “tended to be of an experimental nature in an attempt to determine what types of films are most suitable for a university audience” and that the average attendance was about 120 per night and that over

the course of the year, a net profit of about £220 had been made. These profits were to be shared between the ICC and the Theatre Committee. A further £70 was donated from educational screenings for local schoolchildren of *Rivers of Fire and Ice* (a documentary about a white hunter's explorations in central Africa) and Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*.

The screening of films at the Avalon required that users draw aside the curtains, which protected the screen when not in use, and throw the ends of these curtains over a ledge. In July 1963, a curtain that was thus draped came in contact with a light bulb and a fire broke out. A next door neighbour rushed to the scene with a hose and the Fire Brigade was called. The theatre lost two curtains, the film screen and the screen masking. There was damage to the ceiling in the stage area and soot damage to paint work, while water affected the speaker and stage props below stage. After this time the main curtain had to be opened and closed by winding a lever in the prompt corner, leading on occasions to unintended humour as an inexperienced stage hand turned it the wrong way.

Also in that first year of operations the Staff Players donated a set of flats to the theatre, and a new toilet block at the front of the building was completed, but the Avalon's limited space for dressing rooms and lack of storage area continued to present problems for students. In May Sir Fred Schonell intervened once more, this time offering to buy the adjacent property outright. The Anglican Diocese's Property and Finance Board met in July and rejected the offer, but the Vice-Chancellor continued to correspond with the Dean on the subject throughout the year. Whether at his suggestion or not, but with considerable political acumen, Dramsoc invited Dean Baddeley to become their patron in late 1963, a position he accepted.

In early 1964, the Vice-Chancellor attempted a different approach. He suggested to the Diocesan registry that the University only wanted to purchase "a small piece of land ... It would be sufficient for our purposes if we could get a strip of up to 10 to 12 feet [3–3.6 metres], in order to gain the fullest benefit for the many hundreds of students who now use the theatre". Dean Baddeley hand wrote a note in reply, saying that "the matter is on the agenda for the next meeting of the Diocesan Council and will be discussed". Perhaps his role as patron of Dramsoc was having an effect for he added, "I have expressed myself very fully to the Archbishop and even drew a map". In March 1964 the Diocesan Council met and considered the Avalon issue. However, instead of the expected agreement, the Council came up with an alternative plan in which the University was invited to fund capital improvements to church land:

It is possible that the University might later include a new University Theatre in some other new building in the grounds of the University and might then wish to dispose of the property formerly known as the Avalon Theatre. Our Board has therefore suggested that you might like the Registrar of the University or some other official of the University to confer with myself as to a possible scheme under which the Diocese could purchase the property from the University at an agreed price and then

grant the University a lease of the property at a reasonable rental and perhaps with the right to erect new dressing rooms and storage.

The Vice-Chancellor was unimpressed by this suggestion and began thinking about how to improve the dressing room situation on the existing site. The University Architect, Mr Birrell, had pointed out six months earlier that the construction of the septic toilets at the front of the building and the removal of the existing earth closets would eventually free up about 12 feet (3.6m) of space at the rear of the building. This area could be used for dressing rooms if the University was prepared to build right to the boundary line, and if a different area could be found for the flats and other pieces of stage equipment which were currently stored there.

In the meantime, theatrical activity continued unabated. Dramsoc's schedule for 1964 followed their regular timetable: an Orientation-week play in February-March, an evening of one act plays where new actors and directors were given a first chance to demonstrate their abilities, a "commem" (commemoration week) play in June – in 1964, N.F. Simpson's, absurdist British comedy, *A Resounding Tinkle* – and an entry for the annual Inter-Varsity Drama Festival in August. The Annual Report noted that the "general policy this year has been to present to our audiences experimental theatre". Staff, students, the public, and people from other theatre groups continued to intermingle: "Our producers [i.e., directors] have come from Brisbane Arts Theatre and Twelfth Night Theatre ... We have lent our properties to all persons using the theatre which have included The Staff Players, the English III Players, the Architecture Students, Scoop Revue Company and the College Players to name a few".

During 1964, the conversion from a cinema to a theatre also continued. Renovations were undertaken on the "Bio Box", the room which housed the theatre's three film projectors. Located behind the balcony at the front of the building, it was modified to make space for the lamp dimmers and sound equipment that were required for stage plays. A 25 ft x 1 ft (7.6m x 30cm) double-faced plastic sign saying "UNIVERSITY THEATRE" in 15 inch (38cm) Roman letters was erected on the ridge of the roof at the St Lucia Road end. By October, the University had also received a preliminary sketch plan prepared for the possible arrangements of dressing-rooms at the rear of the theatre from architects, Fulton, Collin and Partners. At the Students' Union AGM, these plans also appear to involve an extension of the theatre stage and the possible addition of a workshop.

The various building projects were costing the University money and, while the students and societies using the theatre were overwhelmingly university-based, the building itself had yet to be used for any official University teaching and learning purpose. Early in that second year of operation (1964), the University Theatre Committee "agreed that University bodies making use of the theatre be not required to pay any fee at this stage", but insisted that there was an understanding that students would make donations from house revenues towards the upkeep of the theatre. The widening margin between University expenditure

and these student contributions prompted the University to raise the matter with Union representatives in early 1965. Meanwhile, further – increasingly extravagant – requests for capital works continued to be received: the University Theatre Committee noting that “the provision of an orchestra pit [was] ... deemed not as essential as a dressing room”.

What made the issue of waived, or differential, rental fees difficult to assess was the dynamic nature of the student body itself and the manner in which student groups formerly associated with the University could continue to be considered legitimate university entities. This was especially so as former students began making the shift to professional theatrical activities that mixed old and new UQ personnel. In February 1965, the Registrar Mr Carroll wrote to Bryan Nason saying that, in relation to future College Players productions:

In the past you have made several offers to pay some form of rental for your use of the theatre but so far no moneys have been received by either the University or the Union. This time a rental of £2 per performance will be charged regardless of your making a profit or loss, the first payment to be made Friday 5th February, 1965, for the first seven performances. Further occupancy of the theatre will depend on these payments. Since you last used the theatres, the Union no longer conducts the candy bar. The running of the candy bar is now the responsibility of the society using the theatre. We can assist by supplying the staff: however, you are responsible for their wages.

Then in April, 1965 the Vice-Chancellor wrote to the Registrar saying that he was “still very worried about the fact that we received no money whatsoever from [the revue group] *Scoop* last year. They are now preparing another *Scoop* and I think this matter should be brought up to the Theatre Committee”. Soon after this, *Scoop VIII* gave the University a cheque for £500 and detailed in-kind payments it had made: carpet cleaning and new stage curtains and electrical equipment, as well as a cyclorama backdrop and a half share in a stage floor cloth purchased for earlier productions.

In addition to concerns about low revenue, the University also began to worry about unsupervised student access to the building. Keys were signed out to student groups who then took full responsibility for the building, but there had been at least one break-in. At the end of 1964, the University advised its security staff (“watchmen”) to include the theatre in their nightly rounds, and decreed that, “when parties are held at the Theatre, after final performances, the Theatre must be closed not later than 12 midnight”. Perhaps in response to University concerns, Dramsoc’s Annual Report reads as something of a public relations offensive. The society boasted that: “this year as no other committee before us has done, [we have] ploughed much of the profits back into the theatre. We have spent upwards of £160 on the theatre which included a floor cloth, new wings and lighting equipment”.

For 1965 Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* was Dramsoc's Orientation-week production, and later at a Freshers night two Edward Albee sketches were performed. There were also several seasons of one-act plays and the regular Inter-Varsity production. The dressing room extensions were completed, and the building received a pay-telephone when the *Scoop* Revue Company paid for its installation, (though the Union undertook to pay the annual rental fees), while a Health Inspector's Report required that a stainless steel sink unit with suitable flashing be placed under the existing tap in the Drinks Bar area. More ambitiously, Dramsoc applied to the University Theatre Committee to build a storage area under Avalon stage. Rex Cramphorne (1941–1991), Dramsoc's Secretary (and later one of Australia's most distinguished theatre directors^{viii}), wrote:

Our society, the mainstay of drama in this University, is hampered by lack of storage space for permanent properties and the matter is now of some urgency, as we must shortly vacate the space we have at George Street. However inspection of the recent extensions to the University Theatre has suggested the possibility of utilizing the space beneath the stage. This area ... could probably be sealed and lit at a reasonably small cost. The Dramatic Society would be prepared to meet part of this cost on the basis of an understanding that the use of this storage space be confined to the Society alone. We feel that this is a reasonable request for two reasons: first we are the only Society with permanent properties of any value; second, these properties, despite the cost involved, are generally made available to all other societies undertaking theatrical ventures.

A booking sheet for the latter half of 1965 shows the range of theatre hirers: the Queensland Arts Council (Dr Gertrude Langer); the Archi[tectur]e Revue; the Goethe Society; the German Department (Professor Leopold); the Staff Players (Eunice Hanger); WUS [World Union of Students] (Helen Rodwell); the College Players; Dramsoc (Ian Heap) and the King's-Women's Players (Tony Boyd). The heavy demand on the Avalon was partly the product of its own success in providing a focal point for theatrical activity on University property. Given this, it was unsurprising that momentum began to build once again for a permanent theatre to be established on campus. The Students' Union set up a Union Theatre Development fund to which it quixotically undertook to transfer the sum of £100 per year. More pragmatically, Union representatives met again with the Australian Universities Commission on their scheduled visit to Brisbane, keen to shore up the major financial assistance that would be required for such a project. The Commission's suggestion was that the Union might care to consider emulating the plans at that time taking shape at Monash University in Melbourne where the costs of a combined Lecture Hall and Theatre were being shared. The Commission asked that the students raise this possibility with the Vice Chancellor, and this may have been a nod towards the design of the Abel Smith Lecture Theatre which opened the following year (1966) and which the Drama Society and the Classics Players did use occasionally, although its main use as a theatre was for the regular English Department Wednesday (later Thursday) afternoon play readings.

The Union certainly did speak to Sir Fred Schonell whose support was crucial, but the agreement they came to focussed more on delivering a theatre complex to the students than any building shared with the University. A submission was made to the Australian Universities Commission for the 1967–69 funding triennium. Although the application was made on behalf of the Union and for a Union Theatre, both the Queensland Coordinator-General and the AUC insisted that the application itself come from the University.

By January 1966, the Union Theatre Committee had become responsible for arranging booking times in the University Theatre. In this year Brisbane once again hosted the Inter-Varsity drama festival at which Dramsoc presented John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, directed by David Clendinning. At the opening night, Dramsoc hosted a seminar by Clendinning at which "a lengthy and informative discussion between members of the audience, the producer and cast" was held. After this, the first ball to be held at the Avalon included a champagne supper which was served in the theatre to 150 official guests and cast. Dramsoc's Annual Report noted that "this proved an enormously successfully evening, receiving approval from all present and it is recommended to the incoming committee that this become an established tradition".

For many years Eunice Hanger had been the driving force for the Staff Players, the English III production, and the regular Wednesday afternoon play readings. Another staff member, Alrene Sykes, added strength to the English Department's teaching and research in Australian drama although she did not teach practical theatre. Then, in the mid-1960s, Dr Robert Jordan was appointed, adding to the Department's expertise in practical drama. Forty years later, in July 2004, Oscar winner Geoffrey Rush described Jordan as having "a great passion for the history of drama ... He looked and sounded like George Martin. We felt we were being mentored by somebody who ran The Beatles". In 1966, Jordan's name was added next to Dean Baddeley's as a patron of Dramsoc.

Other productions during 1966 were Bertolt Brecht's *A Man is a Man*, allegedly "the first Dram Soc production to start 30 minutes late, due to the fact that a couple of leads were languishing in jail" and Edward Bond's *Saved*, which was set in South London and contains a scene in which a baby in a pram is stoned to death. It had been banned by the Lord Chamberlain in the UK in 1965. The Brisbane season was the initiative of Doug Anders, later to work professionally as a stage director, and was originally advertised as a King's-Women's College production. Due to its "avant garde" nature it was "deemed unsuitable" by the College Principals. During this year, Dramsoc also made its first film, called *Ethnic Paralysis*. This was filmed at Stradbroke Island with the technical support of two ABC camera operators. Jack Thompson, another UQ student who trained at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney (and who, as noted earlier, would go on to international fame as an actor), was employed by Dramsoc to run "basic training in Dramatic craft" workshops on Sunday evenings at Twelfth Night. Thompson also appeared with Elizabeth Nosworthy and Doug Anders in a production entitled *Alice Is* at the Avalon Theatre that year. The

Dramsoc Annual Report noted the publicity innovation of “casts putting up posters in town for their own productions”. Yet another innovation in what was a period of major artistic growth was a series of Architecture revues jointly written and staged by the architecture student Willy Young (later the photographer and stage performer William Yang) and the rock musician Ralph Tyrell, culminating in the “pop musical” *Childhead’s Doll* (1971), later restaged in Sydney.

1966 also marked the first real steps taken towards building the new Union Theatre. Both the Office of the Coordinator-General and the Australian Universities Commission insisted on the University’s involvement in the legal arrangement. However, the Union was the body for whom the work was to be done and the Architect was answerable to Union. An application to the AUC went in from the University on the Union’s behalf; this was successful and the Union received \$80,000. A joint press release from the Vice-Chancellor and the Union President, Roger Woodgate, announced:

The University of Queensland Union has much pleasure in announcing that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, Sir Fred J Schonell, has agreed to the Union’s suggestion that the proposed Union Theatre be named the Sir Fred Schonell Theatre. The Schonell is at present being designed by Brisbane Architect S Trotter and will be constructed during 1967 at a cost of \$260,000. The Union feels that Sir Fred Schonell, who has had a distinguished career as Vice-Chancellor of the University during which he has shown his great interest in Education in this State, and who is also noted for his interest in theatre and cultural activities within the University, is the most fitting person after which to name its theatre.

In fact, the building cost much more than this and took much longer to build. Even by the time the plans were complete, the estimated cost had risen to \$674,000, and the final cost when the building opened in 1970 was \$870,000. In the years that followed this first optimistic press release, the additional cost was met through the Commonwealth Bank which extended the Union overdraft to \$400,000 (at 6%). This in turn was underwritten by an irrevocable order drawn up with the University who acted as the revenue collector for Union fees. The Bank then offered to fund part of the Commercial Centre extension for the 1970–72 triennium in exchange for 15 years’ free rent in the new premises. So Level 2 of the North Wing Refectory extension was built ahead of schedule (concurrently with the Theatre) and was paid for by the Commonwealth Bank at a cost of \$145,000.

At around this time, tension grew between the relative emphasis which should be given to “popular” and “experimental” drama, and between current students and ex-students who wanted to maintain a connection with the Avalon and UQ but move forward to professional theatre status and standards. All three major productions in 1967 were directed by Rodney Fisher, then at the start of his major professional career in theatre,^{ix} and used actors some of whom were no longer students and who had already trained at NIDA. To start the year Fisher wrote as well as directed a revue *Pucker Up, Here Comes a Big Red Kiss* – publicised, in

those pre-feminist years, by having attractive young female students sitting outside the refectory selling tickets at a desk framed by a pair of giant red lips as if they were selling kisses. He followed with a remarkable production of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* starring Shane Porteous as Willy Loman. Flushed with funds from these two box-office successes, Fisher then decided to present both at the Avalon and at the Inter-Varsity Drama Festival in Adelaide a Restoration comedy, Vanbrugh's *The Confederacy*, spending extravagantly on costumes, hats and shoes for the cast. Unfortunately, the production was not a success and this lavishness left Dramsoc with no reserves to carry forward to 1968, and also coincided with the departure of most of the major figures whose expertise and leadership had sustained the dramatic society for several years.

In his 1967 Annual Report the Vice-President, Peter Lavery, wrote that it was difficult to determine the role of Dramsoc within University life and that now seemed to be an expedient moment to "express some objective realistic criticism of this Society in view of the expressions of 1967 and imagining some of these in 1968". Lavery noted that while it was important for the society to retain some of its original traditional production concepts – "those that provide experience for the Society's members and are also entertaining for the public" – there was another side that needed to be developed "to provide impetus for Drama on campus and also to provide ideas and practical knowledge for larger productions".

Lavery suggested that, if Dramsoc did a show to entertain and make money, it should match it with an experimental production, and that, while Dramsoc did not operate as an acting school, it should run workshop classes and that there should be some sort of laboratory approach to theatre-practice: "an underground stream of experiment" which could generate new techniques for actors. He concluded: "It is difficult to imagine any other place in a city other than a University where work such as this could be done".

In April 1967 the number of complaints that the University was receiving concerning late night noise from the University Theatre had increased to the point where the Registrar was forced to send a reminder that no persons were to remain in the premises after midnight and that, in future, all bookings were to be made through the Buildings and Grounds Officer, not the Union. The Buildings and Grounds Officer, Frank Fentiman, was charged with working out who had been using the Avalon and wrote to the Registrar saying that:

... the booking of the Theatre has been handled by the Union Office Staff and I have not been able to trace any of the application forms which presumably have been completed this year for past and future bookings, nor have I been able to gain a clear picture as to what has been happening in respect of payments which should have been made as deposits on bookings and hire charges.

According to the 1967 Union Theatre Committee Report, the theatre was operating at full capacity, hosting productions or films every week. Beyond the booking schedule, the Union Theatre Committee's role was to liaise between the

University and the theatre-hirers with regards to maintenance and repair: items like the construction of a new door from the stage to the dressing rooms; repainting of the interior of the auditorium; overhauling the Avalon's electrical equipment, and repairing the auditorium seating all appear in the 1967 Report. The University Theatre Committee for its part had to adjudicate on competing bids for use of the space. It passed regulations giving priority to Dramsoc and then, in order, to other Union-affiliated groups, college groups, other University theatre groups, and then the University's film clubs (the UQ Film Group and the Inter-College Council Film Group).

Unlike the burst of activity in 1967, the years from 1968 to 1970 saw Dramsoc lose momentum, to the extent that there was no President for much of 1970. At the very time when the Dramatic Society should have been gearing up for the move to the Schonell, it was suffering from one of those downturns common to student societies with their rapidly-changing membership. From January to October 1968, the Avalon cost \$727 for the University to run and total receipts received from various theatre hirers amounted to only \$352. Buildings and Grounds tried to work out exactly how the Avalon was being managed and how the financial loss could be minimised. In October, Fentiman wrote that he had been informed by Dramsoc that it had been previously agreed that the Dramatic Society should not have to pay theatre-hire if they undertook to spend money on equipment for the theatre instead. He went to past minutes and confirmed this, but pointed out that, in light of this, Dramsoc's practice of leasing out the lights as if they were owned by the student society was somewhat suspect since they were actually a payment-in-kind, and so properly belonged to the University. He noted that "the position relating to the use of Theatre by the Dramatic Society needs to be clarified".

Dramsoc's 1968 productions included *Rashomon* with a professional director, Ron Ray. Bales of hay were used for the set and real water simulating the rainstorm in which the story took place dripped continually from the flies, rotting the hay and requiring a major clean-up afterwards. Van Itallie's *America Hurrah* was extremely controversial, particularly the segment "Motel" in which obscenities were scrawled on the set walls. To try to avoid police action, it was staged not at the Avalon but in the Union Relaxation Block on the main campus, where the audience through passive resistance prevented the actors from being arrested. Finally, Willy Young directed a self-devised work, *Quartet*, with Ross Gilbert, Max Bannah, Nick Langton and Jane Hyde, for the re-named "Australian Festival of University Drama" at Monash University in Melbourne.

In October 1968, following the Festival where had members become aware of the moves in other States towards expanding drama on and off campus, Dramsoc decided to encourage and support the establishment of a Drama Department at UQ. In a letter to the Dean of Arts, Professor K.G. (Ken) Hamilton, the Secretary of Dramsoc, Margaret Robertson, wrote:

We feel that there would be considerable interest in such a department and we hope that should it be established there would be active co-operation

between our society and the department's activities. We would further hope, that any such scheme would include dramatic training in conjunction with academic studies so that a nucleus of professionally trained actors can contribute to Queensland's cultural scene. Having seen the very successful productions of the University of New South Wales at the last few festivals, and recognizing that a higher standard of acting and production is being expected of university groups, we feel that it is only through the establishment of a Drama Department to which well-qualified actors and teachers are attracted that this standard can be achieved.

At the end of 1968, the traditional roll call went out to potentially interested hirers of the Avalon for the following year. A new group, The Young Yeti Theatre, had appeared, led by Paul Richards, who was not a full-time student and so could only book the theatre in the holiday periods. An unusual and remarkable group, Young Yeti had a deliberately inclusive attitude towards those on the margins of Queensland society in the late 1960s: it consciously set out to involve Aboriginal performers and others, including the prominent transsexual Toy de Wilde. Richards later established the Aboriginal Legal Service in Brisbane. Dramsoc began the year with Edward Bond's *Early Morning*. For this satire on the English ruling class, the front steps of the Avalon were painted as a Union Jack, leading to complaints to the police that the British flag was being desecrated by people walking on it, and the long-suffering Frank Fentiman arranging to have it painted over.

At two meetings of the Board of the Faculty of Arts in March, 1969, the Board endorsed the idea of the University being associated with a School of Drama for Brisbane – “one concerned with the training of actors and more particularly of producers [directors]” – but made it clear that it did not, as a consequence, “favour the setting up of practical courses in drama within the structure of the Faculty of Arts”. It went on to recommend that a Committee on Drama Studies be set up within the University. This Committee met in July, with Professor Hamilton, Dr Jordan, and Manfred Jurgensen from the German Department representing the Arts Faculty and from Dramsoc Rod Wissler (President) and Margaret Robertson (Secretary).

At the beginning of the meeting the Drama Society representatives indicated that their preference was for the establishment of practical theatre courses, preferably of a kind that would give some form of professional status. However, the Arts Faculty representatives were unanimous in feeling that courses of this kind were inappropriate to the Faculty as it was then constituted. It was suggested that a more likely development would be in the form of a Drama School affiliated with the University, on the pattern of the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney, although it was remarked that the Queensland Institute of Technology and the recently-established Queensland Theatre Company were thought to be interested in establishing Drama Schools and the State would not support more than one such institution.

The Committee noted that the two premier drama studies facilities within an Arts Faculty in Australia were at the University of New South Wales and the Drama Discipline at Flinders University and the discussion moved to the several courses that were already in existence or being planned. The English Department was already offering one advanced drama subject (Drama, Mediaeval to Jacobean) and Dr Jurgensen said that the German Department was planning several units which were to focus on the study of German drama but which would also be available to non-German speaking students. However these were intended as courses in dramatic literature and Wissler objected that units of this kind contained no practical work at all and paid very little attention to the theatre. The English Department's course in Modern Drama was in a slightly different position since it was conceived in terms much closer to those that prevailed in the academic Drama Departments already mentioned. The report on this meeting continues:

In such departments, while much of the close study of texts is similar to that offered in purely literary courses, much attention is also paid to the theatrical environment for which the plays were planned as well as to theories of the drama and of the nature of the theatrical medium. For this type of study, some knowledge of the theatre arts is essential and so students in academic Drama Departments receive some practical training and do some practical work of the kind in which the Dramatic Society representatives were interested. This practical work is analogous to that in Psychology or Geography or to the Language Laboratory periods in French – that is, it is regarded as a necessary adjunct to the theoretical studies which are the core of the course. As far as the existing Modern Drama unit was concerned Mr Wissler objected that the practical work in it was very limited and that it was after all, only one course.

In reply to the last objection, it was indicated that the course was in its first year and was still developing. In response to the larger question of expanding the drama offerings, Professor Hamilton suggested that Dr Jordan should develop the proposals he had submitted to the meeting – namely, for a first-year Academic Drama unit. This seemed to Professor Hamilton the most useful starting point for any expansion of Drama at UQ.

The 1970s: from Student Theatre to University Teaching Space

The story of the Avalon from the late 1960s onwards needs to be placed within the context of the Student Union's commitment to building the Schonell Theatre Complex, and the quite separate interest of the Arts Faculty and Dramsoc in persuading the University to offer formal theatre studies including practical work.

The Union had high hopes that the Schonell Theatre would increase the quantity and quality of student drama at the University of Queensland and take it to a State or national flagship level. The groundwork had been laid in good faith at a time when, as noted earlier, Brisbane had few spaces suitable for live theatre. The momentum for Queensland to house a State theatre company had been building

over the previous decade, fuelled by the work going on in small theatres such as the Avalon and the proliferation of actors talking about “professionalism”. This story might have taken a very different form if the Schonell Theatre had been built a few years earlier, as originally planned, and had established itself as a leading live theatre venue. In fact, the delay in building it meant that by the time it opened in 1970, the larger SGIO (later the Suncorp) Theatre in Turbot St in the city had replaced the Albert Hall and been open for nearly a year, and the Queensland Theatre Company had moved there rather than to the University. Consequently, unlike the situation in Sydney and Melbourne where the professional State companies were explicitly connected to the University of New South Wales and Melbourne University respectively, in Queensland there was no official link whatsoever. This would prove disastrous for the Schonell’s future as a live theatre.

In January 1970, although the Schonell was still eight months away from completion, the management procedures for the new Union Theatre were being worked out. Robert Wensley, as Chair of the Union Theatre Committee, was, more than any other individual, responsible for overseeing the final stages of the development of the theatre complex. Realising that the major users of the new theatre would be student groups and not the professional companies previously envisaged, he urged in a memorandum that it was “imperative that [the rates of hire] are not so high as to force student groups (for whom the theatre was built) out of the market”. On the one hand, there was a need to keep the overall operating loss to a minimum, on the other “University and especially students groups will have to be encouraged to use these very expensive facilities and therefore hire rates etc must be fixed at a sufficiently low level to allow them to do so”.

In 1969–70, the cost of the Avalon had been \$2 for rehearsals and \$5 for performances. Societies also paid the University 25% of net profits provided that any payment did not exceed \$100. Outside bodies could hire the theatre, provided it was available, for \$10 per performance and \$5 per rehearsal. Even at this rate, Dramsoc’s newsletters often lamented how difficult it was to have an economically successful run at the Avalon and how such pressures resulted in “set” plays being too often performed. Despite this evidence, the hiring rates at the Schonell Theatre for University groups were finalised at \$40 per night or \$230 per week. The Union was heavily mortgaged and this amount, while eight times the cost of the Avalon, represented a considerable subsidy: outside groups, such as the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust which used the Schonell for its national tour of *The Legend of King O’Malley* in 1971, paid a base rental of \$540 per week of eight performances, plus expenses.

As the completion of the new theatre drew closer, the Avalon continued to be booked solid. Between February and November 1969 the following groups again used the theatre: Young Yeti Theatre, Contemporary Arts Society, Dramsoc, Russian Society, University of Queensland Film Group, King’s-Women’s Play Group, Twelfth Night Theatre, Inter-College Council, College Gilbert and Sullivan Company, and the Architects’ Revue Group. Bookings were again being

taken by the Union Theatre Committee but under strict conditions of notification in writing to Buildings and Grounds, which produced an enormous volume of paperwork. Following Fentiman's attempts to limit breaches of security, keys were not obtained from the Union but from Buildings and Grounds.

In May 1970, the University finally acquired the Anglican Church land at the back of the Avalon. By October they were attempted to rezone it for University purposes with the idea that the newly formed TV Unit would be able to operate from there. The University then entered into a protracted negotiation with the Brisbane City Council over the zoning of the Avalon land. The University wanted to change the zoning from Residential to Special Uses A. With only one objection lodged, the Council indicated it would grant the change for "the purposes of staff rooms, foyer, secretary's office, toilet, studio, lecture-seminar room, workshop, electronics and technicians store ..." but made the change subject to a list of stringent conditions. The University appealed and in April 1971, was granted permission to change status without works, on the proviso that: "no noxious uses were to be carried out on the site or in the building; no noise nuisance was to be created; no machinery was to be used on the site or in the building". Determined to maximize the options for the site, the University Legal Officer negotiated directly and privately with the Council "without prejudice" and in January 1972 a memo showed that the University did "not want the appeal taken off the list, but as a matter of tactics does not want to push the Council to an immediate decision". In June 1973, the Council agreed to all of the University's demands except those regarding machinery, and the two parties worked at trying to agree on an acceptable definition of machinery and then leave it at that. In March 1974, the matter was resolved by the Council striking out all their objections, if the University agreed to pay \$32 in fees. Records show the University was refusing to pay, and that in 1975, the zoning of the Avalon Theatre remained unchanged as "Residential B" but it could now also be used for University and educational purposes.

In 1970, the Department of English was offering two full drama units and Jordan was hoping to build up the practical sessions in at least one of these. At an Arts Faculty Board Meeting in April 1970, the Committee on Drama Studies within the University formally proposed that a first year drama course be introduced. The Head of the English Department, Professor Hamilton, supported the request, saying that the number of students taking the present first-year English courses was making class sizes unmanageable. He informed the Faculty that he had requested from the Standing Committee of the Professorial Board an additional lecturer to teach the first year drama course.



2. *Bacchoi*, the opening production at the Schonell Theatre, in rehearsal at the Avalon, 1970. (Fryer Library, UQFL 194, Box 188)

The English Department was redesigning its Drama program to include practical work. The Union had almost finished building its major new theatre. It should have been Dramsoc's heyday. In fact, it was being squeezed on all sides, with the University proposing to make drama part of the curriculum and appropriate the Avalon for this and other purposes and the Students Union determined to force student groups to use the Schonell to recover their debt. In May 1970, Wensley circulated "a word on the fate of the Avalon," saying that the Union intended to remove all the equipment to the new theatre and that, while the Schonell's opening production would rehearse at the Avalon, after the opening the University planned to move in builders and refurbish it for other uses. The Union had received some additional "special project funding" from A.J. Creedy, the Director of Cultural Activities in the Queensland State Department of Education, and the Schonell opened in September 1970 with a performance of Bryan Nason's and Ralph Tyrrell's rock opera based on Euripides, *Bacchoi*. In *The Australian*, Katherine Brisbane reviewed not only the performance but the politics of the new space, drawing on various articles and letters which had appeared in the student newspaper *Semper Floreat*. "The opposition elements claim they are being deprived of the Avalon which was cheap to rent and where they could paint the walls and do what they liked. They say the rent of the new theatre (\$35 a night to students) plus other costs and restrictions will defeat them".^x Sadly, this gloomy

prophecy would prove true, and the Avalon would not be used again by any of the groups which had made the 1960s a golden age of student theatre in Brisbane.

Perhaps in part because of these external challenges, Dramsoc began to implode. In April 1970 there was a two-hour meeting of the members at which the lack of “group spirit” was lamented. A motion was proposed that the University of Queensland Dramatic Society go into dissolution and that the committee do all necessary steps to effect same. It was moved by Errol Martin (a long-serving member who had been the lighting designer and operator for many shows), seconded by Margaret Robertson, and lost 10 to 13. A second motion was proposed: that Dramsoc go into recess for an indefinite time. It was moved by Margaret Robertson, seconded by Colin Beasley, and lost on a tie (12-12). The President, Carlene Crowe, and Secretary, Margaret Robertson, both resigned.^{xi} The meeting was declared closed at 10.25 pm. Dramsoc limped on without a formal executive but managed a number of *ad hoc* projects, including its last season at the Avalon, in August 1970: a staging of Max Frisch’s allegory of the nuclear age, *The Fire Raisers*, directed by Michael Macklin, later an Australian Democrat Senator for Queensland, with Richard Fotheringham as Herr Biedermann, the good-hearted citizen who realises too late that his weakness has allowed arsonists into his house. Plans to actually burn down the Avalon at the end of the final performance fortunately were not serious.

In October, Robert Jordan wrote to the new Vice Chancellor, Sir Zelman Cowen:

With the opening of the Schonell Theatre following so soon on the creation of the Queensland Theatre Company and the building of the SGIO Theatre, drama is assuming a major role in the cultural life of Queensland, and we feel that this makes the present moment an appropriate one for considering the place of theatre in the academic work of the University, The English Department has already taken several steps towards the development of theatre studies. ... We would therefore be very grateful if we could have the opportunity of giving you a clear understanding of what we are actually doing in the field of drama and theatre and also if we could have the opportunity of discovering your attitude to the projects that we are at present considering. Most of these projects can be implemented by the English Department out of its own resources but there are one or two which involve negotiation with the University administration and other Departments. There is, for example, the question of room space for the setting up of practical classes, there is the question of the re-establishment of the Stable Memorial Tree Theatre, and there is the possibility of the revitalization of the University Theatre Committee, of which the late Sir Fred Schonell was chairman.

In various attachments, Jordan went on to detail what was considered the most pressing of problems – the securing of room-space for practical work. He made it clear that he was not asking for the permanent use of a full scale theatre. All the program wanted was “a large bare room with a high ceiling”:

This is because the practical work consists not so much of performances of plays before audiences as of small groups of students working on improvisation exercises with a tutor, or studying the various techniques of production under rehearsal conditions. A room of this kind is also badly needed as a rehearsal space for the English Department's Thursday afternoon play readings. ... Once the projected first year course got under way a second room would probably be needed. This would almost certainly be required full time by this class since, on the figures available from the University of New South Wales, it would in all likelihood number about 150 students.

In a follow-up letter to the Vice-Chancellor, the Darnell Professor of English, Ken Hamilton, indicated his support for the drama program, adding that he was interested in having the creation of a Professor of Drama placed on high priority. He said, "I think this is one of a couple of fields – Communication is the other – which shows some promise of rescuing the teaching of English from its present rather moribund state".

Late in 1970, Bill Brown (later the major international actor and playwright Bille Brown), who had been a cast member in *Bacchoi*, relaunched Dramsoc as "Uni-Que", with a flurry of rhetoric about taking new directions. In fact the society, like all theatre groups on campus, was operating in a new and difficult climate. Wensley's fears articulated in a memo in 1971, that the new complex would end up emulating the Sydney Union Theatre and only be used to show movies, were being realised. All revenue from the Schonell in 1971 came from film screenings. Booking sheets for the Schonell show the same role call of societies as for the Avalon – Ralph Tyrell, Uni-Que, College Gilbert and Sullivan, Brisbane Arts Theatre – as well as some conference bookings, but none made a surplus. Uni-Que attempted a two-play season in which they paired A. A. Milne's *Toad of Toad Hall* with Peter Handke's much more radical piece, *My Foot My Tutor*. However the experiment was not a success and they made a significant operating loss. The first Schonell productions of King's College, Grace College, and the newly-formed Trabble Theatre also all lost money. Uni-Que wrote to the Union asking it to cover their debts saying "this adaptation period for companies used to the Avalon is a difficult time" and adding for rhetorical flourish, "that the Student Union built the Theatre to foster drama in the University and it would be a tragedy if it succeeded in doing the exact opposite".

Halfway through 1971 and after only six months as President, Brown resigned from Uni-Que and Peter Sutherland and Michael Macklin continued the society. In July, Wensley outlined a scheme which was designed to raise finance for all student groups wishing to stage productions in the Schonell Theatre. He proposed that "all student Theatre groups combine together for two or three next year and hire the Theatre collectively for the purpose of showing films. Profits from these screenings will go into a trust fund for the sole benefit of the groups themselves".

In 1971 Robert Jordan was on study leave and records show that a tutor in the English department, Maureen Strugnell, was using the Avalon Theatre for

theatrical rehearsals, although no more than about 3 hours per week. Its main function had been to become a storage facility; it was used to house University Bookshop materials pending the completion of their new premises and also drawing tables belonging to the Department of Architecture. However in 1972 the English Department began to offer its introductory drama units using the Avalon as a tutorial venue, while student theatre groups continued to look desperately for an alternative performance venue. They focused on the concrete-block walled and steel-louvered rehearsal space under the Schonell, and in April 1972 Joe McColum, the associate artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company, worked with Uni-Que students on a rehearsed reading of Daniel Berrigan's *Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, based on the transcripts of a trial of anti-Vietnam war protestors. Subsequently the floor was concreted and an elementary lighting rig attached to the ceiling, and in late September the first Uni-Que full production, John Bowen's *The Disorderly Women*, was presented there, directed by Fotheringham, who declared: "... the Cement Box Theatre (downstairs Schonell) is a different world, a simple large space asking to be used for inventive uncommercial, experimental, rough, live theatre; unpolished, unpretentious, BUT ALIVE!!" The title "Cement Box" (sometimes "Cementbox") survived in spite of its later remodelling with brick walls, and it continued to be the home of student drama at The University of Queensland for the next thirty-four years.

One significant Cement Box production occurred in the early 1970s, when Robert ("Bomber") Perrier, later Artistic Director of the Murray River Performing Group and founder of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, acted with Geoffrey Rush in Beckett's *Endgame*. This was performed, not in the main studio space, but in the garage and storage area.

In November 1973, Robert Jordan wrote again to the Vice-Chancellor, outlining how it was now possible for a student to take a major in drama within the English Department – a situation brought about "with very little fuss", and he raised the idea of creating a drama subsection within the English Department, indicating that theatre studies were now further advanced at Queensland than at any other Australian university, with the possible exceptions of the University of New South Wales and Flinders University whose drama departments had much longer histories:

The position, however, is changing rapidly. In the last few weeks the University of New England has announced the creation of a Department of Drama and Newcastle University has advertised the position of Professor of Drama within the Department of Creative Arts. Pressure for the development of drama courses is also building up at other Universities such as Adelaide and (I believe) Tasmania. With these developments taking place it seems to me important that the position of Queensland should be clarified.

Jordan was not advocating changing the financial situation of Drama or administrative patterns of funding and employment, but wished to assert the significance of theatre studies by increasing the official recognition given to it by

the University. He quoted the support of Professor Hamilton and said he had raised the issue with the Dean of Arts as well then ended his letter by indicating that his motives were partly selfish. If the University was not going to actively support the development of Drama Studies at UQ, he would consider moving to a University which would. As events unfolded, although the Vice-Chancellor did in fact ask Jordan to establish a Drama Department at The University of Queensland, Jordan decided to apply for the Newcastle Professorship, and was appointed. Professor Charles Bachman from the USA replaced Jordan with Dr Margaret (Maggie) Collins as lecturer and Don Batchelor as senior tutor in drama. However, by 1976–77 Bachman, Collins and Batchelor had all left and Dr Veronica Kelly and Jeremy Ridgman were appointed, with Richard Fotheringham joining as a senior tutor in 1979.

From their inception, all practical tutorials for drama units were conducted at the Avalon Theatre. At a first year level, students were invited to learn about staging issues, and given opportunities to explore some of the elements of performance craft: acting in different styles, movement and mime. The advanced units were also taught through practical workshops where staging as well as script interpretation was considered. In 1974, to provide “temporary” accommodation for this drama teaching program until a dedicated building could be built on the main campus, the Avalon was divided in two by a masonite wall and later was completely cut in half by a concrete block wall. The front section was turned into a single drama studio with a flat varnished wooden floor, floor-to-ceiling grey curtains and a basic lighting grid, but no stage area. The rear section of the Avalon was remodelled as the University’s first television studio with the control booth on part of the raised stage area, and consequently the earlier Avalon stage, screen, and backstage areas were lost or remodelled beyond recognition. The TV Unit under John McRae and later David Walker was moved from the Social Sciences Building to the Avalon and renamed the Department of Audio Visual Services. A garage was built to house an outside broadcast van; the TV unit used this mobile studio to travel around the University to record program material. The van was decommissioned in 1978 but the garage continued to be a TV Unit workshop for all the metal work required for video installations around the campus. The drama program and the TV Unit shared the Avalon until 1992. This co-existence was reasonably amicable, punctuated by the occasional student incident. Keith Cox, fire warden for the building and part of the TV unit, recalls at least one time when he had to put a stop to some student activities involving petrol soaked rolled up newspapers being used as Olympian style torches for a “classic” play.

At around the same time as the Drama teaching was being formalised, two concurrent developments were having a major effect on students’ ability to devote themselves whole-heartedly to extra curricular activities on campus: the introduction of the semester system in 1974 and the implementation of new forms of progressive assessment at around the same time. These separate changes worked in tandem to produce some profound changes in student psychology. The idea that students should work from the very beginning and consistently throughout the semester had a major effect on students’ sense of superfluous time.

Student life no longer operated as a bohemia largely free of responsibilities for a significant part of the year, and many student groups ceased to function.

In 1976, Uni-Que was allowed back into the Avalon one last time in *Bandersnatch*, perhaps because it was directed by Professor Bachman. The program notes indicated that little had changed for drama groups on campus in the intervening 3 years:

Why we're not using the Cement Box and why we can't charge an admission fee. Let me assure you it is not simply a change of policy by Uni-Que. We would love to use the Cement Box and we would love to have the option to charge an admission. A Student Theatre group, like everything else, needs money to run. But, the Cement Box is out of bounds to a public audience because technically, it does not meet City Council regulations. Because the Avalon is not a licensed theatre we cannot charge admission. We cannot charge an admission at either place but at least we can perform here.

Student enrolments in drama had increased slightly each year between 1972 and 1977, by which time there were 116 students enrolled in the first unit of what now formed a complete undergraduate drama major. Consequently, the English Department decided there was some need to safeguard the future of the drama program by renewing the campaign for dedicated teaching premises on the main campus. In 1977, the then English Department Head, Professor Ken Goodwin, wrote to the Vice-Chancellor with a proposal for managing the future space requirements of drama at UQ. He proposed that a working-party be formed consisting of a member of the drama-teaching staff, representatives of the University of Queensland Union, representatives of other theatre groups, someone for architectural advice, and that "someone from the central admin to be on it as well" so that there could be some understanding of the University's building program and priorities.

Suggesting Alrene Sykes as convenor, Goodwin proposed a theatre complex that would once again blur the distinctions between student and Faculty drama:

Where is drama to be taught when the Avalon is no longer available? Not in the Michie Building: its low ceilings alone make it entirely unsuitable. Possibly in the music shell under the Physiology Lecture Theatres – but not without substantial modification. What is really needed is a properly designed permanent facility. If that teaching facility could be associated with facilities for student drama (and, I would hope experimental drama by non-university community groups), a most useful and exciting complex would result.

Goodwin suggested that the English Department needed two drama teaching studios with three academic offices situated close by. In addition, he suggested that they be housed in a building or part of a building that also contained a small theatre complex: two flexible theatres (seating 100 and 250 respectively) and their

attendant dressing rooms, toilets, showers, storage space, workroom space, and foyer and ticket office. The flexible theatres, he suggested, would be made up of open space, with very few permanent features and were to be for the use of both the Department and other University drama groups.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Zelman Cowan, took the request seriously enough to confer with his Deputy Vice-Chancellors. The response from J.J. Ritchie, the DVC in charge of Fabric and Finance, shows how tensions could build between the academy and those responsible for its supporting infrastructure:

This is another instance where an academic development has taken place without regard to the availability of the physical facilities and other resources required for its support. We do not have and our development plans do not provide for performance or practice theatre. I do not know what other institutions provide instruction in theatre or drama, but perhaps we should ask if it is necessary that we should. If this first question is answered affirmatively, then the way is clear for this need to be taken into account in formulating future accommodation and resourcing priorities. Given the long list of building projects already given priority it will need to be given special priority if it is to be provided within the next two triennia. ... The area available at the Avalon can be doubled (with some expenditure) when we are able to remove Television to this campus ... Despite all these limitations, provided that we want to keep on with teaching drama, then Professor Goodwin's proposed working party could go ahead ... however we would need to make it explicit that setting up the working party would not convey any priority in meeting the needs when defined.

Professor G.N. Davies, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Programs, indicated in his response that there was little chance of Drama receiving any money from University funds until the mid 1980s. He suggested that the proposed working party be given terms of reference exploring the possible use of the Schonell and Cement Box. He said that since the only argument against using these facilities for University purposes was "that receipts did not cover expenses", it "would not be unreasonable for the English Department to pay for the use of the Schonell Theatre from its maintenance funds". As with many other proposals before and since, this plan came to nothing.

In 1977 the Avalon site had been amalgamated by survey into one parcel of land. In the same year an outside group, Camerata Theatre, began presenting seasons of plays, bringing the public back to the Avalon. In correspondence, Professor Goodwin described Camerata as "an amateur theatrical group associated with the University's Department of English [Jeremy Ridgman's wife Verity was the secretary, and Ridgman directed several of the plays]. Goodwin added, perhaps placatingly, perhaps deprecatingly, "this group presents plays largely of academic interest and the audiences are never very large". Nevertheless Camerata applied to the Brisbane City Council for a license for public performances at the Avalon and inspections were undertaken by both BCC Health Inspectors and the Metropolitan

Fire Brigade. The result was a request that improvements be made to the building to the amount of \$3,000–\$5,000. J.J. Ritchie wrote to Professor Goodwin:

The improved fire precautions required by Council will have to be undertaken by the University in any event ...Although the building alterations are not required unless public performances are given, I think we will have to undertake these improvements also having regard to the attendance of staff and students.

He went on to say that these additional costs to the University, together with the costs of electricity and cleaning, meant that Camerata Theatre would certainly not be exempted from paying the set hiring fees, despite connections with the English Department. The charges were: weekdays, \$12; Saturdays, \$15; Sundays, \$18 and Public Holidays \$20 per session of more than four hours between 8 am and midnight or after 6pm. Furthermore, there had been complaints about the noise made by Camerata after performances: “shouting, singing and general hullabaloo extending on one occasion to 2.30 am” and he reminded Goodwin that one of the conditions of the University’s use of the Avalon Theatre was “no noise”.

Camerata’s performance schedule for 1977 included Ibsen’s *Little Eyolf*, John Ford’s *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, John Arden’s *The Royal Pardon*, Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, and Saul Bellow’s *A Wen*. In 1978, Camerata arranged their program so that performances did not clash with teaching commitments at the Avalon and produced Albert Camus’ *The Just* and Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge*. In 1979, Camerata produced Strindberg’s *The Father*, Trevor Griffiths’ *Comedians*, Jean Anouilh’s *The Rehearsal*, Mrozek’s *Repeat Performance*, William Fraser’s *Blood*, and Jack Hibberd’s *One of Nature’s Gentleman*. Camerata continued using the Avalon throughout 1980, producing Pinter’s *Old Times*, Miller’s *The Crucible*, Douglas Stewart’s *The Fire on the Snow*, Van Itallie’s *The Serpent*, Peter Nichols’ *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, and the musical, *Irma La Douce*. But the condition that Camerata strike their set each night and that the productions not interfere with the teaching program was becoming unworkable. In addition, an incident when Camerata cut up for a set some of the teaching rostra, steps and flats soured relationships with the teaching staff, and other groups (including Uni-Que/Dramsoc) who had an equal if not better claim to use of the Avalon started agitating for equal access. The teaching staff considered that student numbers in 1981 would be such that the University should have sole use of the building and in June 1980 Veronica Kelly, on behalf of the English Department, wrote to Gary O’Neill, the Director of Camerata, indicating that the relationship was coming to an end. The English Department decided not to allow outside hirers in future: Camerata made an application to the Department in 1981 to continue to use the Avalon but this was rejected.

In these same years, one of Australia’s most famous music groups had its inception at the Avalon. Writing soon after Grant McLennan’s death in 2006, Robert Forster wrote in *The Monthly* that it was at the Avalon in 1978, in their second year, that the two Go-Betweens met:

Most of the drama subjects were taught at a small off-campus theatre called the Avalon. It was a jostling atmosphere in which Grant and I felt immediately at home, and our friendship began and blossomed here, amid the costume trunks, the works of Beckett, Genet and Ionesco (perfect for a pop band), and a genial professor, an Englishman [actually, Australian] by the name of Harry Garlick. It was action, and fun, and good learning and it's where the Go-Betweens started.^{xii}

In the same drama classes McLennan and Forster had performed in scenes from *Hamlet* and *The Rocky Horror Show*; material they used in later songs and skits.

Theatre Studies: 1980–2004

Throughout the 1980s the Avalon was used intensively for workshops in three undergraduate units per semester, with up to 170 students in first year, and 50–80 in each advanced unit. Two-hour tutorials and rehearsals for productions kept the lights burning from 9am till late six days a week; Saturday or Sunday rehearsals had become necessary due to students' work and other study commitments. The focus on Australian drama which Eunice Hanger and later Alrene Sykes had championed was maintained, and after Kelly, Ridgman and Fotheringham founded the scholarly journal *Australasian Drama Studies* in 1982, the University of Queensland gradually was recognised as the pre-eminent Australian drama research unit in the country. As the curriculum and performances started to align with these research interests, undergraduate teaching benefited through an Australian theatre history unit, and students became aware of plays and artists before as well as after *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. In 1986 Dr Adrian Kiernander replaced Ridgman as a lecturer in drama, and began a series of outstanding productions which frequently transcended the limitations of student theatre. In 1988 the students under Kiernander's direction presented the world premiere of the Australian colonial poet Charles Harpur's *Stalwart the Bushranger*, written and published in the mid-nineteenth century but never before performed. Dean Tuttle, who went on to a professional career in theatre, was the outlaw Stalwart, with Kathy Strelow, later an Arts Administrator, as Linda, the settler's daughter who befriends him.

Veronica Kelly introduced a popular advanced unit on "Carnival" whose teaching productions tended to be noisy, funny and outrageous. Kiernander, who had trained with Ariane Mnouchkine, directed an excellent version of Euripides' *Bacchae* which used the student talents of Lynne Bradley and Simon Woods, who later founded the Butoh-influenced Brisbane company Zen Zen Zo. Also working on the production was Fran Barbe, who established an international career as a choreographer. These are just a few of the many UQ drama students who went on to careers in theatre, film, television and even stand-up comedy, while others combined their drama studies with journalism and began successful careers as television presenters. This was in spite of the fact that UQ drama program did not ever attempt formally to teach acting or other stage crafts, in part because the University never committed to vocational training of this kind, but increasingly

also because other institutions in Toowoomba and Townsville, and in particular the Kelvin Grove campus of the Queensland University of Technology, stated to develop vocational theatre training programs.

From 1981 onwards, the Avalon was used by the Australian Electoral Commission as a voting station, but otherwise only the occasional parent or friend of the student actors ventured inside the busy walls of the front studio. A cement block wall cutting the building completely in half had been installed at the request of the TV studio because the vibrations caused by students warming up and performing caused the TV cameras to wobble, and a flashing "On Air" sign on the drama studio wall had proved ineffective. Meanwhile, the University continued to seek some final decision on the Avalon property. In 1981, the Assistant Bursar (Property) wrote to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Fabric and Finance, saying that the Avalon was zoned Residential B which "allowed for construction of residential housing of Types T1, T2, and T3". As the area of land on the Avalon site was 905 square metres, T3 construction only would be possible, which meant construction would be limited to no more than 3 stories (including the ground storey) and only 3 x 2 bedroom units would be possible. In 1988 the Director of Buildings and Grounds, Bill Humble, wrote to the Vice-Chancellor: "I have on occasion been asked about our plans for this site. The right answer is none! It houses (a euphemism really) the TV unit and an English Drama presence in what is an anachronistic theatre". He went on to describe a recent approach from a property developer who specialised in three star accommodation. "I believe we have always thought some form of accommodation is what would go on the site, however vague we may be about specifics". However, since the value of the land without rezoning was not sufficient to replicate the teaching facilities on the main campus, this option was repeatedly rejected.

During the 1980s wider changes in the higher education sector began to reframe the relationship between higher education and vocational training, and in doing so challenged what was being taught in the Avalon. The initial stages of this process followed John Dawkins' appointment as the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 1987. The ensuing "Dawkinisation" of Australian universities resulted in over seventy campuses being rationalised into a much smaller number of institutions, with all gaining the title of university. Within this newly formed "unified national system", the late 1980s and 1990s saw NIDA rejoin the University of New South Wales, the Victorian College of the Arts join with Melbourne University, and in Queensland the performing arts programs at the Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education and the Darling Downs College of Advanced Education be transformed into the Queensland University of Technology's Academy for the Performing Arts and the University of Southern Queensland's Performance Centre respectively. By redefining these programs as university studies, and their qualifications as academic diplomas and degrees, these vocational studies came into direct competition with the University of Queensland's drama teaching.

UQ drama responded in two ways. Firstly, the practical work was separated out and students for the first time could take a performance unit for credit. Previously,

up to 40% of a unit could be assessed as a practical component, but since this was voluntary and not all students took this option (doing a written assignment instead), a two track system was set in place which began to breed frustration on the part of some of the staff who were enduring double workloads directing the intensive practical work plus a near-normal marking load and students who had been complaining that other students not taking the practical option were only doing a fraction of the work for the same result. The decision to offer full practical units would have extra benefits some years later, when the English Department was able to argue successfully to the State Board of Teacher Registration that students completing at least 50% of their drama majors in practical units were sufficiently trained to work as drama teachers in Queensland secondary schools.

Making the performance work fully for credit was also very popular with students, but increased even further the pressure on space in the Avalon. Adrian Kiernander organised for the front façade to be colourfully repainted in a striking art deco design in 1989 (a feature that led to protests from members of the public) but almost no work other than minor repairs had been done to the interior since 1973, and it was starting to look very shabby. After the TV Unit moved back to the main campus, the English Department applied to be able to use that area as well for the drama program. Permission was eventually granted in 1995 and \$80,000 was spent on refurbishment. A lighting grid was installed in the rear (former TV) studio, the front studio was extensively remodelled, new black floor-to-ceiling curtaining was installed in both studios, and two banks of retractable audience seating were purchased to enable the front studio to function more effectively as a public theatre when required. The new Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Hay, re-opened what now became the “Avalon Drama Studios” in 1996. Kiernander had left to take up the Chair in Drama at the University of New England in Armidale, but was replaced by Dr Helen Gilbert. Later Dr Joanne Tompkins also arrived at UQ to teach drama; together Gilbert and Tompkins wrote the definitive *Post-Colonial Drama* (Routledge, 1996) and UQ became known for this specialisation as well as for Australian drama. Students studied and performed plays by South African, West Indian, Canadian, Indian and other authors writing out of their experiences of living in former British colonies.

The second innovation in response to the Dawkins challenge was the decision to set up a research postgraduate theatre company, Cracka Theatre Troupe, to explore the new concept of “performance as research” and also to provide semi-professional performance opportunities and training for those research Masters and PhD students who wanted to go on to careers in the theatre industry or as academics in drama departments with a similar emphasis on performance. Delyse Anthony, later Dr Delyse Ryan, Senior Lecturer in Drama at the Australian Catholic University (Banyo campus) but then herself a PhD student, was instrumental in organising the initial project, which comprised four actors performing scenes from Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and the two other plays in that trilogy. As well as setting up Cracka as a limited-liability, profit-share company, Anthony played both Nancy and Pearl. Thanks to the professional track record of the guest director, Bruce Parr, and of one of the actors, Jean-Marc Russ (later to have a significant career in theatre and television

drama), the Queensland Arts Council approved the project for performance in State secondary schools. Using a UQ vehicle, the Troupe undertook a major tour playing to year 10–12 students across south-east Queensland and, the following year, to north Queensland as well. Later similar projects included a history of Australian drama *An Entirely New Sensation* (1995, revived several times in later years). In response to requests from secondary drama teachers struggling to teach “Brechtian” acting and performance styles, Nigel Pearn, Mary Ann Hunter, Stace Callaghan, and Stephanie Kehoe devised *Boneless Chicken Brecht*, which would prove to be one of Cracka’s most in-demand shows. It premiered at the 1996 Australian Drama Studies Association (ADSA) conference at the Australian National University in Canberra, where the keynote speaker was the major Brecht scholar John Fuegi. His endorsement helped the project win the prestigious national Philip Parsons Performance as Research Prize for 1997.

All these shows were performed for undergraduate students as well as touring to secondary schools. Two larger projects, both after the 1995-96 refurbishment and the installation of tiered seating, saw bus loads of secondary students coming to UQ to view performances twice daily for several weeks. The first, in 1996, was Nick Enright’s *Property of the Clan*, a one-act drama based on the murder of a teenage girl near Newcastle which he later reworked as the play and feature film *Blackrock*. Impressed by a reading of *Property of the Clan* which Leah Mercer had directed with the Cracka Troupe for a conference, Enright granted them permission to premiere the play in Queensland. The season at the Cement Box also included a “forum theatre” session, devised by Pearn and Callaghan who had attended workshops by the Brazilian director Augusto Boal, the pioneer of this method of involving audiences in using live theatre to discuss social and political dilemmas. The actors sketched out a scenario loosely based on the situations they had presented in the play, and then asked individual audience members to join in and try to improvise a better solution to the problem. A forum afterpiece was also added to the 1997 project, for which Cracka commissioned an original play by a UQ drama postgraduate and prize-winning dramatist, Tim Benzie, based on the annual year-12 “Schoolies Week” at Queensland beaches. For this project the director, Mary Ann Hunter, liaised with youth workers and others who were struggling to turn “Schoolies” from a dangerous and anarchic event into a safe and fun festival, and Benzie combined these ideas with his own to produce *Schoolies!* With the refurbishments to the Avalon completed and the new seating banks installed, *Schoolies!* was able to perform there. So successful was the 1997 season that Benzie revised and expanded the play for a second Avalon season in 1998, and it was also published together with notes for teachers who used the storyline for follow-up workshops in schools with the year 12 students who would be attending their own Schoolies week that year.

In 2001, under Hunter’s leadership, Cracka and Brisbane director Sue Rider involved some eighty young people from schools and community groups in Ipswich in researching archival sources and gathering oral histories of former staff members, volunteers, health care workers and the public with connections to the historical mental health-care facility – the Challinor Centre at Sandy Gallop – which occupied the site of UQ’s new Ipswich campus. *Sandy Gallop Dances with*

the Moon was Cracka's first community-based performance using local actors, including almost all those young researchers. It took the form of a processional performance staged in and around the historic buildings. In July 2002 Cracka actors performed a short comedic work on genetic engineering at the Environment, Culture & Community Conference hosted by UQ. However, the lack of sufficient research postgraduates interested in performing in educational and community settings led to Cracka ceasing operations shortly afterwards.

Another reason for the demise of Cracka Theatre Troupe was that other former students and current postgraduates were joining or even setting up their own companies, some of which achieved national and international prominence. The first was *Zen Zen Zo*, a physical theatre company inspired by contemporary Japanese performance styles including *Butoh*. As noted earlier, Lynne Bradley and Simon Woods, students in the early 1990s, lived and worked in Japan for several years and established their company there before returning to Brisbane where they quickly built up a group of dedicated performers who trained regularly at the Avalon and also performed there before moving on to larger-scale seasons downtown. Another company which based itself at the Avalon was the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble which Dr Rob Pensalfini founded after he was appointed to the linguistics staff of the University in 2001. Pensalfini, a Linklater-accredited voice coach and former actor with the US-based *Shakespeare & Co.*, quickly built up an enthusiastic and dedicated team of artists who presented several seasons of Shakespeare at the Avalon.



3. *Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble rehearsing Coriolanus at the Avalon, 2003, with Rob Pensalfini in the title role.* (Photo: Emma Tonkin, courtesy QSE)

Unfortunately, in 2004, it was observed that the Avalon Theatre's roof structure had cracked and was sagging dangerously, presumably due to the weight of the

lighting grid which it was discovered had simply been coach-bolted to the ceiling of the old picture theatre. An audit by the University of Queensland's Property and Facilities Division revealed that the roof structure had been fabricated with Oregon, a lightweight timber neither durable nor strong enough for the purpose. Major structural damage had occurred and there was also severe white ant infestation and the joists under some areas of the flooring were no longer supported by stumps, a problem which had probably been exacerbated if not caused by the energetic "stomping" in physical theatre workshops. Under the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995, supervisors must identify and seek to eliminate immediately major risk factors affecting students and staff of the University and anyone failing to do so is liable for criminal penalties in the event of any serious injury. Consequently it was reluctantly decided to close the Avalon immediately. A suggestion was made that the Avalon should be heritage listed and restored; however, only the front façade resembled the building as it existed prior to 1963, and that façade was where the white ant damage was most severe. A quotation indicated that at least \$560,000 would be required to bring the building up to a useable state, including substantial structural work to fix the roof, but that even this would not guarantee that the building would meet current OH&S requirements, nor provide more than a short-term solution to the problem of finding Drama teaching facilities suitable for the twenty-first century. Reluctantly, therefore, the (now) School of English, Media Studies and Art History had to look elsewhere to find new drama teaching facilities. Zen Zen Zo moved out to train, rehearse, and perform elsewhere, as did the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, although it remains resident at UQ, performing in 2007 at the Ipswich campus.

The University of Queensland had initially bought the Avalon as an investment in the cultural life of the campus at a time when the Students Union could not afford to do so. Between 2004 and June 2006, the Students Union leased the Cement Box venue back to the University for its drama tutorials for precisely the same reason, with the roles reversed. In June 2006, following the federal Government's decision that student union membership become voluntary, the Students' Union was forced to close the Schonell Film and Theatre Complex; screening films too had become a loss-making activity. Later the same year, an occupational health and safety report on the Cement Box found it, like to Avalon, to be in a run down and dangerous condition, mean that at present (2007) it too is closed. Sadly, the wheel had come full circle.

oooo0000oooo

Sources

The above account was compiled by Nigel Pearn and Richard Fotheringham, using The University of Queensland archives, the UQ Students' Union archives, and the Fryer Library holdings relating to Camerata Theatre (UQFL140), Eunice Hanger (UQFL333), and Dramsoc (UQFL194).

The following people provided information by interview and/or read drafts of this report and made comments and corrections: Justice Roslyn Atkinson, Lynne Bradley, Keith Cox, Justice Ian Gzell, Ian Hanger QC, Justice John Helman, Dr Mary Ann Hunter, Professor Veronica Kelly, Professor Adrian Kiernander, Professor Peter Lavery (QUT), Dr Bryan Nason, Elizabeth Nosworthy, Dr Rob Pensalfini, Paul Richards, Margaret Robertson, Dr Delyse Ryan, Robert Wensley QC, Professor Rod Wissler, Ashby Utting.

Other sources are listed below.

ⁱ *Brisbane City Council Heritage Citation* (BCC Heritage Unit, June 2004), p. 4.

ⁱⁱ See Philip Parsons with Victoria Chance, gen. eds, *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency/Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 259.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Malcolm Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning: The University of Queensland's First Seventy-five Years* (St Lucia: The University of Queensland Press, 1985), p.139.

^{iv} *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, p. 258. The Brisbane season was also controversial, with the proprietors of the Albert Hall refusing permission to present it there, leading to a successful season being offered at Her Majesty's Theatre. See Don Batchelor, ed., *Twelfth Night: The Morning After* (Brisbane: Twelfth Night Theatre, 1986), p. 57.

^v See Brian D Pascoe, ed., *A Guide to the Great Court* (St Lucia: The University of Queensland, 1979; rev. ed. 1992), pp. 30, 32. The brass plaque from the Tree Theatre is held in the Fryer Library.

^{vi} *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, p. 260.

^{vii} See The College Players / Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe: Description List of productions by the College Players then Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe. 1959-1998, compiled by Robby Nason, reg. no. 2000.0103.0001, Queensland Performing Arts Centre Museum, Brisbane.

^{viii} As Rex Cramphorn. See *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, p. 165.

^{ix} See "Rodney Fisher AM", *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, p. 227-28.

^x Katharine Brisbane, "Students score a spectacular premiere success", *The Australian*, 30 September 1970, p. 14.

^{xi} Richard Fotheringham served as Acting President for the rest of 1970 but without being formally elected.

^{xii} *The Monthly*, July 2006. See http://www.themonthly.com.au/excerpts/issue14_excerpt_003.html