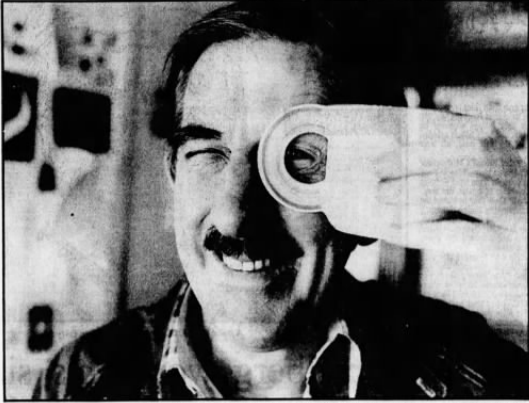


John McKellar: I'd rather be at the pictures

Theatre
By SUSAN MOLLOY



JOHN McKellar, boisterous, barmy, boyish and aged somewhere in his early 50s, was in a wink-wink mood without the rudge-udge.

"This show's supposed to be a retrospective," he said this week. "Don't they do retrospectives when you're dead?"

John McKellar, cunningly unlined and buoyantly happy despite his twin careers in the theatre and advertising, is not dead although his past is about to be re-animated. From November 23 *Kinselas* in Sydney's Taylor Square will present a compilation revue, meaningfully titled *Four Lady Bowlers in a Golden Holden*, as a tribute to McKellar's 30 years as a revue writer.

A hefty scrap book tracing articles and critiques of his revues from 1953 lies in front of him, research material for the show's director, Richard Wherrett, and designer Brian Thomson. John McKellar is not impressed by this wad of his past.

"There are about 1,000 old suitcases brimming with this crap and I delivered it to the Sydney Theatre Company," he said. "I'd rather be at the pictures, wouldn't you?" he added, a bit suddenly.

The Herald chose not to take personal umbrage at this. John McKellar has claimed for more than 40 revues, he has written more than 40 revues, he has written only one film script.

"I wrote one for Tiny Tim which Fink (Margaret) was to direct. We put it in some competition and it ran ninth or something. I think 'shined' is the word. It may emerge one day when Tiny Tim is 150. It may be regretted like this revue. Why not? It's a laugh.

"This revue is entertainment at our own risk, I think. At least it's been put on in the right place. The *Luzon Show*. It should be called, subtitled *Our of the Kinsela Ashes*.

This is the man who wrote revues such as *A Cup of Tea*, *A Rex and a Good Lie Down*. This is the man who wrote revues for the old Phillip Street Theatre which in 1961 became the Phillip Theatre in Elizabeth Street. This is the man who was the pilot of an Australian theatrical phenomenon the stars of which were Ruth Cracknell, Gordon Chater, Noel Ferrier, a young Reg Livermore (then known as Ronald Livermore), Ron Fraser, Barbara Wyndon, Jane Saller, Noel Brophy, and several dozen more from Jill Perryman to Dawn Lake, from John Waters to Barry Humphries.

He created the *Coo-er Girl*, *Les Boys*, James Bond, *The Borrowers*, *Pierre of Balmale*, *The Phantom Stockman*, the *Hulk Family*, who starred in revues such as *It Australia Really Necessary?* *Send in the Cloner*, *A Streetcar Named Prospero*.

He gave to Australians such immortal lines as *But I Wouldn't Want to Live There*, *It Australia Really Necessary?* and *A Cup of Tea*, *A Rex and a Good Lie Down*. He wrote *Hot*, *Glouce* (renowned for *Glouce Dawn*), *A Cup of Tea* etc ran for a year in Sydney and then toured.

More recently, Clap (as in applauded) with Noel Ferrier, ran for nine months at Jools Theatre Restaurant and *Girl's Night Out* ran for a year at Jools.

McKellar has worked for advertising agencies George Patterson and Leo Burnett, with two others he ran a creative consultancy called HHMM, and for the past six years he has freelanced for ad agencies, working mainly on trade presentations.

As soon as he writes advertising ditties, he forgets them, which, he says, "is not a bad idea." The one he can remember happens to be yet another of John McKellar's gifts to the Australian expressions' book.

For Clayton's Tonic — and prior to the screen advent of Jack Thompson — he penned "his drink I have when I'm not having a drink."

He's thinking about writing a revue for production next year. His recent musical revue, *Kyzyner*, is playing in America.

"I heard two kids playing in the back lane where I live in Paddington, and one said, 'OK, now you play the straight and I'll be the pool.' Well, it's still the same game as Mummies and Daddies or doctors and nurses, they're just using different terms."

He has always preferred writing about women.

"They are not hiding something in a drawer or a closet," he says. "Most men are not up-front. I think a lot of women are up-front. A lot of the shows I've done, the women were very strong and they were terrific to write for. This is before what is laughingly referred to as the advent of feminism."

He is staying out of rehearsal for *Four Lady Bowlers in a Golden Holden* (subtitled McKellar at Kinselas, or, Rex Raggardians, or, A Show for the Hole Family, incorporating an Orzagic Look at the Phillip Street Revues). "They'll do a better job without me," he says. "I may see it when it's over."

"I think movies is the best. How you see *E.T.*? It is like *Men's Mirror*, no, it's like *Bambi*, like a sack of potatoes with *Bambi's* eyes. I like going to movies because it is such a laugh. I especially like trashy movies because they are more fun."

"Fags? Most of them have been written. I've never written a real play I guess. I guess I am lazy. It is difficult enough to sit through them, let alone write them."

And then he goes. As a parting gesture, he offers a picture of himself. A colour illustration of his great grinning face in front of the leading tower of Pisa, lip-sludgedly coming out of his car. "Not many people can wear that jewellery," he says. Wink-wink.

John McKellar... "Don't they do retrospectives when you're dead?"