The AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP is a co-operative group venture designed to provide a foundation for experiment in the performing arts and is concerned with developing a uniquely Australian form of theatre.

For the past year the Performing Group has been a permanent performing company at Melbourne's famous La Mama — the one-time shirt factory in 154-156 Jezzine St., Carlton, which has become the centre if experimentation in the Australian theatre. More than a dozen Australian writers have had their plays performed there.

The young actors and directors of the Australian Performing Group work together at La Mama in a studio and performing workshop. The group's workshops provide a focus where actors can work together improvisationally and provide an opportunity for playwrights to work with them and form theatre pieces from the group's exercises and improvisations. Before La Mama was established here was nowhere in Australia where an unknown playwright with a few unconventional plays could go to see his work performed sympathetically, to try nothing of a place where experiments could be carried out with actors and directors.

The AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP has presented the plays of Jack Hibberd ('one of Australia's most promising playwrights, with a brilliant ear for the vernacular', Laurie Litt-Ray, The Listener) and the works of Barry Oakley, the well-known poet...

The group is also responsible for productions of plays by Alex Eagle, author of the powerful WORM AND ANIMAL, ('Australia is barking in this sort of fashion, but should continue it because it is beginning to find a more understanding climate,' Virginia Grant, The Canberra Times.)

The work of the group has attracted the attention of the Exmouth Council for the Arts, The Melbourne Theatre Trust, the Paris Festival Committee and the National Union of University Students.

The group has also taken theatre out into the streets in the attempt to make the theatre accessible. The group has forced the theatre into a new, fresh confrontation with the community in the streets and parks and has in the process...
1. The Group

(i) Leonard Radic: The Age, July, 1969

"La Mama is a rarity in Australian theatre — a non-establishment centre, where new ideas and new ways of expression can be tried out and where there is complete freedom of expression. Half a dozen more La Mamas and a couple more repertory companies to provide a balance and Melbourne might be an interesting city theatrically."

(ii) Catalyst?

Although accredited as being the bastion of experimental theatre in Melbourne La Mama does not confine itself exclusively to this role. Their performances (The ABC) at "La Mama" in Carlton, are original and exciting, their unorthodox techniques can be quite devastating to an uninitiated audience.


Keeping theatre from mediocrity by keeping it relevant for successive generations — in fact, for all of them at once — new depends more than ever on the workshop experiment which has nothing to do with calculating commercialism. In Australia, where theatre is sustained by theatre from abroad, the workshop is a vital necessity if our theatre is ever to have any of its own hairs on its chest. Yet in the entire nation there are only two shops of any consequence for the working of theatrical experiments — La Mama in Melbourne, uncompromisingly determined with an ensemble company now almost constantly working with original scripts, and a policy which drives through the dead ends of conventionality by ignoring them...La Mama is dedicated to the belief that theatre in Australia will stay boring and dull, and will continue to lose audiences, while resources are stuffed into productions which were good oversights.

2. The Writers and Their Plays

(i) Phil Adams: Vogue, 1968

"... local writers can try out their experimental work with the help of young professional actors who donate their services. It was at La Mama Blak that first saw the work of Jack Hibbard, a writer of sinister Pinteresque persuasion and potentially a great talent.

(ii) H. G. Kippax: Sydney Morning Herald, 16.8.69

"...Somewhere in the forests of M. Buzo's theatrical imagination there is a tiger, here felt rather than glimpsed in the snarl of an occasional line and the sweep of a paw in a confrontation, and I refuse to believe it a paper tiger."

3. A.P.G. in the Street

(i) The Sun: May 5, 1969, Keith Dunstan

Yesterday MAYDAY was a well-organised affair, and for the first time in 30 years, it had a touch of class. The fascinating new wrinkle in the protest business was the "Street Theatre" and unquestionably we will be seeing much more of this. It was staged by LA MAMA CARLTON THEATRE. There were, perhaps, 15 players in white masks, black cows and black by-pass suits, plus strolling players with clarinet and drums. As the march proceeded, they sprinted from corner to corner giving high-speed sketches.