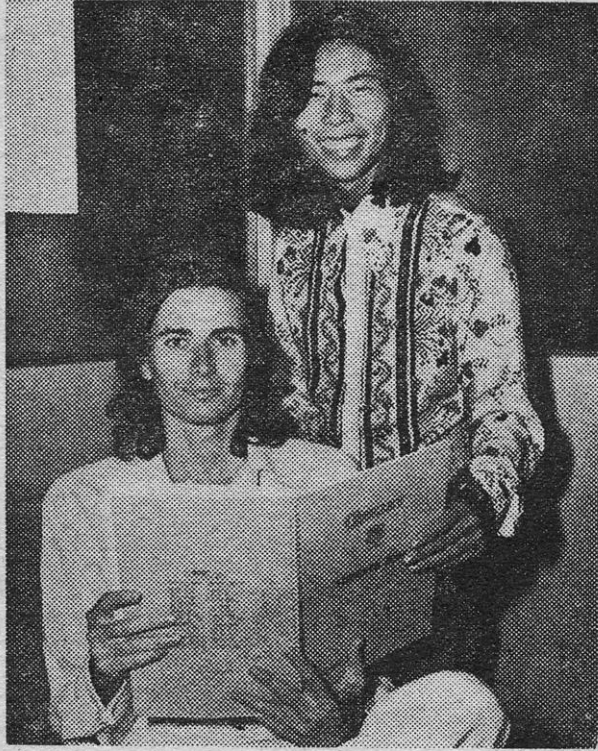


TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 1971

# JET SET



Ralph Tyrell and Willy Young —  
co-creators of the latest pop opera.

## Tyrell & Young play it again

# Pop goes the opera

**A** POP OPERA based on a fairy story — that is the next offering at the Schonell Theatre, from February 4 - 20.

It is the brainchild of Young Tyrrell Productions, sponsored by the Architecture Students' Association, and called Childhead's Doll.

It has been written and produced by Willy Young with music by Ralph Tyrrell.

Young and Tyrrell have been working in the theatre for the past five years, and as students of architecture they presented the annual Architect's Revue.

Young produced them and wrote most of the scripts, while Tyrrell wrote and arranged most of the music.

Besides working in revues for which they are best known, they have undertaken other projects, including the play Quartet which was well received at the Festival of University Drama in 1969.

Another project was the Suite for Chamber Pop Orchestra, on themes by J. S. Bach.

For some time, Young has been working in Sydney where he worked for the Marionette Theatre of Australia and designed Tintookies 2000 for Expo '70 at Osaka.

He also did the advance course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, where he wrote 10,000 Miles Away described by a leading critic as the best play on the Sydney scene in 1970.

He was one of the original cast members who evolved the popular Legend of King O'Malley and has just finished a national tour of Australia with the play.

Ralph Tyrrell's most recent success was the music for Bacchoi which received acclaim from both critics and public.



Ralph Tyrrell and Willy Young

Both Young and Tyrrell agree that Childhead's Doll is one of the most interesting projects they have tackled, and one which they hope will bear the fruit of the experience they have gained from working together for so long.

Childhead's Doll is a pop opera in treatment, but in content it is a fairy story. The doll of the title is a beautiful life-sized one rumored to hold the secret of men's fortune in her eyes.

# Getting out of the microgroove

29/8/71

By BRIAN HOAD

THE TROUBLE with most pop-rock musicals/operas/oratorios is that they are a product of the microgroove culture; the stuff that gramophone records are made of; pop-rock song-cycles if you like. Of course, it is a pleasantly healthy sign that the microgroove generation is attempting to rectify its cultural myopia and broaden its field of expression beyond the discotheque into the theatre. Yet there are certain intractable difficulties in the staging of a song-cycle — be it pop, rock or Schubert — which must not be ignored.

Ignore them and you are liable to turn up such wet events as that recently on view in an inflatable theatre on the Sydney Showground. The glow of love, life and happiness which the beautiful young people involved in "Man-Child" had promised would envelop us all resolutely refused to put in an appearance. And why should it, when the rhyme or reason of the evening was quite indeterminate, when the prevailing ignorance of matters theatrical included the most rudimentary techniques of moving or speaking upon a stage, when the words were mostly inaudible and the music distorted

through lack of control of the electronic appliances which were producing it?

It has all happened before: an attempt in Sydney early last year to stage The Who's "rock opera," "Tommy," ended in unmitigated disaster. And it could, unhappily, happen again: for although Mr. Harry M. Miller no doubt intends to lavish much theatrical expertise on his promised production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" next year, its fame is still completely confined to the microgroove, its form still essentially a song-cycle and the challenge no less than making a theatrical spectacular out of a Bach Passion or Handel's "Messiah."

Whether by coincidence or not, live music is returning to the serious theatre, anyhow — rock, pop, electronic and otherwise — put there by theatre people and rapidly establishing itself as a basic pillar of strength. Director Rex Cramphorne in his recent production of John Marston's "The Dutch Courtesan" in Sydney introduced a trio of stage musicians who, by scraping, scratching and tapping their way through a score by Barry Conyngham, managed to evoke and explore more of the play's twilight world than did the actors. In a current version of the Orestes legend at the Arts Factory Mr. Cramphorne has gone further, and has integrated acting and music to a surprising degree. The entire play is performed to drum rhythms, the dialogue is in speech-song form, the actors respond with some brilliantly sustained passages of mime, and the total effect manages at times to get through to some points of contact with the audience which are seldom tampered with — fear, menace, madness, moments of inexplicable tension, moments, too, of unexpected compassion. The effect is something comparable to that achieved by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in their collaboration on the same theme in the opera "Elektra" — both generate moments of great theatrical power through the skilful integration of drama and music, whether you chose to call one opera and the other dance-drama or not.

Luckily for the microgroove generation, there is a more popular tradition to suit the pop-rock requirements for music in a serious theatre. Quite simply, it is a matter of a play with songs in the popular musical idiom of the day; not a string of songs which you attempt to turn into a play (such as "Tommy" or "Superstar" or "Man-Child"); and nothing to do with the rose-tinted frivolities of operetta or its bastard child, the American musical.

John Gay's "Beggar's Opera" of the 18th century, Brecht's "Threepenny Opera" of the 1920s and "Hair" of the



The Black Prince (Gary Day) and the doll (Patricia Leehy) in the pop opera "Child-head's Doll"