



AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY BY ARRANGEMENT WITH MICHAEL CODRON AND THE
HAMPSHIRE THEATRE PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

DEAD

BY TERRY JOHNSON

FUNNY

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THE ATC
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season

5

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THE ATC
International
season 95

*On behalf of all of us at the Auckland Theatre Company, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the second play in our 1995 International Season, Terry Johnson's **Dead Funny**.*

*British writer/director Johnson is perhaps best known for his play **Insignificance**, which featured the unlikely combination of Marilyn Monroe, Albert Einstein, Joe McCarthy and Joe Di Maggio discussing the merits of marriage, mortality and the theory of relativity. In a similarly unlikely vein, **Dead Funny** juxtaposes the bawdiness of Benny Hill with the disintegration of a relationship. As you are about to see, the result is painfully hilarious. Johnson has refined the art of serious comedy (for grown-ups!).*

*We welcome Simon Bennett as director, who can now add contemporary comedy to his established credits for Shakespeare and Sondheim. Judith Gibson returns to the Company, in a follow-up to her triumphant turn as Shirley in **By Degrees**, and Tina Regtien, fresh from her success in the highly controversial **Oleanna**, now takes up an entirely different challenge. New to the Company are Timothy Bartlett, Geoffrey Dolan and Bruce Phillips, who was instrumental in the development of Wellington's Circa Theatre. Neill Duncan composes tonight's original score, the first for us. We welcome them all, and hope to see more of them. Set designer John Parker (**Lovelock's Dream Run**) completes a talented line-up, working on a play that proves there's more to life than a custard pie in the face.*

We take this opportunity to thank all those who work behind the scenes: on lights, costumes, props, stage management and the myriad tasks that make tonight possible. Their input is as crucial to the performance as the actors, and for the most part, they are theatre's unsung heroes.

We thank our Season Sponsors, particularly Aline Sandilands and her team at TVNZ for their generous support, and gratefully acknowledge the ongoing commitment of the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa.

*Finally, we thank you, the patron for your support. If you are not already a subscriber, we invite you to join: it costs nothing and the benefits and discounts make it very worthwhile. Write to us at PO Box 1312 Shortland St, or fill in the Freepost postcard available in the foyer. In any event, we trust you enjoy the show (and apologise for the custard!) and hope to see you at **The Learner's Stand**, opening at the Herald on 8 June.*

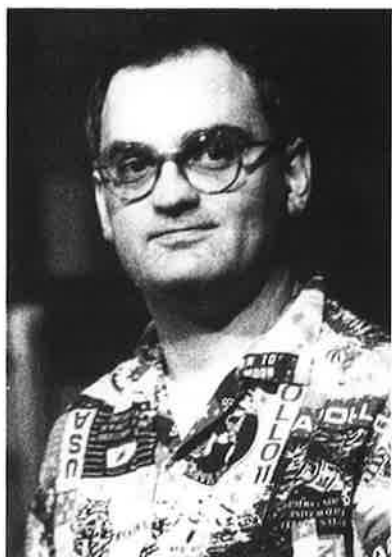


Very best wishes

*Simon Prast
Producer*

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY

TERRY JOHNSON



Terry Johnson writes and directs for theatre and television. His theatre writing credits include: **Insignificance and Hysteria** (both at the Royal Court Theatre); **Unsuitable For Adults** (Bush Theatre); and **Imagine Drowning** (Hampstead Theatre).

His directing credits include: **Death of a Salesman** (Theatre Royal, York); **Children of the Dust** (Warehouse, Croydon and Soho Poly); **Sleeping Night** (Warehouse, Croydon and Royal Court); **Ragdoll** and **Just Between Ourselves** (both at Bristol Old Vic).

For television he directed **The Lorelei Way**, **Upstream** and **Time Trouble** (all for the BBC), **Ball On the Slates** (Channel 4), and wrote and co-directed **99-1** for Carlton Television.

IT'S ALL IN THE MIND by Susan Maslen

"The death of a comic actor is felt more than that of a tragedian. He has sympathised more with us in our everyday feelings and has given us more amusement." Leigh Hunt.

April 1992 was a sad month for comedy. Within days the death of two great comics, **Frankie Howerd** (Francis Alick Howard) and **Benny Hill** (Alfred Hawthorne Hill) was announced. In their lives the two comedians had followed a similar path in their climb to the top - music hall, entertaining servicemen, revue, radio and television, and though their performing styles differed greatly they both relied heavily on the innocent delivery of sexual double entendres - the world of the saucy seaside picture postcard.

Max Miller totally understood this concept and adjured any suggestion of "higher influences". He was wildly popular and has gone down in the history of comedy as one of the best 'front cloth' comedians of all time. In his act he appealed blatantly to the audience's love of the suggestive, openly offering them a choice of act. Would they like his spot tonight to be from his white book (clean), or his blue book (dirty)? Every night the punters bayed for the blue book. Miller generally got away with the most filthy stories ("It's the way I tell 'em, lady") but even he was occasionally banned by management.

As comedy moved into radio the bans became stricter as the top levels of the BBC tried in vain to prevent possible obscenities polluting the air waves. All writers were given a list of topics to avoid the five principal areas thought most dangerous to the British public's morals were religious, physical disability, royalty, race and homosexuality. In 1949 these restrictions were docified by Michael Standing in his 'Green Book' and spelt out all taboo topics. They included lavatories, effeminacy in men, immorality of any kind, honeymoon couples, fig leaves, prostitution, commercial travellers, animal habits (eg rabbits), ladies' underwear and brass monkeys.

THE CRAZY GANG - ROBUST VULGARITY

After the war the **Crazy Gang** were the most popular exponents of this robust vulgarity. Dr Jonathan Miller analysed their comedy in 1962 "Their targets for fun are bottoms, breasts, urinals..." Also high on the list are "Trousers, pants, trusses and hernias, bedpots, farts and contraceptives."

The team of comics who appeared in the 'Carry On' films were the natural heirs of the **Crazy Gang**. Their producer, Peter Rodger, said of this film series: "The real humour of the Carry On's has its basis in the picture postcard, the broad music hall joke... The critics who dismiss 'Carry On' humour as old-fashioned, do not realise that audiences like to see the laughs coming and to recognise them".



Frankie Howerd

AN ANCIENT AND DISSIPATED WALNUT

The 'Carry On' team of regulars included Kenneth Williams, **Hattie Jacques**, Joan Sims, Charles Hawtrey, Barbara Windsor, Kenneth Connor and perhaps the best-loved of them all - **Sid James**. Once described by Hattie Jacques as having "the general appearance of an ancient and dissipated walnut" this quintessential cockney actor was, in fact, born in Johannesburg in 1913. Sid always played himself, whatever the costume and century, and built up a huge following worldwide, having fan clubs in Bangkok and Cambodia. His big break had come in 1956 when he was

cast in **Hancock's Half Hour** on radio. Hancock's aspiring gentility found a perfect foil in Sid's cockney philistinism. ("What him? Sid? An intellectual? That thing there - lying on the ottoman, scratching himself?"). He stayed with the show for eight years, the last three on television, and only left the series when Hancock began shedding all his support team. It was a sad parting, "I don't think Tony will be as funny without me. I know I won't be as funny without him".



Benny Hill

Sid James died, as do so many great comedians, in harness. It was 1976, backstage at the Sunderland Empire on the first night of **The Mating Season**. He had been a trouper throughout his career, even playing his part in **Carry On Doctor** from bed as he was too unwell to walk.

Sid had been described by Frankie Howerd in **Carry On Up the Khyber** as "Common as muck". Howerd appeared in two of the series. In the first, **Doctor**, he was cast as an evangelical faith healer - "What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind." - and in the second he took the supercilious role of the omithologist

Inigo Tinkle in search of the legendary Oozalum bird.

Whilst the 'Carry On's were topping the listings on the wide screen, **Benny Hill** was spending his time perfecting a similar form of comedy on television. Hill saw that for a comic to succeed in this new medium he must have a tremendous fund of material. A dozen sketches which could provide a lifetime's work around the halls could be gobbled up within the space of one television programme. Hill, once described by Michael Caine

as having a face like "an evil cherub", began to build up his comic gallery of characters (Fred Scuttle, Mr Chow Mein et al). At the height of his popularity in 1984 **The Benny Hill Show** was playing to 13.3 million people worldwide.

Both Hill and Howerd recognised the abiding love of the British of old gags. Howerd once said "If I told a completely new joke nobody would laugh. They wouldn't understand what was funny about it". Old jokes gave a sense of conspiracy with the audience, who found half their fun in knowing what was coming next. Neither Hill nor Howerd's strength was in their basic material but in their visual presentation (in the case of Hill) or delivery (in the case of Howerd). Frankie was a master of lugubrious camp and used, with great success, throughout his professional career a technique much favoured by George Robey - that of trying to prevent his audience laughing. His long, tortuous rambles were punctuated by such attempts - "No, really. No, don't laugh. Poor soul. No, don't. More control, please - it might be one of your own!". The more he protested, the more the audience laughed.

Neither comedian employed that close-to-the-edge touch of madness which such comedians as Max Wall and Tommy Cooper brought to their acts. Cooper's mien was described by J. B. Priestley as: "That craggy, convulsed face, the sudden daft grin, those rolling eyes, and perhaps above all that almost insane high giggle, together make us feel, in some dark corner of the mind, that we might have here some dangerous lunatic capable of something appalling."

Both Hill and Howerd's comedy was of a less manic kind. Like Max Miller they were blue without using a blue word, conjuring up images and leaving the inference to their audience. "To be vulgar is not the same as being filthy, tasteless and offensive. But bad taste is a matter of opinion. Comedy is like walking through a minefield", said Frankie Howerd. They both crossed the minefield and survived.

That April in 1992 saw the world poorer for the loss of two such downs.

FUNNY BUSINESS - A DEAD FUNNY GLOSSARY OF FAMOUS COMEDIANS.

Norman Wisdom	Catchphrase "Don't laugh at me because I'm a fool!"
Tommy Cooper	A comedy magician and a magical comedian. Famous for his Fez hat. Cooper died with his fez on on-stage during a televised theatre show "Live at Her Majesty's" - true to form the audience believed this was another trick! Catchphrase "Just like that..."
Max Miller	The original 'cheekie chappie', bought a new form of humour to the music halls of the 30's & 40's - risqué jokes! With his white stetson, white shoes, floral suits and plus fours he was an outrageous sight - garrulous patter of a salesman. Catchphrase "There'll never be another, will there lady?"
Ken Dodd - "Doddy"	They call Ken Dodd the "Comedians Comedian". His style is a brilliant and eccentric variety of stand-up comedy, bolstered both by his daft accessories like the tickling stick and, previously, the Diddymen and his own startling appearance - buck teeth and fingers-in-the-socket hairdo. Catchphrase "How tickled I am..."
Little & Large	Comedy duo who enjoyed Seaside Summer Season success at Brighton, Bournemouth etc.
Hills Angels	Dancers - Suspended bimbos. Benny Hill's answer to Charlies Angels .
Bella Emberg, Henry McGee	Benny Hill's inner sanctum of close friends
Bob Todd	
Tony Hancock	British comedian who committed suicide in Melbourne in the 1960s

CAST (in order of appearance)



JUDITH GIBSON - Eleanor

Judith has had over 20 years experience as a professional actor and director. Judith has played many lead roles from the classics to modern plays and musicals. Originally a leading Theatre Corporate actor and founding member, Judith has gone on to film and television work.

Films include **User Friendly** and **Trial Run**, and television work includes, **Hanlon, Shark in the Park** and **Plain Clothes**. The plays in which Judith has performed are too numerous to list. In 1994 Judith performed in Auckland Theatre Company's production of Roger Hall's **By Degrees** - marking her much awaited return to the stage. Earlier in 1995 Judith performed in **Fanny Business** at the Watershed Theatre.



TIMOTHY BARTLETT - Richard

Timothy began his professional career in 1975 Theatre Corporate's "Story Theatre" Company. Since then he has worked in most New Zealand theatres. After a long period in Dunedin where he appeared in a number of plays for the Fortune Theatre and as a presenter for TVNZ's **Playschool**. Timothy moved to Wellington and worked as a freelance actor appearing at Downstage in **Arsenic & Old Lace**, at Circa in **Love**

Knots and in numerous television and film roles including: **Soldier, Soldier, Bread & Roses, Angel At My Table** and **Tommyknockers**.

Timothy last worked in Auckland in 1985 in Theatre Corporate's **Hooters, Trumpets and Raspberries** and **Happy End**.

Timothy is currently playing Bernie Leach in **Shortland Street**.



BRUCE PHILLIPS - Brian

Bruce was last seen in Auckland as Ted in **Joyful and Triumphant**, which toured NZ, then played Sydney Festival in 1994, and in 1995 to Adelaide and Melbourne. Bruce, a member of Wellington's Circa Theatre Council for 10 years, was thrilled to see Circa move to superb new premises on Wellington's waterfront and be in their first production, playing Prior in **Angels in America**.

A professional actor for 20 years, Bruce has acted in over 70 productions at Downstage and Circa, Wellington and Court Theatre, Christchurch. Bruce has recently directed shows such as Ayckbourn's **Time of My Life** and Shauffer's **Lettice and Lovage**. (cont)

CAST (in order of appearance) - cont

TV roles have included Country G.P., Erebus, Neighbourhood Watch, and Shark in the Park. Films include Shaker Run, Alex, Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior and Starlight Hotel. Bruce has been in countless radio productions and written for both radio and television.

He is very pleased to now have the opportunity to work with the Auckland Theatre Company, especially on such an extraordinary play.



GEOFFREY DOLAN - Nick

After being part of the original committee that helped establish the Auckland Theatre Company, Geoffrey is pleased to finally be able to perform for them.

Geoffrey has worked at most of the professional theatres in New Zealand, in productions such as *The 3 Musketeers*, *Burn This*, *Our Country's Good*, *Ladies Night* and more recently in Auckland in the Watershed productions of *Hamlet*

and *Into the Woods*.

Television appearances include: *Shark in the Park*, *Gloss*, *Shortland Street* and Roger Hall's *Neighbourhood Watch* (not Network) with show colleague Bruce Phillips.



TINA REGTIEN - Lisa

Tina graduated from the New Zealand Drama School, Toi Whakaari in 1987. Since then she has worked throughout New Zealand for Mercury, Circa, Downstage, Bats, Court and Auckland Theatre Companies.

Favourite theatre productions to date include *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Bloody Poetry*, *Twelfth Night*, *Lysistrata*, *School for Scandal*, the

Wellington and Auckland seasons of *Daughters of Heaven* and the recent Australasian tour of the musical *Blood Brothers*.

On TV she has appeared in *Undercover*, *The Ray Bradbury Series*, *Shark in the Park*, *Shortland Street* and has presented for TVNZ Holiday Programme. On film her credits include *Brain Dead*, *The Invisible Hand* and Preston/Laing's production of *Bread and Roses* for which she was nominated for best supporting actress in 1994.

Tina has just completed the very successful season of the ATC production of David Mamet's *Oleanna*.

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY BY ARRANGEMENT WITH MICHAEL CODRON AND THE HAMPSTEAD THEATRE PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

DEAD FUNNY

A NEW COMEDY BY TERRY JOHNSON

*Australasian Premiere - Auckland Theatre Company Production, Herald Theatre, Aotea Centre March 30, 1995.
This play was first performed at Hampstead Theatre on 27th January 1994.
First performance at the Vaudeville Theatre on 6th April 1994.*

CAST (in order of appearance)

ELEANOR	Judith Gibson
RICHARD	Timothy Bartlett
BRIAN	Bruce Phillips
NICK	Geoffrey Dolan
LISA	Tina Regtien

Sex Therapy Video Voice Over

MIRIAM FAIRCHILD	Suzanne Paul
COCKNEY MAN	Bruce Phillips
COCKNEY WOMAN	Clare Corridan
MAN	Simon Prast
WOMAN	Harriet Crampton

*The play takes place in Eleanor and Richard's living room in Islington, Spring 1992.
There will be one 15 minute interval.*

DIRECTOR	Simon Bennett
DESIGNER	John Parker
LIGHTING DESIGN	Robin Pentecost
COMPOSER	Neill Duncan
STAGE MANAGER	Pam Hindmarsh
PROPERTIES	Alistair Floyd
WARDROBE	Elizabeth Whiting
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Michelle Armstrong
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Judith Tizard (MP)	
Simon Prast	

SIMON BENNETT - Director



Simon's introduction to theatre was with his parents' company, Mike International, touring New Zealand extensively as a technician and operator. Simon studied theatre and film at Victoria University before training as an actor at the New Zealand Drama School in Wellington. After graduation, Simon formed a partnership Nomis Productions, with designer Simon Elson and together they restored the derelict BATS Theatre, reopening it in 1989 as Wellington's fourth professional venue. Resident in Auckland since 1992, Simon has gained a reputation for directing innovative and popular interpretations of Shakespeare (*The Shrew*, *12th Night*, *Titus Andronicus*), and most recently Sondheim's musical *Into the Woods* for the Watershed Theatre. Simon's production of *Blue Sky Boys*, the Everly Brothers musical starring Michael Galvin and Tim Balme, is currently touring North Island regional centres.

In late December 1994 Simon acted as Script advisor on the workshop of the musical *Braindead* by Stephen Sinclair and Fran Walsh.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Dead Funny is among the best contemporary British writing for the theatre.

Although cultural specifics place the play in an affluent North London suburb in 1992, the wider issues of finding pleasure and meaning in a life governed by routine; of sex and fidelity within marriage; and of the nature of friendship, loyalty and responsibility to the self and others, shine out and speak to us loudly and clearly.

Great comedy is always based in truth. If the attitudes to sex and human relationships reflected in the work of such illustrious British comedians as Benny Hill, Frankie Howerd and Max Miller are indicative of male sexual mores, then God help us all.

Enjoy.

JOHN PARKER - Set and Costume Design



John began designing with Theatre Corporate. Productions included: *Cabaret*, *Three Sisters*, *Macbeth*, *As Is*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Hooters Trumpets* and *Raspberries* and *Wednesday To Come*. For the Mercury Theatre design highlights were *The Mikado*, *Gypsy*, *Burn This*, *The Homecoming*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Glorious Ruins*. After turning freelance in 1989 major theatre work has included *The Holy Sinner*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Chess*, *Pack of Girls*, *Lovelock's Dream Run* (for Auckland Theatre Company), *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Contest*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Into The Woods*.

John has an MA Degree from London's Royal College of Art and is an internationally renowned potter and film critic.

ROBIN PENTECOST - Lighting Designer

Robin has had over 16 years experience in professional theatre. He has designed for many ballet, opera and musical productions during this time. Robin studied lighting design at Waikato University and had master classes with Francis Reid of Great Britain. Currently he is resident Head Lighting Technician with the Aotea Centre.

He was responsible for the lighting design of *Romeo and Juliet* (1993) at Herald Theatre, and for the following productions for Auckland Theatre Company: *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1994) and *Oleanna* (1995).

NEILL DUNCAN - Composer/Musician

Neill spent 10 years playing and composing for many of Wellington's most eccentric groups including *The Six Volts*, *The Spines*, *The Bung Notes* and *Primitive Art Group*. He was a founding member of *Braille Records* which recorded and released much of this music.

For the past two years he has been in Auckland composing for theatre and television. His TV soundtracks include documentaries on *Black Power*, *Armed Defenders*, *Samoan Drag Queens*, and *'Hair'* which recently won a gold medal in the New York TV Awards for best arts documentary and was a finalist in last years New Zealand TV Awards for best soundtrack.

Recent theatre work in Auckland includes *Hamlet*, *Cabaret* and *Jack & The Beanstalk* with Michael Hurst and *Spectacle of One* and *Pinocchio* with Inside Out Theatre Company. This is the third project Neill has worked on with Simon Bennett, the other two being *Titus Andronicus* and *Into The Woods*.

ALISTAIR FLOYD - Properties

Alistair studied at Elam School of Fine Arts, majoring in photography before travelling to Europe and the UK where he trained at the London College of Fashion. Subsequently his theatre credits have included *My Fair Lady*, *The Seagull* and *Into The Woods*.

Alistair is currently working as Production Designer/Wardrobe Supervisor on a short film.

ELIZABETH WHITING - Wardrobe

Elizabeth was wardrobe supervisor for Theatre Corporate and Mercury Theatre. Elizabeth is now a freelance designer and wardrobe supervisor with many outstanding productions to her credit. Elizabeth was wardrobe supervisor for Auckland Opera's *Magic Flute*, and Harry M. Miller's production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, designer for the television series *Homeward Bound* and designer for Auckland Theatre Company's *Angels in America* and *The Seagull*.

HAMPSTEAD THEATRE

Dead Funny, the play you are seeing this evening, had its World Premiere on 27th January 1994 at Hampstead Theatre.

The Hampstead Theatre was founded 33 years ago by James Roose-Evans and moved to its current site at Swiss Cottage in 1962. Though a small and intimate theatre, seating under 200 people, it has through successive decades established a national and international reputation for the presentation of new plays (together with the occasional revival of special interest, and the encouragement of new writers from home and abroad - a reputation that continues today under the directorship of Jenny Topper.

Since Jenny Topper's appointment in August 1988, productions have included, Mike Leigh's *Smelling A Rat*, *Valued Friends* by Stephen Jeffreys, *Amongst Barbarians* by Michael Wall, *Carthaginians* by Frank McGuinness, The Field Day production of *Saint Oscar* with Stephen Rea, *Burn This* with John Malkovich and Juliet Stevenson, *Imagine Drowning* by Terry Johnson, *Bold Girls* by Rona Munro, a radical new version of *The Philanderer* by George Bernard Shaw, *The Fastest Clock in the World* by Philip Ridley, *Making it Better* by James Saunders, *June Moon* by George S. Kaufman and Ring Lardner, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* by Frank McGuinness with Stephen Rea and Alec McCowen, *Grace* by Doug Lucie with Anna Massey, *La Musica* by Marguerite Duras, *Unidentified Human Remains and True Nature of Love* by Brad Fraser, *Marvin's Room* by Scott McPherson, *A Going Concern* by Stephen Jeffrey's, *Dead Funny* by Terry Johnson with Zoe Wanamaker, *Ghost From A Perfect Night* by Phillip Ridley, *The Lodger* by Simon Burke, *A Collier's Friday Night* by D.H. Lawrence, *Poor Superman* by Brad Fraser, *GaUCHO* by Doug Lucie, *Slavs!* by Tony Kushner and *Bearing Fruit*, the generic title for five new plays from new and emerging women writers. Future productions include new plays from Rona Munro and Michael Frayn.

Hampstead Theatre is a registered charity and is funded by The London Arts Board, The London Borough of Camden and The London Boroughs Grants Scheme.

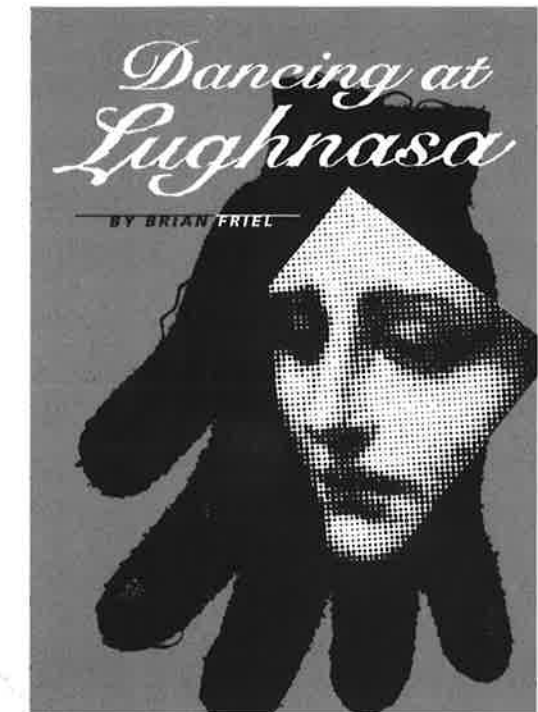
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General Manager *Richard Wakeley*

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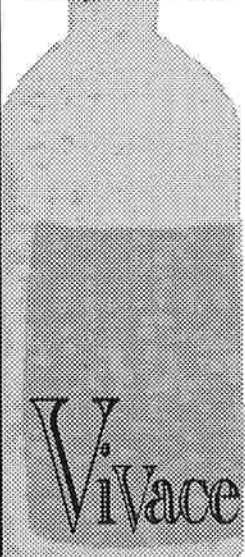
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