

# Malvern Theatre Company History 1957 - 2009

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## 1957

On the 27th of September, **1957**, *The Malvern Arts Council* decided to form a drama group and a meeting, advertised throughout the Arts Council membership and the local press, was called for in October. An inaugural meeting was held early that month where approximately twelve people attended. A Mr. Luke Oldham offered to produce the first production, and made a preliminary selection of suitable plays. The Mayoress, Mrs. Joan Morgan, was asked to be patron of the group and to take the chair at the next meeting, which was held at the small Court Room in the Malvern Town Hall on the 29th of October and was attended by 40 people. The *Malvern Drama Group* was formed with an elected Interim Committee.

On the 3rd of December, with 25 people attending, the following office bearers were elected: President Mrs. Joan Morgan, Vice-Presidents Mr. & Mrs. Alec A. Rosenblum, Treasurer Miss K. Morant, Secretary Miss Joy Batty (who played Mrs. Small in the first production), Publicity Officer Mr. John B. Dunn, plus five Committee Members, Mrs. Deller, Miss Wendy Marshall (who stage managed the first show), Miss Roff, Miss Hitchcock and Mr. John Mackenzie.

Luke Oldham then commenced reading *A Lady Mislaid* by Kenneth Horne, which became our first production and took five and a half months to produce.

A constitution with minor adjustments to the original draft was adopted at a meeting held in the Mayoress' Room on the 24th of February, **1958**. *A Lady Mislaid* was finally staged at the Holy Advent Church of England Parish Hall, Armadale, on the 18th and 19th of April, **1958**. The cast consisted of Joy Batty, Dorothy Heulin, Nanette Gerock, John Norman, John McKerchar, Ron Warfe and Pam Young. The Stage Manager was Wendy Marshall. Subscribers were asked to pay £1/1/0 plus 10/6d for each ensuing year. Our first telephone number for enquiries was UM3504 (the President's home in Chadstone). The group's second production, *The River Line* by Charles Morgan, was staged at St. Joseph's Hall, Malvern, from the 27th to 29th August, **1958**. Orchestral interludes were provided by members of the Malvern Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Milton Thrift and the programme listed the new patroness, Lady Tait. The show received the following press review: "The first Act ... was shapeless ... the production generally was uneasy and cramped ... the cast was moderately effective". For our third play, *Random Harvest* by James Hilton, 3rd to 5th December, **1958**, the four-page programme was typeset and printed for the first time. Previously it was typed out on a typewriter and duplicated.

In **1959** Graham Adams became President and Joan Morgan became Secretary. Tickets were five shillings each, a programme cost sixpence and one shilling was charged for tea and biscuits at interval.

## 1960s

In **1960** the *Malvern Drama Group* had the honour of being the first to use the 250-seat Chadstone Shopping Centre Auditorium, and for the theatre's opening on 3rd October, after being officially opened by Premier Henry Bolte earlier that day, we staged *As Worn By Achilles*, written by the group's then President Graham Adams.

The group started including cast notes, written by Joan Morgan, in the programmes in **1961** and consisted of phrases such as: "one of our youngest members", "a stand-in for one night", "newcomer to the stage", "her first experience with us", "shows exceptional keenness", "has had acting experience" and "always in evidence whenever complicated hairstyling is necessary". Norma Milward became Secretary followed by Keith Napper later that same year and Fay Baker was Treasurer.

In **1962** Anthony Dwyer became President. The following year, **1963**, an adult admission was increased to six shillings and John Mackenzie took over as President.

Graham Wall became President in **1964**.

Carolyn Gunn became Secretary in **1966**. The last production of that year was *Gaslight* and for the first time the programme used the words 'Directed by'. Previously the director had always been referred to as the 'Producer'.

In January **1967**, a newsletter was established as a liaison between Committee and Members. Its name took the initial letters from *Malvern Drama Group* and so 'Madragro' was born. Joy Warfe (nee Batty, Foundation Secretary) was the originator and first editor. On the 18th of February that year, the Group moved to new premises at 117 Glenferrie Road, Malvern, and named it 'The Pillar Theatre'. Only two minor productions were presented there before the Group moved again. Barrie Sudweeks became President.

In **1968**, major productions were still being performed at the National Theatrette, South Yarra, as well as the Group's new premises, named 'The Attic', at 262a Glenferrie Road, Malvern. Three of that year's productions toured to such places as Bacchus Marsh, Warragul, Foster, Toolamba, Leongatha, Rushworth, Wonthaggi and Sorrento. Touring productions continued to 1971. The programme for *Tevya And His Daughters* contained headshots of the cast for the first time. Then due to a fire that destroyed the National Theatrette, the last production of the year, *All Because Of Agatha*, was presented at the Arts Theatre (later The Viaduct), South Yarra. The President was Barrie Sudweeks, Treasurer Peter Johannsen, and Carolyn Gunn, Secretary. Linda Debnan was the acting editor of *Madragro*.

In **1969**, Don Hammond became Treasurer and David Baggallay took over as editor of *Madragro*. A No Smoking rule during performances was enforced. The programme for *Eight Beats In A Bar* had an unfortunate layout error and listed Interval as being directed by Iris Blake.

## 1970s

David Baggallay became President and Joan Blake, Secretary in **1970**. Joan also became co-editor of *Madragro* with Madeleine Calcutt, following B. Hayne who produced the first edition for that year. In February, due to the expense of improvements and rewiring, the Committee decided to vacate The Attic and relocate to three old shops (also referred to as two old shops and a garage) at 25–29 Morey Street, Armadale. The group's plans for these premises were not accepted by the Prahran Council and so we moved yet again to the Congregational Church Hall, 29 Burke Road, East Malvern. We are indebted to Councillor Hubert Healy who introduced us to its Board. After moving eleven times over the previous thirteen years, what turned out to be the very last move occurred on Saturday 6th June and one of the first tasks of building the stage was completed in time for the official opening of the new theatre on Friday 3rd July with the third performance of *The American Dame*. Later, in September, ninety-five new theatre seats were installed. The venues for our activities were numerous. So much so that when we weren't on the move, our programmes would contain the words "our next production will be staged in this theatre". The venues were:

- Holy Advent Church of England Parish Hall, Armadale, St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Parish Hall, Malvern, and R.S.S.A.I.L.A. Hall, Malvern (1958);
- Argosy Theatre, Murrumbeena (1959–60);
- Library Auditorium, Malvern, and the Chadstone Auditorium (1960);
- Arrow Theatre, Middle Park (1960–1);
- 'Northbrook', Malvern (1961–2);
- Methodist Hall, Malvern (1962);
- St. James' Church Hall, Glen Iris (1963–5);
- Braille Library Hall, Prahran (1963–4);
- National Theatrette, South Yarra (1966–8);
- Pillar Theatre, Malvern (1967);
- The Attic, Malvern (1968-9);
- Arts Theatre, South Yarra (1968);
- Presbyterian Church Hall, Armadale (1969);
- 25–29 Morley St., Armadale (1970);
- Malvern Theatre (originally Congregational Church Hall), East Malvern (1970 onwards).

The year of **1971** saw the return of Barrie Sudweeks as President and Pat Milthorpe became editor of *Madragro*. In February, after due consideration, the group's name was changed to *Malvern Theatre Company (MaTC)* in order to identify the theatre and company with the City of Malvern, acknowledging the association with and assistance from the Council since the early days at 'Northbrook'. Ken Kemp designed the company's new emblem. The proscenium was extended and painted light brown and stage flying gear was installed. A lime green curtain, complete with track, was purchased and installed. Wall-bracket lights were installed in the auditorium, which completely eliminated the use of the old fluorescent bars on performance nights. The stage manager's cueing system was installed and the foyer also received a number of improvements. A Saturday matinee was included in the run of *The Island Of Happiness*, but matinees didn't become the norm until 1983. David Johnston (later, Channel 7's Newsreader) appeared in *The Man Who Came To Dinner* as a TV producer. Adult tickets were increased to \$1.20. The bi-annual Subscription Brochures (one Autumn season and one Spring, 4 plays each) offered subscribers 2 plays for \$2.40, 3 for \$3.20 or 4 for \$4.00. Programmes were increased to 20c but coffee at interval was lowered to 10c a cup!

In **1972** Carolyn Gunn became the Treasurer, Pat Milthorpe became Secretary and Iris Blake, who had been closely involved with the theatre's Youth Group since 1968, was made an Honorary Life Member. At least two of the programmes for this year were printed in Pentridge Gaol. In the following year several of the programmes suspiciously have the same look about them but no printer is mentioned. Three-phase power was connected to the stage switchboard. Carolyn Gunn became editor of *Madragro* in September and Barrie Sudweeks and Colin Pearce helped out from time to time as 'guest editors'. In October, the 60th edition of *Madragro* took on a brand new style and format due to the purchase of a 'Scanning Machine'. It was folded and collated into 24 pages. The first 59 issues (except No.

40) were flat one- or two-sided foolscap sheets varying from one to nine pages of text. The year finished with *The Rivals*, which was our 100th major production and its special programme included a brief history of *MaTC*. The season made a profit of \$92.23. Front of House, which charged for everything, even the programmes, made a loss of \$1.73.

Claire Thonemann became Secretary in **1973**. Admission prices were increased again to \$1.40. Subscriptions were 2 plays \$2.60, 3 plays \$3.60 and 4 plays \$4.00. Perhaps to give the patrons a little something extra for their money, the programme for *Wait Until Dark* included a crossword puzzle on the last page. The combined rent for the year was \$1,200.00.

In **1974** the mailing list for Madragro was pruned due to some recipients no longer having any contact with the theatre. The Committee organized meetings at 29 Burke Road with other theatre companies to discuss tactics to persuade the *Listener-In TV* from discontinuing its Theatre Page. After an inspection of the theatre, the Commission of Public Health demanded that 20 modifications be made to the electrics, within 60 days, to comply with S.E.C. Public Building Regulations of 1957. The theatre purchased a sewing machine, a typewriter, and installed a pay phone 'at some cost' in the foyer. The number then, was 211 0020, the original version of today's number 9571 0020. During August and September of this year Malvern had five plays rehearsing all at the one time, while just a few months earlier The Viaduct Theatre in South Yarra was forced to close. The VDL Bulletin was retired and replaced by *Theatrecraft*.

Ticket prices for **1975** were increased to \$1.60. Subscriptions: 2 plays \$2.90 and 3 plays \$3.90. The annual membership fee was \$5.00. Joy Warfe returned as Secretary. A letter from the Committee dated 6th June was sent to all members indicating that unless there was an indication of increased interest and willingness to contribute by the general membership, an Extraordinary General Meeting would be held to put the following motion: that, due to a lack of interest on the part of the majority of its members, the *MaTC* be disbanded. The EGM was held at the theatre on Monday 1st July. Amongst those in attendance were Barrie Sudweeks, Max Mander, Joy Warfe, John and Carolyn Gunn, Ken Read, Don Hammond, Alistair Tweeddale, Colin Pearce, Andrew McKay, Caroline Piesse, Michael Nugent, Maurie Johns and Ewen Crockett. The motion was ultimately defeated and members offered to fill vacant positions to assist the already strained committee. After thirteen performances of *Mother Courage* at Burke Road, the entire show was transported into the City for another six performances at the *Bridge School of Drama*, Bennet's Lane, Melbourne.

In March **1976** *The Fantasticks* won Best Production at the Moomba Festival of Theatre. While the cast of *The Glass Menagerie* were deeply involved in rehearsals, the author Tennessee Williams was to appear at the Alexander Theatre, Monash University, on 18th of March. Unfortunately, after everybody had scrambled to get their hands on tickets, he decided to remain in New York for the opening of his new play so his Australian tour was cancelled. Mike Lynch (broadcaster on 3LO) appeared in *The Fantasticks*, his marriage and honeymoon and *When Did You Last See My Mother*. Huge increases in ticket prices to \$2.00, subscriptions for 2 plays \$3.50 and 3 plays \$5.00. Colin Pearce became Secretary. Graham Adams, former President and Life Member, died. In November, *Madragro* published its 20-page 10th edition.

The programmes started to be overwhelmed with advertisements in **1977**. It was difficult to find anything to do with the actual show. Later that year, under programme designer, Ian Brewerton, it was printed in two colours throughout for the first time. Enormous increases in admission prices to \$2.50, subscriptions 2 plays \$4.50 and 3 plays \$6.50. A critique by adjudicator Monte Miller for *A Thousand Clowns* appeared in the 104th issue of *Madragro* and was possibly the longest on record, filling seven and a half pages. Work on raking the auditorium seats began and was completed the week before Christmas. Colin Pearce became President and Barrie Sudweeks was made an Honorary Life Member. Hilda Orton took over as editor of *Madragro*.

**1978** marked several milestones for *MaTC*, which celebrated its 21st year of operation. Maurie Johns became the Treasurer, Sal Doncaster took over the position of Secretary and Colin Pearce was guest editor of *Madragro* for the February issue. In March, *Jugglers Three* was awarded Best Production (shared with Heidelberg's *Absurd Person Singular*) at the Moomba Festival. The Malvern Council, with the assistance of \$40,000 from the State Ministry for the Arts, purchased the former Congregational Church and Hall, 29 Burke Road, East Malvern, for \$85,000. The property then became the Malvern Community Arts Centre. Having leased the premises for the previous seven years, Malvern

Theatre entered a new lease arrangement with the Council, which had set aside a further \$25,000 for improvements to the building. The theatre also continued to improve its premises with a new 20-channel lighting board and new carpet for the auditorium and foyer. From May through to early July workshop classes were held for Acting with Frank McNamara for \$8.00, Stage Management with Lats Ertekes for \$5.00, and Lighting with Fred Thomas, also \$5.00.

On the 7th of January **1979**, Colin Cave the theatre's Activities Director, died in a road accident. To perpetuate his name, the Colin Cave Memorial Honour Board was created. It lists the names of past Presidents, Honourary Life Members as well as recipients of the Colin Cave Memorial Award which is given to a member for outstanding services to the theatre. The Memorial Board was unveiled by the Mayor of Malvern, Ann Morrow, on 18th November, and Dawn Cave presented the first Memorial Award to Max Mander.

## 1980s

Carolyn Gunn became President and Angelo Gianchino took over as Treasurer in **1980**. The publicity budget was doubled and membership fees were increased to \$8.00. *Cowardy Custard* won Best Production at the Moomba Festival of Theatre. Auditions were held in September for a co-production of *Dames At Sea* between *Pumpkin Players* and Malvern. It was planned to be staged at Pumpkin Theatre, Richmond, in November/December then transfer to Malvern Theatre to run during the following February. Due to 'viable economics' it never happened. *MaTC* became incorporated on the 19th November and the occasion was celebrated after the close of the opening performance of Patrick Pearse Motel on the 20th. Then, only two days later, the theatre's store in Waverley Road, which housed Malvern's costumes, furniture and scenery, was totally destroyed by fire.

Joy Warfe became Treasurer in **1981**. Production runs were standardized to thirteen performances plus the usual charity night on the evening before the opening Thursday night. After 59 episodes on the then-popular television police series *Homicide*, Terry McDermott directed *Table Manners*, our first production for the year. *Malvern Youth Theatre* staged *Dimboola* in the Arts Centre Hall opposite the Theatre from the 20th to 23rd of May. Fed up with the all too frequent electricity power cuts, the theatre purchased two generators.

**1982** was the year of the newly named *Malvern Theatre Company Ltd.'s (MaTC)* Twenty-Fifth Anniversary. John Gunn was made an Honorary Life Member. Anniversary T-shirts were produced and sold for \$6.50 each. A Subscribers Cocktail Party was held on the 6th of February during which the Mayor, Max Dumais, announced the beginning of construction of the new foyer between the Theatre and Hall. A Souvenir Booklet was produced and given to the guests. On the 28th of March, a Members Day was held at Werribee Park and later, on the 26th of June (the last performance of *The Beggars' Opera*) a re-union night was organized for key members from the 50s, 60s and 70s at which a silver pendant of the two theatrical masks attached to a silver chain was presented to Joy Warfe (Treasurer and Foundation Member) and an engraved silver tray was presented to Elaine Rawson (ex Ticket Secretary). During the evening, a doubled-tiered anniversary cake was cut by Carolyn Gunn, Joy Warfe and Joan Packam (nee Morgan). The special opening of the new foyer was held over the weekend of the 16th and 17th of October. The original pioneers of the project, which cost \$120,000, were Barrie Sudweeks, Dick Baird, John Durham and Colin Pearce. *MaTC* and the Arts Centre Management Committee contributed \$7,000 each (to be paid over ten years) towards the costs. A Dinner Dance was held on the 22nd of October at Tudor Court Receptions in Caulfield.

The first production for **1983** was the Australian Amateur Premiere of *In Duty Bound*, which was awarded Best Production of an Australian Play at the Moomba Festival. A new ten-year lease with the Council was signed for \$355.00 per month subject to CPI adjustments. The first Thursdays of the production runs for this year were dropped and an intermediate performance on the first Saturday at 5:00 pm was introduced. Charity nights were moved from Wednesday to the Thursday before opening night. Production photos were included in *Madragro* for the first time thanks to the purchase of a paper plate maker for the theatre's offset printing machine.

Ron Ward became the new Treasurer in **1984** and the first production for that year, *The Perfectionist*, won the Best Production Award at the Moomba Festival. New carpet was installed in the new foyer. The 5:00 pm Saturday shows, which were added to the production runs in the previous year, continued after proving to be very successful. The World Amateur Premiere of *The Man In The Glass Booth* was staged in September.

For the August **1985** production of *Just Between Ourselves* we managed to get a car on stage. This involved taking out all the auditorium seats in the middle of the theatre and pushing an engineless Mini in through the Burke Road double doors, up and down the raked floor and straight up onto the stage, where it sat for the duration. After the run, the whole process had to be repeated to get it out again. In the latter part of the year the Board decided to begin using computerized tickets at a cost of around \$80.00 per show. Previously, theatre staff were printing and hand numbering 11,000 tickets per year. John Gunn became President, Ada Mees became Treasurer and Hilda Ortlund became Secretary in **1986**. Ticket prices were increased to \$6.00.

**1987** was *MaTC's* Thirtieth Year and was celebrated with an Anniversary Dinner at George & Marika's Restaurant, Camberwell, on the 20th of June and a Members' Social Function in the theatre's foyer on the 6th of December. A 25%

increase in membership fees to \$10.00 was blamed on the rise of the consumer price index and the fall of the Australian dollar. The third production of this year, *Pride And Prejudice*, was another World Amateur Premiere for Malvern. New seats for the auditorium were purchased from *Eltham Little Theatre* who had in turn bought them from the *Metro, MaTC*. Theatre seating capacity was now 126. The year finished with four performances, from the 17th to 19th of December, of *Our Town* staged by the *Malvern Theatre Workshop Group* and was directed by Carolyn Gunn.

In **1988** admission prices were increased to \$6.50. On the 6th of August Channel 2 used the theatre's auditorium to film a scene for the ABC/BBC television film *Darling Of The Gods* and in September we staged the Victorian Amateur Premiere of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* over a four-week period. Ron Ward became the new Treasurer. *The Hartwell Players* celebrated their 50th Anniversary in September. A free Lighting Course of six sessions through September and October was conducted by Laurie Gellon. The year finished with a Christmas get-together for all members on the 11th of December and the *Malvern Theatre Workshop Group's* four performances of *Separate Tables*, directed by Helen Lipp, from 15th to 17th.

The Australian Amateur Premiere of *Why Me?* was the first production of **1989**. After 25 years of dedicated involvement at all levels, Carolyn and John Gunn retired from their positions on the Board. Don Hammond who was presented the Colin Cave Memorial Award for 1988 became President. Malvern's first entrant in the Waverley Festival was the year's fifth production, *Crimes Of The Heart*.

## 1990s

In **1990** the Saturday 5:00 pm intermediate session was changed to a matinee starting at 2:30 pm and ticket prices were increased to \$7.00. Later, in August, a further increase took the price to \$8.00. Jody Chave took over the position of Treasurer. A new second-hand printing machine was purchased for \$3,000.00 to enable the continuation of the in-house printing requirements. *The Dresser* was awarded Best Production in the 11th Waverley Festival of Theatre. Malvern began their own Annual Awards, which were presented for the first time on the 16th of December with Beverley Dunn as the presenter and adjudicator.

In **1991** admission prices were increased again to \$9.00. A meeting with the Council was held on the 26th of August at which an assurance of a satisfactory future, lease-wise, to enable a substantial investment by the theatre in building renovations was agreed in principle by the Council. Our adjudicator for 1991 was Terry McDermott who presented the various awards at the Annual Awards Day and Christmas Social on the 15th of December.

In **1992**, our thirty-fifth year, the production runs were lengthened to 14 performances by the addition of a Monday performance in the third week. This year also marked the 60th year of the *Geelong Repertory Theatre Company* as well as the 40th anniversaries of both the *Victorian Drama League (VDL)* and *Heidelberg Theatre Company*. In August ticket prices hit double figures at \$10.00. With a new ten-year lease, Council approval of the plans, eighteen months of trauma to get the permits and a \$15,000.00 grant from the Ministry for the Arts, our long-time dream of a new two-storey brick building at the rear of the theatre (the intended Colorbond steel and timber version was objected to by a number of Douglas Street residents) became reality with the demolition and clearance of the old structure. The Board introduced a new policy, which placed a ban on smoking in the foyer. *Spare Me Bloomin' Days* was awarded Best Production at the Waverley Festival, while sadly, *Pumpkin Theatre* closed after being evicted from their premises.

In **1993** production runs were reduced to 13 performances by deleting the Monday performances as a result of poor bookings throughout the previous year. By April, a concrete slab had already been poured, bricks delivered, concrete lintels and steel floor beams craned into place, and the eastern wall of our new building had been completed. *Trak Players* celebrated their 30th Anniversary. Roxanne Inglis-Lowes received the Colin Cave Memorial Award for 1992 at the 12th AGM, 23rd May. Our Public Relations Director Rod McGregor, became the new editor of *Madragro* in September. The Malvern Annual Awards Day was held on the 5th of December followed by the official opening of the new backstage building by Councillor Bert Healy who was instrumental in securing the Burke Road premises for us in 1970 and who had consistently supported the company. The planning and construction of the new building was the culmination of about 2,000 hours devoted to the project by our Building and Technical Supervisor, Max Mander.

John Avery became the new President at the 13th AGM, 22nd May, **1994** and Michael Strahan took over as Treasurer. Life Memberships were given to Hilda Ortlund and Don Hammond while the Colin Cave Award was presented to Manuel Proeger. With the addition of an extra fire extinguisher, we passed the final building inspection of the new premises at the rear. A 20% increase saw admission prices rise to \$12.00. The Malvern Annual Awards were presented on the 11th of December by our adjudicator Dina Mann.

Early **1995**, in an effort to make the theatre more comfortable in the hotter months, overhead fans were installed in the auditorium and wall fans in the dressing rooms. Programme sales decreased (was it because that less were needed to double as fans?) so it was decided to lower the price. At the 14th Annual General Meeting on the 21st of May, the Colin Cave Memorial Award was presented to Graeme Moore.

In **1996**, at the 15th AGM on 26th of May, David Corben became Treasurer, Bert Healy was awarded Honourary Life Membership and the Colin Cave Award was presented to Gwen Hart. Our applications for building a new control booth/bio-box at the back of the auditorium were finally approved and work began immediately. The cost of this project was assisted by a generous donation from the final winding up of the *Clayton Theatre Company*. Elsewhere, *Williamstown Little Theatre* celebrated their 50th year. Graeme Moore became the new editor of *Madragro* and the June issue took on a new single-colour format in a more up-to-date metric A5 size. The new Control Booth was completed, thanks to Max Mander, and in operation for *Time And The Conways* in August. *Echoes* won Best Production plus three other awards at the final Waverley Festival of Theatre in October. This brought Malvern's tally of Best



Production Awards to three – the most received by any theatrical group. Champagne flutes, bearing the Festival's logo and the dates 1979–1996 in gold, were presented to everyone present on its final Gala Night. The Malvern Annual Awards were presented by adjudicator Denzil Howson on the 8th of December and included the official opening of the new Control Booth by Councillor Bert Healy.

**1997** was Malvern Theatre's 40th year. The number of productions was reduced to five per year, which made way for longer rehearsal periods. Ticket prices were raised to \$13.00. An additional row of seats was added at the rear of the auditorium increasing our seating capacity to 142. The proscenium was given a face-lift and new stage curtains were installed while the outside of the *Malvern Community Arts Centre* was painted in heritage colours. Don Hammond received the Colin Cave Memorial Award at the 16th AGM in May. During *Romantic Comedy*, *Optus Television* filmed part of the play and interviewed some of the audience members in the foyer for their Monday television programme. The 40th Birthday Party was held on the 3rd of August and began at 4:00 pm with a special performance of *The Actor's Nightmare*, directed by David Corben and Liz Lipski, in the theatre, and guests were then transferred to the adjoining hall for the festivities. The Australian Premiere of *The Family Dance* was staged later that month. The author, Felicity Browne, while visiting Melbourne in May, managed through the VDL, to track down and meet with Graeme Moore, the director of our production. During rehearsals, an actor who was replaced, filed a lawsuit against the theatre which ended up in the Supreme Court. Even though justice and common sense prevailed in favour of the theatre, the enormous expense was an unwarranted financial burden. Legal advice persuaded the introduction of an 'Engagement Form' to be signed by each cast member at the beginning of rehearsals.

In January **1998** a new illuminated sign was fitted to the front of the theatre. Other improvements included a new lighting dimmer rack, a smoke machine, new flats, a laptop computer for accounting purposes and a new vacuum cleaner. Fridge magnets were produced and issued gratis to audience members. At the AGM in May, Margaret Baxter became Secretary and Membership Director. Sixteen days after the final performance of *Dial 'M' For Murder*, our Front of House Manager, Michael Maude, who played the part of Inspector Hubbard, died of cancer on the 3rd of August. A memorial award in his honour was created in 2000. Malvern Theatre started its first internet web page and *A Month Of Sundays* received three VDL Silver Awards – Best Production, Best Director and Best Sound. Our own Annual Awards Day was held on the 12th of December with adjudicator Peter Stephenson Jones.

**1999** started with new plastic sphere lighting being installed in the foyer. In February a new Axiom 48 lighting desk was purchased and installed in time for the first show of the year, as was a remote-controlled curtain motor for the stage. At the 18th AGM in May, Rod McGregor became President, John Avery (former President) was made a Life Member and the Colin Cave Memorial Award was awarded posthumously to Michael Maude. A dishwasher was installed in the Foyer shortly followed by a telephone answering machine backstage. *Pizza Man*, which was staged in December 1998, won First Prize for Best Production at both the Mordialloc Eisteddford in June and the Anglesea One-Act Play Festival in August. The play was entered under the director's company, *Chloe Productions*, and was partly financed by *MaTC*.

## 2000s

The year **2000** began with the installation of an Evaporative Cooling System in the auditorium the week before the opening of the first production *Life Goes On*. At the 19th AGM on the 26th of March, Joan Miller was presented with the Colin Cave Memorial Award for 1999. Malvern Theatre's own independent website was registered in October and was up and running shortly after. Although admission prices were increased to \$14.00, the attendances for the five productions of this year averaged 94% capacity. Michael Maude's sister, Sheila Crighton, sent the theatre a sum of money from England to set up a memorial award in his name (see 1998). The Board decided it should take the form of a perpetual trophy for the Best Set of each year. The *MaTC* Awards were presented on the 17th of December by our adjudicator Les Cartwright and the first Michael Maude Memorial Award was awarded to Chris Baldock, Jill Clague and Graeme Moore for the set concept for *The Philadelphia Story*.

On the 6th of April **2001**, *MaTC* paid tribute to their immediate former President, John Avery, who sadly passed away on the 27th of February. On the first day of April at the 20th AGM, Dina Mac Namara was presented with the Colin Cave Memorial Award and Patrick Sheridan was appointed Treasurer. Tragically, Patrick died from a heart attack in July while preparing to go on stage in *Kelly* with Nuworks at Wesley College. Ken Read was then co-opted to the position of Treasurer. Ticket prices were increased to \$15.00. At our Annual Awards Day in December, State Government Certificates for the International Year of Volunteers were presented to Rod McGregor, Margaret Baxter, Ken Read, Ray Russell, Graeme Moore, Shirley Fitch, Mike Grant, Liz Lipski, Joan Miller, Judy Clues, Tracey Wheeler, Dina Mac Namara, Don Hammond, John Konewka and Angelo Gianchino.

In **2002** production runs were lengthened to fourteen performances by adding a Thursday night to the first week. Charity nights were then moved back to the Wednesday before opening night. Ticket prices were increased to \$16.00 and Membership fees were increased for the first time since 1987 to \$15.00. Shirley Fitch became President at the 21st AGM, John Konewka received the Colin Cave Memorial Award and Joan Miller was granted Life Membership on the 28th of April. Malvern's adjudicator for this and the following two years was Joan Chapman.

Ray Russell became Malvern Theatre's new President in **2003**. The Colin Cave Memorial Award was presented to Angelo Gianchino at the 22nd AGM on the 27th of April. Beaumaris Theatre celebrated their 50th Anniversary in April. Stonnington Council was only prepared to offer Malvern Theatre a lease renewal of one-year plus a one-year option. After several meetings with the Council over a period of eleven months, a petition of over 1,600 signatures collected by Max Mander who spoke to the audiences before each performance of *Gaslight* during September and Press exposure, the terms were increased to three years plus two three-year options and it was finally signed just before Christmas.

In **2004**, the production runs were adjusted again by deleting the first Thursday night performance and adding a second Matinee on the Sunday of the second week at 3:00 pm. To combat the daylight of now *two* matinees, blackout shutters were fitted over the north-wall windows of the stage and auditorium, worklights were dual-switched and the backstage areas were fitted with light-proof curtains. Roger Ustick took over the position of Treasurer. A video projector was purchased and installed in April for *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. At the 23rd Annual General Meeting on the 25th of April, Alistair Johnstone was presented with the Colin Cave Memorial Award.

From the beginning of **2005** the Saturday Matinees started 30 minutes earlier at 2:00 pm. Don Hammond returned as President and Deborah Fabbro was our adjudicator for this and the following year. At the 24th AGM on the 24th of April, the Colin Cave Memorial Award was presented to Shirley Hislop and Rod McGregor received Life Membership. Additional atmospheric lighting was added to the auditorium, fluorescent lights to the wardrobe department and at long last the fourth and final lighting bar was installed over the stage. Four-times Mayor of the City of Malvern and *Malvern Theatre's* greatest supporter for more than 30 years, Bert Healy, passed away on the 22nd of June. *Peridot Theatre* celebrated its 20th Anniversary.

In **2006**, after the success of the earlier starting time of the Saturday Matinees in the previous year, Sunday performances began an hour earlier at 2:00 pm also. The theatre's web site was revamped in January. Ticket prices were increased to \$18.00 while \$20.00 was charged as a one-off for the November production of the musical

*Something's Afoot*. At the 25th AGM on the 9th of April, Judy Clues and Ray Russell were presented with the Colin Cave Award and Life Membership, respectively. In June, Athan Agriopoulos became the new editor of *Madragro* and new atmospheric ceiling lighting was installed in the foyer. *Malvern Theatre Company Ltd.* was converted from that of a public company limited by guarantee to an incorporated association, *Malvern Theatre Company Inc. Co.* Bruce Parr took over the editorship of *Madragro* in October and Cynthia Paciocco joined the committee as Treasurer.

**2007** was the year of Malvern Theatre's 50th Anniversary. All the programmes throughout the year featured special gold covers and historical displays were set up in the foyer. Malvern Theatre began sponsoring a 5-year-old child living in Tanzania, through the World Vision organization. Reverse cycle air conditioning was installed in the auditorium and above the stage in February, while in May a new digital photocopier, with duplex and collating facilities, was purchased, making in-house production of *Madragro* and production programmes once again possible. At the 26th Annual General Meeting on the 3rd of June, Barbara Dwyer was elected President, Pat McDonald was presented with the Colin Cave Award and Margaret Baxter was presented with Life Membership. Later that month a new Malvern Community Arts Centre sign was added to the front of the building. The backstage passageways were carpeted and 'another' new dishwasher was installed in the foyer in August. As part of the 50th-year celebrations, guests were invited to a special preview of *The Rose Tattoo* on the 26th of August and a birthday celebration on the 30th of September. Ed Bailey was Malvern's Annual Awards adjudicator. The lease on our scenery store at Dandenong Road, Malvern, was terminated on the 31st of December. Its contents were culled and relocated at Wilson Self Storage in Malvern.

In mid-January **2008**, the stage lights were taken down, cleaned and according to the new Occupational Health and Safety regulations were tested and tagged, as was all other electrical items in the theatre. Former *Madragro* Editor, Secretary and Life Member, Hilda Orland (nee Orton), died on Monday 25th February. On Thursday 24th of April, the Stonnington Council replaced the old 1984 carpet in the foyer just in time for the evening's charity performance of *Rapture*. At the 27th Annual General Meeting on 27th of April, former *Madragro* Editor, Graeme Moore, was presented with Life Membership. One of the cast members of our very first show in 1958 *A Lady Mislaid*, Dorothy Heulin, died in England on 18th June. A new permanent '1300' telephone booking number was established which solved the problem of having a different number everytime we changed ticket secretaries. In October the backstage talkback system and sound monitoring equipment was overhauled and the video monitoring system was upgraded and extended into the foyer with an HD video monitor.

We began **2009** with *Scotland Road* and during the performance of the 7th of March an earth tremor measuring 4.7 on the Richter Scale struck.