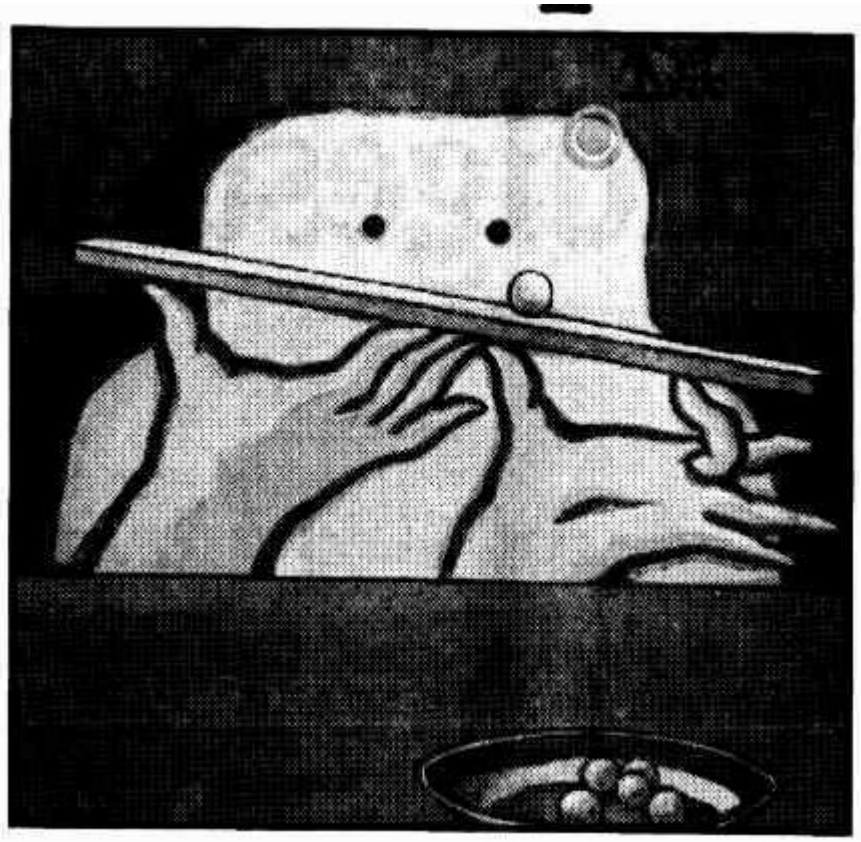


Detail from Guan Wei's *Person Rolling a Ball.*

Anarchic theatre of sensation

THEATRE

By HELEN MUSA

Splinters Theatre Group, at ANG Sculpture Garden, 11am-1pm, Sunday March 18. Amateur.

"PAGAN!" screeched the flyers Splinters sent around town for their latest multi-sensation spectacle. And indeed if one were inclined to search for Anti-Christian symbols it was not hard to find them in the promise that the near dead (of which I was one on Sunday) would be raised and the sick healed.

When, in addition, a radiant baby was wheeled through the crowds by a mother in white there was scope for those in search of heavy comment to find it. But not much scope. For the forte of this Splinters performance was in sensation and action of a different order.

Huge Artaud-style effigies bicycled their way from the High Court to the ANG. Coloured smoke belched from the drummers' conical, chimney-like hats. Brown-faced dervishes whirled peacefully if a little hotly under the autumn sun, and a throng of the near-dead under mosquito netting were ushered in to primeval ululations and cries. The kids loved it. The mums and dads looked on in bemusement and snapped away.

Splinters represent an anarchic antidote to the conventions of mainstage theatre. They arouse, ideally, feelings of pain and joy in the participants and onlookers through the creation of larger-than-life primitive images.

In spite of the occasional collision with a casuarina as their effigies wheeled about, they were remarkably successful in achieving all this in their latest gambit. It is pleasing to hear that they have been awarded an ACT government grant to develop a promotional package, for even theatre of anarchy needs an audience.

Most impressive to report, Splinters seem to have access to the very young, whose faces they painted as they enlisted them in a grand, death-defying parade around two of our major temples to Australian civilisation. It did seem to have a

tralian civilisation. It did seem to have a salutary effect.

A soothing evening of assured entertainment

By ANN NUGENT

The Witches. The School of Arts Cafe, 108 Monaro Street, Queanbeyan. Dinner and show, March 21,22 and 23 at 7.30pm. Professional.

FAR FROM the image their name conjures up, The Witches are in fact a well matched trio of young women performers. Their varied musical program brings pleasure to the eye and the ear.

Rebecca Collins, Megan Corson and Belinda Wellman first met when they performed in the Canberra Philharmonic Society's 1989 production of West Side Story.

Finding that they harmonised well (and they certainly look good together) the three formed The Witches performance group.

Each song is set as a little drama. Using stylised gestures and looks, the performers play off each other, often in an ironic way as in *It's my party and I'll cry if I want to.* The result is a form of miniature theatre with music.

Changes of costume and mood add to the entertainment value of the show. The unaccompanied singing of Irish and English folk songs makes a refreshing contrast with Latin American numbers and songs from the 1950s.

The nostalgia of songs from musical comedy, *Annie, Fantasticks* and *Godspell,* prepare the way for a final energetic rendition of a Kylie Minogue collection. My favourite, however, was the spirited *It's Raining Men* complete with umbrellas. Pianist Jocelyn Dobb provides musical backing and interludes.

The Witches have a nicely developed sense of audience — that wonderful talent for engaging their audience in the mood of the song, and then letting them down ever so gently. The School of Arts Cafe has just the right ambience. It's an evening of assured, soothing, non-threatening but quietly entertaining restaurant theatre.