Red Square promises innovations



WORLD OF THEATRE

By JOHN SMOUT

WE MAY be witnessing a major development in the Canberra performing arts as yet another group sets out to enliven the local theatre scene.

It is called Red Square, for reasons that are not at all obvious, and the group's founder members are Steven Brown, Phil Roberts and Wendy Tubman, all well known in Canberra community-arts circles. Their combined expertise is considerable and their aspirations are high. In their own words, "The group has been formed because of the obvious demand for good-quality, intelligent theatre performance". Their approach promises to be innovative, with the staging of relatively unknown plays, "using the best actors, designers and directors from the ACT and elsewhere". Steve Brown has described the company as "alternative professional".

Alongside the sudden appearance of the energetic Black Inc only a few months ago, this theatrical proliferation might cautiously be described as a trend. What both groups share is a dissatisfaction with mainstream theatre in Canberra, and also the belief that the time is ripe to do something about it. Both companies will be based in the new E Block theatre at Gorman House, which has quickly gone into full time use.

Red Square's first production will be three short plays. Two are by Australian playwright Steve J. Spears, best known for his 'The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin'. They are 'People Keep Giving Me Things' and the comedy 'There Were Giants in Those Days'. The third is 'Number Three' by British actor and playwright John Grillo. The season will run Wednesday to Saturday, September 11 to 21 at the E Block theatre.

The major, in fact gala, opening this week is Canberra Repertory's 'Private Lives' at Theatre 3 on Saturday night. The evening constitutes a preview and a chance to dress up, with the season moving into full swing next week, Thursday to Saturday, until September 28.

Rep's 'Private Lives' coincides with the 55th anniversary of the first production of this Coward classic in London in September, 1930, which featured Gertrude Lawrence, Noel Coward and Laurence Olivier. Here we will see Kate Peters, Eryl Evans, Jenny Ongley and John Honey, all directed by Peter Williams. For those who agree that Coward is the greatest wit since Oscar Wilde, 'Private Lives' is essential viewing.

The suspicion that Canberra is populated by Philistines (even worse, apathetic Philistines) has gained greater currency over the past two weeks with appalling attendances at most Youth Arts Festival events. This weekend officially ends the Festival for 1985, but there's still plenty to be seen over the next few days. Some programs continue for the rest of the holidays.

The multicultural group Splinters can be seen at Downer Community Hall this evening and on Saturday for a matinee and evening performance, 'Rhythm and the Dollar' goes on at the Youth Cafe in the old Canberra Post Office in Northbourne Avenue tonight and tomorrow night at 8pm. 'Living Doll — a celebration of Barbie-ism' also continues till Saturday night at Cafe Jax.

For the younger audience, 'Pirates of Lake Burley Griffin' can be seen at

For the younger audience, 'Pirates of Lake Burley Griffin' can be seen at the TAU Community Theatre today, tomorrow and through next week, and really should not be missed. It's great fun. Alpha Theatre's 'Jack and the Beanstalk' will be on again Saturday and Sunday afternoons and next weekend also.

Finally a quick note for those who still love Rolf Harris. He's at the Canberra Theatre tonight only, complete with wobble board, house paint, songs and characters.

As regular readers will know, Ken Healey is overseas for the next two months. Until he returns I will attempt to keep you up to date with forthcoming shows and theatre news.