Keating places faith in the human factor

THEATRE

By HELEN MUSA

PRIME Minister Paul Keating has chosen to place his faith in the human factor, rather than physical structures, with the announcement of 12 1993 Australian Artists Creative Fellowships which saw the theatre score well. Actor John Bell, controversial performance artist Lynda Jories, the first of our Aboriginal playwrights Kevin Gilbert, and stirrer-dramatists John Romeril and Dorothy Hewett all appeared on this year's list, which offers a reward for services rendered to the arts and a chance to produce more of the same. Said Mr Keating, we should focus on depth in the arts rather than "democratise".

■ *Drama Ties* was the theme of the National Drama in Education Conference at which I gave a paper last week in Adelaide. The fiery Eva Johnson, leading Aboriginal playwright, urged our drama teachers to get out of their "cosy" routines and into theatre of other cultures. Steven Gration, Director of the State Theatre Company's Magpie Theatre in Education troupe, has done that, with an exciting piece of fusion theatre, *Chutney*, which used everything from Balinese to Bunraku theatre techniques to explore the story of an Australian ambassador and his little daughter abroad in Asia. The subject was East Timor but the theatre was so exciting, drama teachers agreed, that it could have been anywhere else in post-colonial Asia.

■ And in Sydney Sidetrack Theatre is holding its Third Contemporary Performance Week at 142 Addison Road, Marrickville, from October 14-18. Canberra's Renald Navarro with be directing a theatre piece based on gates and our outrageous Splinters Theatre till be creating mayhem with *Something's Missing*. Phone 02 5601255

■ On the home front the theatrical hiatus has been enlivened by *Space Demons* at Youth Theatre and an impressive display of intellect and talent from ANU students in the CADS production of *The Madwoman of Chaillot* as well as People Next Door's seasonally-named *Wild Grass and Toxic Kisses* on the weekend at the ANG Sculpture garden.

■ Tempo Theatre makes a welcome reappearance with *Rehearsal for Murder*, directed by Donna Cohen. It's a thriller written by D.D. Brooke, author of the *Columbo* series, and plays at Theatre 3 Thur-Sat until October 31st. Bookings: 2475199

■ *Riverbend*, a celebration of Australian history through music, verse and drama uses as its backdrop Nolan's *Riverbend* paintings on loan from the ANU. Ned Kelly is the narrator! October 15-17, 8pm, St Paul's, Manuka. Ph: 2396148, 2571077.

■ Locally, it is otherwise a case of what's about to happen. David Branson is full of his all-women *Waiting for Godot*, opening at the Ralph Wilson Theatre on October 27 (bookings 2497377).

Phoenix Theatre opens at the Belconnen Community Theatre on October 22 with *No No Nanette* (ph: 2571077), and Sue Leach at the Canbera Theatre is brimming with excitement about the acquisition of John Waters in his one-man tribute to John Lennon *Looking Through a Glass Onion*, coming up in early November.

■ Domenic Mico at Tuggeranong Community Arts (phone 2931443) brings a feast of good acting at their Theatre Workshop Space from October 21 to 31 with Micky Beckett in *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All for Us* — the American answer to Ron Blair's *The Christian Brothers*. Those two theatrical Phils, Roberts and Mackenzie, join this triple bill with Chekhov's *Smoking is Bad for You* and *Swansong*. When not acting, Phil Roberts is busy running the latest meeting-place for Canberra's theatrical cognescenti, Cafe Neruda,

atrical cognescenti, Cafe Neruda, which opened in Endeavour House, Manuka, last Friday.

■ The Canberra Critics' Circle Theatre panel meets tonight to decide on 1992 awards, to be presented at the Canberra Arts Ball on Friday October 23.

Tickets are selling fast, I hear, for this Arabian Nights Extravaganza (the ball, not the Critics' Circle). Phone 2497377.

■ Meantime, over at the School of Arts Cafe, Monaro Street, Queanbeyan, Rosemary Hyde and Doug Williams play Australian Music Hall stars Florrie Forde and Billy Williams in the cheeky *Let's Have a Song* Thursday to Saturday.

On Sunday Craig Schneider returns for his *Salute to Nat King Cole.*

Bookings essential on 2976857.

Well played, light and fast whodunnit

By HELEN MUSA

Rehearsal for Murder by D.D.Brooke, directed by Donna Cohen, at Theatre 3, 8 pm Thurs-Sat until October 31. Amateur.

"NOBODY ever committed suicide because of a bad review," asserts the central character in *Rehearsal for Murder.* We hope not, but Tempo Theatre need not fear, for this light piece of theatrical titillation works perfectly well.

This is a theatregoer's piece par excellence. Alex Dennison, played with sympathy and unerring precision by Greg Toohey, loses his fiance, star of his latest play, on the eve of their marriage. A year later he plays manipulator by bringing the protagonists in this drama together to prove that she could not have taken her own life in a series of dramatic confrontations very familiar from the popular *Columbo* series, which D.D.Brooke has also scripted. The setting is contemporary Broadway where the critics can kill productions if not people.

Whodunnit? This reviewer is not about to tell, and there is little likelihood that anyone will win the prize offered at interval for those who fill out the form correctly.

Tempo director Donna Cohen steers a varied cast in a variety of accents not much reminiscent of Broadway through the scenes efficiently. Since it is a play within a play, no marks can be deducted for falseness in acting, but in general the "friends" of Dennis could have been more stridently portrayed.

The oddly unnerving use of small spots instead of a large follow-spot and the decision to play flashback scenes behind an upstage scrim took away from the immediacy which could have tipped the scales and made this a genuine thriller, but suffice it to say that the truth is revealed in good time.

Light, fast and humorous, *Rehearsal for Murder* brings together some new talent and some very experienced Canberra players in a script designed for people who love the "theatrical" idiom of Broadway.