

The Rude Mechanicals present

The Australian première of
Ying Tong – A Walk With The Goons
By Roy Smiles, Directed by Ian Hart
The Street Theatre, Canberra 17 August – 2 September 2006

*Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.*
—John Dryden

The subversive anarchy and surreal humour of *The Goon Show* burst on post-war Britain and Australia like an exploding batter pudding. The shockwave wrenched English comedy off its secure moorings and set the course for *Monty Python*, *Beyond the Fringe*, *The Goodies*... all the way to *Little Britain*. Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan became household names. Today, 50 years later, *The Goon Show* is still being repeated on the ABC.

Roy Smiles' brilliant new play celebrates the genius of *The Goons*, but also demonstrates the truth of Dryden's couplet in the high price that Milligan, its creator, paid for his success.

Ying Tong opened at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and then transferred to The West End and has been touring in Britain and South Africa for the past year. The Street Theatre season is its Australian première. The Rude Mechanicals production is directed by Ian Hart and features four talented Canberra actors: Robert de Fries (Spike Milligan), Steven Kennedy (Peter Sellers), Robbie Matthews (Harry Secombe) and John Honey (Wallace Greenslade). The choral performance of *The Ying Tong Song* is by OOTS Choir, Tuggeranong, directed by Jenny Sawer.

Visit the Rude Mechanicals web site <http://www.camrin.com/rudemech>

Preview: 16 August
Season: 17-19, 22-26, 29 August-2 September
Wednesdays-Saturdays 7:30pm, Tuesdays 6:30pm
Matinees 19 Aug, 26 Aug, 2 Sept at 1:30pm
Venue: **The Street Theatre Studio**
Tickets: \$28 Concessions available.
Cut-price Tuesdays \$15

Then at **Tuggeranong Arts Centre**, for one night only, Thursday 7 September

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THE PLAY

Ying Tong - A Walk with the Goons is a fantasia on the life of its creator, Spike Milligan, a man much loved in Australia, if only for insulting Prince Charles in a live TV broadcast while the heir to the throne was actually making a speech in his honour. Spike developed, wrote and starred in this surreal radio show. His insight was that in a psychotic world your best defence may be psychosis.

Arguably, comedians are the true artists of the troubled Twentieth Century. They certainly have a more direct relationship with the world and the audience, for whom they lay bare its hypocrisy and absurdity. Spike's terror was not that he ever actually lost the love of his audience, but the burden of nurturing the monster he had created.

The play opens in 1960 in a psychiatric hospital where Spike has been admitted after yet another breakdown. He hallucinates real characters, such as fellow Goons Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe, as well as the invented ones he created for them. Can he please them, conquer his writer's block, go back and recreate the success of the Goons? Or must he pay the high price of moving on, whatever that involves?

The action shifts between the bleak ward, where Milligan grapples with his demons, to the BBC studio, to the little pub where it all started when Secombe introduced Sellers to Milligan.

The play is punctuated by flashbacks and fantasies of Milligan's fevered brain as he relives the traumatic experiences of WW2, or imagines a trio of manic leprechauns, Nazi psychiatrists and nurses of Wagnerian proportions threatening to administer an enema of the dreaded hospital mince...

In a parallel reality, the invalid receives solicitous but unwelcome visits from fellow Goons and the BBC presenter, Wallace Greenslade. They all have the same objective: to coax or coerce Milligan into writing another series of Goon Show scripts – which he adamantly refuses to do.

THE AUTHOR

Roy Smiles is from West London. Recent theatre credits include: *Stand Up*, *The Little Green Monkey Club* (Old Red Lion), *Bombing People* (Jermyn Street), *Promised Land*, *Top Of The Town* (Kings Head); and *Roberto Calvi Is Alive & Well* (Finborough), which won a Guinness Fringe Theatre Award. He has had a playwriting attachment to the National Theatre Studio and has been the resident playwright at both the Warehouse Theatre in Croydon and Jermyn Street Theatre in Piccadilly.

Ying Tong is the first part of his "Dead Comedians" trilogy, the other two being *The Bitter End* (Groucho Marx/Lenny Bruce) and *The Lad Himself* (Tony Hancock) which will be going on a first class UK tour next year.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

As a schoolboy in rural NSW in the 1950s, the Sunday night broadcast of *The Goon Show* was a religious experience for me. I eventually met Milligan when he accepted our invitation to the 1962 UNSW Dramsoc Revue, came to the party afterwards and invited us to recordings of *The Idiots Weekly* at the ABC studios in Castlereigh St. Having been touched by the finger of Goonery and seduced by the siren of radio, how could I resist Roy Smiles' funny and incisive play?

Ying Tong presents many technical challenges, not the least of which are the 54 sound cues (*The Goon Show* was renowned for setting the BBC audio technicians impossible tasks such as the sound of a sock full of custard on Eccles' skull or the sound of a piece of string). Another challenge was finding actors who could bring these driven and iconic comedians back to life (not to mention Major Bloodnok, Eccles, Neddy Seagoon, and the incomparable Bluebottle!) Fortunately, Canberra is a city of talented and intelligent actors and I'm confident our cast will deliver an evening that is as hilarious as it is insightful.