

## ON STAGING "BOOJUM!"

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**Boojum!** was originally performed as a stage musical a dozen or so times by State Opera of South Australia, at the 1986 Adelaide Festival of Arts; the opening night was attended by Queen Elizabeth II. It was generally regarded as a success, but I was most unhappy with the treatment it received from the director, who re-wrote large parts of the show, contrary to an agreement that this would not occur. (Some additions were quite good, but others were awful.) Peter and I protested, of course, but we were told it was "too late" to change it back -- and anyway, who did we think we were? Only the writers, who in Australian theatre are one rung above the theatre cat in perceived importance.

It was subsequently performed several times -- for various reasons, disastrously -- at the 1988 Expo in Brisbane, Queensland. After that I realised that the strength of the piece lies primarily in its words and music, and that any presentation must allow maximum comprehensibility, particularly of the words. For the next production (Sydney, 1988), I called it, for the first time **Boojum!** in concert, and I removed most of the theatrical and audio-visual elements and printed the libretto in the programme, allowing the audience to follow it as the performance proceeded. This was the answer! It has, perhaps, less commercial viability, but for the first time it worked stunningly well. I then withdrew the work while I tidied it up a bit and computer-set the score; it is now available for other performances. During 1991 I plan to release both a cassette and a CD of the work. When this is done, I intend to take score, production notes and CD to various choirs and entrepreneurs around the world, particularly England and America, hoping that more performances will result. I must press on!

Although there is only a minuscule audience that knows Lewis Carroll well enough to appreciate all the nuances, the Sydney performance showed that it is generally a very entertaining show and that there is plenty there to interest non-specialists. Everyone finds their own level. Some, for instance, found ANAGRAMESSAGENERATOR somewhat mystifying, though enjoyable, while a teacher told me that several teenage boys she took plunged enthusiastically into that song, modifying the computer program and writing their own anagrams. Many people know and love the **Alice** books, so there is immediate interest; many of those I talked to told me that they went out after the show, their interest kindled, and bought Martin Gardner's **The Annotated Alice** or **The Annotated Snark**, following up many of the themes of the show. Others simply enjoyed it as it was, content to allow some of the intricacies to fly past them.

**Boojum! in concert** can be done relatively cheaply with a good professional choir of, say, sixteen people, including soloists, with piano and only minimal theatrical elements (different hats, for example, and good lighting). Or, it can be done by a larger amateur choir. I think it would go well as an off-Broadway production. The release of the CD will give us an indication of general audience response and whether the show has a future. We might release one of the songs as a single; if that were to take off, then perhaps productions would automatically follow -- with a bit of luck!

**Word Ways** readers who would like to know more about **Boojum! in concert** can order a copy of the libretto for AUS\$17 (including packing and postage by economy air). Send a bank check, or quote a credit card (name, number, expiration date) to Sounds Australian, 3 Smail Street (PO Box 49), Broadway, Sydney, NSW 2007 Australia (tel [02] 212 1611, fax [02] 281 9569). The score (choir and piano) is also available for an all-inclusive cost of AUS\$80. Also, contact the above if you wish to be informed when the recording is available.

### A CELEBRATION OF SPOONERISMS

The spoonerism, named after Oxford tutor and dean Archibald Spooner (1844-1930), has occupied a modest niche in the field of wordplay for more than a century. Ordinarily a spoonerism is created by interchanging initial sounds in a two-word phrase (*blushing crow* to *crushing blow*) but also by switching internal elements (*conquering kings* to *kinkering congs*). Viewed as slips of the tongue, spoonerisms have attracted the attention of psychologists, who believe that they shed light on the way the brain processes information prior to articulation. On the other hand, deliberate spoonerisms have been treasured by punsters, often constructing elaborate scenarios such as *boyfoot bear with teak of Chan*. Don Hauptman tells all this and much more in a new paperback devoted to the genre: *Cruel and Unusual Puns* (Dell, 1991; \$5.99). The bulk of the 144-page book is devoted to a collection of spooneristic puns, many of which will be familiar to the reader, but which never fail to delight. (There's even a couple of **Word Ways** examples by J.A. Lindon and Mary J. Hazard, who wrote of a family picnic in Milwaukee "Beer nigh? Nearby. In casks? kin asks.") There's a chapter devoted to X-rated spoonerisms (*cunning runts* to ...) and a bunch of hilarious spoonericks (limericks) from a Mary Ann Madden New York Magazine competition. I like Marjorie Friedman's naughty

Poor Susan, you're really undone.  
 You tell me that now you've begun  
     To think that the sister  
     Is hiding your mister?  
 There's nothing, Sue, under the nun!