

state ed

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll

by Ray Lawler



**STATE SA
THEATRE
COMPANY**



**SUMMER
OF THE
SEVENTEENTH
DOLL**



*Dramatic
Women*

DURATION APPROX: *2 hours & 45 mins (including interval)*

SUITABLE FOR *Years 9 - 12*

DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session

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Cast and Creatives

CAST

bubba ryan

Annabel Matheson

pearl cunningham

Lizzy Falkland

olive leech

Elena Carapetis

emma leech

Jacqy Phillips

barney ibbot

Rory Walker

roo webber

Chris Pitman

johnnie dowd

Tim Overton

CREATIVES

director

Geordie Brookman

set and costume designer

Pip Runciman

lighting designer

Nigel Levings

composer

Quentin Grant

assistant lighting designer

Susan Grey-Gardner

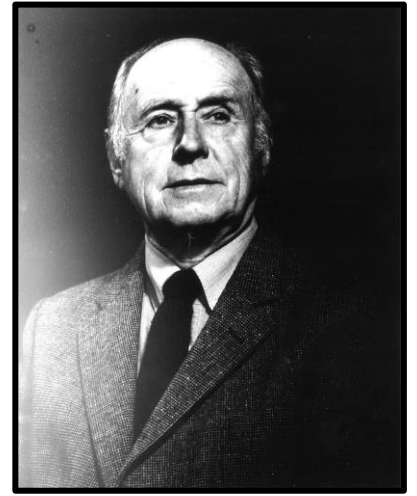
fight choreographer

Duncan Maxwell

Playwright

RAY LAWLER

Ray Lawler was thrust into prominence when his play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, in which he appeared in the role of Barney, became a hit for the Union Theatre Repertory Company, under John Sumner's direction. The year was 1955, and Lawler, appearing in the role of Barney, toured with the play through its successful seasons in Australian and the London West End, until it finally finished on Broadway in 1958. Lawler then lived abroad until 1975, when he returned to Australia to join the Melbourne Theatre Company as Literary Advisor, and to occasionally direct for that Company.



Among other plays, Lawler has written *The Piccadilly Bushman*, which toured nationally under the J.C. Williamson banner, *The Man Who Shot The Albatross*, *Godsend*, *The Unshaven Cheek* and *Cradle Of Thunder*. He has also written two works, *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times*, which are companion plays to *Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll*; the three being published as *The Doll Trilogy*.

He now lives as a semi-retired and devoted grandfather in a bayside Melbourne suburb.

BIOGRAPHY

Raymond Evenor Lawler is an Australian actor, dramatist and producer. Born in the working class suburb of Footscray, Melbourne in 1921, he was the second of eight children. The Great Depression hit Australian families hard. To help support his family during this time, Lawler left school at thirteen to work in a foundry. Once there he developed a fascination with theatre, using some of his earnings to have acting lessons.

He wrote his first play, *Cradle of Thunder* at 19, and attracted attention as a writer. His most notable play, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* written in 1953 was presented by the Union Theatre in 1955 and changed the direction of Australian drama. For the first time, Australian audiences saw Australian actors taking the leads in a play, where the lives and language of their times were acted out in front of them.

Lawler played the role of Barney in the premiere production, which toured Australia to critical acclaim before heading to London and New York. The play was a flop in New York, principally because the Americans didn't understand the Australian accents and language. However, American producers purchased the rights to make the play into a film. While they left it in the Australian setting, they used American actors and deleted the Australian slang. Ray Lawler refused to see the film.

Lawler's other plays include; *The Piccadilly Bushman* (1959), *The Unshaven Cheek* (1963), *A Breach in the Wall* (1967), *The Man Who Shot the Albatross* (1971) and *Godsend* (1982).

He lived abroad until 1975, when he returned to Australia as Associate Director of Melbourne Theatre Company. There he completed a trilogy based on *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. The first play, *Kid Stakes*, opened in 1975 and the second, *Other Times* opened in 1976. The Doll Trilogy had its first full performance in Melbourne in 1977.



Watch Ray Lawler talking about his play.

“What I wrote: Ray Lawler”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_XtJPEguLM

Director

GEORDIE BROOKMAN

Geordie is the Artistic Director of State Theatre Company. Since graduating from Flinders University Drama Centre in 2001 Geordie has directed work around Australia, the UK and Asia. His State Theatre Company directing credits include *Footfalls*, *Kryptonite* (Sydney Theatre Company & State Theatre Company), *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Little Bird*, *The Seagull*, *Maggie Stone*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Speaking In Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Ghosts*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *Ruby Moon* and *Hot Fudge*, *Toy Symphony* (Queensland Theatre Company & State Theatre Company), *Knives In Hens* (Malthouse & State Theatre Company), Other directing credits include *Spring Awakening: The Musical* (Sydney Theatre Company), *Baghdad Wedding* (Belvoir), *Metro Street* (Arts Asia Pacific, Power Arts, Daegu International Musicals Festival and State Theatre Company), *The City and Tender* (nowyesnow), *Marathon*, *Morph*, *Disco Pigs* and *The Return* (Fresh Track), *Tiny Dynamite* (Griffin), *Macbeth* and *The Laramie Project* (AC Arts).



His productions have won or been nominated for Helpmann, Greenroom, Sydney Critics Circle, Adelaide Critics Circle and Curtain Call awards.

He has also worked as a producer, dramaturg, teacher, event director and curator for organisations including the Adelaide Festival, The National Play Festival, University of Wollongong, Australian Theatre for Young People, Australian Fashion Week and Queensland Theatre Company.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Like most school kids who took Drama or English I studied *'The Doll'* during my teenage years, I even had *'Season of Passion'*, the compromised film version of the play, forced on me. At that point I didn't take away a favourable impression. I was never lucky enough to see the play onstage and be in the position where Lawler's superb dramatic gearing could go to work on me. I took the piece for a nostalgic picture postcard, how wrong I was.

The play that I rediscovered in my early twenties was funny, heartbreaking and progressive. It sat proudly alongside the work of the great American dramatists of the mid-20th century, every bit as humorously skillful as Tennessee Williams and as deeply connected to Greek tragedy as Arthur Miller. The idea that it represented an Australia that had ceased to exist was hokum, the depth with which Lawler examined human nature was close to timeless.

Unapologetically this production is no picture postcard, we've retained a gentle connection to the period but our focus has been on the depth and damage involved in the human relationships that the play presents. When the play's power hit me properly 10 years ago it wasn't the stage directions that made an impact, nor its view of an imagined 1950s Australia. It was the people that Lawler had created and the words he'd put in their mouths that thrilled me, uncluttered by anything else. I hope they do the same for you.

Actor Profile

ELENA CARAPETIS (OLIVE)

Since graduating from NIDA, Elena has worked extensively in film, television and theatre.

Her State Theatre Company credits include *Othello*, *Between Two Waves* our 2014 State Umbrella production, *The Comedy of Errors* (State Theatre Company/Bell Shakespeare) *Features of Blown Youth*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Hot Fudge*, *Central Park West*, and *The Things We Do For Love*.

Other selected theatre credits include *Ruby Bruise* (Vitalstatistix and The Misery Children), *4:48 Psychosis, this uncharted hour* (Brink Productions), *Translations* (Flying Penguin and Malthouse Theatre), *Assassins* (Flying Penguin and AFTC), *Helly's Magic Cup* (Windmill and State Theatre Company of SA), *Mike Leigh's Greek Tragedy* (Company B Belvoir) and *Deep Suburbia* (Sydney Theatre Company).



In 2103 Elena won a Sydney Theatre Award for her work in Lachlan Philpott's *Truck Stop* (Q Theatre).

Elena's television credits include *Wicked Love: The Maria Korp Story*, *Blue Heelers*, *Water Rats*, *All Saints*, *Murder Call* and *Children's Hospital* and had regular roles in *Heartbreak High* and *Marking Time*. Her film credits include *Dead Europe*, *Burning Man*, *One Eyed Girl* and *Look Both Ways*.

Elena's first play *The Good Son*, directed by Corey McMahon premiered at The Bakehouse Theatre last month. Her second play *Helen Back* was nominated for the 2012 Adelaide Festival Jill Blewett Award for Playwriting. In 2014 Elena directed second year actors in her own adaptation of *Euripides' The Bacchae* at the Adelaide College of the Arts.

INTERVIEW WITH ELENA

1. Why do you think Olive is one of the quintessential Australian roles for a female actor?

Ray Lawler was the first playwright to write Australian characters who spoke like real Australians of the time, with the vernacular of the day, and it's pretty clear the accent is Australian too. So regardless of gender, getting the opportunity to be in this groundbreaking play is to be treasured. It is also such a brilliantly written play that stands the test of time. We really don't feel like we are playing 'old fashioned' characters but real people who we can all relate to on a deep level.

In terms of playing Olive, she's quintessential because she is part romantic lead and part Greek tragedy. She, along with Roo, bares the emotional cost of her own hubris. Lawler has also written a woman who was ahead of her time, in terms of gender politics. She is unmarried, almost anti-marriage, in a relationship with a man who doesn't live with her for more than half a year, is independent and has her own job and money. She smashes the conventions of what women were meant to be like at that time; that is married, subservient and 'respectable'. She lives her life by her own rules.

2. What is the biggest challenge in this role?

I think people who know the play and love it will have their own very personal take in the play and each character within it. My challenge will be to bring my own interpretation of her to the stage with enough humanity and gusto to melt away any preconceived ideas that audiences may have of who she is. I am not a traditional Olive so I've got my work cut out for me.

3. Before the rehearsals begin, what research into the role do you do?

I read the play over and over again. I research the years of the play, the politics, art, music and social mores to figure out all the things that may have influenced the points of view of my character. I write a biography for the character, including all the backstory of her relationships with the other characters in the play. I write down everything that is said about her. I write down every single question I have pop in to my head while reading the play with a view to answering them during rehearsal.

4. During rehearsals, how do you work with the director to bring the character of Olive alive?

It's a constant conversation between actor and director. I will make 'offers' on the floor in terms of, for example, how I use my body or voice, what intention I put into each line, what behaviour or rhythms we need to bring out, what my character wants and is trying to do from moment to moment. Then Geordie will direct me towards one choice or another, shaping my individual performance to fit in to the overall structure of the story.

5. You work closely with Chris Pittman (Roo) on this piece. Have you worked with him before? And how do you work with him during rehearsals to convey Olive & Roo's relationship

The first time I worked with Chris was last year during *Othello*. We work in a very similar way, I think. We both spend a lot of time sifting through all the details of the play before we start rehearsals and we both use art, music and poetry to feed our characters' emotional landscapes. So it's been great to be able to exchange ideas with someone who approaches work in the same way as me. There are many intense and beautiful moments that we have to make sense of, invest in and bring fully to life. So one of us might bring in an image that evokes a particular mood or feeling, or we might talk about what transitive verb we will attempt to play at a particular moment to try to get their character to do what we want. It's a true collaboration and I'm very lucky to be working with him.



CHRIS PITMAN (ROO)

Chris is a 1997 WAAPA Acting Graduate. His State Theatre Company credits include *Othello*, *The Seagull*, *Babyteeth*, *Speaking in Tongues*, *Toy Symphony*, *Ghosts*. Other selected theatre credits include *Skip Miller's Hit Songs* for Brink; *Our Town*, *Don's Party*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *Republic of Myopia*, *Harbour* and *Love for Love* for Sydney Theatre Company; *A Number*, *Capricornia*, *Sapphires*, *In Our Name*, *Rhinoceros*, *La Ronde* and *Cloudstreet* (Australian and International tours) for Belvoir St Theatre; *Macbeth* for Melbourne Theatre Company; *The City* for nowyesnow.

Television credits include *Young Lions*, *All Saints*, *Farscape*, *White Collar Blue*, *Go Big*, *Scorched*, *McLeod's Daughters*, *Deadline Gallipoli*.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS

1. Roo is the quintessential Australian male character. What challenges does this bring?

I'm not sure if Roo is the quintessential Australian male. I guess he displays some very male qualities in that he is quite emotionally illiterate. He finds it difficult to communicate his feelings and needs, and this feeds the gulf of understanding between him and other characters in the play. As an actor you are always looking for the psychology behind your characters decisions. Roo operates in confusion for a large portion of the play, so the challenge is not being too clear in making decisions.

2. Before the rehearsals begin, what research into the role do you do?

Before rehearsals I read the script at least 30 times. This helps me to find the writers voice. Roo is a cane cutter so is obviously fit from a hard working life. I did a lot of physical labour, prior to rehearsals to tune my mind and body to a man that works hard. And then I guess I just try to imagine what it would be like living in his shoes. I spend a lot of time wondering and imagining.

3. You work closely with Elena (Olive) on this piece. Have you worked with her before? And how do you work with her during rehearsals to convey Olive & Roo's relationship?

Elena and I talk a lot about the relationship. We are friends and have an easy relationship so that removes much of the awkwardness of being in love with someone on stage. We have to trust each other, work hard for each other to make a believable couple on stage.

4. Roo remains emotionally detached throughout most of the play, why then, do you believe he is so shocked when Olive turns down his marriage proposal?

Roo is certainly not emotionally detached through the play. He is hurting badly and is actually quite vulnerable. He has a front that he uses to hide this vulnerability, as many men do. More to the point, he struggles to express himself. He is shocked when Olive turns him down because he believes he is absolutely, finally doing the right thing. He is mistaken, and this is the tragedy.

Synopsis

Set in an old house in Carlton, Melbourne, in early December of 1953, Olive, Bubba and Pearl are awaiting the arrival of Roo and Barney who are coming down from Queensland to spend their layoff season with the women. Emma is at community singing, Olive is nervously getting ready, and Bubba is telling Pearl about Nancy, who used to spend every summer with them but was married earlier this year.

When Roo and Barney arrive they bring with them their usual pile of presents including the doll that Roo brings Olive each layoff season – this year’s doll is the seventeenth doll. Following a bad season in the cane fields for Roo, along with Nancy absent and the arrival of Pearl, this year’s layoff season is destined to be different to the way things have always been as they all learn that nothing lasts forever.



Characters

OLIVE LEECH

Olive is the central character who drives the action of the play and ultimately leads us to the dramatic climax. She is thirty-nine, but has a youthful optimism that tends toward naivety. She lives with her mother, Emma and works as a barmaid. Olive lives for the lay-off season when she gets to spend five months with Roo, the man she loves. She feels betrayed by her best friend, Nancy and has talked her friend and work colleague, Pearl into replacing Nancy this year. Olive is a dreamer and strives to hold onto the idealised life she has created, but it's her desire to keep the dream alive that finally destroys it.

PEARL CUNNINGHAM

Pearl is a widow in her late thirties. She is the mother of eighteen year old Vera who lives with relatives. She works with Olive at the hotel and has been invited to join Olive this summer when Roo and Barney arrive for the lay-off, but she is clearly an outsider to the group. She is somewhat conservative in her views and dresses accordingly, but aims to impress and puts on airs and graces about the whole situation. She is obviously nervous, as the situation is frowned upon by society, but she is secretly hoping to perhaps marry again. Pearl is cynical of Olive's life, which she perceives as less than respectable.

REUBEN 'ROO' WEBBER

Roo is forty-one years old, a cane cutter and well respected foreman of a labouring group up North. He is good at his job, but is slowing with age. He and Barney are best mates and have worked and enjoyed the lay-off together for the past sixteen years. He is described as physically large and is incredibly proud and defensive of his masculinity. Roo has had a few setbacks in the last year, walking off the job in the cane fields and turning to alcohol to get away from his troubles. Without the usual wad of money to enjoy the lay-off season, Roo takes up a job in a paint factory to earn a living as his pride won't let him live off loans or handouts from Olive, Emma or Barney.

ARTHUR 'BARNEY' IBBOTT

Barney is a forty year old cane-cutter, a larrikin and Roo's best mate. He has a weakness for women and has a history of winning them over with his charm, confidence and sexual prowess. He has two adult sons and a younger daughter, all by different mothers, for whom he pays maintenance. For the past sixteen years, Barney has been partnered with Nancy during the lay-off, but this year Pearl has been brought in as a substitute following Nancy's marriage. Barney begins to realise that he is losing his prowess with women.

EMMA LEECH

Emma is Olive's mother, in her late sixties. She is shrewd, having saved quite a sum of money throughout her life. She is protective of Olive, even though it comes across as sharp and unaffectionate. She is exceptionally proud of her piano playing and voice, attending regular 'community singing' sessions, but the difficult life she has experienced has left her cynical and unoptimistic, always expecting the worst of the world.

KATHIE 'BUBBA' RYAN

Bubba is the twenty-two year old neighbour who has lived next door all her life and grown up knowing Olive, Nancy, Roo and Barney. To her they are family. The lay-off season when Roo and Barney come to stay has always been a source of excitement in her life too and each year she engages in a fond joke that sees her give the two men ribbon wrapped walking sticks. Despite not being a child anymore, the men and Olive still think of her that way, using her pet name Bubba as they did when she was a young girl.

Bubba looks up to Olive and her life with the men, seeing this way of living as a viable option, this is the main reason she is attracted to Johnnie Dowd. She doesn't understand or realise the pain that Olive, in particular, has endured and can't see why it is ending.

JOHNNIE DOWD

Johnnie is a twenty-five year old cane-cutter; strong, fast and good at his job. He was taken on by Roo as part of his gang, but when Roo leaves, he takes over as the gang leader, liked and respected by the men. When Dowd visits Roo at the house in Melbourne to make amends, he makes a mockery of the lay-off situation that Barney and Roo have. He wins Bubba's affections by treating her as an adult.

NANCY ALLAWAY

Although we never see Nancy, she is mentioned often and is a key part of the history that precedes the action of the play. She worked with Olive at the hotel and was partnered with Barney for the past sixteen years during the lay-off but has realised those 'good times' can't last and has opted for a more conventional existence. She has recently married Harry Allaway, a bookseller and moved away.



Analysis

The play is set in an old Victorian style house in Carlton, Melbourne, in early December of 1953.

Act I opens on Olive, her neighbour Bubba and her workmate Pearl, awaiting the arrival of cane-cutters Roo and Barney, who are coming down from Queensland to spend the lay-off season with the women. Olive's mum Emma is at community singing, Olive is nervously getting ready and Bubba is telling Pearl about Nancy, who used to spend every summer with them, but left to marry earlier in the year.

Pearl, a barmaid who Olive has invited to replace Nancy, is not entirely comfortable with the arrangement. Her conservative attitude to the unconventional lifestyle that sees two 'bushmen' travel down south to spend the summer with two Melbourne barmaids, provides a critical lens through which to view and question other characters. Pearl's opinion of Nancy, who had been Barney's partner for the past sixteen years, is cutting, despite the fact that Nancy left the group and married, opting for a stable, socially acceptable existence. Despite the significant changes to the status quo this year, Olive is still determined that this summer will be as pleasant as previous ones.

Roo and Barney arrive and as always, Roo has brought Olive a kewpie doll, which symbolises their seasonal romance. The previous sixteen dolls and other gifts adorn the room, as a reminder of the past sixteen summers.

However, it is immediately apparent that this year is different and Barney reveals to Olive that Roo had a bad season, hurting his back in the cane fields. He explains that Roo gained a young rival, Johnnie Dowd, who proved to be an excellent cane-cutter. A contest started between the two men, but Roo's back gave way and he collapsed. Roo lost the competition and subsequently left the fields broken and broke.

Due to his lack of funds, Roo decides to get a job in Melbourne, despite Barney and Olive's protests. Barney tries to woo Pearl, but instead reveals that he has illegitimate children in three different states. This shocks Pearl, who has strong family values and disapproves of Barney's disregard of how 'decent' families work. In the end, Barney makes Pearl come round using his charm and explains to her, "*He's not after all the lovin' he can get but that he has a lot of lovin' he can give.*" Pearl decides to stay, but always has a bag packed ready to go.

Act II opens on New Year's Eve. Olive and Roo are playing cards, Pearl is knitting, Barney is writing a letter, Emma is in her room and Bubba is going out to a party. Once Bubba has gone, the remaining five lament their uneventful New Year's Eve at home doing nothing. This scene reveals their weaknesses and failures; Olive's stubbornness for change, Barney a loud and vulgar braggart; Roo ashamed of his failure; and Pearl, the stand in for Nancy, who places herself above these tawdry relationships. When the clock strikes twelve, Olive breaks down in tears, mourning the loss of her fun filled summers, as their end draws ever closer.

The following Friday, Roo, now working as a painter, is in his work clothes, sleeping on the lounge. He is woken as Barney arrives home after a big night out with some other cane-cutters who are in Melbourne, bringing with him Johnnie Dowd, Roo's rival and insists that they make a truce. Barney organises for the three men to go to the races with Pearl and Olive and tries to rope in Pearl's daughter as company for Dowd. Upset by this, Pearl storms off, so Barney asks Bubba, an invitation she readily accepts, as she seeks a life like the one she has lived next door to from a young age.

Upset by Barney's betrayal in befriending Dowd, Roo picks a fight with him. The two argue bitterly and reveal the truth about one another, with Barney telling Roo that he and the others felt betrayed by him walking off the job.

Roo reveals to Olive that he in fact never hurt his back on the cane fields, but that Dowd was a stronger and better worker than him and he couldn't take it. Roo angrily smashes a vase containing the seventeenth doll, which lands on the floor; then, in a pathetic gesture, Olive picks up the doll and holds it close to her.

ACT III. The next day, when Roo comes downstairs, he finds that the room is bare - all seventeen dolls and the other gifts that he has given Olive have been removed. Olive tells him that as she was cleaning, many of them were breaking, so she put them away. After being offended by Barney the previous night, Pearl has packed her bags and Barney realising he can't talk her out of it this time, helps her to the taxi.

Emma makes Roo accept the truth about the fabled summers. Barney returns, and tells Roo that he's going to join a group of workers heading to the Murray region to pick grapes, imploring him to go with him. Roo refuses, saying he could never leave Olive before the end of the lay-off season. He finds Olive and tells her that he's staying in Melbourne, and asks her to marry him. She refuses his offer, screaming at him in horror, *"You think I'll let it all end up in marriage – everyday – a paint factory – you think I'll marry you?"* Defeated, Roo replies, *"This is the dust we're in and we're gunna walk through it like everyone else for the rest of our lives!"*

After Olive leaves the house an emotional mess, Emma tells the boys that their summers are over and that they are no longer welcome in her house. Barney reassures Roo that they can make a fresh start, but Roo in a baffled rage picks up the seventeenth doll and beats it against the piano, smashing and tearing at it, *"Until it is nothing but a litter of broken cane, tinsel and celluloid."* The play ends when the men exit.

Themes

GENDER ROLES

The 1950s was a time of transition and change in the way Australian men and women saw themselves and the ways in which they related to each other. This is a major theme of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and throughout the play we see the main characters struggling with their identity – with who they are, and with how others see them. Much of this struggle relates to ideas of what it means to be either a woman or a man.

However, while Roo, Barney, Olive and Pearl are very much men and women of their time, they also reject many of the expectations that society places upon their genders.

In Act 1, Scene 1 Olive makes it clear to Pearl that she is aware of how other people view her unconventional relationship with Roo:

OLIVE: *'S different, right enough. Compared to all the marriages I know, what I got is—five months of heaven every year . . . You think I haven't sized it up against what all those married women have? I laugh every time that they look down their noses at me. Even waitin' for Roo to come back is more excitin' than their little lot.'*

The character of Pearl is used throughout the play as a critical voice so the audience can size up the characters and compare their actions. Much of the dialogue between Pearl and Olive enables the audience to explore the gender stereotypes Lawler examines throughout the play.

In Act 1, Scene 1 Olive defends the arrangement that has existed for the past seventeen years during the lay-off, and through this we see her idealised view of Roo and Barney who represent in her mind, 'real' Australian men:

OLIVE: *With these you don't have to. These are -*

PEARL: *—men. You keep tellin' me.*

OLIVE: *Not the sort that we see rollin' home to their wives every night—*

Olive goes on to enforce and validate her particular viewpoint by offering Nancy's take on the masculine power and confidence they are both attracted to in Roo and Barney:

OLIVE: *Nancy used to say it was how they'd walk into the pub as if they owned it—even just in the way they walked, you could spot it. All around would be the regulars, soft city blokes havin' their drinks and their little arguments, and then in would come Roo and Barney.*

The stereotypical idea of the man as the provider and protector; strong, powerful, independent and confident was prevalent in the 1950's and is shown in Olive's opinion of Roo and Barney. However, Lawler takes this notion and unravels it through the two men's character development. Both men are grappling to retain their masculinity which defines them; Barney's loss of appeal to women and Roo's physical strength waning. Roo is no longer the man he once was as is revealed in Act 2, Scene 2:

No strain, nothin'. I walked out up North because young Dowd, he did a better job than me. And I just wasn't man enough to take it. Wasn't even man enough to put you right on this one's cover-up.

MATESHIP AND LOYALTY

Barney and Roo are described as the typical Aussie larrikins. They have worked together as good mates on the cane-fields for many years, side by side, then head to Melbourne for the lay-off. Unfortunately,

Barney broke the unwritten code of mateship and let Roo down. Instead of following him when Roo left the job, Barney stayed with the gang. Barney explains what happened;

Roo's knees went. Never seen anythin' like it, they just buckled under him and there he was, down on the ground. This strikes Dowd as bein' funny, see, and he starts to laugh. Well, that did it. Roo went him and it was on, cane knives and the lot. Took six of us to separate 'em; could've been murder, I reckon. 'Course the boys all blamed Roo for it, so he did his block again, packed up his gear and walked off.....I didn't see him after that till I picked him up in Brisbane a week ago.

Olive is shocked to discover Barney didn't leave with Roo, given the strong mate ship that has existed between the two for the past sixteen years, and questions his decision not to follow Roo. As a result of this, Roo and Barney's relationship had changed sometime before the men arrived in Melbourne:

OLIVE: You didn't go off with him? When he—

BARNEY SHAKES HIS HEAD.

Why not?

When the gang comes to Melbourne, Barney meets them for drinks. He tells Roo that they're talking about heading up the Murray grape picking. He invites Roo along, but doesn't understand what Dowd represents to Roo - the man he will never be again. When Barney appears to shift his loyalty to the new alpha male, Johnnie O'Dowd, Roo considers this betrayal the end of their mate ship. However, by the plays final moments we see that Barney's fate is bound up in his wounded friend "*Come on, Roo—c'mon, boy.*"

There was obviously great mateship between Olive and Nancy. They spent sixteen years together waiting for Roo and Barney during the lay-off. Olive is contemptuous of Nancy's choice to leave and get married, seeing it as a betrayal of friendship and the dream she's created.

OLIVE: I'd like to ask her. Right now, with them expected any minute, and her sittin' chained up to that—book bloke—I'd like to ask her if she thinks it's worth it. And I'll bet that's one question she wouldn't be able to laugh her way out of.

AGEING AND TIME

All of the characters have to face the harsh reality of time and inevitable ageing throughout the play. From the onset we learn that Nancy has broken away from the group realising that this way of life was for the young. It's clear that Emma believed Nancy had the foresight to recognise and acknowledge her age and move on with her life:

EMMA: Only thing I'm sorry for is Nancy isn't here. But she knew which way the wind was blowin', that one.

ROO: Nancy got married.

EMMA: Nancy got out while the goin' was good, that's what Nancy did.

We discover that the reason Roo broke down in the cane-fields is due to the constraints of his ageing body, not from having a bad back. However, Roo refuses to accept the inevitable and acknowledge his physical strength and stamina is waning as he gets older, and that his days in the cane-fields are numbered. At the end of Act III it is Emma that finally makes him realise that he is getting too old for the strenuous work and that he should settle down.

EMMA: *How long did you think these lay-off seasons were goin' to last? They're not for keeps, y'know, they're just—seasons.*

ROO: *Righto, yeh. But whose fault was it that we came a cropper?*

EMMA: *Nobody's fault, you melon.*

ROO: *Must be somebody's.*

EMMA: [EXASPERATED] *Why must it? All that's happened is you've gone as far as you can go. You, Barney, Olive—you're too old for it anymore.*

ROO: *Old ?*

EMMA: *For what it is you're up to—that's it. Old.*

Barney also discovers that his reputation with the ladies has diminished as he has aged, losing some of the sexual charisma and charm he once possessed. It is again the oldest character Emma who cuts straight through the illusions when she offers her opinion on Barney, *"When he was star turn in the bedroom, all he did was brag about it, Barney. Now he lies. Same thing, your account. Might be an old fossil round the place, but I can still nut that one out."*

Olive realises that her Aussie hero is slowing down, but she doesn't want him to be a factory worker, or betray her ideals by settling down. She only realises that her youth has gone and that she is losing everything when Roo proposes. She hopes that if he leaves it may all magically change back to the way she wants it to next time. But Roo's newfound acceptance leads him to make radical changes to his circumstances and give up life in the cane-fields and remain in Melbourne. Olive doesn't have the ability to adapt and is left devastated by the events of the play.

When Roo says, *"Olive, it's gone – can't you understand? Every last little scrap of it – gone!"* Olive yells back, *"You give it back to me – give me back what you've taken."* Time has destroyed her dream.

Nancy is the only one in the original group who realised that things had to change as she was getting older. She wanted to get out of what was becoming a crumbling dream and settle down, so she took the plunge by getting married and set the wheels of change, that permeate the play, in motion.

CYCLES

We see three generations of women with a cyclic pattern occurring. It's clear that Emma hasn't had an easy life and although Olive has witnessed this, she hasn't learnt any lesson, other than she wants it to be different for her. With her ideals destroyed at the end of the summer, we wonder if she will turn out like Emma, hardened and cynical.

Bubba has seen Olive's life and the less than perfect outcome, but she is determined to make it work for her, seeing an opportunity in Johnnie Dowd. Whether through naivety or blind determination, she believes her life will be different than Olive's, not thinking that the same tragedy could befall her.

IDEALS & DREAMS

The play presents its audience with the idealistic fantasy of the lay-off and then thrusts it into reality which secures its tragic end when the dream is shattered.

Through Dowd we can gauge how the house in Melbourne and all it represents has been portrayed to the boys in the cane-fields. Roo and Barney have an idealized view of the time spent in Melbourne during the lay-off. They've created a dream that others have believed and thought about often:

- JOHNNIE: *Funny. I've imagined this place pretty often. House that Roo and Barney come to for the lay-off—heard about it ever since I can remember. (REALLY TAKING IN HIS SURROUNDINGS FOR THE FIRST TIME) Parties, and the fun, and all the goin's-on. Reckon you could say it's almost famous up North.*
- BUBBA: *Things that Barney said?*
- JOHNNIE: *And bits 'n' pieces that the boys picked up. Or made up, by the looks of it— [MOVING AROUND WITH A SNORT OF LAUGHTER.] - just struck me. None of the boys ever seen the place, when I go back tonight, they'll want to know the details. Never believe me when I tell them this.*

There is a real contrast between Olive, who is a dreamer and Pearl who is practical and cynical. Pearl doesn't understand what the season means to them all and unwittingly she shows them that the lay-off is just an illusion. She says to Olive, *"There's not one thing I've found here anything like what you told me... Take a look at this place now that you've pulled down the decorations. What's so wonderful about it? It's just an ordinary little house the hell of a lot worse for wear. And if you came out of your dream long enough to take a grown up look at the lay-off, that's what you'd find with the rest of it."*

We see the characters of Olive and Roo brought down by flaws; Pride for Roo and idealism for Olive. When Roo takes on a job in the lay-off, Olive's ideals of what the summer should be are lost and Pearl confronts her with the harsh reality that things have changed. *"All the time you talk of years. How long you've been doin' this—how long you've been goin' there—and what's it prove? Nothing. There's not a thing I've found here been anythin' like the stuff you told me."* Olive realises that her dream life is only an illusion and burst into tears.

After the breaking of the vase and dolls at the end of Act II we begin to see Olive absorb the fact that her dream; her illusion is falling apart. However, it is at the end of Act III that the idealistic world Olive sought so hard to retain is ultimately shattered when Roo proposes. Her spirit broken and plunged into reality.

All her life Bubba has seen Barney, Roo, Nancy and Olive in the lay-off season. She believes that this type of life is for her too and pursues Johnnie with the intention of establishing a relationship that mirrors that of Olive and Roo. She is convinced that for her the dream will be different. It is sad and unfortunate that she hasn't learnt anything from the other characters and we wonder whether she'll find the same disappointment that Olive has too late.

The final scene when Roo smashes the final doll, dramatically symbolises the shattering of everyone's dream.

PRIDE

Roo has been a proud worker, becoming 'top dog' in a job that requires physical strength and endurance. He thrives on his gang looking up to him, but as he ages and sees the young Dowd with the vigour of youth, he loses confidence in himself and his abilities.

Roo's pride gets in the way of asking for help from Olive and Barney, *"It's all that lousy rotten pride of his what the hell's he up to? I got money. Other times down here, when I've run dry, he's kicked me on. Why can't he?"*

Even when Emma offers money, his pride stops him and instead he takes on a job. This causes conflict with Olive, as she has a clear vision of what the lay-off season is; partying, seeing shows and generally having fun. He'd rather become a holiday labourer in a paint factory; a far cry from his job as a leading cane-cutter where he had status and recognition, than accept help from anyone.

Roo's pride also prevents him meeting the boys for a drink, or joining them grape picking and it drives a wedge between him and his mate Barney.

Pearl also has pride and it's difficult to see why she's come to replace Nancy. She wants to be seen as respectable, perhaps finding someone to marry and settle down with. Olive obviously talked her into the romantic idea that Barney and Roo were the ultimate men, being true to them during the working season and returning during the lay-off. However, Pearl realises early that she will not find this in Barney.

CHANGE

The play is set at the moment of change in all the lives of the characters; Nancy has left and chosen marriage, so Olive replaces her with Pearl; Roo is ageing and can no longer sustain his working role and chooses to work in a factory in the lay-off season to support himself; Barney is disillusioned Nancy has left him and is confronted with Nancy's substitute, Pearl; and Pearl, the newcomer, is contemplating the possibility of a new relationship which would introduce change to her life. But in contrast to all this, Olive works tirelessly to counter the change happening around her, desperately struggling to hold onto the past.

Olive is contemptuous of Nancy's choice to leave and get married, but Nancy saw the dream crumbling and so she embraced change.

Roo realises too late that the dream is crumbling and wants to embrace change to retain as much as he can. He listens to Emma and because he loves Olive and what they've had over seventeen years, he wants to spend the rest of his life with her. Olive however, sees his proposal as being traitorous. Instead of compromising her dream, she passionately and childishly resists change and rejects Roo's proposal, wanting to retain her girlhood and live without the responsibilities of the adult world. She believes that by marrying, she will lose her freedom and independence, giving up her name and her financial freedom and her "*five months of heaven*". For Olive, this means abandoning the life that she's always known.

Despite the massive changes in the characters' lives, all of them remain trapped; Roo and Barney in their limited ideals of manhood, Olive and Pearl in different imprisonments of femininity. When considering the changes occurring in post war Australia at the time Lawler wrote this landmark play, we can look to the younger characters of Bubba and Johnnie Dowd as metaphors for the 'new' changing face of Australia in the 1950's. But Bubba is resisting this change, believing that the ideal life for her is what Olive has had.

Genre

“It’s a realist tragedy that still has the capacity to strike home.”

Alison Croggan, Theatre Notes

NATURALISM/REALISM

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll has been described as both a naturalistic and realistic play. The play concerns itself with the domestic, personal and psychological realities of its characters, which takes audiences into the realms of naturalism. However, with weighty cultural, political and social ideas being explored and taking prominence, this play is more often regarded as realism.

Realism looks at real situations and uses symbolism as a means of communicating ideas, whilst providing a poetic aesthetic.

Naturalism also looks at real, often taboo situations but attempts to offer a photographic reproduction of reality, a ‘slice of life’. The use of distinctly Australian language, colloquialisms and slang also place this work firmly in the world of realism.

CHARACTERISTICS OF REALISM

- Characters are believable, everyday figures;
- Costumes are authentic;
- Stage settings, locations and props are often indoors and believable;
- The ‘box set’ is normally used, consisting of three walls and an invisible ‘fourth wall’ facing the audience;
- Settings are often bland and deliberately ordinary;
- Dialogue is not heightened for effect, but that of everyday speech (vernacular);
- The drama is typically psychologically driven, where the plot is secondary and the primary focus is placed on the interior lives of characters, their motives, the reactions of others etc;
- The protagonist often rises up against the odds to assert him/herself against an injustice of some kind.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NATURALISM

- Is an extreme or heightened form of realism
- Stage time equals real time – eg. three hours in the theatre equals three hours for the characters in the world of the play;
- Costumes, sets and props are historically accurate and very detailed, attempting to offer a photographic reproduction of reality;
- Settings are often bland and ordinary;
- Follows rules set out by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, known as ‘the three unities’ - of time, place and action;
- The action of the play takes place in a single location over the time frame of a single day;
- Jumps in time and/or place between acts or scenes is not allowed;
- Characters are often working class/lower class;
- They regularly explore sordid subject matter previously considered taboo on the stage in any serious manner (e.g. suicide, poverty, prostitution).

HUMOUR

Humour is used throughout the play to lighten moments which could otherwise be heavy in melodrama or sentimentality. The use of humour also assists in creating individual characters' personas. The men are as Aussie-as-they're-made, depicting all the charm, humour and beer-loving that go with the territory. Barney's sense of humour is seen as a positive trait and one that differentiates him from Roo:

OLIVE: *Oh, you can't compare them. Different types Roo's the big man of the two, but its Barney makes you laugh. And like I say, it's Barney that the women go for.*

Olive uses humour when being cynical of her mother:

OLIVE: *Know what we're in for, don't you? New Year's Eve - Hogmany - she'll go all Scottish. Start off with 'Annie Laurie', and finish up with 'Auld Lang Syne'.*

BARNEY: *Doesn't matter. Gets too slow, we can always pep it up a bit.*

ROO: *With Emma? I'll bet you don't.*

OLIVE: *I'll bet you don't, either.*

Whilst this mocks Emma, it shows how close Olive is to her mother and is in this sense endearing. Emma's crankiness certainly serves as light relief throughout what can be considered, an emotionally draining play. In Act II when Emma is invited to play the piano for a 'sing-song' on New Year's Eve, she insists on "*No jokes and silly capers—messin' around.*" But the situation becomes comical, as we see Emma's frustration rise when the group don't meet her high musical expectations:

EMMA: *Righto—righto—that's the note to come in on—* [SHE STRIKES IT A FEW TIMES FOR EMPHASIS.]
Try again— 'n this time all together—

The humour also informs us of what previous summers were like, but contrasts with the conflicts that occur this summer.

BUBBA: *Aren't you goin' out anywhere at all?*

BARNEY: *Us lot—naah. We're havin' one of them sensational at-home parties.*

BUBBA: [IMPULSIVELY] *You could have gone to the Morris's, y'know. I bet they wouldn't have minded a scrap.*

Symbolism

AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

As servicemen returned from Europe after the Second World War, their experiences and exposure to new cultures and different ways of living, alongside an influx of migrants, prompted much debate about Australia, its lack of real identity and its struggle to embrace change in a fast changing world. The character of Olive represents the national crisis surrounding identity that Australia was experiencing during the 1950's, and her immaturity symbolised a nation that needed to grow up.

"While the play's narrative provides a closer look at what happens when an outback hero, seemingly stoic and physically strong, begins to age and show signs of fragility and vulnerability, the play on a larger scale uses these characters to map out the time of change and uncertainty that arose from the crumbling of the 'old Australia' into a new and changing world."

<https://madilauren.wordpress.com/2010/09/17/summer-of-the-seventeenth-doll-3/>

The Doll was seen as a "mature" play, a statement that Australia was, at last, "growing up" and asserting its unique identity in the world.

EAGLES & KINGS

Olive makes Roo and Barney out to be idealised images of rural masculinity; outback men working hard in harsh Australian conditions, epitomising freedom and mateship. We see a clear example of this in Act II when Olive describes the men as, *"Two eagles flyin' down out of the sun."* Pearl recalls a journalist in the pub whose discussion prompted Olive's metaphor:

PEARL: *One day this big fat feller walked into the bar. Journalist he is, real ear-basher, always carryin' on, and this time he got tellin' us about these birds that fly from place to place. Spend a season here, a season there, sort of thing. Well, me, I couldn't care less what they did, but Olive, she got real wrapped up in it. After a while, she turned to me and said—*

OLIVE: *When he'd gone— I didn't say it in front of him.*

PEARL: *When he'd gone, then. She turned to me and said—what was it? Oh, yes. That's what they remind me of, she said. Two eagles flyin' down out of the sun, and comin' South every year for the matin' season.*

Earlier in Act I, Olive also describes Roo and Barney as 'Kings', which is again symbolic of her romanticised view of rural masculinity, *"After that, without a word, the regulars'd stand aside to let 'em through—as if they were a couple of kings."*

VASE

The broken vase represents the emotional states of the characters. When Roo accidentally breaks the vase containing the seventeenth doll at the end of Act II, we can see that their dreams are vulnerable and fragile like the doll, and can also be broken. In a final symbolic gesture, he smashes the doll completely shattering the dream. Nothing can fix the situation; there's nothing more to say, as reflected in Barney's last line of the play, *"Come on, Roo—c'mon, boy."*

DUST

The term dust is used many times throughout the play. When Roo proposes to Olive he invites her to share the 'dust' with him. The 'dust' is the reality of life. When she rejects him, he says, *"The dust we're*

in and we're gunna walk through it like everyone else for the rest of our lives!" In this he refers to the dust as mortality; that everything has been smashed and cannot be repaired.

The reality of their lives for the past sixteen years has been covered up by dust, literally and metaphorically. The dolls and butterflies representing the good times, have lost the lustre and shine they had when new and now fall apart when the dust is removed and they're seen for what they are:

OLIVE: *I took things down to dust, and half of them, they fell to pieces. Some of the dolls were moth eaten, and the butterflies, you couldn't touch 'em. Coral and the shells were all right, but they looked so silly on their own, I couldn't put them back.*

DOLLS

Roo has given Olive a kewpie doll every year for the past sixteen years. As per tradition, he gives her another doll this year to commemorate the seventeenth summer. Initially, these dolls are seen as cute, kitsch reminders of the fun the group has had, but they symbolise much more. They are reflective of Olive's childish dreams, and a reminder that she has Roo, who loves her. But, they become hollow reminders of what she has lost, especially when she reflects on the loss of Nancy and Pearl's critical assessment of the situation.

PEARL: *All right. But the least you can do is to see what you've got as it really is. Take a look at this place now you've pulled down all the decorations. What's so wonderful about it? It's an ordinary tatty little room that's a hell of a lot the worse for wear. And if you'd only take a grown-up look at the rest of it, that's exactly what you'd find as well.*

When Olive talks protectively and sentimentally of the dolls, we begin to see the depth of Olive's dream. The breaking of the dolls is significant because it shows the dissolving of her innocence:

OLIVE *Aah look - prettier than ever. First thing I told Pearl about when we got talkin' of the lay-off. Not that she really cottoned on. Imagines these and the stuff from up North, coral 'n the shells 'n butterflies, they're all some sort of a hobby.*

Like I was collectin' stamps, y'know, or picture postcards. [PAUSING IN QUESTION WITH THE KEWPIE] Where'll I put her?

ROO: *Maybe ought start on upstairs. Gettin' a bit crowded down below.*

OLIVE: *Kittens. Belongs right here with the others. [SHE PLACES THE DOLL IN A NEARBY VASE, AND ARRANGES IT APPROVINGLY.] There—beautiful. [LOOKING AROUND WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF AND SATISFACTION] All falls into place when you arrive.*

Roo's uncaring attitude towards the dolls is first seen as a typical male reaction to sentimentality. In the final scene, when he smashes the seventeenth doll completely, it symbolises the shattering of everyone's dreams and a release of his helplessness and frustration.

Australian Voice

AN AUSTRALIAN VOICE

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll has been labelled, 'The First Real Australian Play.' It was one of the first productions to find success in Australia and soon after in London.

Lawler parallels the growth of Australia and its recognition of finding its identity as a nation, with the ending of the way of life for Barney and Roo, typifying the Australian way of life. After the World Wars, Australia began to realise that deals and treaties with American and Asian nations would be more beneficial than relying solely on trade with Britain, which is further away.

During the 19th century, theatre in Australia meant melodrama. With World War I, however, melodrama declined with the onset of the Depression and was replaced by the Hollywood movie.

Onstage theatre comprised of popular imports such as American musical comedy and vaudeville, operettas, comedy and theatrical versions of plays such as; *The Sentimental Bloke* and *On Our Selection*. Theatres refused to take risks with new Australian plays. This attitude coupled with the inarticulation of our nationality, with Australian plays favouring outback settings and telling stories of fires, floods and stampedes, made such productions difficult to stage.

In *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Ray Lawler innovatively brought the characteristic elements of the stereotypical outback 'bushman' and the values of mateship into the domestic interior. His play dealt with real people and the cultural scene of the country without, patronising or simplifying.

Even though the play was written in the 1950s and over time we've lost many of the colloquialisms and morals, the play is about ordinary people and thus has stood the test of time. Audiences can relate to the universal feeling of sadness that permeates the play such as; the characters realising that they are getting older and that their dreams and ideals have died.

Also during World War II, many women had to go to work to help keep Australia's economy going, with so many men away fighting. This meant that women had more independence and were reluctant to give this up to settle back into the stay-at-home theory of times before. Australians were also exposed to more American ideals with a 'sexual' awakening, where women didn't necessarily have to be married. Much of the play reflects this rejection of marriage.

ORIGINAL REVIEWS

When the play was first performed reviews were extremely favorable.

The Argus stated that Lawler had:

"Written a play so superbly true to Australian thought and the Australian scene, that theatrical conventions disappear "Barney", "Roo" "Pearl" and "Emma" are real people. We know their faces, their voices- we share their dreams, we understand their failures"

The Sydney Morning Herald:

"Here was real and exciting Australiana with Australian spirit springing from the deep heart of the characters and never merely pretending that Australianism is a few well-placed bonzers, too rights, strike me luckies and good-os."

"It was a queer experience to hear Australian place names and idiom being used in a big theatre after years of Bournemouth boarding house settings and brittle West End chatter."

J. Griffin Foley in the Daily Telegraph:

"It has happened at last – someone has written a genuine Australian lay without kangaroos or stockwhips, but an indigenous play about city dwellers." (Indigenous, of course, was used differently then.)



Summer of The Seventeenth Doll - the birth of an Australian classic

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll is a play that holds an important place in the Australian theatrical canon. First performed 60 years ago, on 28 November 1955, the play has been regularly performed by theatre companies in the years since and is one of the few plays to become an undisputed 'Australian classic'.

It premiered at a time when seeing theatre in Australia usually meant seeing fully imported productions. Often, a whole year could pass without a single work by an Australian playing on the professional stage. *The Doll*, with its unmistakably Australian working class characters and accents, was a pivotal moment in Australian theatre. Audiences could suddenly relate to the people on stage, speaking their language and telling their stories.

In 1956, a reviewer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: 'This was real and exciting Australiana, with Australian spirit springing from the deep heart of the characters, and never merely pretending that Australianism is a few well-placed bonzers, too-rights, strike-me-luckies and good-Os... One hardly knows what to applaud most in Mr Lawler's work—the tension he holds till the last curtain, the dramatic strength of situation after situation as his people bicker and brawl... or the full-bloodedness, variety and shrewd knowledge of people in his characterisations.'

Reception of the play on opening night was warm—the laughs began from the moment the curtains were raised and at the end the applause and curtain calls continued for five minutes. But it was during the Sydney production, early the following year, that *The Doll* started to become the legend that it is today. 'It opened on January 10, 1956 at that old theatre in Newtown [the Elizabethan Theatre].' Lawler was particularly involved with these early productions of *The Doll*, as he was also part of the cast, playing the character of Barney Ibbot. Lawler said in an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2011. 'It was in summertime, I remember, with no

air-conditioning and we played to full houses every night. It was as hot as hell.'

From Sydney, the production began a 13 week tour of Australia, playing in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Launceston and throughout regional areas. To keep up with demand, a number of other theatre companies staged their own productions and toured concurrently.

With a successful Australian tour and the backing of Laurence Olivier's production company, Lawler and *The Doll* travelled to England to stage the production on the West End. After brief seasons in Nottingham and Edinburgh, the play opened in London at the New Theatre in April 1957 and soon won the *Evening Standard's* prestigious Best New Play award, beating *The Entertainer* and guaranteeing a further six-month run.

But *The Doll* had prior commitments, having been scheduled to travel to the US. The US tour was backed by the Theatre Guild—which had already introduced a number of foreign plays to New York audiences. Expectations were high, but after opening on Broadway on 23 January 1958, the production only ran for five weeks.

'No one in America understood it,' Lawler says. He was asked to remove 'all the Australianisms' from the script to make the play more accessible to an American audience.

"I asked the rest of the cast and they didn't want to do it either," he says. "So I said to the Guild, 'If we've come this far and we are going to go down, let's go down with the play as it is.' We didn't change it, and I'm glad we didn't."

In 2015, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* celebrates its 60th anniversary and remains unchanged and unabashedly Australian—a true Australian classic of the stage. According to Australian Stage records, this year's production of *The Doll* by State Theatre Company will be the 125th production worldwide since its premiere in 1955.

1950's Australia

1950S IN CONTEXT

After decades of suffering through the Great Depression and World War II, the 1950s were prosperous, vibrant years for Australians. Employment was high and people were encouraged to spend their money freely.

Technology advanced rapidly after the war and soon transformed the lives of many Australians. Televisions provided a link to the rest of the world and cars gave people a new mobility that would change the nation's patterns of leisure and living.

In 1956, Melbourne hosted the Olympic Games. This fostered a great sense of national pride and cast the international spotlight onto Australia like never before.

The Role Of Women In The 1950s

For women in the 1950s, life was centered on the family and domestic duties. Women who had held wartime jobs were expected to abandon their careers in order to provide employment for men returning from war. They were encouraged to stay at home, raise children and care for their husbands. To assist in the homemaking task, shiny new home appliances promised to transform housekeeping into a delight.



Some women, however, challenged traditional values and remained in the paid workforce. They were usually paid less than men for performing the same work and were often employed in routine, low-status positions. The women's rights movement was still a decade away.

Australia's Ties To Britain In The 1950s

Thousands of people queued to welcome Queen Elizabeth II when she visited Australian shores in 1954. Many Australians still considered Britain to be their homeland and proclaimed unwavering loyalty to British culture and values. Australia's cultural ties to Britain, however, would be challenged by an influx of American culture through cinema, radio and television. Technological innovation spurred these changes, breaking down geographical barriers and allowing new, exciting forms of popular culture like rock 'n' roll to penetrate Australian life.

Immigration In The 1950s

Throughout the 1950s, a flood of migrants transformed the shape of Australian society. Australia suffered a huge shortage of workers for the nation's reconstruction efforts and the nation embarked on a program to boost its population. In 1950, it was estimated that 170 000 migrants arrived in Australia. By the end of the decade, this figure would reach one million.



Most migrants hailed from Britain, or European countries, such as Greece and Italy. They had a major impact on the make-up of the Australian population and introduced new food, music, religion and traditions to Australian cultural life.

Politics in the 1950s

Despite the optimism of the decade, Australians lived in the shadow of the Cold War. The Cold War was a bitter political struggle that had emerged after World War II, between America and her Western allies and Communist countries like the Soviet Union and China. As tension mounted between nations, many people feared the outbreak of nuclear war.

Throughout the decade, Australia was led by Liberal leader Sir Robert Menzies. He came to power on 10 December 1949 and would go on to become Australia's longest serving Prime Minister.

EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN IN 1950s

Women were expected to return to household duties after WWII. Although some women pursued jobs such as hairdressing and retail, the media encouraged women to return to their traditional roles such as; caring mother, diligent homemaker and obedient wife.

The perfect type of woman would stay home and nurture and a good wife carried out her husband's orders and agreed with him on everything. It was abnormal for woman to attend university, with most women marrying straight after high school. The braver woman, who chose to take a different career path, could not study mathematics or science, but instead home subjects like; economics and cooking.

The men were the workers of the household; working all day and coming home to their families at night.

1950's Timeline

IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN EVENTS DURING THE 1950s

1950

- February** Petrol rationing ends
July The government announces that Australian troops will be sent to the Korean War
October *A Town Like Alice* a novel by Nevil Shute published

1951

- August** Start of National Service

1953

- July** Korean War end after 3 years
October Britain explodes the first of two atomic bombs at Woomera in South Australia
December Oil is discovered in the Exmouth Gulf off the coast of WA

1954

- February** Queen Elizabeth II arrives with Prince Philip for Royal Tour
The Australian flag is raised at the new Mawson base in Antarctica
April Soviet diplomat, Vladimir Petrov, is granted asylum

1955

- February** NSW hotels stay open until 10pm
November Arrival of Australia's one-millionth post-war migrant
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, by Ray Lawler, opens at the Union Theatre in Melbourne
December Barry Humphries' character Edna Everage makes her stage debut

1956

- January** The Circular Quay loop of the underground railway opens in Sydney
September Sydney: First television broadcast from TCN-9
November The Duke of Edinburgh opens the 16th Olympic Games in Melbourne

1957

- March** Australia's union movement steps up campaign for equal pay for women workers,

1958

- January** QANTAS international services commence
November The Menzies Government wins a fifth term

1959

- January** Darwin becomes a city
March Australia's population reaches 10 million
May The Snowy Mountain Hydro Electric Scheme's first big power station, Tumut 1, begins operation

Timeline adapted from: ABC Online – Archives and Library Services-
<http://www.abc.net.au/archives/timeline/1950s.htm>

Language

AUSTRALIAN SLANG

“Slang” according to the Oxford Dictionary is defined as:

“A type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people.”

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll celebrated the Australian vernacular of the 1950's and audiences and critics alike applauded Lawler's unapologetic use of 'Aussie' slang and colloquialisms, until then, unheard on the Australian stage. The informal speech patterns of the characters represented natural conversation and presented a recognisable Australian voice.

Lindsay Browne in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said:

*“This fine play, untranslatably Australian in all its accents, gave Australian theatre goers the chance to feel as American audiences must have felt when O'Neill first began to assert American vitality and independence in drama, or the Irish must have felt when Synge gave them *The Playboy of the Western World*. This was real and exciting Australianism, with Australian spirit springing from the deep heart of the characters, and never merely pretending that Australianism is a few well-placed bonzers, too-rights, strike-me-luckies and good-Os.”*

EXAMPLES OF SLANG IN THE PLAY:

hang on to your hats

Get ready for what's coming

OLIVE: **Hang on to your hats** and mittens, kids, here I come again

[Act One, Scene One]

a wag

Someone who is fond of making jokes

OLIVE: God you're **a wag**

[Act One, Scene One]

to cotton on

To come to understand or realise something

PEARL: If she **cottons onto** me doing anything wrong, she's likely to break out the same way

[Act One, Scene One]

a skinned rabbit

a very thin person

OLIVE: Nancy... always reckoned [Roo and Barney] made the rest of the mob look like a bunch of **skinned rabbits**.

[Act One, Scene One]

to lam into

to hit out or give a thrashing

BARNEY [cupping his hands and yelling] Bubba –what are yer hiding for? Reckon we're gunna **lam into** you with a walkin' stick or something?

[Act One, Scene One]

Larrikin a trouble-making youth, usually a male
EMMA: ...*you oughta be damned glad I did go, or these **larrikins** wouldn't be here.*
[Act One, Scene One]

the johns the police
EMMA: *Yez'll be laughing the other side your face once **the johns** git after yer!*
[Act One, Scene One]

She'll be jake it'll be ok, alright
BARNEY: ... *Righto, I'll have a word with her after. **She'll be jake.***
[Act One, Scene One]

a razoo very little money
BARNEY: ... He went off and I stayed. Then, like I said, I picked him up in Brisbane a week ago. By then he hardly had **a razoo**
[Act One, Scene One]

Bottling excellent or outstanding
BARNEY: *And of course I had to put me foot in it all over again by tellin' him how they made Dowdie ganger in his place, and what a **bottling** job he done*
[Act One, Scene One]

Up there, Cazaly come on
OLIVE [*calling upstairs*] **Up there, Cazaly**—*come on down –the party's on*
[Act One, Scene One]

to loll around to laze around and do nothing
EMMA: ... ,Course it doesn't matter to you, all youse have to do is make a pigsty of the joint and then go off and **loлл around** bars all day
[Act One, Scene Two]

to get a snout on someone to hold a grudge against someone
BARNEY: *Oh yes, you are. You got **a snout** on that kid the first day you saw him working*
[Act One, Scene Two]

to smooqe around someone to chat someone up
OLIVE tells BARNEY to '**smooqe round**' Pearl
[Act One, Scene Two]

to poke mullock to ridicule or make fun of
EMMA: *Oh, so that's what you got me in for, is it – **to poke mullock?***
[Act Two, Scene One]

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll and the modern audience — Interview with Ray Lawler

By Meanjin - January 16 2012

1. Has the language used in Australia changed much since the play was first performed in 1955? If so, have you changed any words or elements of the script?

Naturally, slang expressions and everyday terms for common objects have changed over the years. The use of 'bad' language, both in general conversation and accepted interchange between the sexes is also more widespread. The permitted use of four-letter words on stage, screen and in the media, has had a definite impact in those areas. But *The Doll* is a play that belongs to its time, 1953, and I have never felt the urge to modernise it for any of the above reasons.

Changes came with the writing of the other two plays of *The Doll* Trilogy, which pre-date *The Doll* in actual time. *Kid Stakes* takes place in 1937 and *Other Times* in 1945, which means that I was able to examine the characters over the seventeen-year span of their relationship. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* stood as a pre-determined ending to the story. I knew that events and happenings must follow the line they had in the original production, but the Trilogy gave me a chance to shade dialogue here and there to emphasise character traits and attitudes already indicated in the original draft.

2. Has the rhythm of speech changed since 1955, and if so, how have you altered or adapted the speech to accommodate that?

I do think the rhythm of Australian vernacular has changed since 1955, and I am greatly aware of this nowadays when I attend the first reading of a modern production of *The Doll*. Often the actors were not even born when the play was first produced, and they have occasional difficulty with the extended line of the speeches. But actors are experts at finding the speech rhythm of a play, it is part of their job, and I certainly make no attempt to ease the process for them.

3. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is considered a naturalistic play, but it has a universality that gives it a contemporary message, how did this happen?

Your guess is as good as mine. If one accepts naturalistic as a lifestyle corresponding to present day society, *The Doll* has lost its relevance. There are no longer itinerant cane-cutting teams, pub life and barmaids have changed greatly since the Aussie male preserve of the public bar was lost, and the social attitude towards unions outside marriage has changed entirely. There seems no reason why audiences nowadays should accept *The Doll* as anything but a naturalistic play with the set values of its own particular period. If it comes through as anything beyond that, perhaps one should question the label 'naturalistic'.



(Ray Lawler, June Jago, Roma Johnston, Noel Ferrier, Fenella Maguire and (at piano) Carmel Dunn, in the 1955 production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.)

4. Do city and country audiences respond differently to the play?

I have no great experience of seeing it played to country audiences. But companies who have done country tours tell me that the response is much like that of city audiences. Personally, I would think that country audiences might relate to the questions of mate ship, marriage and seasonal working life on a

more immediate level, assuming that social changes come more slowly to a rural community, and that the values involved would have meant more in a country setting.

5. What is your experience, seeing so many different productions of the play?

Always an interest in what the company involved has made of the play. And always gratitude that the people concerned should make the effort. What other response would you expect from a ninety year-old playwright?

<http://meanjin.com.au/blog/post/summer-of-the-seventeenth-doll-and-the-modern-audience-interview-with-ray-lawler/>



Interesting Reading

THE DOLL TRILOGY

It is interesting that *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is the final work in the trilogy, yet the first and second works were written retrospectively – like many contemporary cinematic ‘prequels’ – and more than twenty years later. Lawler was commissioned by the Melbourne Theatre Company to write two prequels – *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times*, which trace the same characters through the 1930s and '40s.

These two plays in the trilogy have never enjoyed the success of *The Doll*, and while they offer us a new perspective on the lives and experiences of Emma, Olive, Nancy, Barney, Roo, Bubba and Pearl, the characters and the narrative of *The Doll* still stand alone. Moreover, the place that the play holds in the Australian cultural and theatrical psyche has not been particularly enhanced or defined by the two additional plays. While the characters’ retrospectively constructed backgrounds can illuminate the events in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, they should not be allowed to colour an interpretation of the play.

KID STAKES

A joyful portrait of the summer of the first doll, in which a chance encounter brings Olive and Emma, Roo and Barney, into the shabby Carlton terrace to begin a seventeen year journey of seasonal love and argument. *Kid Stakes* introduces the fun-loving Nancy, who has left the scene by the seventeenth summer, adding a new poignancy to the story.

OTHER TIMES

The middle play of *The Doll Trilogy*. Set during the Second World War, in late winter, when Barney and Roo are on leave from the army. *Other Times* is the fulcrum of the three plays in which the characters stop being kids and become adults. Middle age is looming and life is no longer just a game. Things are changed forever by Nancy's decision, setting the stage for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

CANE CUTTING

Following the Second World War, the sugar industry was hard hit by a shortage of labour, particularly for cane harvesting. Displaced persons from the upheavals of Europe were brought to Australia by the International Refugee Organisation from 1947. Two thousand DPs were sent into the North Queensland sugar industry and came to be regarded as the saviours of the industry at that time. They worked as cane-cutters, living in cane barracks during the harvesting season and moving south during the five-month slack season.



Cane cutter knife c.1950s, photograph Joanna Boileau



Taking a Break' on McEvoy's Farm, Innisfail,

LIFE OF THE CANECUTTER

Cane-cutters were a hardy crew, generally working in gangs of six to eight, between forty and forty four hours a week. Until the 1930s they lived in tents, with a cook to provide meals to satisfy appetites sharpened by hours of hard physical work. After the war, with improvements in transport, the cutters traveled from their homes and supplied their own food. During the war, Italian prisoners of war worked cutting cane, and some farmers built barracks to accommodate them on their properties, with bedrooms, kitchens and dining rooms.

Cane cutting was tough, dirty work, out in the open in all weathers, contending with snakes, rats and other vermin and the risk of diseases, carried by the vermin. From around 1950 sugar cane was burnt before harvesting to get rid of snakes, rats and trash. The sugar syrup would start to ooze out making it sticky to handle and the cutters were quickly covered in soot from head to toe. Unfortunately, this syrup attracted another pest, bees. First thing in the morning after heavy dew the cane was particularly slippery, and the knife could easily slip causing injuries, to the cane cutter or to the man working beside him. It was not only the men who worked hard. Wives and mothers would be up before dawn every day, preparing their men's lunches and washing their soot blackened clothes.

Cane cutting gangs could earn three or four times the average wage during the season, which ran from June to December. They were paid by the ton, and every man in the gang had to keep up the pace, otherwise they would be forced to leave. Competition was fierce to join the top gangs. The top wage for cutting cane in the early 1950's was £30 a fortnight, compared to the average wage of £5 per week. Cane-cutters could earn enough money to buy themselves new Holden or Ford cars in the 1950s. If the cane was lying down, full of weeds, rat infested, or the terrain steep and rocky, the cane gangs would try to negotiate with the farmer for higher wages.

During and immediately after the Second World War the cane farmers were desperately short of labour. European migrants played an important role in the survival of the industry. Refugees had to work for two years as a condition of their assisted passage to Australia and many were sent to work in the cane-fields. They had no choice in where they were sent. Cane cutting was regarded as the toughest job; if they thought you were good enough, the camp officials put you in the sugar cane line. Migrants were accommodated in barracks and conditions were primitive. There were beds in the barracks, cane knives, wood and water, but no blankets and no electricity. After spending months or years in refugee camps with little food the men were soft, and then they suddenly had to adjust to the hard physical work of cutting cane.

CUTTING

"The cutting itself demanded teamwork: the method of cutting was as precise and ordered as the choreography involved in a London changing of the guards. The first man, the pacemaker, cut the bottom of the plant, topping in mid-air with the stalk slanted so that the tops dropped free of the falling cane. The second man then started down his row, cutting the bottom of the stalk which was elevated then angled before topping so that the top fell parallel to the cane rows but away from the butts of the first felled sticks to avoid entangling the cane when it was later lifted to be loaded. More than that, the tops were placed to avoid fouling the standing cane of the cutter in the third row. The second row cane cutter threw his cane stalks neatly on to their brethren placed on the ground by the first man. The third cane-cutter duplicated the role of the pacemaker, by making the foundations for the cane bundles built upon by the fourth cane cutter. In a perfectly matched gang, the cutters would begin cutting one end of a paddock at the same time and finish at the end of the row together. If there were slower cutters, they were placed in positions seven and eight in an eight-man gang so that their lack of pace did not impede the faster members."

(Robert Pascoe, 1987 *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage* p.116-117)

CANE-CUTTING FILM

Below is a link to a short film that takes a look at the life of Queensland sugar cane-cutters. It shows itinerant workers contracting with a cane farmer, cutting the cane and loading it for transport, from early morning to dark.

Other sequences show the cutters in their quarters eating as much food as they need to carry out a tough job. The film is straightforward in its approach: cane cutting is hard work although the pay is good and the industry itself means much to the thriving state of Queensland.



Made by The National Film Board 1948. Directed by Hugh McClines.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2D3ioAH6_4

Designer

PIP RUNCIMAN

Pip's theatre credits include *Romeo and Juliet & Attempts on Her Life* for the State Theatre Company, Set design for *Vere (Faith)* for the State Theatre Company and Sydney Theatre Company, *Mojo* (Set design), *Ruby Moon*, *Actor on a Box - Aesop's Fables*, *Our Town* (Set design) & *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* for Sydney Theatre Company, *Just Macbeth* for Bell Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* for State Theatre Company and Bell Shakespeare, *Jump for Jordan* for Griffin Theatre Company, *Music* for Griffin Independent, *Tiny Dynamite* for Griffin Stable-mates, *Tender* for Griffin and B Sharp, Costume design for *Baghdad Wedding* for Belvoir St Theatre, *Ruby's Wish* for MAKEbeLIVE productions in association with Belvoir, *King Arthur* for the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, *Disco Pigs* for B Sharp, *Cubbyhouse* and *The Naked MC* for the Old Fitzroy Theatre, *The Sista She Scratch Night* and *Inna Thigh; The Sista She Story* for the Sydney Opera House Studio, *The Barber of Seville*, *Così Fan Tutti* and costume design for *Hansel and Gretel* for Pacific Opera and *Debbie Does Dallas the Musical* for Three Amigos Productions.



Previous Event Design work includes Event Designer for the City of Sydney New Year's Eve Celebrations 2007, 2008 and 2009. Designer for the Sydney Opera House Studio Late Night Lounge 2010; Sydney Opera House Studio Mardi Gras Festival 2009; Design Team 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games Opening and Closing Ceremony, Design Assistant & Costume Designer 2003 Rugby World Cup Opening Ceremony, Associate Designer on *Priscilla Queen of the Desert - the Musical* in Milan and Sao Paulo and Projection Designer for events including White Night (Melbourne), Sydney and Melbourne and Town Hall Christmas and City of Sydney Chinese New Year Celebrations.

INTERVIEW WITH PIP

1. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is a classic piece of Australian theatre set in the 1950s, yet you're not referencing the era in the design. Can you explain why this decision has been made and your approach to this style?

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll was so popular with audiences of the day because for the first time Australians were seeing a contemporary play set in Australia about Australians.

By stripping back the set we aim to gently update the piece so it is a little more relevant to today's audience, but giving a nod to the fact it was a contemporary play when it was written. The stripped back set also aims to highlight the themes of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and really focus on the characters and the script.

Though the set itself is fairly abstract it still follows the basic theatrical convention of 4th wall removed – or a terrace house viewed side on. Many of the fittings and props are of the era but can also be found in many homes today, giving a gently period feel instead of a slice of 1953.

1. How difficult is it to make a contemporary approach to an era piece and what challenges did you find along the way?

Our first challenge was to make the space feel intimate in the Dunstan Playhouse, yet give it a sense of a room with walls, but an awareness of the world beyond it and a feeling of fragility; and that what was holding this house together, was not as strong and impervious as it seemed.

It also needed to be beautiful even though it is rather stark.

The set also needed to be the correct scale as the scale of the design contributes greatly to the mood and emotional trajectory of the play. We spent a bit of time thinking about how the height of the space affected the mood. By Act III we lose this intimacy and become aware of the increasing alienation of the characters in what was once a warm and secure environment.

Another challenge was to create a set that provided great scope for painting with light, capturing the feeling of lazy summer heat, dust and the Russel Drysdale sunsets that Ray often mentions in the script. The soft gauze drapes seemed the perfect solution to our challenges.

2. Ray Lawler writes detailed descriptions of the set and the characters, how have you referenced his design ideas?

Ray Lawler's descriptions of the characters and design are really fantastic because they provide you with such a wealth of knowledge and insight into the characters – it really gives you a lot of information to go off and research.

With any design the more background information and research you start with the better your design will be for it, practical research and abstract, even if you don't literally use every knickknack or image of a Carlton terrace in 1953, or every costume change; the information still influences your conscious and subconscious decisions. Similar, to an actor having a solid backstory to their character, which then informs their acting choices as the character.

3. What challenges have there been in designing the costumes, particularly as the setting is over a few weeks?

The main challenge with the costumes for this show was working out a viable way to convey time changes, but at the same time streamline the costumes from around seven costumes each to about three or four. As with the set design we didn't want it to be too fussy, though still retain a period feel. We also wanted to tone down the patterns and colours of the costumes to give everything a sun faded, tired look.

5. What references have you used when creating the design. (EG. Artist, building etc)*

References for me were:

- The photography of Todd Hido – particularly his homes at night series:



<http://www.toddhido.com/>

- Paintings of Russel Drysdale sunsets:

Brolgas at Giru



The cricketers



<http://www.artrecord.com/index.cfm/artist/4410-drysdale-george-russell/medium/1-paintings/?page=9>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_cricketers

- Sample painting of Rick Amor:



<https://www.ravencontemporary.com.au>

- Photographs from Max Dupain and Fred Mitchell from Melbourne in the 1950s.
<http://www.maxdupain.com.au/gallery1.htm>
<http://www.redbubble.com/people/failingmemory>
- And the work of Belgian Theatre Director Ivo Van Hove and designs of his partner Jan Versweyveld.

Design

The place is set over the summer, from Christmas time until a few weeks into the New Year. The action takes place in one room.

SET DESIGN

Ray Lawler has written very specific set design instructions for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Set in 1953 in the living room of a terraced house owned by Emma, with the power of the household passing to Olive, her daughter. His description includes; the chaise lounge, covered in a bright chintz that matches the curtains at the French windows; Emma's piano and the chromium smoker's stand.

However, in this version Director, Georgie Brookman and Designer, Pip Runicman have reimagined the setting. Not wanting to create a period piece, they approached the design with a minimalist approach, instead relying on the characters and the story instead of presenting a limited view of the 1950s. There are some practical considerations in the overall design that needed to be adhered to; stairs to the second floor, a front porch a back verandah and a hallway to a kitchen. There also needed to be the chaise lounge, sideboard, piano, table and chairs, and of course, the 16 dolls and other souvenirs of Olive's.

To give it a feeling of being a well worn, faded, dusty home, there are used several different design elements. There are worn floorboards on the ground and the walls surrounding the room are made of translucent fabric, almost creating a world beyond the confines of the room, which add a feeling of catching dust.

In this version, there is an interval after Act I, so that the action can continue through Act II and III, climaxing in the tragedy of the ending. Between Act II and III, the architraves fly upwards from a ceiling height of 3m to 6m. This creates the idea that everyone has become isolated, and gives the stage a stark, epic and brutal feel.



COSTUMES

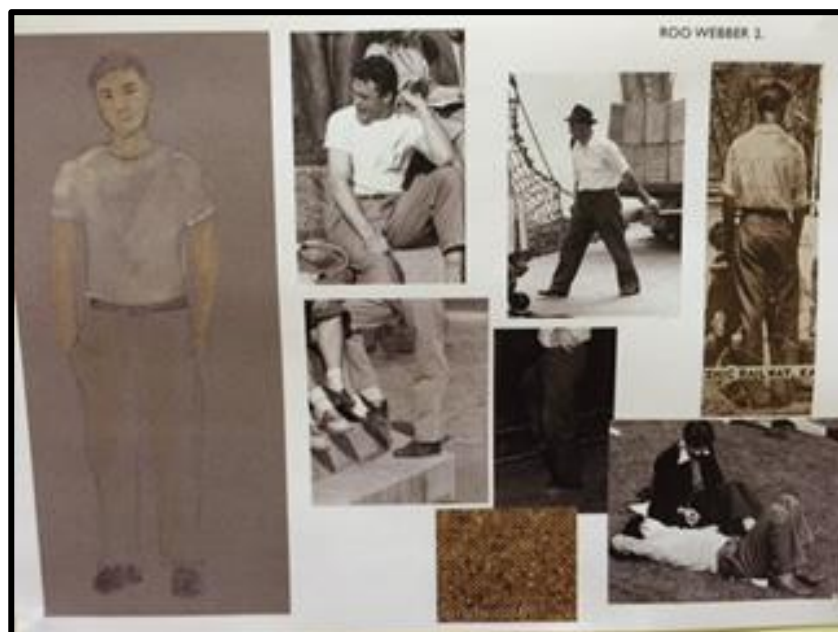
The costumes give a gentle nod to the period. All the men have hats and their casual wear consists of pants, shirt and work boots are similar to the era. Interestingly men in the cane fields wore the same casual wear to work – having a good set for home for work.

Olive's look is graceful, flowing and simple and she has an ease and earthiness to her, often not wearing her shoes when at home.

Bubba shows her youth through her blouse, capri pants and flats and dresses up in a simple gown for New Year's Eve.

Pearl is very controlled and is buttoned up and conservative. She dresses up for New Year's Eve.

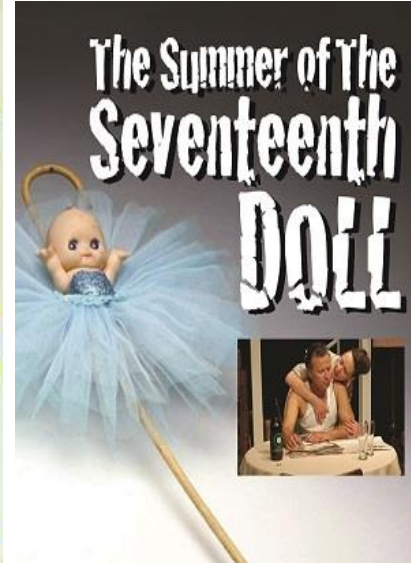
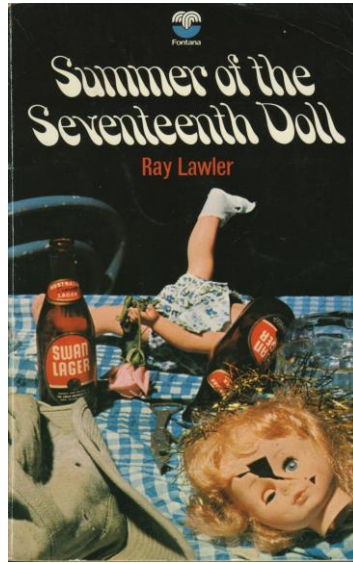
Emma is mainly in a house dress, house coat and apron.



Marketing & Design

Look at the following poster / book cover designs for various *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* productions. How does each design represent the play and its characters? Having seen the play, which poster clearly reflects the story and which poster appeals to you as an audience member? Discuss.

TASK: Design a poster or book cover that depicts the play you would produce and describe the marketing concept behind your choice.



Essay Questions

ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. The play is deliberately left unresolved. Write an ending for the play.
2. Discuss what society in the 1950s expected of Nancy, Pearl and Olive. Why were these women breaking the rules?
3. Why is the character of Pearl crucial to the play?
4. The missing character of Nancy adds dramatic impact and depth. Discuss.
5. Roo has no other option, but to smash the seventeenth doll. Discuss.
6. Do you consider the play to be a story of the failure of childish illusions or a proud assertion of a new vision?
7. How is language used to reflect the setting, both time and place, that the play is located in?
8. There are many elements of symbolism throughout the play. Identify and discuss.
9. Discuss how and why the play is considered, '*The first real Australian play.*' Why does it remain a timeless theatre piece to this day?

DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. The play is left unresolved. Write a monologue for the characters of either Olive or Roo describing what they are going to do now.
2. Write a monologue for the character Bubba five years from now. What has happened to her?
3. Research the genres of realism and naturalism and talk about the ways *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* reflects these styles.
4. Choose one character from the play and make a character profile and back-story, which would be useful to an actor playing that part.
5. Write a scene, set many years later when the characters are reunited, that sees them sharing where they are now, and discussing how they look back on that final summer.
6. Lawler wrote the play and also performed the role of Barney. He says, "*It was difficult but not impossible.*" Make a list of the difficulties in acting in a play you have written. What are the advantages?
7. Lawler worked in theatre as an actor, director and playwright. For him the role of the actor, director and designer is to interpret the playwright's intent. He says that while the other theatre workers are often creative in their interpretation, the writer is the only one that creates something from nothing. Do you agree with him? Discuss.
8. Explore the relationship between the audience, the actors and the play. Is it a static or fluid relationship? On what does it depend?
9. *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times* form the prequels to *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and were written retrospectively over twenty years later. As an audience member, how do you think your experience would differ seeing *The Doll* as a standalone play or the entire *Doll Trilogy*? Discuss.
10. Explain the meaning in the music used in the sing-along. What affect does this have on the mood, humour and suspense in the play?

DESIGN

Look at Ray Lawler's design instructions. Design a set using his instructions as your starting point. Explain why you've made your choices along the way.

PERFORMANCE

Choose scenes from *The Doll* and devise your own contemporary versions of each, tackling the themes inherent in the play.

Create and present a short performance from a minor character's perspective.

Post-Show Reflection

PRODUCTION & PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

	Production elements	Performance elements
Strengths		
Impact on audiences		
Weaknesses		

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Design role	Technique	What did this contribute to the performance?
Lighting	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
Music	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
Stage & Costume Design	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

Resources

PLAY

<http://lardcave.net/hsc/english.2ug.lawler.17thdoll.html>
<http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/1.1/Cousins.html>
<http://theatre-notes.blogspot.com.au/2012/05/olive-as-tragic-hero-summer-of.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Lawler
www.enotes.com/topics/ray-lawler
www.whatiwrote.com.au/writer/lawler.php

INTERESTING READING

www.skwirk.com/p-c_s-14_u-189_t-506_c-1870/1950s-decade-in-context/nsw/1950s-decade-in-context/australia-s-social-and-cultural-history-in-the-post-war-period/social-and-cultural-features-of-the-1950s
[/www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s](http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s)
<http://meanjin.com.au/blog/post/summer-of-the-seventeenth-doll-and-the-modern-audience-interview-with-ray-lawler/>
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www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/viewfile/2850/3263
www.fhanq.org/pdf/RelativelySpeaking2012Nov.pdf
www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2D3ioAH6_4
www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/journey/work/attachment/work-cane-cutting/

PHOTOS

Rehearsal shots by Mike Smith

#1 Jacqui Phillips, Elena Carapetis, Chris Pitman, Georgie Brookman & Rory Walker

Production shots by Shane Reid

2 Elena Carapetis and cast

3 Rory Walker and Lizzy Falkland

#4 Chris Pitman, Annabel Matheson & Elena Carapetis

5 Set