

## MUSIC

# Masterly Messing About on the piano

By W.L. HOFFMANN

*Don't Shoot Me, I'm Only the Piano Player.* Pianist and satirist David Scheel at the School of Arts Cafe. February 8 to 17.

**S**outh Australian-born David Scheel returned to Australia in 1994 after more than 12 years in England, where he had established a wide reputation as one of the most original musical satirists of his generation. He has made highly acclaimed appearances at three Edinburgh Festivals.

Now he brings his one-man show to the School of Arts Cafe, keeping last Thursday's first-night audience laughing constantly with a combination of musical send-ups, comic discourses on aspects of modern living, and irreverent comments on politicians and other public figures. This mixture was seasoned with some excellent piano playing which brought a more serious note to the entertainment.

The tone of musical satire was established with some inventive pianism when *Scotland the Brave* was played as Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Albeniz and others might have written it, ending with a contemporary avant-garde version including a well-deserved barb at Australia Council grants to composers.

Andrew Lloyd Webber also came in for treatment, with his song *Memory* intextricably mixed with a J.S. Bach prelude. This was followed by the pianist illustrating his amusing first experience with an electronic keyboard which had a computerised rhythm section attached, and which resulted in a well known Borodin tune as a cha-cha, Handel's *See the Conquering Hero* in country and western, and the introduction to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet as a blues.

By contrast, a *Tin Pan Alley* medley quite brilliantly offered in new rhythmic guises such popular standards as *Love is the Sweetest Thing*, *I've got my Love to Keep me Warm*, *Mad about the Boy*, and *It Might as Well be Spring*.

In a more serious vein were some of his own compositions, including a movement from a *Suite of Northern English Folk Tunes*, and an attractive

*Piano Prelude* inspired by Venice, as well as a clever instant improvisation based on four notes given by members of the audience.

Two of the non-musical items were a hilarious *Ballad of the Night Bob Married Blanche* as Banjo Patterson might have written it, and an amusing interlude in which the words of *Waltzing Matilda* were explained to a group of new immigrants. And in a section *Pet Hates* came the delightfully comic story of a supermarket adventure of “the frozen turkey and the peeled prawn.”

Finally, to round out an evening of musical fun he played his own sparkling arrangement of *Six of the Best from George Gershwin*, which ingeniously matched and mixed six of Gershwin’s best-known songs.

David Scheel is a very fine serious pianist and composer; but he is also an excellent raconteur with a nice feeling for comic timing and for pointing out the ridiculous in everyday things.

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