

'TIMEOUT' Sept 27 1989

'10 OUT OF 10 FOR THIS MASTERPIECE'

by Werner Baer

Thank heaven for little Australians – and seven, to boot; though, alas, only six remain at the end of this heart-warming, fast-moving show.

Well presented, the production has been run-in from previous seasons in other capital cities.

It is a real Australian show, both in sentiment and in colour, mirroring the much loved novel of Ethel Turner.

Derivative situations can hardly be avoided as the structure is correctly measured on internationally acclaimed shows in similar vein.

The music, too, is professionally arrived at, uncomplicated and free from unnecessary syncopation, which would have been out of line in relation to the goings on on stage. Songs like 'Look for a Rainbow', perhaps repeated once too often, may well become evergreens, without our having to go as far as Gundagai for them.

Some of the acting/dancing is truly splendid. The effervescent Melissa Bickerton, as amply red-haired (is it real?) Judy, is outstanding in her energetic portrayal of the Tomboy Sprite, and all the actor/dancers give spirited entertainment, memorable in its simplicity and sincere enjoyment in being Australian.

No nudity and no wailing, just straightforward unashamed patriotism free from jingoism.

The most notable contribution gives us constantly energetic dance routines, somewhat on the lines of similar American offerings. No matter. John O'May's direction avoids the tempting pitfalls of sentimentality and presents himself as a dashing, if (as per script) undemonstrative, stern father of the late 19th century family.

The children, the very young ones, in particular the Little General, performed by Scott Vanderheyden, are, not surprisingly, the real stars of the evening.

Musically, the fast numbers, are better than their slow counter-parts and, sometimes towards the end of the second act, the action seems to lose pace, but perhaps the necessity of adhering to the original Turner epic enforces this.

Seven Little Australians is a family show, enjoyable and uplifting by the sheer force of its joys and sorrows. Conductor/composer David Reeves reveals his affinity with the Ethel Turner action and has come up with a masterpiece in this genre.
