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THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

Raising the Curtain

A History of the Patch Theatre Company
1939 - 1950

Elizabeth Leong
Master of Philosophy thesis

THESIS



Raising the Curtain

A History of the Patch Theatre Company 1939 –
1950

A thesis submitted in the part fulfilment of a
Master of Philosophy

Elizabeth Leong
School of Arts and Sciences, Fremantle
The University of Notre Dame Australia
August 2022

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this Research Project is my own and contains work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

The candidature was supported by a HDR scholarship which formed part of a larger project funded by bequest-like grant from an individual, David Crann, the former head of the Patch Theatre in Perth. The funder had no role in the research undertaken.

The Patch Theatre record collection was provided exclusively to the project custodian (Prof Deborah Gare, Murdoch University) by the funder for the purposes of completing a history project on the Patch Theatre, of which this thesis reports on one component. The oral histories with former Patch employees were conducted by members of the Patch Project prior to the commencement of this thesis work and hence were used as primary source material. At the completion of the Patch Project the record collection was transferred to the State Library of WA.

Elizabeth Leong

1 August 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis arises from research funded by Patch Theatre that interprets the company's early history. The project has been extensively supported by its long-term director, David Crann, for which we are very grateful. We were saddened to lose him in recent weeks—before the final completion of this thesis. The project's research team, including Prof Deborah Gare, Paul Reilly, Toni Church and me, pay our respects to the extraordinary work of Mr Crann and his partner in Patch, Ross Kendall.

I am deeply thankful for the amazing support of my supervisors, Professor Deborah Gare, whose confidence in me to take on this project has meant so much, and Dr Christine De Matos, who fully committed to making this work the best that it can be. Thank you for all your time helping me, providing valuable feedback, and getting this thesis to the finish line.

To my friends, Abbey, Matilda, Milly, Eleanor, Grace, Teneil, Ben, Bethany and so many others, thanks for making me smile and just generally being awesome. To the Nadin, Cosh and Mardon families, your encouragement and belief in me means more than you could ever know. To my other mothers, Lara, Lizzie and Geraldine, I am so lucky to have your wisdom and experience to guide me. It is a privilege to have such incredible role models in my life. To my extended family, thank you for your support, love and always being there.

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I would also like to acknowledge that my enrolment at The University of Notre Dame Australia was supported by the Commonwealth's Research Training Program, for which I am also grateful.

Cover Page Image: "Four 'bridesmaids' dancers, (from left to right) Biddy Walker, Margaret Corser, Nance Devenish and Hazel Dawson, in Slavonic Wedding", photograph, October 1947. Private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the social history of one of Perth's oldest and longest-running amateur theatres, the Patch Theatre Company, from when it was founded in 1939 by Ida and Edward Beeby until their departure from the company in the late 1940s. The Beebys' strong partnership and dynamic personalities helped build Patch into a successful company and thriving community. It was a school of music, drama, and dance, and one of the most popular amateur theatres in Western Australia during and after the Second World War. The development, operation and impact of Patch has been largely overlooked in Western Australian histories. In this thesis, I investigate the origins of Patch in the social, cultural, and political context of Perth in the 1930s and 1940s, including the impact of its charismatic leaders, the Beebys. I evaluate the degree to which Patch and its performances were influenced by the political activism of Edward Beeby in an age of ideological extremism, and assess the progressive impact of Ida Beeby on the development of modern dance in Perth. Finally, I determine the social, cultural, and political impact of Patch in its first decade, from 1939 to 1950, and consider the degree to which its initial success may have rested on the dynamic partnership of the Beebys.

This research has been supported by a scholarship funded by the Patch Theatre Company, which continues to exist, and draws on exclusive access to the company's rich archival records to contribute new knowledge of Western Australia's social and cultural history of the 1930s and 1940s. I also draw on oral history interviews, conducted as part of this project, and make use of primary-source evidence in historical newspapers, artefacts, ephemera and archives within the State Library of Western Australia, records of the Museum of Performing Arts WA (His Majesty's Theatre, Perth), and published biographical records. Rich historical literature also informs my research for this thesis, including that of mid-century theatre and Western Australian history. The Beebys' engagement with international political and cultural movements challenges the historical canon that asserts Perth's cultural, social, and political isolationism. Finally, this study contributes to Perth's rich history of amateur theatre and dance by examining Patch, one of the key theatres during the war, and its impact.

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A NOTE ON THE USE OF NAMES

Ida Grace Sharland was born in Auckland in 1889. She married three times and, on each occasion, took the surname of her husband. While she did not marry Edward Beeby, for reasons discussed in this thesis, Ida Sharland took the name 'Ida Beeby' for twenty years—being the whole duration of that relationship.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, we refer to 'Ida Beeby' or 'Mrs Beeby'—the name she chose and was known by while in Perth. We normally refer to her as 'Ida' in sections of this thesis that do not relate to her time as Mrs Beeby.

Edward Beeby was born in Sydney in 1892 and known informally as 'Bill'. In this thesis, we usually refer to him as 'Beeby'.

INTRODUCTION

Perth's 'Little Theatre'

*Its first curtain was made out of patches.*¹

The very first stage curtain of the Patch Theatre Company (Patch), also known as the Patch Theatre Guild, was pieced together with scraps of fabric that were donated and stitched together by its members. It is in the story of the patchwork curtain, which gave the company its name, that we detect the modest origins of the community theatre group. Despite wartime rations and limited funds, the company's resourcefulness enabled it to stage high-quality theatrical and dance performances throughout the 1940s in the same manner that it managed to construct its curtain.² The company was established in July 1939 by Edward "Bill" Beeby and Ida "Min" Beeby and was one of several amateur theatre groups in Perth that emerged in the 1930s.³ What differentiated it from the other amateur theatres was its broad commitment to teaching and performing, a range of artistic mediums, such as music, singing, speech, drama and dance. The dance school, in particular, was unusual as it was the first to teach modern dance styles and techniques in Perth. The Beebys' aim was to make knowledge of the arts accessible to the working classes and thus ensured that their fees were always affordable. Peter Thompson, a grandson of Mrs Beeby, argues that the importance of Patch has been underestimated to date, and that it provided "a safety valve for intelligent people"⁴ who wanted somewhere to discuss and share ideas that mattered. The company was formed during a period of complex political ideologies and its co-founder, Edward Beeby, had a career as a prominent political activist whilst running the theatre. Yet, Mrs Beeby's daughter Patricia Thompson, later Patch director David Crann and others argue that the company and its

¹ "Another Patch for Theatre Curtain," *News, Adelaide, SA*, August 19, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article127066172>.

² Peter Mann, "Patch Theatre," in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 429.

³ Mann, "Patch Theatre," 428.

⁴ Peter Thompson, interview with Deborah Gare and Beth Leong, online, 12 July 2021, The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA).



Figure 1. Long-time Patch members Jesse Gorman and Mary Senior (who took over the drama school after Mrs Beeby left) in 1960. Source: Artist unknown, [Jesse Gorman and Mary Senior in front of the Patch Theatre curtain], photograph, 1960, Museum of Performing Arts WA.

performances remained largely apolitical. Chapter Two of this thesis investigates this discrepancy. It seems that the company had a more significant social, rather than political, impact in wartime Perth.

This thesis arises from grant-funded research that interprets the early history of Patch. The research has been led by Prof Deborah Gare and the research team includes Paul Reilly, Toni Church and me. I was the principal researcher of the original material from the Patch Theatre Archive used throughout this thesis and as stated in the author's declaration, I authored the entirety of this thesis with project and editorial support provided by my supervisors, Prof Deborah Gare and Dr Christine De Matos. The research scholarship that is supporting my postgraduate enrolment has been funded by Patch and facilitated by its long-term director, David Crann, who recently passed away.

Within the introduction of this thesis, I first briefly introduce Patch, the Beebys and amateur theatre in Perth. Then, I contextualise Patch as a theatre and place of performance; discussing the impact that theatres have as producers of cultural content, and how artistic trends within theatre and dance reflect social ideas and trends within the community. In order to understand Patch's performances and target audience, I examine entertainment as it is understood within the classifications of 'popular' and 'high' entertainment. Perth's 'tyranny of distance' is also reviewed as this has been a consistent theme within social and cultural histories of the city. Thus, it needs to be considered in my own analysis to determine to how Perth's isolation impacted the development of Patch. This is then followed by a review of the scholarly literature divided into relevant topics such as the development of social history, the conflict/consensus debate regarding 1930s Perth, the Perth

homefront during the Second World War and the growth of the arts in Perth and Australia in the interwar period. My research problem and aims will then be identified, followed by a discussion of the methodology, the ethics clearance, the chapter structure, limitations, and, finally, the significance of this thesis.

Patch's Background

Ida Sharland, originally from New Zealand, was involved in the arts from a young age. She played the piano and was skilled in singing, dancing and acting.⁵ She attempted to become a professional singer and actress after moving to Sydney in 1924 with her second husband, Norman Kent.⁶ Although her acting career never took off, despite landing some roles in amateur productions, Ida worked as a singer in a 'Scottish' quartet and as a concert pianist.⁷ She also worked at Palings Department Store in the Gramophones and Records Department, where she met Beeby in 1927.⁸ He was then a solicitor with a wife and eight children and helped run an outdoor theatre in Castlecrag, Sydney.⁹ After separating from their respective spouses, Edward and Ida moved in together. Though the couple never married, she was thereafter known as 'Mrs Beeby'.¹⁰ After the collapse of Beeby's legal practice in 1938, the couple moved to Perth, where they founded Patch.¹¹

Amateur theatre in Perth had proliferated throughout the 1930s as Perth's local cultural scene experienced a period of growth and commercial theatres failed to survive the economic depression in the early 1930s.¹² Amateur theatres or 'little theatres' focused more on providing theatrical experiences and education for their members and audience. The rise of little theatres in Australia during this time shifted the value of theatre from pure entertainment purposes to their relational and communal impact. This is the context in which we can understand Patch.

Patch was born in a leased room in the Bon Marché building, on the corner of Barrack and Hay Street, as a studio dedicated to the study of drama, dance, and music. At first it offered lectures and classes on theatre and the arts, at which Beeby spoke and Mrs Beeby provided piano

⁵ Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988), 23.

⁶ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 40.

⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 40, 64; Mann, "Patch Theatre," 428.

⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 73.

⁹ Beeby v. Beeby, 657 Supreme Court of New South Wales Matrimonial Causes (May 30, 1924).

¹⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 81.

¹¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 74; Mann, "Patch Theatre," 428.

¹² Terry Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre in Perth in the 1930s," in *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939*, ed. Jenny Gregory (Perth: Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1990), 106.

Introduction

accompaniment.¹³ It soon moved to offering drama and dance lessons and theatrical performances. Patch differed from other amateur theatres in Perth in the 1930s as it was not solely dedicated to theatre but was equally involved in other arts, such as music and dance. Furthermore, up until 1949, Patch was the only organisation that offered formal drama instruction in Perth.¹⁴ The company's fifth anniversary pamphlet declared Patch's main objective:

to provide for the citizens of Perth a cultural centre in the arts of music, drama and dancing to bring these arts within the reach of every purse, to encourage the development of talent in those branches of the Arts and stimulate a wider interest in them.¹⁵

This establishes Patch as a grassroots venture dedicated to encouraging people who may not have been exposed to 'high' cultural products to develop an appreciation for them.

It seemed that people came to Patch for the arts but stayed for the community. There was a strong commitment to the theatre, evidenced by its students and members during times when they had to be at Patch six nights a week if they were preparing for a show.¹⁶ Valma Fountain-Smith (née Clayton), a Patch actress, joined Patch in 1943 at sixteen years old, and she wrote that everyone loved Patch: "Min and Bill had a 'Big Happy Family'...we loved going to Patch of an evening...for us it



Figure 2. Patch dancers performing with fans. Source: Artist unknown, [Dancers with Fans] photograph, n.d., private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

¹³ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

¹⁴ Mann, "Patch Theatre," 428.

¹⁵ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁶ Valma Fountain-Smith to David Crann, n.d., Patch Theatre Archive.

was 'Home away from Home'".¹⁷ She later lamented, after leaving for Melbourne, that her new theatre group was not the same as Patch.¹⁸ Some of Patch's notable and key members in the 1940s included Ray Angel, Margaret Ford, Raymond Bowers, Alan Seymour, Alan Trevor, Jean Rule, Nita Pannell, Tim Megaw, Mary Senior, Morris Hertz, Flo Bernard, Mae Meadows and Jean Wilkinson. The Beebys left the company at the end of the 1940s following the breakdown of their relationship. Beeby left in 1947, while Mrs Beeby departed in 1949. Megaw then took over the trusteeship, Wilkinson became the director of the dance school, Rule and Senior ran the theatre, and Meadows continued in her role as secretary. The dance school waned after Wilkinson left in 1952, but the amateur theatre prospered throughout the 1950s and continued into the early twenty-first century. The numerous individuals who supported Patch and ensured its continuation over the years helped shape Perth society and its values.

Producing Culture

Patch's significance in Perth society is tied to its role as a creator of cultural products, which has the power to either perpetuate or reject certain social values and beliefs. The message and purpose of any theatre, dance or music performance is shaped by those involved; the creators of the theatrical product: the directors, playwrights, choreographers, composers, conductors and designers; the performers, including dancers, musicians, actors, and singers; the entrepreneurs: landlords, managers, producers, the press and benefactors; and the audience.¹⁹ These groups of contributors are inherently affected by political, social, economic and religious contexts and thus have the capacity to embed their values in a theatrical performance in varying degrees. These values, and the audience's reaction to them, indicate the values of certain social groups.²⁰ Moreover, the power of the theatre lies in its ability to encourage conformity or divergence to group values as this medium exists as a form of socialisation.²¹ As the theatre is either perpetuating or challenging mainstream ideas and values, it is an inherently political activity. In Australia, and indeed in Patch, the values within the performances were predominantly directed by British cultural values and social attitudes as the plays were mostly imported from the United Kingdom. However, these would not have seemed separate to the national identity, as most white Australians still identified themselves to be

¹⁷ Fountain-Smith to Crann.

¹⁸ Fountain-Smith to Crann.

¹⁹ Lynn Fisher, "Dance Class: A History of Professional Dance and Dance Training in Western Australia from 1895-1940," (MA Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1992), 98.

²⁰ Fisher, "Dance Class," 98.

²¹ Fisher, "Dance Class," 99.

British. The cultural imports that Patch regularly performed reinforced the strong overlap between Australian and British culture.

From 1890 to 1940, new trends of theatre and dance were developed in western countries and inevitably made their way to Perth. In dance, notions of individual freedom and expression were celebrated in the modern dance movement that was embraced largely by middle-class and working women.²² Mrs Beeby became a cultural leader as she introduced modern dance to Perth audiences. In British and American theatres, attempts were made to make drama more naturalistic and depictive of everyday life as seen by middle-class intellectuals.²³ There was also a movement in the Soviet Union, Germany, England, Ireland, and the United States to democratise the theatre by making it more available and relevant to working-class audiences.²⁴ These ideas possibly influenced Patch, where the aim was to make the arts more accessible and affordable. Theatres 'for the people' were different from the working-class theatres that had existed previously, as these had a socialist purpose.²⁵ Their aim was to remove theatre from its upper class and bourgeois associations that promoted an intellectual snobbery in its audience.²⁶ Another club in Perth in the 1930s, the Five Arts Club, was part of this movement and, as such, produced local plays that were non-intellectual and not embedded with middle class values.²⁷ Theatre, and entertainment in general, were thus subject to differentiation along class lines.

Popular vs. High Entertainment

In interwar Perth, popular entertainment changed considerably as audiences, who had previously flocked to see the vaudeville performances in theatres, were drawn to silent films and then the talkies in cinemas.²⁸ John Docker, in analysing entertainment and culture in Australia, offered a distinction between 'high' culture and 'popular' culture,²⁹ defining the former as exclusive, formal and used as a site for defining class membership, and the latter as less confined and enjoyed by large masses of people, namely from the lower middle and working classes.³⁰ There are, however, exceptions to these classifications. For example, Docker found that intellectuals from the working

²² Fisher, "Dance Class," 104.

²³ Fisher, "Dance Class," 104.

²⁴ Fisher, "Dance Class," 105.

²⁵ Fisher, "Dance Class," 105.

²⁶ Fisher, "Dance Class," 105.

²⁷ Fisher, "Dance Class," 105.

²⁸ Annette Davis, "Good Times for All?: Popular Entertainment and Class Consciousness," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 11 (1990): 68.

²⁹ John Docker, "Popular Culture and Bourgeois Values," in *Constructing a Culture*, eds. Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 242-244.

³⁰ Docker, "Popular Culture and Bourgeois Values," 242-244.

classes and tertiary-educated socialists were more likely to prefer high-culture products due to their political nuances.³¹ Nevertheless, his distinction of high and popular offers a useful tool to analyse Patch and its performances. The company's cast, crew and audience were mainly drawn from Perth's working classes; yet they produced traditional, high-culture theatrical performances.

Perth's 'Tyranny of Distance'

While entertainment in the 1930s tended to be split along class lines, Perth was divided from the rest of Australia due to its geographical isolation. This, in turn, influenced the state's culture, society and politics. The 'tyranny of distance' has pervaded the psyche of Western Australians since the establishment of the Swan River Colony in 1829, and it influenced Perth's social, political, and cultural development. The early years of colonisation and a continuing British mindset established "Western Australia's reputation as the most isolated settlement in the world's most isolated continent,"³² according to historian Geoffrey Bolton. Historians have noted how the geographic remoteness of Western Australia and Perth encouraged an intense parochialism and a separate identity for those who lived there. Brian Shoemith and Leigh Edmonds discusses how "the cultural discourse of the 1920s and 1930s revolved around isolation and the 'tyranny of distance',"³³ which was somewhat improved with the introduction and proliferation of radio in the 1930s. During the economic depression in the early 1930s, Western Australia's sense of separation from the rest of the country was strengthened as its people blamed the eastern states and federal government for their economic misery, compelling over two-thirds of the population to vote for secession in a 1933 referendum.³⁴ Isolation also translated into feelings of vulnerability in Western Australia, which were exacerbated by Japan's entry into the Second World War. There were fears of being abandoned by the eastern states, for instance, should Australia be invaded by Japan.³⁵

Perth's remoteness impacted the development of its theatre. Bill Dunstone argued that the city's isolation produced "self-reliance and a sense of local identity in Perth Theatre".³⁶ In spite of

³¹ Docker, "Popular Culture and Bourgeois Values," 255.

³² Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Publishing, 2007), 23, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³³ Brian Shoemith and Leigh Edmonds, "Making Culture Out of the Air: Radio and Television," in *Farewell Cinderella: Creating Arts and Identity in Western Australia*, eds. Richard Rossiter, Geoffrey Bolton, and Jan Ryan (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 203.

³⁴ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 93.

³⁵ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 100; Jenny Gregory, *City of Light: A History of Perth Since the 1950s* (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2003), 61.

³⁶ Bill Dunstone, 'Perth,' in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, eds. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 436.

Introduction

Perth's geographic isolation, the port of Fremantle acted as Perth's source of international connection for news and many people in Perth were well connected internationally. Katherine Susannah Prichard and Keith George, for example, were able to secure plays for the Workers' Art Guild only a year after productions opened in cities such as New York and London. Nevertheless, a sense of isolation and insularity persisted into the 1950s, argues Jenny Gregory, as Perth tended to "look inwards, to view itself as the Cinderella city and to call itself the most isolated city in the world".³⁷ This context helps to inform our understanding of Patch's origins: the Beebys were not locals and, thus, may not have been affected by the city's history of cultural isolation to the degree that other amateur theatres and artistic schools were. While Perth's 'tyranny of distance' is a key theme in Western Australian historical scholarship, the next section provides a deeper analysis into the main works within the literature on Perth's history.

Literature

My research is informed by at least four genres of scholarship with which we can understand Western Australian social, cultural and political history in the 1930s and 1940s. The first section shows the rise of social history as a form of historical inquiry and how my thesis will build upon the work of other social historians by applying this lens to the Beebys and Patch. The second section deals with the historiographical debate about the degree of social cohesion within Western Australian society between the two world wars. My arguments about the Perth context that Patch was built on and Edward Beeby's left-wing activism are informed by this discussion. The third section addresses the limitations of current scholarly research about the arts in Perth during the Second World War and how this thesis can contribute to this under researched area. The final section discusses the evolution in the literature about the performing arts, amateur theatre, and dance in Perth to reveal how the Beebys, Patch and their contribution to Perth's arts and culture has not been the object of any dedicated study.

Western Australian Society and Culture

The literature on the history of Western Australia from the 1930s to the end of the 1940s evolved from conservative 'top down' historical approaches to 'bottom up' critical analyses of society and power. Key debates have emerged within historiography around themes of the impact of isolation on the development of Western Australian society and the degree to which Perth society was cohesive.

³⁷ Gregory, *City of Light*, 61.

Before the 1970s, the principal works on Western Australian history were by James S. Battye (1924) and Frank Crowley (1960). While the histories were published decades apart, both fit into the genre of traditionalist history, mainly drawing on official sources and consequently producing a gentrified approach that espoused an upward narrative of progress and success.³⁸ Revisionist and social historians in the 1970s challenged this narrative as they employed a 'bottom up' approach that broadened and diversified history by drawing on experiences of the general public, and historically marginalised groups such as women, Indigenous people, people of colour, immigrants, and the working class. As Jenny Gregory argues, these "more recent histories have made it abundantly clear that Western Australia's history was not always a success story".³⁹

Tom Stannage, a revisionist social historian, embodied this era of challenging traditional approaches to history in his works. Stannage challenges the gentrified approach to Australian history by placing life experiences in a meaningful social context, and analysing the "acquisition, maintenance, and exercise of power, and the social consequences of its distribution".⁴⁰ Stannage's work paved the way for other historians such as Gregory, Deborah Gare and Charlie Fox to continue to deconstruct the workings of power in Perth and question traditionalist portrayals of Perth's history. Other historians such as Terry Craig and Dylan Hyde have also created histories on theatre in Perth that utilise a social-historical approach, but there is currently a lack of critical analysis of any amateur theatre in Perth during the 1940s using a social history framework.⁴¹ This thesis intends to analyse Patch through a social-historical lens to explore how this organisation fits within Perth society. The rise of social history facilitated the challenging of traditional histories and within Western Australia's historiography this was evident in the debate on the degree of social consensus within Perth during the interwar period.

Isolation and Social Cohesion

The impact of Western Australia's geographic isolation on Perth society and whether this enabled conflict or consensus in the 1930s and 1940s has been a persistent theme in the historiography of Western Australia. This debate informs my research on the social and political culture in Perth, especially in its relevance to Beeby's political activism and the role of amateur theatres in society.

³⁸ James S. Battye, *Western Australia: A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth* (London: Clarendon Press, 1924); F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times* (London: Macmillan, 1960); Jenny Gregory, *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939* (Perth: Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1990), 3.

³⁹ Gregory, *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939*, 1.

⁴⁰ C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City* (Perth: Carroll's for Perth City Council, 1979), 9; C.T. Stannage, "The People of Perth," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 29 (Jan 2015): 97, <https://doi/10.3316/ielapa.895933286958100>.

⁴¹ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre,"; Dylan Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon: The History of the Perth Workers' Art Guild* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2019).

Introduction

Frank Crowley identifies Western Australia's inhabitants as markedly different to the rest of Australian society arguing that dissent, activism, and protest were inhibited by their consensual attitude.⁴² Geoffrey Bolton supports Crowley on the notion that "Western Australia was different".⁴³ This frames Bolton's conceptualisation of the Western Australian community as he suggests that due to their isolation, Western Australians shared a belief that,

disagreements should never be pushed too far, but all should stick together ... this clannish sense of fundamentally shared identity of interest seems to have formed an effective social cement.⁴⁴

Bolton was influenced by Paul Hasluck's 1977 autobiography which portrayed Western Australia in the interwar years "as an open society with a strong emphasis on opportunity for all".⁴⁵ This depicts a society with no social divisions where anybody could succeed purely based on individual potential. While Bolton demonstrates a keen awareness of social divisions throughout his work, he remained committed to the idea that a sense of community tended to stifle conflict and social upset was caused by outsiders, at least until the 1960s.⁴⁶ This Bolton/Crowley view has since been contested by Tom Stannage, Jenny Gregory and various other historians. Gregory specifically challenges this understanding of a harmonious society in the interwar years, suggesting instead that Perth was "a dynamic society, based on class, with a history marked by tension and conflict".⁴⁷ While Perth cannot be characterised as a radical city, writes Charlie Fox, it has a history of radicalism and dissent that has originated internally rather than, as Bolton believes, exclusively been brought in by outsiders.⁴⁸ Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones depict the interwar years as a period of "rising ideological discord".⁴⁹ Paul Reilly concurs that, with the return of servicemen from World War I and the Great Depression, it is no surprise that "Western Australia's history of the 1930s was marked by political and social volatility".⁵⁰ This helps frame the context for other areas of Perth history that authors, such as Dylan Hyde, have built on. Hyde's history of the Workers' Art Guild demonstrates that amateur theatre was another arena where these social and political tensions and conflict could be

⁴² Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, 369.

⁴³ Geoffrey Bolton, "A Local Identity: Paul Hasluck and Western Australian Self Concept," *Westerly* 22, no. 4, (1977): 7, <https://doi/10.3316/ielapa.780602131>.

⁴⁴ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 13.

⁴⁵ Paul Hasluck, *Mucking About: An Autobiography* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1977), 126.

⁴⁶ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*.

⁴⁷ Jenny Gregory, "Peopling History: Tom Stannage and Social History," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 29 (2015): 119, <https://doi/10.3316/informit.896156882613199>.

⁴⁸ Charles Fox, Bobbie Oliver, and Lenore Layman, *Radical Perth Militant Fremantle* (Perth: Black Swan Press, Curtin University, 2017), 2.

⁴⁹ Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle, 1899 to 1945* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2014), 63.

⁵⁰ Paul Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent: Activism in 1930s Fremantle," (MPhil thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2018), 2.

seen.⁵¹ Authors such as Fox, Paul Reilly, Alex Salmon, David Rose, and Stuart McIntyre have examined interwar local and national left-wing activism but have mainly concentrated on worker's movements, including unions, strikes and protests and larger organisations such as the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), and the Movement Against War and Fascism (MAWF).⁵² Left-wing activism during the Second World War has not attracted as much scholarly investigation and Beeby, and his Anti-Fascist League, has thus far not been featured in any of these discussions about leftist activities. The discussion of the presence of internal pressures and divisions in Perth prior to the Beebys' arrival necessitates the need for my thesis to address these arguments, particularly regarding the development of Beeby's political activism and its potential influence within the company. Following this is a consideration of the current literature about the home front during the Second World War.

World War Two

Prior to the 1990s, histories of the Second World War mostly neglect the social impact of the war in Perth, as Frank Crowley's main focus was on the state's rural industries and Tom Stannage devoted only several pages to a brief overview of the war in Perth. Scholars in the 1990s then began to construct a deeper investigation into the social impacts of World War Two on Perth society. Jenny Gregory's edited book *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War Two* contributes detailed histories to the historical canon with specialised topics such as women's involvement in war efforts, propaganda, returned soldiers and the internment of 'enemy' aliens.⁵³ Published in the same year, Anthony J. Barker and Lisa Jackson wrote a social history analysing the cultural interaction during World War Two between the American troops and the Western Australian public. They discern that even before the arrival of the Americans "wartime unrest was widespread".⁵⁴ Geoffrey Bolton disagrees and reinforced his notions of consensus, arguing that the only tensions were between the American and Australian servicemen, and even despite that, "the need for unity seemed paramount".⁵⁵ This observation opposes the trend in national studies that Kate Darian-Smith identified in 1996: that the popular rhetoric of unity during the war, endorsed by Bolton,

⁵¹ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*.

⁵² Charlie Fox, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Inter-War Peace Movement," in *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle*, eds. Charlie Fox, Bobbie Oliver, Lenore Layman (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2017); Stuart Macintyre, *Reds: The Communist Party of Australia, from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), Alex Salmon, "Unemployed," (Master thesis, Murdoch University, 1998), Alex Salmon, "The 1931 Treasury Building Riot," in *Radical Perth Militant Fremantle*, eds. Fox, Oliver, and Layman; Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent,"; David Rose, "The Movement against War and Fascism, 1933-1939," *Labour History* 38 (1980): 76-90, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27508406>.

⁵³ Jenny Gregory, ed. *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II* (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 1996).

⁵⁴ Anthony J. Barker and Lisa Jackson, *Fleeting Attraction: A Social History of American Servicemen in Western Australia During the Second World War* (Perth, W.A: University of Western Australia Press, 1996), 190.

⁵⁵ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 103.

“masked the divisions of class, age, gender, ethnicity and race,” and instead of having an equalising effect “the temporary conditions of war actually accentuated or reshaped pre-existing social differences and tensions”.⁵⁶

Despite these nuanced social histories, there is a lack of consensus within the scholarship about the effect of the war on non-essential industries, particularly on the arts. Bolton writes that the war “had an unexpectedly enlivening influence on the cultural scene in Western Australia”.⁵⁷ Geoffrey Serle agrees and suggests that the challenges of war caused national consciousness and idealism to surge, which prompted a widening interest in the arts.⁵⁸ Paul Hasluck, however, records no change: “The life of the community, so far as it could be observed in the spending, recreation and entertainment of the people, was going on much the same as if there were no war.”⁵⁹ Conversely, P.A. Doherty comments that “the war had a stifling effect on theatrical activities.”⁶⁰ This thesis will provide further knowledge about the operations of amateur theatre and the performing arts during the war to help determine the war’s impact on Perth’s artistic and cultural scene.

Theatre and Dance

Australian theatre, following the trend of other national histories, has often been described and defined by its evolution in the eastern states. However, since the 1990s historians have made a considerable effort to bring theatre in Western Australia into the historical canon and are working towards an understanding of how theatre contributed to Perth society in the first half of the twentieth century.

Remarkably, the first study of theatre in Perth, specifically of amateur theatre, was a 1962 doctoral thesis by P.A. Doherty at Graylands Teachers College.⁶¹ Following the approach of Crowley and Battye, Doherty espouses a narrative of upward progress, arguing that “the history of amateur theatre in Perth is a success story”.⁶² In the same year, N.Y. Purves also finished his thesis at Graylands Teachers College, “The Growth and Development of the Perth Repertory Club and National Theatre”.⁶³ Both theses focus on the Repertory Theatre as the only theatre of importance

⁵⁶ Kate Darian-Smith, “War and Australian Society,” in *Australia’s War, 1939-45*, ed. Joan Beaumont, (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 55.

⁵⁷ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 103.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973), 159.

⁵⁹ Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952).

⁶⁰ P.A. Doherty, “The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920,” (PhD Thesis, Graylands Teacher College, 1962), 18.

⁶¹ Doherty, “The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920.”

⁶² Doherty, “The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920,” i.

⁶³ N.Y. Purves, “The Growth and Development of the Perth Repertory Club and National Theatre,” (Teachers’ Higher Certificate thesis, Graylands Teachers College, 1962).

before the 1950s, which demonstrates that, for a time, amateur theatre in Perth was synonymous with this company.

As discussed in the previous section, one of the main themes in Western Australian history is the state's physical and social isolation. This extends into discussions about the impact of isolation on the arts in Western Australia. Most recently, Dylan Hyde describes how Perth's physical isolation had transferred into social and intellectual isolation as evident in the arts.⁶⁴ This reinforces what other historians have previously argued, such as Bill Dunstone, who suggests that isolation produced "self-reliance and a sense of local identity in Perth Theatre".⁶⁵ David Hough supports this understanding of isolation as he reaffirmed that physical distance helped establish independence as a characterisation of Western Australia, resulting in parochialism in the arts.⁶⁶ Further endorsement comes from Ivan King and Marie Simmons, who believe that "isolation gave amateur theatre a strength and importance not exceeded elsewhere in Australia",⁶⁷ a theme that was briefly explored by Alexandra Hasluck, fourteen years earlier, attributing the rise of amateur theatre in the 1930s to the state's geographical separation from the rest of Australia.⁶⁸

The period from the 1930s to the 1950s has been described by Serle as the 'coming of age' period of the arts in Australia.⁶⁹ This conjures up an image of the arts maturing from its undeveloped stage of 'infancy' to a stronger, independent 'mature' industry. Serle argues that the economic depression and a growing national consciousness of Australia's isolationism caused "the growth of a much more diverse intellectual and cultural class," echoing R.M. Crawford's earlier observation that the Australian people matured and became more professionally skilled in the 1930s.⁷⁰ Hough later adds that the interwar period saw "the flowering of the homegrown,"⁷¹ in Perth as local artistic talent, such as writers, directors, musicians, actors and artists, emerged, and fostered a vibrant amateur theatre community in what he describes as "a particularly creative time for the arts".⁷² This contrasts with Serle's position that serious local theatre during this time barely existed in Australia.⁷³

The conceptualisation of Perth's amateur theatre scene in the 1930s was analysed through a political lens by Craig, who argues that two main theatres during the time, the Workers' Art Guild

⁶⁴ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 7.

⁶⁵ Dunstone, "Perth," 436.

⁶⁶ Hough, "The Playmakers," 9, 10.

⁶⁷ Ivan King and Marie Simmons, "Repertory Club," in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, eds. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995) 494.

⁶⁸ Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait in a Mirror: An Autobiography* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), 137.

⁶⁹ Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 148.

⁷⁰ Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 154; R. M. Crawford, *An Australian Perspective* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960).

⁷¹ Hough, "The Playmakers," 29.

⁷² Hough, "The Playmakers," 29.

⁷³ Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 159.

and the Repertory Club, represented Perth's radical and conservative political factions respectively.⁷⁴ Notably, Craig agrees with Bolton and Hasluck's consensus view of Perth and concludes that "there was no 'sharpening of class divisions'," and "no real conflict in Perth other than the odd hiccup now and then," and that theatre, for the majority, "was simply an entertaining art form and not a catalyst for class conflict".⁷⁵ Hyde, however, later emphasises the impact of Workers' Art Guild radical left-wing politics in provoking the city's mainstream social and political fabric.⁷⁶

The Second World War brought new challenges to amateur theatre. John West describes the difficulties in mounting productions during the war due to shortages.⁷⁷ Some amateur theatres, such as the Workers' Art Guild, did not survive the war, mainly due to the enlistment of nearly all the male actors in the Guild.⁷⁸ Hyde argues that the Guild's "exodus was to have an adverse effect on the cultural life of Perth well beyond the war" as "Western Australia culture retreated back to the orthodox".⁷⁹ This somewhat challenges Serle's argument that the national progress of the arts was not hindered by the war.⁸⁰

Prior to the 1990s there was little critical historical analysis of dance in Australia. There was a cynicism regarding the development in dance in the country due to a supposed lack of a direct Australian dance heritage as any dances performed by First Nations people were essentially overlooked. For Russell Dumas, one of Australia's most respected and influential dance choreographers, dance was an imported art that was a derivative of the works produced in Europe and the United States.⁸¹ He argues "Australia's 19th century vision of ballet is intact, and it is this vision that stymies the development of all contemporary dance here. It is as if the last 50 years of development and change did not happen – and indeed in Australia it did not!".⁸² Others take a less cynical view. Edward Pask provides an encyclopaedic history of ballet in Australia in three volumes and although he describes the establishment of modern dance in Australia through Gertrud Bodenwieser, the pioneer of "expressive dance", and other European dancers who came to Australia, he does not mention Ida Beeby or Patch.⁸³ Indeed, scant attention is paid to Western Australia in his chapter on modern dance as he mainly focuses on Sydney and Melbourne. Similar to Pask, Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon provide a detailed overview of dance in Australia from

⁷⁴ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre."

⁷⁵ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 116.

⁷⁶ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 9.

⁷⁷ John West, *Theatre in Australia*, (Stanmore, NSW: Cassell Australia, 1978).

⁷⁸ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 252.

⁷⁹ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 252.

⁸⁰ Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 176.

⁸¹ Russell Dumas, "Dislocated, Isolated, Seduced and Abandoned," *Writings on Dance* 3, 1988: 30.

⁸² Dumas, "Dislocated, Isolated, Seduced and Abandoned," 30.

⁸³ Edward Pask, *Ballet in Australia: The Second Act, 1940-1980* (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

1945 to 1965, but they do not situate any of their descriptions within their historical context thus offering no historical reasoning for dance's development.⁸⁴ In contrast, Amanda Card later offered an in-depth historical analysis of dance and its significance before the 1970s, arguing that dance in Australia was heavily influenced by social events, artistic trends, gender ideology, health practices and an interest in the exotic and antiquity.⁸⁵

Lynn Fisher is one of the principal historians of dance in Western Australia. In her works, she compares the development of dance from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century in Perth to that of England and argues that there was a strict class distinction.⁸⁶ She focuses heavily on Linley Wilson as a key figure in the founding of ballet in the state and facilitating the shift from dance being mainly a working-class professional pursuit to a middle-class recreational activity, thus ensuring its respectable status. Fisher briefly acknowledges that Mrs Beeby was an instrumental figure in dance in Perth in her works and explicitly cites the need for additional research on Mrs Beeby and her contributions to dance, which this thesis aims to achieve.⁸⁷ Additionally, there is currently no dedicated study of the development of modern dance in Perth.

Research Problem and Aims

Despite the large number of social histories dedicated to Perth history in the 1930s and 1940s, an analysis of the literature reveals a lack of knowledge about the Patch Theatre Company, the Beebys and their impact on Perth culture, society, and politics. Theatre histories in Perth have mainly focused on the Workers' Art Guild, the Repertory Club, and the proliferation of amateur theatres in the 1930s. These have neglected to examine Patch's role in Perth's artistic and community life during and after the war. There are differing opinions on the impact of the Second World War on the arts scene in Perth and little research has been conducted on the activities of amateur theatres and dance schools (other than Linley Wilson's school) during the war. Thus, Patch offers a valuable case study into the cultural life at the home front as one of the most active theatres and performing arts teaching organisations during the 1940s.

⁸⁴ Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon, *Australia Dances: Creating Australian Dance, 1945-1965* (Wakefield Press, 2010).

⁸⁵ Amanda Card, "Tethering the Flow: Dialogues between Dance, Physical Culture and Antiquity in Interwar Australia," in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, eds. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Amanda Card, "History in Motion: Dance and Australian Culture, 1920 to 1970," (PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 1999).

⁸⁶ Fisher, "Dance Class,"; Lynn Fisher, "Dancing Queen: A Story of Dance," in *Farewell Cinderella: Creating Arts and Identity in Western Australia*, eds. Richard Rossiter, G. C. Bolton, and Jan Ryan (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2003).

⁸⁷ Lynn Fisher, "The Cost of Dancing the Dream: Linley Wilson and Alison Lee," *Brolga*, no. 16 (June 2002): 34.

Introduction

Recent scholarship on left-wing activism acknowledges the social and political divisions and conflict in 1930s Perth. This body of historical research has predominantly focused on labour movements, unions, the Communist Party of Australia, the Workers' Art Guild, and other leftist international movements that gained a following in Australia, yet there has been no analysis of the Anti-Fascist League and Beeby's impact in Perth. Mrs Beeby's contributions to dance in Perth have also yet to be extensively considered within the existing literature on dance in Australia. By examining the impact of the Beebys on the company's first decade, especially considering themes of political and cultural activism, we can better understand how they, through Patch, influenced the arts, society, community, culture, and politics of Perth in the 1940s.

I therefore intend to investigate the history of the Patch Theatre Company from its origins in 1939 to the formal withdrawal of the Beebys from the company in 1950, including an evaluation of its social, cultural, and political impacts. It is my aim to:

1. examine the origins of the Patch Theatre Company in the social, political, and cultural context of 1930s Perth, including the background of its charismatic leaders, Edward and Ida Beeby;
2. evaluate the degree to which the Patch Theatre Company and its performances were shaped by the left-wing political activism of Edward Beeby;
3. assess the impact of Ida Beeby on the development of dance in Perth and her impact on the Patch community; and
4. determine the social, cultural, and political impact of the Patch Theatre Company from 1939 to 1950, and the degree to which its success may have rested on the dynamic partnership of the Beebys.

Method and Structure

This thesis uses the methodology of social history while incorporating a biographical history of the Beebys to create a history of the theatre that is a blend of narrative and analysis. Social history, as historian Laura Jurgens describes, "combines narrative elements with critical analyses which places those events into wider social and cultural contexts".⁸⁸ This study seeks to analyse the social,

⁸⁸ Laura Kathryn Jurgens, "Understanding Research Methodology: Social History and the Reformation Period in Europe. *Religions*12 (May 2021): 370, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060370>.

political, economic, cultural, and personal forces that influenced the Beebys and Patch to provide a contextual framework for Patch's establishment and activities. Traditional historical research practices will be used to conduct this research, including the qualitative review of primary source, archival materials. Most notably, this includes exclusive use of a large private collection of Patch Theatre records, currently gifted by Patch to the University of Notre Dame Australia, and which we expect to transfer to the State Library of Western Australia at the completion of the research project. The collection has not been used by scholars previously and includes more than 20 archive boxes of original manuscripts, scores and scripts, photographs, newspaper clippings, newsletters, letters, notes from interviews conducted by David Crann, journals, ephemera, and ledgers.

Other primary sources used throughout this work include the autobiographical work of Patricia Thompson, Ida Beeby's daughter;⁸⁹ *Dance Child, Dance*, a book published by Ida Beeby in the 1940s; photographs and notes from the personal collection of Marguerite Aravena, the daughter of a former Patch dancer and teacher; Edward Beeby's Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) files, including reports, radio transcripts and correspondence; and archival materials from the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History and the Museum of the Performing Arts WA, including photos, theatre programs, newsletters, newspapers, oral history transcripts, pamphlets and newsletters; newspapers from Trove. This is supplemented by the scholarly literature regarding Perth in the 1930s and 1940s, including works by David Hough, Dylan Hyde, Terry Craig and others on the performing arts and political activism.

Ethics Approval for Human Participation

The research team conducted several oral history interviews with surviving members of the original Patch company or some of their children. We approached our interviews with open-ended questions designed to guide conversation through such themes as the participants' relationship to the Beebys, their experiences of performance and classes with Patch, understandings of Beeby's political activities and Mrs Beeby's engagement with dance, wartime experiences in Perth, and the life-impact of their engagement with Patch. These interviews are significant as they have contributed new data on amateur theatre and dance during the 1940s through first-hand accounts of Patch. We propose to store the interviews and transcripts within the Patch Theatre archive.

⁸⁹ This autobiography offers valuable information about Mrs Beeby's personal life including her early life, career, and relationships, manifestly through the lens of her daughter's life, but it does not provide any detailed analysis of Patch's activities during the 1940s, Beeby's political activism, or the dance school at Patch. It is a descriptive recollection of events rather than an analytical social history which this thesis aims to achieve.

Introduction

Permission for the research team to conduct interviews involving human participants has been sought by the project's Chief Investigator, Deborah Gare, and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee. The ethics approval form (Appendix A) acknowledges that this project is grant-funded from Patch and present and past members are being interviewed as sources of information for this work. Ethical issues such as in the age and vulnerability of the participants have been acknowledged and throughout this research the autonomy of the participants has been respected in the interviews. I completed the Introduction to Oral History Workshop (online) to enhance my interview skills. Following the ethics approval, the research team conducted oral history interviews with early company members and their families, including David Crann, Bidy Walker, Shirley Gilmour, Molly Warsnop, Marguerite Aravena, Jack Thompson, and a former Patch dancer who wishes to remain anonymous. These interviews focused on seeking information about the participants' experiences with Patch in its early years, the roles of Ida and Edward Beeby, and the wider historical context of the company in the 1930s and 1940s. Appendix B is a list of sample questions that were used in the oral history interviews as a starting point. The research team located participants principally through the 'snowball effect', which is where existing contacts recommended others, but a call was also put out on the Facebook group "Perth Reflects" for participants. I have conveyed excerpts from the interviews within their intended context throughout the thesis to the best of my ability to ensure the clarity and integrity of the statements. The limitations of many of these oral histories was the age and health of the participants. Many were in their nineties and were suffering from various health conditions, so their memory of events was potentially compromised; however, most were still able to recall specific events, stories and feelings that provided useful first-hand accounts to supplement other sources.

Chapter Structure: Achieving the Thesis Aims

The first aim of this thesis, to evaluate the origins of Patch and the impact of the Beebys as early leaders, is achieved in Chapter One. It is in this chapter that I investigate the social, political, and cultural context of Perth in the 1930s and 1940s, including the flourishing amateur theatre community in which the Beebys were positioned. My research requires a multifaceted approach that makes use of both primary and secondary sources. I examine the rise and proliferation of amateur theatre in Perth during this period. At the same time, I interpret the lives of Edward and Ida Beeby prior to their arrival in Perth and their intent for the new company in this context. This offers a new appreciation of the Beebys' charismatic leadership in 1940s Perth.

The second aim of this thesis is to evaluate the degree to which Patch and community were shaped by the left-wing political activism of Edward Beeby. I address this aim in Chapter Two. This is supported by oral history interviews conducted with surviving company members and their families, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation files on Beeby from the National Archives of Australia, as well as the continuing use of primary and secondary sources available in relevant library and museum collections. Chapter Two examines most closely the early influences of Beeby, paying particular attention to his father's, Sir George Beeby, career. The left-wing political engagement of the Workers' Art Guild, Perth's only radical leftist theatre, is discussed to determine the influence of Perth's existing theatres on Patch and how theatre and left-wing politics intersected. I intend to investigate Beeby's political and radio career to determine what his political beliefs were and how he influenced Perth's political and social scene. This then informs the analysis of the plays performed at Patch to evaluate the degree to which his left-wing politics influenced Patch.

In the third chapter, I assess the impact of Mrs Beeby on the development of dance in Perth and her impact on the Patch community. To do this I examine Mrs Beeby's dance leadership at Patch and the relationship she had with her students. I explore the development of modern dance globally, including the works of Isadora Duncan and Francois Delsarte, two of Mrs Beeby's key inspirations. Additionally, I briefly identify how dance and dance teaching in Australia, specifically in reference to modern dance, has evolved from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War to contextualise dance in Perth in the 1930s and 1940s. This helps contextualise Mrs Beeby's dance style and teaching at Patch which I explore last. Source materials for Chapter Three include many of those mentioned earlier, with the addition of a key work published by Ida Beeby (*Dance Child, Dance*, 1947), Mrs Beeby's notes on dance from the private collection of Marguerite Aravena, Ted Shawn's articles on dance and Patch, and oral history interviews.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I determine the degree to which Patch and the Beebys had a social, cultural, and political impact by interpreting the findings of my previous chapters. Patch had a meaningful social impact on its students and members, through the friendships and community at Patch and its audience, as its performances were a fun social gathering that were especially important during wartime when trying to keep morale high was so important. Patch was culturally impactful as the company made 'high' cultural products accessible to the working classes; their theatre and dance performances were a source of entertainment for the public during and after the war; and Patch helped introduce modern dance to Perth. Patch's political impact was not to the same extent as its cultural and social impacts. Despite Beeby's left-wing beliefs and political activism, the theatre did not produce explicit left-wing material. Instead, the political impact was more subtle as Patch espoused values of accessibility and equality in its desire to bring the 'high' arts to the

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proletariat. To conclude the narrative of the Beebys, I also present an epilogue of what happened to the Beebys and Patch after 1950.

Limitations

This thesis does not closely analyse all of Patch's performances and the everyday operations of the theatre year by year, instead significant performances are identified, and trends and patterns highlighted that are relevant to my argument. Connections between the left-wing activism of Edward Beeby and other left-wing groups, and the extent to which Beeby and his group were influential, though relevant, are not the focus of this research. This thesis does not offer any artistic interpretations or analysis of the performances nor interrogate the constructed experiences of those who attended Patch. There is no detailed discussion of other dance schools during the war and how these, and the other dance teachers and performers, interacted with Patch and Mrs Beeby. This thesis is limited to examining Patch from 1939 to 1950.

Significance

As one of the longest running amateur theatre groups in Perth, Patch's legacy as an enduring contributor to Western Australian society and culture spans over 80 years. Yet it is mentioned only briefly within the existing scholarship on theatre and the arts in Perth. Patch is an historically significant institution due to its distinctive aim of making the arts accessible to the working class and its contributions to Perth culture and society in the 1940s through their performances, classes, and community. Furthermore, Ida and Edward Beeby are significant figures in Perth's history due to Beeby's political impact, Mrs Beeby's artistically progressive ideas about dance and their influence on those who attended Patch. This thesis is the first academic research using the Patch Theatre archives thus contributing new evidence from this resource. Patch was one of the most active amateur theatres during the war; research into the company offers new insights into life on the homefront. Additionally, this thesis can introduce new knowledge about left-wing political activism during the Second World War through an analysis of the activities of Beeby and his Anti-Fascist League and how his politics affected Patch. Research into the development of modern dance in Perth through the dance classes led by Mrs Beeby is another significant aspect to this project in its contributions to the dance history of Perth. This project has produced new data and resources in the forms of oral history interviews and materials from the Patch Theatre archives which are valuable for

future researchers. The significance of my thesis is thus tied to the acquisition of new data and knowledge of Patch and the Beebys, an important, yet thus far overlooked, part of Perth's social history in the 1940s. The next chapter begins that journey by introducing Patch.

CHAPTER ONE

The Origins of the Patch Theatre Company

Bill's business affairs having collapsed around his ears, he and Mrs Beeby had fled from Sydney and settled in Perth.... What lay ahead for them, which for a few years was an unusual sort of success, could not be envisaged then.¹

The Beebys arrived in Perth in 1938, stepping off a ship docked in Fremantle Harbour on what was supposed to be a short stopover on a longer voyage of migration to England.² Friends returning from Europe warned them, though, about increasing political unrest abroad, and so the Beebys decided to stay in Perth.³ Ida and Edward Beeby arrived at a culturally significant time in Perth's history. The 1930s had seen a marked increase in the demand for live theatrical performances, despite the economic hardship of the decade, yet it was accompanied by a strong movement that sought to censor popular entertainment and to preserve the moral fibre of Perth society.⁴ Stronger connections to international cultural and political trends developed, particularly as radical political ideas were adopted by Perth's new intellectual classes, and as travel and communication technologies introduced locals to international cultural ideas and trends. Many younger creatives spent time abroad and were inspired to expand the cultural life of Perth upon their return.⁵

Perth's cultural and creative evolution in the 1930s included a growing proliferation of amateur theatre. The main group in Perth was the Repertory Club, which started in 1919 and thereafter dominated the local performing arts scene. Other amateur theatre companies that emerged in the 1930s included the Five Arts Club (1930), the Shakespeare Club (1930), Garrick Theatre (1932), Little Theatre (1933), and the Independent Players (1935).⁶ The repertoire of

¹ Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988), 159.

² "Peter Wilson's Personalities," *The Daily News*, June 21, 1946, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78250864>.

³ David Crann, n.d., Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁴ Annette Davis, "Good Times for All?: Popular Entertainment and Class Consciousness in Western Australian Society During the Interwar Years," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 11 (1990): 68.

⁵ Patricia Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) from 1938 to 1980 and its Role in the Cultural Life of Perth," (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2013), 48.

⁶ David Hough, "The Playmakers: Theatre," in *Farewell Cinderella: Creating Arts and Identity in Western Australia*, ed. Richard Rossiter, Geoffrey Bolton, and Jan Ryan (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 38.

'drawing room' plays that these groups produced was disturbed by the emergence of the Workers' Art Guild in 1935, which performed left-wing, political works. The visual arts also expanded in Perth during this time, while local literature and playwriting was supported by the establishment of such groups as the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) in 1938.⁷ Notable creatives helped fuel momentum in Perth's cultural industries, including the writer and activist Katherine Susannah Prichard, director Keith George, dancer Alison Lee, and dance teacher Linley Wilson. This was the rich cultural context in which the Beebys soon opened a theatre and dance school.

This chapter examines the origins of the Patch Theatre Company in the social, political, and cultural context of 1930s Perth, including the impact of its charismatic leaders, Ida and Edward Beeby. It thereby resolves the first aim of this thesis. First, I account for the Beebys' background and experiences prior to 1938, which informs our understanding of their decision to open an amateur theatre and dance school in Perth. Secondly, I outline the theatre movement within Perth in the 1930s and appraise the cultural, political, and economic environment that the Beebys encountered on arrival. This establishes the context for discussions in Chapters Two and Three regarding the political and cultural significance of Patch while it was under the leadership of the Beebys. Finally, the chapter examines the operations of Patch in its earliest years, including the immediate impact of war from 1939. This chapter draws on scholarly literature of Western Australian history, including: works by David Hough, Dylan Hyde, Terry Craig, Lynn Fisher and Patricia Kotai-Ewers; the autobiography of Mrs Beeby's daughter, Patricia Thompson, and former company members of Patch; the rich cultural records of 1930s newspapers that are available on Trove; archival collections of the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History, the Museum of Performing Arts Western Australia at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth and—for the first time—the archives of the Patch Theatre Company.

The Beebys

Ida Grace was a lovely girl, rapidly developing into a real beauty, with soft blue eyes, an exquisitely straight nose, and a cloud of black hair as soft and fine as silk.⁸

Ida Beeby was born Ida Grace Sharland in 1889 in Auckland to a middle-class couple, Alice and Frederick Sharland.⁹ Her father was a pharmaceutical chemist who ran a business with his brother:

⁷ Hough, "The Playmakers," 29; Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 35.

⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 4.

⁹ Most of the information about the Beebys early lives is drawn from the autobiography of Patricia Thompson, Mrs Beeby's daughter, which was published in 1988. While this is an invaluable primary source, Thompson's recollections will be shaped by her own implicit bias such as her feelings of growing up in her mother's shadow and difficult relationship with Mrs Beeby's first two husbands.

Sharland & Company.¹⁰ After the death of Ida's uncle, the family business floundered and the family suffered financially.¹¹ Consequently, at twelve years old, Ida began to teach piano to other children as a way to contribute to the family.¹² She was considerably talented at playing the piano and studied under Samuel Adams and Johannes Wielaert.¹³ When she was fifteen, a journalist wrote that she was one of youngest performers in a concert at the Choral Hall in Auckland, yet "was in point of



Figure 3. Susan Watkins, *Portrait of Ida Beeby*, October 10, 1944, photograph, Museum of Performing Arts WA, [https://www.mopa.ptt.wa.gov.au/item/cjz2nlkec0ej3qr967q3k3s45-Mrs Beeby-founder-and-director-of-patch-theatre](https://www.mopa.ptt.wa.gov.au/item/cjz2nlkec0ej3qr967q3k3s45-Mrs%20Beeby-founder-and-director-of-patch-theatre).

¹⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 13.

¹¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 14.

¹² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 14.

¹³ Prompter, "The Lorgnette," *Observer*, November 12, 1904, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO19041112.2.7>; "Musical and Dramatic Bookings," *New Zealand Herald*, November 23, 1907, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19071123.2.85.37>; see also Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 23.

expression probably the most brilliant”.¹⁴ However, at sixteen, Ida developed a repetitive strain injury that hindered her ability to play long, difficult works, and which compelled her to develop her singing ability instead.¹⁵

Ida Sharland married her first husband, Philip Cole (known as Patrick), on her 21st birthday. Her mother had disapproved of the relationship since Ida, at 16, had first declared her intention to marry Cole. She was forced, therefore, to wait until adulthood, which in New Zealand was then the age of 21.¹⁶ Ida was interested in all that Cole, an Englishman, could tell her about musical life and the arts in London.¹⁷ She gave birth to her first and only child, Patricia Drakeford Cole (later, Patricia Thompson), in 1912. She continued giving piano lessons after her daughter’s birth to supplement Cole’s income.¹⁸ She occasionally taught singing lessons and accepted singing jobs where she performed in concerts or live over the wireless radio.¹⁹ Her students formed a club called ‘The Damenes’. She also became involved in acting and took on roles as part of the Auckland Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society.²⁰ Perhaps it was here where Ida found her love for amateur theatre. Later, Thompson wrote that “Ida always had this gift of inspiring passionate admiration and love in young girls,”²¹ something that was soon evident in her dance students at Patch. Ida and Patrick Cole separated in 1920, after years of fighting. By the time they divorced in 1923, she had fallen in love with a butcher’s assistant, Norman Kent.²² To obtain a divorce at this time was considered highly scandalous and is one example of Ida’s personal strength and unconventionality.²³

Ida Cole first met Kent after the Great War at the Auckland Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society.²⁴ They moved to Australia in 1925, where they married without having to face the judgement of their peers, accompanied by her mother and her then-teenage daughter.²⁵ In Sydney, Ida Kent attempted to establish herself as a professional singer or actress and took the name Mrs Ida Brookfield, which was her mother’s maiden name.²⁶ She won the leading role in a production of *The Merry Widow* at the Mosman Amateur Dramatic Show, but was never asked to take a leading role

¹⁴ Prompter, “The Lorgnette.”

¹⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 23.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 1.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 19.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 22.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 22.

²⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 28.

²¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 39.

²² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 36.

²³ Hayley Marina Brown, “Loosening the marriage bond: Divorce in New Zealand, c. 1890s-c. 1950s,” (Phd thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), 127; Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 38.

²⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 38.

²⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 38.

²⁶ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 63.

again.²⁷ She joined a ‘Scottish’ concert quartet that toured rural centres under the stage name Sheila Maclean.²⁸ She gave up this work, as well as her pursuit to become a professional performer, when Kent lost his job as a commercial traveller even before the economic depression hit Sydney.²⁹ Kent was unable to find another job and became reliant on Ida to support the family. She then worked as a sales assistant at Palings Department Store.³⁰ Thompson later remembered Norman Kent as “moody, silent, frigid”.³¹ The strained relationship ended when Ida and her mother paid for Kent’s third-class fare when he moved to Durban in South Africa, effectively removing him from their lives without going through another divorce. (Ida was thus, legally, Mrs Ida Kent throughout her relationship with Edward Beeby.)³² She stayed on as an assistant at Palings, where she attracted various male admirers—one of whom was Beeby.³³ They met there in 1927. Thompson recalled that Beeby used to visit Ida in the store on Friday nights, where he brought her chocolates and flowers; it was the start of a partnership that lasted more than two decades.³⁴

Edward Augustus Beeby was born in 1892 in Leichhardt, Sydney. He was one of four children of Sir George and Lady Helena Beeby. Sir George was a judge, lawyer, politician and playwright, whose career and influence shaped the opportunities of his children. He remained politically active throughout his career and was one of the founding members of the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales.³⁵ Sir George’s political activism and cultural engagement undoubtedly influenced his son, Edward Beeby, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. It is evident that Sir George’s interest in left-wing politics, theatre, and the law heavily guided Beeby as he trained as a solicitor in Sydney and was himself briefly involved in politics, although he did not enjoy the same political success as his father. Edward Beeby married Elizabeth Gregson McLaughlin in Manly in 1903. They had eight children together (one died as around the age of 5 in 1912), but the marriage eventually broke down and Beeby filed for divorce in 1921.³⁶ The divorce was not granted, resulting in Elizabeth filing for divorce on three further occasions; twice in 1922, and once in 1924 citing adultery with a

²⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 63, 64.

²⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 64.

²⁹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 73.

³⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 73.

³¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 74.

³² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 74.

³³ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 73.

³⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 73.

³⁵ Bede Nairn, “Beeby, Sir George Stephenson (1869-1942),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 7, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 28 October 2021, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/beeby-sir-george-stephenson-5183>.

³⁶ New South Wales State Archive and Records, “Edward Beeby Augustus - BEEBY Elizabeth Gregerson [sic],” *Divorce records Index 1873-1923*, 1921, <https://records-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1e5kcq1/INDEX1244727>; Beeby v. Beeby, 657 Supreme Court of New South Wales Matrimonial Causes (May 30, 1924).



Figure 4. Susan Watkins, *Portrait of Edward Beeby*, October 10, 1944, photograph, Museum of Performing Arts WA, <https://www.mopa.ptt.wa.gov.au/item/cjz2nlkec0ej4qr967ear6gd0-john-beeby-co-founder-of-patch-theatre>.

woman, Alma Robertson, as the cause for divorce.³⁷ Elizabeth petitioned for Beeby to pay alimony in these final divorce proceedings.³⁸ She was granted full custody of their children and Beeby was mandated by the court to pay her five pounds weekly and reimburse her for the cost of her lawyer

³⁷ New South Wales State Archive and Records, "BEEBY Elizabeth Gegerson [sic] - Edward Beeby Augustus," *Divorce records Index 1873-1923*, 1922, <https://records-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1e5kcq1/INDEX1244913>; New South Wales State Archive and Records, "BEEBY Elizabeth Gregson - Edward Beeby Augustus," *Divorce records Index 1873-1923*, 1922, <https://records-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1e5kcq1/INDEX1244903>; New South Wales State Archive and Records, "BEEBY Elizabeth Gregson - Edward Beeby A?????" *Divorce records Index 1873-1923*, 1924, <https://records-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1e5kcq1/INDEX1231169>.

³⁸ *Beeby v. Beeby*, (657 Supreme Court of New South Wales Matrimonial Causes, July 18, 1924).

which was twenty pounds.³⁹ However, the divorce proceedings indicate that Beeby did not fulfill these obligations.⁴⁰ It does not appear that Beeby remained close to his family after their separation.

Thompson later described Beeby as “a pleasant fellow, great fun to be with, energetic, warm-hearted, noisy, intelligent, well-informed, rather sentimental”.⁴¹ Playwright Alan Seymour, an actor with Patch in its early years, worked with Beeby at the wartime radio station. He later recalled Beeby: “what a great lion he was, with the mane of dark greying hair pushed back from his brow, his thick probably bi-focal glasses, his no longer—quite—handsome face, his endless smoking and his odd sloping stride”.⁴² Thompson described him as “a trendy”,⁴³ that is, someone who was considered to be modern, liberal, and progressive.

Beeby enjoyed a degree of apparent success as a solicitor, but he was not a successful businessman. Thompson remembers that he was often careless with other people’s money, and frequently created ‘get rich quick schemes’ with his friend, Edwin Drake.⁴⁴ This eventually resulted in him being unable to repay his investors, declaring bankruptcy and, in 1933, Beeby and Drake were charged (and later discharged) with ‘false pretences’ concerning the publication of a deceptive prospectus.⁴⁵ Regardless of his sub-standard business skills, Thompson later remembered that her family was considerably more affluent due to the presence of Beeby in their lives.⁴⁶



Figure 5. Edward and Ida Beeby at their Greenmount home. Source: Artist unknown, [Ida and Edward Beeby], photograph, donated by Val Clayton to the Patch Theatre Archive.

³⁹ *Beeby v. Beeby*, (657 Supreme Court of New South Wales Matrimonial Causes, May 30, 1924, March 10, 1925).

⁴⁰ *Beeby v. Beeby*, (657 Supreme Court of New South Wales Matrimonial Causes, May 30, 1924, March 10, 1925).

⁴¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 76.

⁴² Alan Seymour to David Crann, September 29, 1991, Patch Theatre Archive.

⁴³ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 74.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 76.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 80; and “No Criminal Intent,” *Truth*, May 14, 1933, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article169307722>.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 78.

When the Depression hit Sydney, Edward and Ida, along with her mother and daughter, were among the fortunate who were not forced out of their jobs and remained well fed and clothed throughout the early 1930s.⁴⁷ Ida and Edward Beeby successfully used the performing arts to build community in the years of economic depression. Even though Edward had not yet moved in with Ida, he had left his family home in Castlecrag and moved to a flat closer to Ida's house in Cremorne.⁴⁸ Ida and her mother cooked large Sunday-night suppers where "[a]nyone and everyone was welcome".⁴⁹ The lure of free food was enhanced by the popularity of Ida and Edward, whom everyone seemed to love, and the musical entertainment that occurred after dinner. In the living room there were two pianos set up beside each other: Edward's Steinway and Ida's old Bechstein.⁵⁰ On one night, all the guests joyfully attempted to play a Beethoven symphony scored for two pianos, though Thompson noted that "the undoubted stars were Ida and Bill [Edward]".⁵¹ On other occasions, Ida played Puccini's operas while guests sang along. These musical evenings created a community based around music and perhaps sparked confidence in Ida and Edward, who discovered they shared the ability to bring together a range of people. Then, around 1931, Ida and Edward moved in together in a flat at McMahon's Point, mainly to avoid the judgement of their previous neighbours who knew that both had living spouses. When they moved back into the city, Ida began referring to herself as Mrs Beeby.⁵²

In 1938, Beeby's problematic business dealings caught up with him when he was charged with, and found guilty the following year, of personal misconduct by the Statutory Committee of the Incorporated Law Institute. His offences were failing to keep account of the money he received, not revealing his true position to his clients, and mixing their money with his own. He was suspended from his legal practice for two years.⁵³ These charges and the collapse of his legal practice triggered the Beebys' departure from Sydney in 1938. Perhaps wary of the legal and social ramifications of Beeby's disgrace, Mrs Beeby used the name Grace Sharland when she first arrived in Perth. The first mention of her was in a June issue of the *West Australian*, where Grace Sharland was credited with performing the music for the Theosophical Society at Arundale Hall on James Street.⁵⁴ With the Beebys' hasty exit from Sydney and subsequent unplanned relocation, it was thus an awkward introduction of the Beebys to Perth.

⁴⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 77-78.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 77.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 78.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 79.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 79.

⁵² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 79-81.

⁵³ "Solicitor Struck Off Rolls," *The West Wyalong Advocate*, 10 March 10, 1939, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article185715095>.

⁵⁴ "Theosophical Society," *The West Australian*, June 18, 1938, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article42088320>.

Political activism in 1930s Perth

Perth society, like many other cities in Australia, was impacted by the international economic and ideological turmoil of the 1930s. The collapse of the New York stock exchange in 1929 caused years of global economic hardship and mass unemployment. In Australia, this crisis led to a collapse in prices and the slump in the value of two of the country's main exports: wheat and wool. This dramatically decreased the amount of money generated by Australia's export income.⁵⁵ As farmers struggled with the fall in demand for these two goods, other industries were subsequently affected and unemployment increased throughout Australia.⁵⁶ The situation in Perth was made more difficult by the state's inability to provide adequate unemployment relief; Sir James Mitchell's government was only able to provide welfare for four months before exhausting its funds.⁵⁷ Moreover, this relief was often provided in the form of meals, food and beds; less than a third of its aid was provided as cash.⁵⁸ At the height of the Depression in Perth in 1932, the unemployment rate hit its peak, with just over 30 percent of male trade unionists recorded as unemployed.⁵⁹ Alternative political voices grew louder in the face of the government's failure to offer a comprehensive response to the economic slump, as more people began to question the existing capitalist structure. Ideological activism increased over the decade, as European political turmoil reached Perth and heightened after the outbreak of civil war in Spain in 1936. The rise of political activism in the 1930s, including the presence of anti-fascist groups in Perth, informs our understanding of Edward Beeby's political activism throughout World War Two, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two.

In 1933, the state had a population of over 460,000 non-Indigenous inhabitants with 207,440 residing in the Perth area.⁶⁰ Growing dissatisfaction with Mitchell's government and widespread economic hardship drove people to a culture of protest in these years. The biggest demonstration was the Treasury Riot on 6 March 1931. Three thousand unemployed workers gathered outside the Treasury Building to protest against the National-Country Party government's inability to support the unemployed and their families, either through improved employment or adequate relief.⁶¹ Other large industrial events included the Fremantle Wool Stores Strike in late

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Bolton, "Unemployment and Politics in Western Australia," *Labour History*, no. 17 (1969): 90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27507955>; David J. Potts, *The Myth of the Great Depression*, (Carlton North, Vic: Scribe Publications, 2009), 7.

⁵⁶ Bolton, "Unemployment and Politics," 90.

⁵⁷ Jenny Gregory, *City of Light: A History of Perth Since the 1950s* (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2003), 8; Alex Salmon, "The 1931 Treasury Building Riot," in *Radical Perth Militant Fremantle*, eds. Charles Fox, Bobbie Oliver, and Lenore Layman (Perth: Black Swan Press, Curtin University, 2017), 125.

⁵⁸ Gregory, *City of Light*, 8.

⁵⁹ Gregory, *City of Light*, 7; Bolton, "Unemployment and Politics," 80.

⁶⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2006*, (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012006>

⁶¹ Paul Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent: Activism in 1930s Fremantle," (Master of Philosophy thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, 2018), 3; Salmon, "The 1931 Treasury Building Riot," 125.

1931 and the Frankland River March in August 1932.⁶² These protests and demonstrations were more an expression of the workers' anger and discontent than any strong political convictions or allegiance, despite the claims by police and a conservative local press of foreign communist involvement.⁶³

Despite such protests, Geoffrey Bolton and Frank Crowley famously propagated a narrative of relative social cohesion within the state's population during this period. In his work *A Fine Country to Starve In*, Bolton claimed that Western Australia escaped significant radicalisation, organised militancy and internal division during the Depression, particularly when compared to experiences of the eastern states.⁶⁴ He argued that protest was driven by 'outsiders' (that is, people born outside of the state),⁶⁵ which he suggests was due to several possible factors: the absence then of a Trades and Labour Council, the channelling of discontent into the secession movement, and/or the resourcefulness of Perth's men and women to live off the land.⁶⁶ Crowley adopted a similar stance in his mid-century work, *Australia's Western Third*, in which he suggested that the consensual and collective values of Perth's society suppressed protest, dissent and activism.⁶⁷ This idea was subsequently heavily critiqued by such historians as Tom Stannage, Jenny Gregory, Charlie Fox, Paul Reilly and Dylan Hyde. They have since argued that, while Perth may not have experienced the degree of political turmoil and social upheaval that was more common in Europe, it was still a place characterised by division, political activism, and internal conflict.⁶⁸

Support for secession from the Commonwealth gathered momentum during the early 1930s, too. Bolton claimed that only a minority of Western Australians genuinely supported secession. In *A Land of Vision and Mirage*, he argued that many channelled their frustration with the government's inadequate economic policies into the revitalisation of a secessionist movement.⁶⁹ David Black had earlier argued that secession diverted the attention of some who might otherwise have become active in radical political activism. He suggested that the secession movement was

⁶² Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 48-52.

⁶³ Dylan Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon: The History of the Perth Workers' Art Guild* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2019), 18.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, (Perth, W.A.: University of Western Australia in association with Edith Cowan University, 1994), 268.

⁶⁵ Bolton, *A Fine Country*, 268.

⁶⁶ Bolton, "Unemployment and Politics," 81.

⁶⁷ F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from First Settlement to Modern Times* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1960).

⁶⁸ C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City* (Perth: Carroll's for Perth City Council, 1979); Jenny Gregory, *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939* (Perth: Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1990); Charles Fox, Bobbie Oliver, and Lenore Layman, *Radical Perth Militant Fremantle* (Perth: Black Swan Press, Curtin University, 2017); Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent"; Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*.

⁶⁹ Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Publishing, 2007), 92, ProQuest Ebook Central.

bolstered by a widespread belief that Joseph Lyons' federal government was the cause of the state's economic problems, due to its large increase in tariff protection in 1930 and the creation of the Loan Council.⁷⁰ When a third of Western Australia's voted to secede from the Commonwealth in 1933, it revealed the state's widespread sense of isolation and discontent with the political dominance of eastern states.⁷¹ Reilly adds that the lack of any radical socialist platform by Labor or any other political party further added to the popularity of the secession movement. Campaigning for secession was a means to protest unpopular federal and state policies and provided a clear focus for popular discontent.⁷²

The frequency of public demonstrations declined after late 1933 due to growing economic improvements (driven partly by an increase in gold prices) and declining unemployment levels. The election of Philip Collier's Labor government in April that same year brought with it improved links to the unemployed through the labour movement and an increase in welfare through sustenance work.⁷³ Despite widespread economic recovery by the end of the decade, unemployment was still at ten percent for men in 1939 and many people still lived in slums, demonstrating the pervasive effects of the Depression.

In addition to the economic situation, the growth of fascism in Europe (and, even, Australia) provoked many in Perth to join left-wing groups that sought to stimulate a social and political response. Socialism became more popular during this period as its supporters, mainly those from an emerging non-conformist intellectual class, saw it as a more viable alternative to the capitalist system and a way to combat the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain.⁷⁴ Many writers and artists adopted the political theories of communism and socialism.

Two key organisations in Perth at this time were the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), which established a branch in Western Australia in 1931, and the Movement Against War and Fascism (MAWF), established in 1933. The CPA was formed in the eastern states before the Depression as a small propagandist group.⁷⁵ While the Depression stimulated an increase in its membership (from 249 nationwide in 1928 to approximately 4000 in 1940), its influence and membership in Western Australia remained comparatively small.⁷⁶ The CPA had a mixture of both

⁷⁰ David Black, "The Era of Labor Ascendancy," in *A New History of Western Australia*, edited by C.T. Stannage (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 420-422.

⁷¹ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 33.

⁷² Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 5.

⁷³ Sandra Wilson, "Police Perceptions of Protest: The Perth 'Treasury Riot' of March 1931," *Labour History*, no. 52 (1987): 65. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27508822>.

⁷⁴ Wilson, "Police Perceptions of Protest," 70; Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973), 148, 173; Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 49.

⁷⁵ Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 49; Wilson, "Police Perceptions of Protest," 70.

⁷⁶ Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 49; Wilson, "Police Perceptions of Protest," 70.

local and interstate members, the most prominent being Katharine Susannah Prichard, a founding member of the CPA in 1920.⁷⁷ Other left-wing groups also emerged in Perth, such as the Militant Minority Movement, Modern Women's Club, Left Book Club, League of Nations Union, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Still, it was the CPA that made the federal and state governments most apprehensive.⁷⁸ An awareness of these groups' abilities to capitalise on the social discontent and the increase in protests and demonstrations triggered the federal government to seek to repress political activism.⁷⁹ The Joseph Lyons government aimed to limit workers' opportunities to mobilise by enabling an increase in police intervention, which included harassing activists (raiding their homes and club rooms), excluding radical and communist individuals from relief work, and keeping political organisations under surveillance.⁸⁰ Members of leftist groups, mostly CPA members, were easy targets for the state, even though few of the unemployed protesters categorised themselves as communists. The CPA's growth was hindered in the early 1930s by the hostile opposition of moderate left-wing organisations, notably the Labor party and the trade unions, which traditionally had strong ties with the working class.⁸¹ Thus, there was reduced political opportunity for socialist reform and radical voices.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 spurred a further rise in socialism and anti-fascist support.⁸² Spanish nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco and the military, launched an unsuccessful coup against the left-wing Republican government in 1936 that catapulted the country into a three-year conflict and triggered an international debate in other countries regarding the growth of fascism in Europe. Anti-fascist supporters had been active in Perth since the mid-1920s, but the Spanish Civil War made the threat of fascism more immediately concerning for people. Support for the anti-fascist movement was largely evident in the migrant communities of Perth and Fremantle: the Italians and, chiefly, the Yugoslavians. Many members of the CPA were Yugoslavs.⁸³ Both groups were acutely aware of, and sometimes directly affected by the rise of fascism in their home countries. While some members of the Fremantle Italian community, in line with the Italian consulate and local fascist organisations, supported Benito Mussolini, others strongly opposed it.⁸⁴ For example, the *Giovane Italia* Club opposed the rise of fascism and distributed socialist literature

⁷⁷ Charlie Fox, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Inter-War Peace Movement," in *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle*, edited by Charlie Fox, Bobbie Oliver, Lenore Layman (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2017), 59.

⁷⁸ Alex Salmon, "Unemployed," (Master thesis, Murdoch University, 1998), 134.

⁷⁹ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 9.

⁸⁰ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 3, 76.

⁸¹ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 9.

⁸² Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 26.

⁸³ Charlie Fox, "Yugoslavs and Inter-War Radicalism in Perth, 1918-1945," in *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle*, edited by Charlie Fox, Bobbie Oliver, Lenore Layman (Perth WA, Black Swan Press, 2017), 98.

⁸⁴ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 62-65.

to its members, in direct opposition to the pro-fascist propaganda spread by *Casa Degli Italiani* (Italian Houses) and the Italian Club.⁸⁵ The Yugoslav community had an even stronger reason to oppose fascism, as many of its migrants came to Australia after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to escape the poverty and political persecution they experienced under Yugoslavia's fascist government.⁸⁶ Thus, many had first-hand experience of life under fascism and sought to stop its spread. Support for the Republican government in Spain was seen as vital to fight the spread of fascism in Europe, and, while Australia, following the lead of other European countries, opted to remain neutral in that conflict, many private organisations and individuals provided aid to Spain. The MAWF and the Spanish Relief Committee were two key drivers of support in Perth.⁸⁷

By the time the Beebys arrived in Perth in 1938, Perth had largely emerged from the economic depression of the early 1930s, though its scars remained evident. Growing optimism as the economy recovered was hampered by concern at the prospect of further war in Europe. Perth had experienced the growth of radical politics and, particularly, the rise of left-wing activism. While Perth's dissident groups did not constitute the majority, there is evidence that many locals were politically active. While Bolton and Crawley argued that Perth society was dominated by cohesion and consensus, the presence of many alternative groups, and more recent historical research, suggests that this was not always the case.

Perth's Culture and Arts of the 1930s

In the early 1930s, Perth, the most isolated capital city in the world, in a state with less than half a million inhabitants, needed some creative stimulus to move it beyond a dull parochial city.⁸⁸

Though Perth was an isolated and provincial city in the 1930s, the same decade also saw a change in its cultural landscape. It was the period when homegrown artists flourished, and local theatre groups proliferated. Companies such as the Workers Arts Guild challenged the status quo and exposed Perth to new, radical and culturally enlightened ways of thinking and being. This shift to the development of a local arts industry is what allowed Patch to thrive in its first decade as the people of Perth had, by the late 1930s, been primed to participate in dance, drama, and musical pursuits.

The development of the arts in Australia's non-Indigenous communities had, since colonisation, been an amalgamation of imported cultural products, including theatre, film, music, art

⁸⁵ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 62; see Richard Bosworth, "Luigi Mistrorigo and 'La Stampa Italiana': the Strange Story of a Fascist Journalist in Perth," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 12 (1991): 61–70, <https://doi/10.3316/ielapa.920707682>.

⁸⁶ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 63.

⁸⁷ Reilly, "Harbouring Discontent," 67.

⁸⁸ Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 50.

and dance styles from Britain, Europe and, later, the United States. In Western Australia, entertainment was also imported from the eastern states. This trend was evident in the theatre and film industries even in the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, theatre in Western Australia was mainly offered by professional companies who toured from the eastern states, or the occasional production from Europe.⁸⁹ Australian theatrical companies were then largely controlled by several chains in the eastern states: Rickard's in vaudeville, Tait brothers in concerts and J.C. Williamsons in spectacles.⁹⁰ As the production of a major event was expensive, these chains imported shows that had proven popular in New York and London as this provided a good indicator of success with Australian audiences.⁹¹ With the arrival of the 'talkies' in the 1920s, cinemas regularly imported films from the United States and the United Kingdom. Sound was introduced to Perth cinema in April 1929 and quickly overtook live theatre as one of the main forms of popular entertainment.⁹² While Perth audiences therefore experienced the best of national and international stage and screen, the power of imported entertainment made it more difficult to create local products.⁹³

The dearth of locally produced theatre (and other performing arts) before the 1930s meant that Perth acquired a reputation for cultural stagnation. The historian Patricia Kotai-Ewers argued that many found Perth to be an isolated "dull, parochial city,"⁹⁴ though the local journalist, Norman Bartlett, later wrote he felt "no sense of intellectual or social isolation"⁹⁵ growing up in Perth during the interwar years. Bartlett attributed this to the efforts of several individuals and organisations who were active within the university, drama, and literary spheres, including companies such as the Workers' Art Guild and the Repertory Club, and such cultural leaders as Keith George and Katherine Susannah Prichard.⁹⁶ Still, it was a relatively conservative state for those who lived outside of these progressive cultural and political circles. Bartlett's small list of influencers indicates how underdeveloped Perth's intellectual and cultural infrastructure remained.

The economic depression of the early 1930s changed some of this dependence on outside imported culture as local playwriting, directing, painting, acting, and writing increased in Western Australia. Notable works were created by such writers as Prichard, George, and Harald Vike. The Repertory Club in Perth staged opening performances of 30 new Australian plays from 1932 to 1942,

⁸⁹ "The Theatre and The People," *The Daily News*, October 5, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article83307255>.

⁹⁰ Lynn Fisher, "Dance Class: A History of Professional Dance and Dance Training in Western Australia from 1895-1940," (Master of Arts Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1992), 115.

⁹¹ Fisher, "Dance Class," 115.

⁹² Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 52.

⁹³ Fisher, "Dance Class," 115.

⁹⁴ Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers," 50.

⁹⁵ Norman Bartlett, "Perth in the Turbulent Thirties," *Westerly*, no. 4 (1977): 61, 67.

⁹⁶ Bartlett, "Perth in the Turbulent Thirties," 61.

suggesting an enormous cultural shift was under way.⁹⁷ It was also during this time the first magazine dedicated to the arts in Western Australia, *Music and Drama*, was first published. The magazine reported on local dramatic and cultural events from 1933 until it ceased publication in 1939.⁹⁸ Another significant development in Perth's art scene was the establishment of the West Australian Drama Festival in 1937, the first of its kind in Australia, which was held at His Majesty's Theatre.⁹⁹ This festival is further evidence of the growing strength of Perth's amateur theatres and interest in locally produced drama in the 1930s.

Amateur theatre flourished during the interwar years, though many commercial theatres struggled to survive during the Depression as imported shows were expensive due to the high travel costs from the length of time it took to transport the show to Perth. As audience numbers decreased and revenue fell, many commercial theatres could not afford to continue importing shows.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the government doubled the entertainment tax,¹⁰¹ creating another blow for Australian theatres, forcing many to close or be converted to cinemas.¹⁰² J.N. Tait surmised that if "the Slump spelled the death of theatre, the entertainment tax buried it".¹⁰³ Live theatre was then sustained by amateur and semi-professional companies that proliferated in Perth in the 1930s. Perth's theatres mirrored the broadening of its political scene, which were described by Terry Craig as ranging between the radical and conservative. Unlike experiences abroad, however, where theatre was often split according to ideological lines, Craig suggests that there was "an open and unblushing co-operation"¹⁰⁴ between theatre companies on either end of the political spectrum in 1930s Perth.

Conservative theatre was represented by the Perth Repertory Club, Perth's oldest amateur theatre group in the 1930s. Paul Hasluck—a journalist and theatre critic who went on to become an Australian statesman and Governor-General—and the scholar P.A. Doherty both considered the Repertory Club to be the most important local company of the period.¹⁰⁵ It was seen as a 'respectable' and cherished part of the Perth community. In 1933, the company, and its 500 members, moved from their premises on Pier Street to the West Australian Chambers on St

⁹⁷ Hough, "The Playmakers," 34.

⁹⁸ P.A. Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," (PhD Thesis, Graylands Teacher College, 1962), 18.

⁹⁹ Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," 14.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre in Perth in the 1930s," in *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939*, ed. Jenny Gregory (Perth: Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1990), 106.

¹⁰¹ The *Entertainments Tax Act 1925* imposed a tax on payments of admission for entertainment events and the *Entertainment Tax Act Amendment Act 1930* doubled the amount of tax that was imposed on these payments.

¹⁰² Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 107.

¹⁰³ P. McGuire, *The Australian Theatre*, Melbourne 1948, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 116.

¹⁰⁵ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 106.

George's Terrace, the old *West Australian* newspaper building, after the venue was converted into a theatre and opened by then Premier, Sir James Mitchell.¹⁰⁶ The Repertory Club produced light-hearted comedies and thrillers that reflected the dominant social values of Perth's 1930s community.¹⁰⁷ Its radical opposition was led by the Workers' Art Guild, which was born out of the Perth Workers' Theatre of George and Prichard.¹⁰⁸ The Guild had strong ties to the Communist Party of Australia and international communist organisations. Consequently, its plays were largely political and critiqued both capitalism and fascism.¹⁰⁹ This binary conceptualisation of Perth's theatre politics has been largely accepted by the scholars Dylan Hyde and David Hough, though Hough notes that the political middle ground was largely occupied by the University of Western Australia's University Dramatic Society from 1922.¹¹⁰ This was the theatrical atmosphere that precipitated Patch's creation.

A School of Dance and Theatre: 1938 – 1939

[T]wo people turned a dirty, oil-stained, and machine-scarred room in Barrack Street, into a studio for the study of music and dramatic art.¹¹¹

After the Beebys arrived in Perth, they moved into a cottage in Greenmount, an outer suburb and cultural centre in the Darling Ranges, home to artistic and literary figures such as Katherine Susannah Prichard.¹¹² It did not take them long to appraise Perth's artistic scene and determine that the city needed a teaching institution dedicated to educating the working class in the arts.¹¹³ Initially Mrs Beeby established the Grace Sharland School of Music and Singing in late 1938.¹¹⁴ It is unclear whether Patch was an evolution of this school, or whether it was a separate venture, but it is clear that the studio and school that became known as Patch Theatre officially started in July 1939 in the heart of the city.¹¹⁵ The company commenced as a small meeting of people interested in the arts. Weekly lectures on theatre and music were offered, as were dance and drama classes.¹¹⁶ These first

¹⁰⁶ Polygon, "Repertory Club," *The West Australian*, August 4, 1933, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article33308231>.

¹⁰⁷ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 106.

¹⁰⁸ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ For more information on pre-war censorship see Sarah Ann Jones, "Pornography : Power and Sexuality in Post War Australia," (PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Hough, "The Playmakers," 31.

¹¹¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

¹¹² For more information on Greenmount as a cultural centre see Trea Wiltshire, *Arts on the edge: Darlington, the place, the people, the festival*, (Darlington, WA: Darlington History Group Inc, 2020).

¹¹³ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Miscellaneous Notes.

¹¹⁴ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹¹⁵ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir"; Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 165.

¹¹⁶ Biddy Walker, interview by Deborah Gare, December 2, 2020; Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

lectures and classes were convened in a small room on the first floor of the Bon Marché building, a three-storey department store located between Hay and Murray Streets that had taken over in 1919 what was originally the Brookman Buildings.¹¹⁷ The Beebys moved down from the hills to be closer to the studio in mid-1939 and lived at 27 Hale Flat Mount Street, although they still visited their Greenmount cottage on the weekends as it was close to their friends.¹¹⁸

The Beebys' intention for their studio and school was to democratise the arts by providing the working classes with the opportunity to participate in and patronise the theatre. The aim, they declared in a souvenir program printed for its fifth anniversary,



Figure 6. Well into the 1940s Patch offered a complex program of multiple events, including lectures about theatre and dance. While classes and lectures were charged an entrance fee, tickets to performances were free. Audiences were, instead, asked to donate to the collection at the end of each performance, ensuring the accessibility of the theatre to all—but also avoiding the government's costly 'entertainment tax' and royalties that would have been owed for performance rights. Source: *West Australian*, May 29, 1943, 5, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page3741623>.

is to provide for the citizens of Perth a cultural centre in the arts of music, drama and dancing to bring these arts within the reach of every purse, to encourage the development of talent in those branches of the Arts and stimulate a wider interest in them; to develop a critical faculty both amongst students and in audiences so that standards can be established and maintained; to prove that this can be done with a spirit of co-operation and hard work motivating all activities.¹¹⁹

Patch can be understood as part of the spread of amateur or 'little theatres' that spread throughout Australia in the interwar period. Historian Jennifer Radbourne defined these theatres as ones that provided "theatrical experiences for both actors and audience in a workshop of

¹¹⁷ "Women's Sphere," *Westralian Worker*, July 14, 1939, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article148391065>; Heritage Perth, 'Bon Marche Arcade,' accessed February 2, 2022, <https://heritageperth.com.au/properties/bon-marche-arcade/>.

¹¹⁸ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Miscellaneous Notes; Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 165.

¹¹⁹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

educational processes not found in professional theatre”.¹²⁰ She outlined the role of amateur theatre as one that is defined by its service to the community by sustaining the general public’s interest in drama and its production of theatrical experiences.¹²¹ Hundreds of people became actively involved in little theatres in interwar Perth as the value of theatre for many lay in its communal and relational ability. As one Perth newspaper reported in 1937, little theatres created “a theatre which is truly and genuinely a people’s theatre, a part of our community life”.¹²² This provides evidence for what architectural historian Ross Thorne suggested: that amateur theatre’s purpose became less about providing commercial entertainment and more about creating a theatre of involvement and community, where individuals were connected via their passion for theatre as a recreational activity.¹²³ The Beebys tapped into this phenomenon with the creation of Patch; its offer of community was one of the reasons it was so valuable to its members. Patricia Thompson described the community atmosphere at Patch, “there were club-rooms where you could always find someone to talk to and where you could buy a cheap hot lunch cooked by a dear old girl who served Patch with touching devotion”.¹²⁴ This reveals the social nature of Patch; it was a place to connect with others in addition to learning dramatic, musical and dance skills. The marked increase in the number of amateur theatres demonstrates that people in Perth were eager to participate in community-driven theatre. When Patch entered the scene, the company was able to utilise an established market for amateur theatre, while offering something new as an affordable school of dance, drama and music.

It seems, too, that Patch steered largely away from politics. In the *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Peter Mann proposed that Patch sat with the Repertory Club on the conservative side of theatre—which, if true, would have been contrary to Edward Beeby’s left-wing political activism.¹²⁵ In fact, whereas the Repertory Club catered to the middle classes with highbrow conservative drawing-room comedies and dramas, and the Workers’ Art Guild targeted the working class with its political plays, the Beebys sought to create, through Patch, a space to perform ‘high’ culture plays for the working classes. ‘High’ culture in the 1940s often meant importing plays from Britain and the United States. Successful American and British plays were a financially safer option than producing

¹²⁰ Jennifer J. Radbourne, “Little Theatre: Its Development, Since World War II, in Australia, With Particular Reference to Queensland,” (Master of Arts thesis, University of Queensland, 1978), 2.

¹²¹ Radbourne, “Little Theatre,” 4.

¹²² “The Theatre and The People,” *The Daily*.

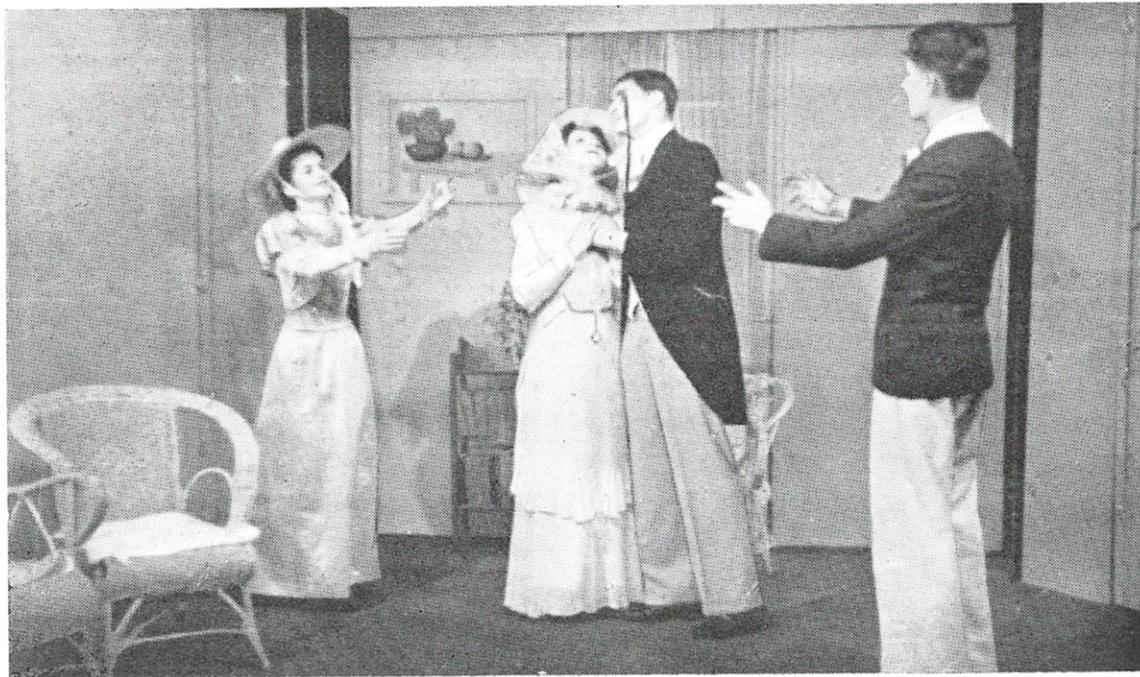
¹²³ Ross Thorne, *Community (Amateur) Theatre*, (Sydney: Architectural Research Foundation, University of Sydney, 1970), 5.

¹²⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 182.

¹²⁵ Peter Mann, “Patch Theatre,” in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 428-429.

unknown Australian plays, something that the commercial theatres in the eastern states had known and practiced for decades.

Patch's intentions could be criticised since it was a company run by middle-class people who could be seen as aiming to 'enlighten' the working classes in a paternalistic manner. It was not unusual for the middle classes in the early twentieth century to attempt to control what the working classes did in their leisure time. In the interwar years, and later during the Second World War, there



A SCENE ON THE STAGE AT "LITTLE PATCH."

Figure 7. Patch actors performing a scene from *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1939 or 1940 at Bon Marché. Source: Artist unknown, *A Scene on the Stage at Little Patch*, 1940, photograph, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth, WA: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

was considerable fearmongering propagated by the upper classes over a decline in moral standards, which they thought threatened Australian society.¹²⁶ Some self-appointed 'moral guardians' of the public attempted to curtail improper leisure activities for Perth society, specifically those of the working classes, while introducing 'proper' activities to promote what they approved of as wholesome, moral and appropriate entertainment and cultural activities.¹²⁷ Despite this, it does not appear the Beebys were acting as moral guardians in their roles at Patch. Instead, their socialist beliefs and admiration for the Soviet Union's commitment to bringing culture to the people inspired them to teach dance and drama to Perth's working class. Further, their unconventional relationship hardly positioned them as moral paragons within conservative society.

¹²⁶ Davis, "Good Times for All?" 78.

¹²⁷ Davis, "Good Times for All?" 78.

The Beebys appeared to be an exotic, charismatic, interesting couple that a lot of young working-class people were drawn to. In her recent interview with Deborah Gare, Bidy Walker (née Wilkinson), a dancer at Patch in the 1940s, described them as an unusual couple—very good-looking, very talented and very interesting.¹²⁸ The fact that they had come from Sydney may have made them seem more cultured and modern to their Perth students. Their charismatic personalities no doubt contributed to the company's initial success, for they attracted a large number of students in music, drama and dance within the company's first six months.¹²⁹ Patch was so popular with its members that the Beebys were encouraged to prepare for public performances, expanding Patch's space within the Bon Marché to another room across the hall.¹³⁰ Beeby converted the room into a small stage, only 2.4 meters wide and 2.7 meters deep with a 46-centimetre back-stage passageway, and an auditorium that was able to seat sixty people on folding chairs.¹³¹ Beeby also rigged up a limited lighting system behind tin sheeting reflectors.¹³² The stage was so small that the audiences' feet in the front row slipped under the curtain.¹³³ Indeed, there was an instance in 1940 at the performance of Molière's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* when one cast member thought he recognised a pair of shoes beneath the curtain and grasped one of the feet, only to discover that it belonged to a stranger.¹³⁴ It is no wonder that these premises were referred to as 'Little Patch' after the company moved to the larger Munster House in 1941.¹³⁵

At its core, Patch was a cooperative, collective, and thrifty operation. It charged two pounds and six shillings for a one-year membership plus a class fee of one shilling.¹³⁶ By comparison, in 1937, the Repertory Club charged its female members thirty pounds for an annual membership and its male members 10 pounds and six shillings, with an extra two pounds and six shillings to cover the entertainment tax.¹³⁷ Patch's low-cost membership was indicative of its aim to encourage people with lower incomes to participate in the arts.¹³⁸ Hazel Dawson, a dance student under the Beebys at Patch, later wrote that all the Patch members were "working boys and girls".¹³⁹ As a cooperative movement, there was an understanding that its members were expected to assist with other

¹²⁸ Walker, interview.

¹²⁹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁰ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³² Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³³ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁴ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁵ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁶ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁷ "Service Department," *The West Australian*, February 13, 1934, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32766538>; "Woman's Realm," *The West Australian*, September 10, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article41428752>.

¹³⁸ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁹ Hazel Dawson to David Crann, February 16, 2006.

tasks.¹⁴⁰ One former dance student of the period recalled in a recent interview with me that this helped to create a sense of shared ownership in the company: “It was your theatre, and you treated it as if it was your own”.¹⁴¹ Dance and drama students were recruited to hand out tea and biscuits during the interval of performances and rostered members were responsible for front of house duties, such as selling tickets.¹⁴² The dancer recollected that,

everyone had to do something, you don't just join then and that's it. If you're interested in theatre you have to go along to the productions, which were Thursday, Fridays and Saturday nights. And you just had to take your turn on the door and serve teas at the interval.¹⁴³

This collaborative spirit was best represented by its patchwork curtain. The curtain was made up of donated ‘patches’ of material—from which the company took its name—and was created by sometimes as many as twenty volunteers piecing and sewing it together while sitting on the floor of the studio in the evening. The curtain took around three weeks to construct, with Pat Walken



Figure 8. Ida Beeby stands in front of the patchwork curtain before a performance at Munster House. Source: Doc K. Stenberg (director), *Theatre in Australia*, 1949, screenshot of film, National Film and Sound Archive. <https://youtu.be/QONAuO8oBhM?t=1462>.

coordinating its assemblage.¹⁴⁴ There were often ‘busy bee’ workshops on the weekends at which company members and students helped create sets for upcoming productions.¹⁴⁵ Patch’s community

¹⁴⁰ Patch Theatre, “Patch Souvenir.”

¹⁴¹ Interview with former Patch dancer [Anonymous] with Elizabeth Leong, September 24, 2021, UNDA.

¹⁴² Hazel Dawson, “Patch Theatre 1946 – 51,” Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁴³ Interview with former Patch dancer, September 24, 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Patch Theatre, “Patch Souvenir”; Judy Smythe to Patch Theatre, June 29, 2005, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁴⁵ Dawson, “Patch Theatre 1946 – 51.”

spirit was further demonstrated by its contributions to the war effort, when members would gather on Saturday afternoons to make camouflage nets for the army.¹⁴⁶

Even though Patch was an amateur theatre it was also a business that provided the Beebys with their income, so they had to make decisions that balanced their desire to be accessible while remaining financially profitable. Until 1946, to maximize the benefit of the cost and effort that went into a production, Patch adopted a long-season policy. It ran plays from six to fourteen weeks, with up to three performances a week, and reached an audience of up to nine thousand people per season.¹⁴⁷ One Patch member later suggested that the audience mainly consisted of working-class people, unionists and left-wing sympathisers.¹⁴⁸ There was no set cost for admittance to plays during the war, though patrons were encouraged to contribute to the 'Patch plate' that was passed around after a performance.¹⁴⁹ This was to avoid paying the entertainment tax and royalties for the plays the company imported, although the method was not foolproof. In 1948, Patch laid itself open to a damages claim due to an unauthorised production of *Life with Father*, which it had first staged in 1943 without paying royalties.¹⁵⁰ The low cost of admittance made Patch more accessible than other amateur theatre clubs. Tickets from the Repertory Club, by comparison, were two shillings and six pence for public seasons, and typically seasons were only available to members and their guests.¹⁵¹ Another amateur theatre group, the Independent Players, charged two shillings and three pence for performances.¹⁵² Patch's method of seeking donations in a collection plate meant that some audience members took advantage of the theatre and contributed only a shilling—and sometimes nothing at all.¹⁵³ Despite this, the profit from the performances plus the fees for the lessons meant that the company was sufficiently profitable to hire staff.¹⁵⁴ By the late 1940s there were three full-time staff: Jean Wilkinson (dance instructor), Jean Rule (drama instructor), and Flo Barnard (wardrobe mistress). There were also two part-time staff: Mae Meadows (secretary), and Maggie Barnard (cleaning and kitchen duties).¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁶ Smythe to Patch Theatre, June 29, 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁴⁸ Gloria O'Connor, in discussion with David Crann, October 14, 2004. Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁴⁹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁵⁰ "Theatre is 'Safe' From Claim," *The Daily News*, April 12, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article80788006>.

¹⁵¹ "Coming Events," *The West Australian*, July 31, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47154656>;

"Advertising," *The Daily News*, May 10, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78388534>.

¹⁵² "Comedy Aids ACF," *The Daily News*, March 29, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78796448>;

"Advertising," *The Daily News*, August 6, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article83134498>.

¹⁵³ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 5 (Perth: Patersons Printing Press June 1946), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

¹⁵⁴ Crann, August 2003 – March 2004, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁵⁵ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51,"; Bernadette Houseley, in conversation with David Crann, 2005, Patch Theatre Archive.

The Commencement of War

Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of the persistence of Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.¹⁵⁶

When the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, broadcast his declaration of war on the evening of 3 September 1939, it altered the trajectory of Patch that was, still, in its very infancy. A group of students tuned in to the broadcast while stitching the curtain in the Bon Marché studio.¹⁵⁷ Patricia Thompson, Mrs Beeby's daughter, remembered that a "lot of tears got sewn into the patchwork curtain that night."¹⁵⁸ It was reported in the *Westralian Worker*, the voice of the Labor party, that "Some of the younger ones openly wept. The older ones went quiet and still. The merry chatter ceased, and the party broke up early to re-adjust itself to what all knew would mean new and changing conditions for everyone."¹⁵⁹ As a result, the foundation years of the company were shaped by the impact of war and conditions of the homefront.

The war affected Perth's many theatres in different ways. After 1941, amateur theatre was mainly sustained by Patch and the Repertory Club, as many other clubs decreased their activities due to the absence of male members. The Workers' Arts Guild ended in 1942.¹⁶⁰ The Garrick Theatre was forced to suspend its activities for the duration of the war.¹⁶¹ The Independent Players lost their rooms during the war, which initiated the company's decline.¹⁶² For Patch at least, the effect of the war was mostly positive. Its business model—which included the 'Patch plate' and dance and drama lessons—enabled it to build on its success and sustain itself in such a way that it increased its membership and audience. Its popularity was so considerable that Biddy Walker (née Wilkinson) remembered the theatre was always packed during a performance, that it was always packed to capacity.¹⁶³ There was also a waitlist for classes.¹⁶⁴ While many of its original male and female members left to serve in the armed forces or the women's auxiliary services, the company still had enough members to operate.¹⁶⁵ It also attracted new students and members who sought activities to occupy their time on the homefront. Wilkinson recalled that Patch attracted wives and girlfriends of

¹⁵⁶ Robert Menzies, "Menzies Declaration of War" (radio transcript), September 3, 1939, <https://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/menzies-speech-declaration-war/clip1/>

¹⁵⁷ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁵⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 168.

¹⁵⁹ "Women's Sphere," *Westralian Worker*.

¹⁶⁰ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 197, 252.

¹⁶¹ Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," 19.

¹⁶² Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," 14.

¹⁶³ Walker, interview.

¹⁶⁴ Hazel Dawson to David Crann, May 18, 2005, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁶⁵ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

young men who were away at war.¹⁶⁶ A few men remained with the company during the war, unable to serve abroad or too young, such as Morris Hertz, Charles Hamilton, and Allan Trevor.¹⁶⁷

Just over a week after the announcement that Australia was at war, Patch staged its first theatrical performance, *Paolo and Francesca*, by Stephen Philips, a romantic tragedy about a forbidden love between a wife and her brother-in-law.¹⁶⁸ Eve Hewitt, one of the initial members of Patch, was one of actors in this performance, most likely in the role of Francesca.¹⁶⁹ (She reprised her role in 1941).¹⁷⁰ On the opening night, the first half of the play was staged in candlelight, as the main fuses had blown within the first five minutes of the performance.¹⁷¹ Despite this, it pleased audiences and the show ran on Saturday and Sunday nights for eight weeks.¹⁷² In the months that followed, the young company produced a season of Ashley Dukes' *The Man with the Load of Mischief* and, then, Molière's seventeenth-century work, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*.¹⁷³ On the off nights during the seasons, play readings were presented at Patch by drama students and members, which allowed those who were not in the main performance to practice interpretations of various parts.¹⁷⁴ The plays that Patch produced in its initial years set the precedent for all future productions as they performed more well-known plays from British, European and American playwrights. Some of these 'old' works may have been chosen to avoid copyright and royalty fees. Seasons during this time were typically six weekends.¹⁷⁵ The first recorded dance performance at Patch was in August 1940 as part of a program to raise money for the arts branch of the Camp Comforts Fund held at a private residence in Peppermint Grove.¹⁷⁶ The students performed "rhythmic dances to classical music".¹⁷⁷ Early recorded dance performances at Patch were typically part of larger programs for charitable events, suggesting that the emphasis in the dance school in the first couple of years was on teaching skills and rehearsing choreography for public events rather than rehearsing for a large scale performance at Patch. Many of Patch's early performances were for charity; in the same

¹⁶⁶ Walker, interview.

¹⁶⁷ "Lady With a Lamp," *The West Australian*, October 17, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47351736>; "Jack Straw," *The West Australian*, March 8, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47366611>; "Patch Theatre Guild," *The West Australian*, August 6, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46765139>.

¹⁶⁸ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁶⁹ Eve Hewitt, August 2003 – March 2004, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁷⁰ Hewitt, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁷¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁷² Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁷³ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁷⁴ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁷⁵ "Advertising," *The West Australian*, August 27, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47158366>.

¹⁷⁶ "Woman's Realm," *The West Australian*, August 27, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46734657>.

¹⁷⁷ "Woman's Realm," *The West Australian*.

month they performed the one act play *Glass Houses* as part of a program hosted by the Repertory Club to donate to the Mission to Seamen.¹⁷⁸

The theatre had a low-key profile in the early years with no reviews of any of their performances until October 1942, when *The West Australian* published a review of *Lady with a Lamp*.¹⁷⁹ The cast consisted of Marie Beck, Patricia Coxon, Sidney Davis, John McLennon, Charles Hamilton, Vera Tate, Archie Mason, Stanley Smith, Grieg Frieze, and Wyatt Joyce, who also produced the play.¹⁸⁰ The critic wrote of the performance:

Marie Beck, though a little inclined to declaim the early scene, soon settled down to a really fine interpretation of the difficult role of Florence Nightingale... Production by Wyatt Joyce was good on the whole but a small piece of fooling by John McLennan as Cpt Jones, while enjoyable and well done nevertheless distracted the attention of the audience from the argument between Florence and Mr Bamford.¹⁸¹

This review indicates that those at Patch were still developing their acting and production skills and had not yet reached their peak of theatrical proficiency. Still, the numerous male actors in this performance show how Patch was able to retain some male members during the war. The next chapter will further examine how Patch developed as the war progressed.

Chapter Conclusions

The establishment of Patch in 1939 followed a decade of significant economic, political, and social change in Perth. The economic depression had created a tumultuous political climate with protests and demonstrations occurring across Perth, spurring numerous locals to engage in political activism and form or join radical organisations. The CPA was one of the most prominent left-wing organisations in the 1930s and 1940s and its members were often targeted by the government. This growing interest in left-wing, antifascist ideology proved fruitful for Beeby's own engagement in left-wing political activism and is therefore an important context for us to consider.

The Depression also affected Perth's theatre scene. As many commercial theatres were forced to close, amateur theatre flourished as existing groups grew in popularity and new theatre groups were established. The two main theatres of the 1930s were the Repertory Club and the Workers' Art Guild, with the former catering to Perth's middle classes' conservative tastes and the latter to the more liberal working classes. Thus, when the Beebys arrived in Perth they found a city

¹⁷⁸ "Rep to the Rescue," *The Daily News*, August 22, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78528302>.

¹⁷⁹ "Lady With a Lamp," *The West Australian*.

¹⁸⁰ "Lady With a Lamp," *The West Australian*.

¹⁸¹ "Lady With a Lamp," *The West Australian*.

with a demonstrated interest in the arts that proved receptive to their new school of dance, drama, and music.

Ida and Edward Beeby created Patch with the intention of developing a community appreciation for the arts and equipping their students with theatrical, dance and musical knowledge and skills. Their classes were affordable, which encouraged participation, and so was membership. As a result, Patch was run as a collective—its members were expected to contribute to all operations of the company, from set design and production to performance and housekeeping. As a result, the Beebys cultivated a cooperative and communal spirit within the theatre. In the following decade, both Edward and Ida Beeby had a unique and significant impact on the company, in politics and performance, which I will discuss in the next chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of Patch

Bill found himself launched on a new career as a political commentator...In no time at all a group of admirers had spontaneously formed what they called the Anti-Fascist League with Bill as president and spokesman and sole raison d'être.¹

P.A. Doherty, in his 1962 thesis on amateur theatre in Perth, commented that, “the war had a stifling effect on theatrical activities,”² as some companies had to either shut down or suspend their activities due to the enlistment of members in the war effort. Patch Theatre Company, by contrast, flourished in its earliest years, which coincided with those of the Second World War. These were also the years that Edward Beeby’s left-wing political activism was most evident. Beeby became a well-known political commentator on Perth radio and established a local profile as the founder of the Anti-Fascist League. On air and in print, Beeby promoted progressive, socialist beliefs, and roundly condemned the spread of fascist ideologies. As a director of Patch, he also had a *literal* stage to use in the dissemination of his political philosophy.

This chapter evaluates the degree to which Patch and its community were shaped by the left-wing political activism of Edward Beeby, thereby achieving the second aim of this thesis. First, I establish the important early context in which Beeby’s political values were established, including the influence of his politically active father, Sir George Beeby. I then return the discussion to 1930s Perth, where I consider the impact and development of the Workers’ Art Guild and the connection they forged between left-wing politics and theatre. Finally, I explain the wartime political activism of Beeby and determine the degree to which his political values impacted on the productions and messaging of Patch. To do the latter, I assess the political values of performances that were produced by the company during the war years and judge the degree to which Patch was ‘visibly’ political. My research in this chapter draws upon a range of primary sources from the Patch archives, the Museum of Performing Arts WA, Australia Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) files on Edward Beeby from the National Archives of Australia, local newspapers sourced on Trove, *The*

¹ Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988), 183.

² P.A. Doherty, “The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920,” (PhD Thesis, Graylands Teacher College, 1962), 18.

Fremantle Sentinel newspapers, records and other archival material from the J.S. Battye Library, Patricia Thompson's autobiography and oral interviews with Patch members, as well as a range of scholarly literature.

Before Perth: Edward Beeby's Early Influences

Edward Beeby's political engagement started in Sydney, where as a child he observed the parliamentary work of his father, Sir George Beeby. Sir George was one of the founders of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in New South Wales, established in 1891, and was elected to state parliament in 1907, having run in three previous elections.³ In addition to his political career, Sir George was a solicitor, establishing his own firm, Beeby & Brown (later Beeby & Moffat) in 1910, which specialised in industrial matters.⁴ In the same year, as a member of the state's first Labor government, he was appointed as the Minister of Public Instruction and Minister for Labour and Industry.⁵ Only a year later in 1911, Sir George was admitted to the Bar, and started his practice as a barrister.⁶ He resigned from parliament and left the ALP on 9 December 1912, due to what he felt was a growing conservatism within the party.⁷ Sir George re-entered parliament in 1913 as a member of the Farmer and Settlers' Association, but, failing to get enough supporters in parliament, he resigned his seat again and formed the National Progressive Party in 1915.⁸ Although Sir George put forward 13 candidates, including himself, none were elected. Following the division in the ALP on the issue of conscription, Sir George was appointed Minister for Labour and Industry with a seat in the Legislative Council in 1916 in William



Figure 9. Edward Beeby's father was a well-educated and politically active man. He was awarded the Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) in 1939. Source: Artist unknown, [portrait of Sir George Beeby], photograph, New South Wales Parliament, <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/member-details.aspx?pk=1209>.

³ Bede Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson (1869-1942)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 7, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 28 October 2021, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/beeby-sir-george-stephenson-5183>.

⁴ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

⁵ Parliament of New South Wales, "Sir George Stephenson Beeby."

⁶ Parliament of New South Wales, "Sir George Stephenson Beeby."

⁷ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

⁸ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson,"; Parliament of New South Wales, "Sir George Stephenson Beeby."

Holman's Nationalist ministry.⁹ He was elected to the assembly for Wagga Wagga in 1918 but, after a trip to Britain and the United States, Sir George resigned his portfolios in protest against issues such as the sale of wheat without public tenders and the allotment of coal contracts.¹⁰ His last position in parliament was as the member for Murray, which he won in March 1920 and which he resigned four months later, following his appointment as judge of the New South Wales Industrial Arbitration Court and president of the Board of Trade.¹¹ In 1926, Sir George became a judge of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and, in 1939, was promoted to Chief Judge before retiring in 1941.¹² He died the following year, aged 73.

Sir George's career and political activism had a notable impact on his son. Beeby trained, first, as a lawyer in his father's firm, and ventured into politics as a People's Party candidate for Martin in the federal election in 1929, but only secured 7.25 percent of the votes.¹³ *The Bulletin* reported that Beeby had inherited Sir George's sympathy for Labor, yet an aversion to the party's 'extremism'.¹⁴ It appears, therefore, that Beeby's political values and activism became more radical after his move to Perth, perhaps due to the proximity of such activists as Katherine Susannah Prichard and the dramatically charged ideological climate of world events by that time. As Beeby did not practice law in Perth, he had more time to dedicate to political activity.

Sir George's professional and political example also influenced his other children. Beeby's sister, Doris Beeby, pursued a career within the legal profession, unusual for a woman at that time, and was politically active in communist circles.¹⁵ She worked as her father's associate from 1920 and was the secretary to the Royal Commission headed by her father into the prosecution of Jacob Johnson (a seaman who claimed he was wrongfully imprisoned).¹⁶ In 1939, Doris moved to London to volunteer for the Spanish Relief Movement, where she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, transferring to the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) on her return to Sydney a couple of years later.¹⁷ She became involved in the Sheetmetal Workers' Union and the Women's Employment Board in Sydney, where she petitioned for an increase in women's wages.¹⁸ Beeby's three sisters were all highly educated and intelligent, indicating that his family did not hold typical patriarchal beliefs that may have restricted women's opportunities. Shirley Gilmour, a student of the Beebys at

⁹ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

¹⁰ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

¹¹ Parliament of New South Wales, "Sir George Stephenson Beeby."

¹² Parliament of New South Wales, "Sir George Stephenson Beeby."

¹³ "Personal Items," *The Bulletin*, October 2, 1929; "Gossip of the Town," *Daily Pictorial*, May 4, 1930, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article246175624>.

¹⁴ "Personal Items," *The Bulletin*.

¹⁵ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

¹⁶ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

¹⁷ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

¹⁸ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

Patch, remembers Beeby's sister Doris visiting Patch during the war, perhaps on her way back from London.¹⁹

Sir George maintained an interest in theatre, as well as politics, which he often combined. He founded the Players' Club, an amateur theatre group, and supported other amateur theatres by advocating for state and municipal support.²⁰ He wrote plays that ranged in style from tragedy to farce, and which drew upon his professional experiences and interests.²¹ His play, *Point O'View*, drew upon his familiarity with industrial relations and the working class, as it involved a courtroom scene and depictions of men on strike.²² His other works included *Dregs*, an anti-war play set within the context of the First World War that was described as "well-written" but a "most unpleasant experience".²³ His plays appear to have been good—but not great—and there is no evidence that any were performed at Patch.

Left-wing Theatre in Perth: The Workers' Art Guild

[T]he Perth Workers' Art Guild came into being, rupturing and rousing the city's social and political fabric...²⁴

Given the example set by his father, we might reasonably expect that the politics of Edward Beeby informed the productions and values of Patch, and particularly so given the heightened ideological conflict of the late 1930s and early 1940s. It would not have been the first time that ideology combined with politics was put in front of Perth audiences. When the Beebys arrived in Perth in 1938, there was already a thriving amateur theatre community that had been cultivated over the previous decade, including a forum where left-wing politics joined the arts at the Workers' Art Guild. This section outlines the development of left-wing political theatre in Perth and its audience's reception, which provides context to the earliest years of Patch under the Beebys. The Guild, initially called the Perth Workers' Theatre, was established in 1935 to spread awareness and knowledge of socialism and left-wing ideas via the medium of theatre. The Guild was founded in response to the economic disorder and social discontent that emerged in the early 1930s; their plays were seen as a

¹⁹ Shirley Gilmour, phone interview by Elizabeth Leong, August 20, 2021. UNDA.

²⁰ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

²¹ Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

²² Nairn, "Beeby, Sir George Stephenson."

²³ "Little Theatres: Judge Beeby's Play," *Australian Women's Weekly*, October 28, 1933, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48203238>.

²⁴ Dylan Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon: The History of the Perth Workers' Art Guild*, (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2019), 9.

form of activism to protest the capitalist system.²⁵ Until 1935, theatre was dominated in Perth by the Repertory Club and their repertoire of conservative ‘drawing room’ plays that were designed to entertain their audiences with light-hearted subject matter.²⁶ By contrast, the Guild worked with radical materials, performing plays that sought to educate their audience; they dealt with current social issues and radical ideas, such as anti-war themes, communism and workers’ rights.²⁷ The Guild demonstrated to Perth audiences that theatre could be meaningful and educational, as well as entertaining.

The Guild was connected to the New Theatre Movement, a loose group of workers’ theatres that originated in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1920s. The League of Workers Theatres was established in 1932 in the United States and, after affiliating with the Soviet-led International Workers’ Dramatic Union, it became the New Theatre League in 1935.²⁸ In Australia, New Theatres presented purposeful plays, modelled after the ‘agitprop’ style—communist propaganda promulgated in popular media such as literature, drama, art and music—that was created and popularised in the Soviet Union.²⁹ The first theatre of its kind in Australia was established in 1932 in Sydney, named the Workers’ Art Club, which is still in operation today as the New Theatre in Newtown. That company produced such leftist plays as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Harry Broderick, *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, and the Australian play *The Emissary* by Nellie Rickey. Their work has since been interpreted by historians as the first instance in Australia of radical artists following international socialist cultural ideas and practices.³⁰ This stimulated a New Theatre boom in 1936 where the Workers’ Theatre Group in Melbourne, Student Theatre in Brisbane, and the Left Book Club Theatre Group in Adelaide all opened.³¹

Perth’s Workers’ Art Guild was founded four years before Patch by the prominent communists Katherine Susannah Prichard, Maurie Lachberg, and their colleague Keith George.³² The Guild established a benchmark for political theatre against which Patch’s own political engagement

²⁵ Terry Craig, “Radical and Conservative Theatre in Perth in the 1930s,” in *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939*, ed. Jenny Gregory (Perth: Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1990), 106.

²⁶ Craig, “Radical and Conservative Theatre,” 106; Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 23.

²⁷ Paul Herlinger, “New Theatre,” in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, eds. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 400.

²⁸ Herlinger, “New Theatre,” 400.

²⁹ Ken Harper, “The Useful Theatre: The New Theatre Movement in Sydney and Melbourne 1935-1983,” *Meanjin* 43, no. 1 (1984): 58, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.905904463969661>.

³⁰ Lisa Milner and Cathy Brigden, “Staging International Communism: British–Australian Radical Theatre Connections,” *Contemporary British History* 33, no. 4, (2019): 508, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2018.1519431>.

³¹ Herlinger, “New Theatre,” 400.

³² Terry Craig, “Workers’ Art Guild,” in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, eds. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 652.

can be measured. Prichard was adamant that the theatre be used as a political tool, a vehicle for expressing the social and economic struggles of workers and their political solutions.³³ The Guild's motto, echoing the New Theatre League, was "Art is a weapon in the people's struggle".³⁴ Lachberg explained that the aim of the theatre was to show "Perth a drama dealing with the social structure from the point of view of the working man or woman".³⁵ Interestingly, unlike the other New Theatres around Australia, the Guild was never officially aligned with the CPA, despite the close association with the party to Prichard and other members, such as John and Ray Oldham. Instead, Prichard and George saw the Guild as an adjunct to the Western Australian arm of the Council Against War and Fascism.³⁶ The Guild claimed that,

[i]t is not attached to any political party but is devoted to...the political ideal of democracy. It believes that democracy is increasingly threatened by vested interests in Australia and overseas and cannot stand by and see it happen here.³⁷

Nevertheless, the Guild was seen as a communist mouthpiece by many, and its members were attacked by conservatives, members of government, the churches, and the police force.³⁸

The Guild performed plays that were radical, provocative, anti-fascist, anti-capitalist and pro-communist. Nevertheless, they transcended crude propaganda and were deemed by critics and audiences to be entertaining and well constructed. The Guild's most notable productions, due to their theatrical workmanship and powerful subject matter, were *Bury the Dead* by Irwin Shaw, *Till the Day I Die* and *Waiting for Lefty*, both by Clifford Odets, and *Hinkermann* by Ernst Toller.³⁹ Each had an explicit political message and were well patronised, demonstrating that there was a section of Perth's population that was receptive to, or, at the least, tolerated this political perspective. The

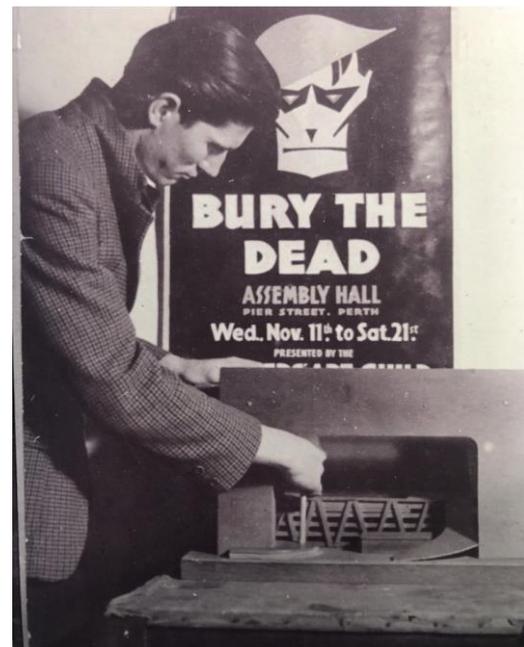


Figure 10. Actor and assistant stage director for effects, Ian Smith, with the model stage of the set for the Workers' Art Guild's 1936 production of *Bury the Dead* by Clifford Odets. Source: Artist unknown, photograph, 1936. Mitchell Library (NSW), BA3378/2.

³³ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 49.

³⁴ Craig, "Workers' Art Guild," 652.

³⁵ Maurie Lachberg, *Daily News*, June 6, 1936.

³⁶ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 50.

³⁷ *Bury the Dead* program, file 3255/a(5-6), Batty Library.

³⁸ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 108.

³⁹ Craig, "Workers' Art Guild," 652.

theatre critic Paul Hasluck (later a conservative federal politician and governor general) wrote under the pseudonym 'Polygon'. He often complimented the Guild for its performances. After a performance of one of Odets' less radical plays, *Awake and Sin*, Hasluck wrote: "The hall was nearly full last night and from the way the audience took the play, it will need no urging here to crowd the house tonight. It is well worth seeing."⁴⁰ While providing many candid opinions on the technical and theatrical elements of the Guild's performances, Hasluck refrained from commenting on their political subject matter, perhaps as he was not willing to show support or disdain for the Guild's political views.⁴¹ Although the Guild's performances were popular with many, they attracted harsh critics, as evidenced by the complaints received by the *West Australian*. One reader wrote that "[t]hey were coarse and vulgar pieces of Socialist [sic] propaganda. ...The Guild has thumbed its nose at convention and decency. ...After all we go to the theatre to be amused not to be assailed by the crudeness which we shrink from as we pass hotel doors".⁴² This criticism demonstrates the prejudice that left-wing theatre faced and how some members of 'respectable' society felt that the Guild posed a threat to their way of life.

Most of Perth, however, became somewhat accustomed to political theatre through the Guild's activities, and this influenced the undertakings of other amateur theatres. Most notable was the traditional Repertory Club, which in 1938 recruited Jerold Wells, a producer with Sydney's New Theatre League, as its artistic director.⁴³ Wells, like the Beebys, is another example of a trans-country influence in Perth's theatre scene. The company also opened its doors for the first time to the public, rather than just club members.⁴⁴ After the success of the Guild's dynamic and progressive plays, the Repertory Club felt emboldened to introduce a more progressive approach to its productions and staff, although Terry Craig emphasised that it was their entertainment value and the technical and creative skills of Wells, rather than politics, that drew audiences.⁴⁵ Under Wells' direction, the Repertory Club produced left-wing polemic plays such as Elmer Rice's *Judgement Day*, a play that defended democracy and criticised modern-day tyrants, and W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *On the Frontier*, a work that pitted freedom against tyranny.⁴⁶ As expected, this divergence from the Repertory Club's typical repertoire agitated many of its older members, some of whom complained about their propagandic nature and the serious themes that denied escapism.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ "Awake and Sing," *The West Australian*, May 20, 1939, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46392376>.

⁴¹ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 111; "Till the Day I Die," *The West Australian*, June 20, 1936, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article40726787>; "Awake and Sing," *The West Australian*.

⁴² Undated newspaper cutting, Gilchrist File 3255/ a 5-6, in Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 111.

⁴³ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 115.

⁴⁴ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 182.

⁴⁵ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 115; Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 182.

⁴⁶ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 115.

⁴⁷ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 182.

Hyde suggested that as the suffering of the Depression eased there was less demand for escapist theatre, something that perhaps shifted again during the Second World War.⁴⁸ With Wells' appointment, there was an increase in cooperation between the Workers' Art Guild and the Repertory Club, which can be mainly attributed to the friendship between Wells and Keith George.⁴⁹ Wells regularly attended Guild rehearsals and they allowed each other the use of club space.⁵⁰

The Guild's activities declined during the Second World War as radical theatre became less popular. The Repertory Club's trend of social plays under Wells stopped almost immediately with the announcement of the war by Menzies on September 3, 1939. The Repertory Club cancelled Well's production of Ernst Toller's *No More Peace*, an apt title, which was the company's entry for the 1939 Drama Festival.⁵¹ This was both a political and practical choice, as the Club's male members were wary of making commitments due to the possibility of being called up for national service.⁵² New Theatres in the eastern states were forced to broaden their repertoires to stay afloat, producing plays commonly engaging with conservative themes.⁵³ While Terry Craig argues that the outbreak of war caused an immediate end to radical theatre in 1939, the Guild continued to produce plays, albeit ones that were less radical, until the war in the Pacific began.⁵⁴ The Guild dissolved in 1942 after many of its members left to serve in the armed forces and political repression of the left increased, which included state censorship of printed and other materials, and police raids on CPA members.⁵⁵ The New Theatres in Sydney and Melbourne managed to continue throughout the war by moving underground. Historians such as Dylan Hyde and Craig argue that the war sparked a decline into complacency and conservatism in both politics and the arts in Perth as class stratifications were reduced and Western Australia's parochialism increased.⁵⁶ Yet, this understanding is challenged by Beeby's progressive, internationalist and liberal politics, demonstrating that not all radicalism disappeared once the war broke out, especially once the Soviet Union became a wartime ally of Britain and France.

Perhaps one of the key historical conclusions from the success of the Workers' Art Guild is the clear evidence that its patronisation suggests there were people in Perth who, if not members of a left-wing organisation, were sympathetic to socialist ideas. The Guild's audience indicates the changing attitudes of people in Perth during the 1930s, and the validity of using theatre as a vehicle

⁴⁸ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 182.

⁴⁹ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 181.

⁵⁰ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 181.

⁵¹ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 180.

⁵² Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 180.

⁵³ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 190.

⁵⁴ Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 116.

⁵⁵ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 197, 252.

⁵⁶ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 184; Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 116.

for protest and political activism. Again, it might therefore be expected that Patch also engaged in political theatre when it was established by the Beebys in 1939, having been informed by Edward Beeby's own political activity and the opportunity that local precedent, set by the Guild, had offered for radical theatre. And, yet I will shortly demonstrate that the company's productions remained mostly apolitical.

The Political Activity of Edward Beeby

Bill, then, loomed as a huge and glittering frog in Perth's little political puddle.⁵⁷

Against the backdrop of the outbreak of the Second World War and alongside the growth of Patch, Edward Beeby began to host a radio show as a political commentator on 6WF, a now iconic station that was first owned by Wesfarmers but, by then, an important asset of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The station was then managed by F.R. Whitford. Beeby's radical opinions found popularity with people who held social democratic sympathies, which led him to establish the Anti-Fascist League (initially the Socialist Progress and Research League) in 1940.⁵⁸ Beeby was the League's president, and his 6WF radio show offered the means for him to promote the values and activities of the League, which met weekly throughout the war. The League blamed political disunity for the fall of France and encouraged Australians not to make the same mistake.⁵⁹ Its purpose was,

to assist citizens to clear their minds of the political confusion which has aggravated the difficulties of today. It is not a political party. It has no political purpose other than to educate, guide, and unite.⁶⁰

The League claimed to be a people's movement that endeavoured "to prove that the people, the industrial worker, farmer and middle class worker, all have the same basic aspirations".⁶¹ It supported the government in the war effort but intended to develop the public's understanding of policies it thought would bring a rapid conclusion to the war, such as the opening of a second front and improving relations with the Soviet Union.⁶² Another purpose of the League was to expose the policies of who they deemed to be fascists in Australia, namely the owners of production and big businesses.⁶³

⁵⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 183.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 183.

⁵⁹ "No Middle Course," *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel*, 5, no. 14, July 1, 1943.

⁶⁰ "Anti-Fascist League," *Harvey Murray Times*, August 18, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252921940>.

⁶¹ "Anti-Fascist League," *Harvey Murray Times*.

⁶² "Anti-Fascist League," *Harvey Murray Times*.

⁶³ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 20 August 1943," A367, C79568, item 21, National Archives of Australia (NAA), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

Beeby used his radio broadcasts to provide commentary on contemporary events, including the war effort, the spread of fascism and the benefits of socialist ideas.⁶⁴ In one broadcast, he sought to expose Britain and America's imperialist power politics, which he believed had too much influence over the activities of Australia's military and navy.⁶⁵ Although he started with a weekly show, the popularity of his broadcasts resulted in increased air time, and he was presenting two 15-minute broadcasts daily by 1941.⁶⁶ Commonwealth censorship files suggest that Beeby amassed a large radio audience and that his influence was widespread amongst workers, farmers and even some of the left-leaning middle class.⁶⁷ While Beeby was initially paid by the radio station, by 1943 he was financed by the League, which received donations from his supporters, namely farmers.⁶⁸ Beeby's significant rural following encouraged him to visit regional towns where he delivered public talks. His speeches aimed to recruit new members and encourage the creation of regional League branches. Surveillance officers traced his activity in Albany, Carnarvon, Collie, Denmark, Goomalling, Kalgoorlie, Kulin, Manjimup, Narrogin, Northam, and York from 1942 to 1944. His popularity in the rural community was apparent in 1943, when a security officer reported that Beeby and a Labor parliamentary candidate had scheduled concurrent meetings: Beeby drew such a substantial crowd that, in an attempt to attract a larger audience, the Labor candidate had to postpone his talk until after Beeby had finished.⁶⁹ At Kulin, Beeby attracted a crowd of over 170 people – a large proportion of the Shire's population (1274 in the 1933 census which fell to 875 by 1947).⁷⁰

The League reached its height of popularity during the middle war years. Mrs Beeby's daughter, Patricia Thompson, recalls during this time that "you could not walk down any suburban

⁶⁴ For more information on Perth's left-wing activities and surveillance see Justina Williams, *The First Furrow*, (Willagee: Lone Hand Press, 1976) and Bobbie Oliver and Bill Latter, 'Spooks, Spies and Subversives! The Wartime Security Service' in *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II*, ed. Jenny Gregory, ed (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 1996).

⁶⁵ Edward Beeby, "The People's Session," radio broadcast script, October 12, 1943, A367, C79568, item 8-9, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁶⁶ "Radio Features," *Sunday Times*, October 5, 1941, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/59155951?searchTerm=%22Beeby%20beeby%22%20AND%20radio>.

⁶⁷ "Post and Telegraph Censorship Bulletin no. 1 Week ending 5th October, 1942," A367, C79568, item 46, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>; Deputy Director of Security for Western Australia to Director General of Security, December 30, 1942, A367, C79568, item 39, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁶⁸ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 20 August 1943," NAA.

⁶⁹ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 20 August 1943," NAA.

⁷⁰ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 9th July 1943," A367, C79568, item 26, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], "Census of the Commonwealth of Australia 30th June, 1933 - Part V. Western Australia. Population Detailed Tables for Local Government Areas," <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2110.01933?OpenDocument>; ABS, "Census of the Commonwealth of Australia 30th June, 1947 - Part V. Western Australia. Population Detailed Tables for Local Government Areas," <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2109.01947?OpenDocument>.

street at midday without hearing Bill's voice coming crisply out of the radio sets in four out of five houses. His success was phenomenal."⁷¹ This is indicative of Beeby's impact on Perth society as he exposed them to alternative and radical issues concerning the war effort. One Perth resident, Harry Smith, wrote in 1943 that there were then four main movements active in Western Australia: the Anti-Fascist League, the League of Service, the Council for Reconstruction and the Christian Community Cause.⁷² Smith compared the League to the Christian Community Cause, and described the two organisations as identical in form: they had intelligent members, and they were well-organised and funded – an interesting comparison when the conservative nature of the latter contrasts with the left-wing values of the League.⁷³ The only difference Smith mentioned was the socio-economic status of their members.⁷⁴ The League had a predominantly working-class membership, whereas the Christian Community Cause was mainly middle class.⁷⁵ Both Thompson and Smith's accounts indicate that Beeby had established himself and the League as an active political force that strongly appealed to the working class.

Beeby's left-wing sympathies were evident at the start of every broadcast with his introduction of "Good Evening Comrades"—a greeting that for some marked him out as a communist.⁷⁶ He was extremely sympathetic to the plight of the Soviet Union's Red Army and critical of the Allies' inaction in launching a second front to the war. Beeby was prone to glorifying the Soviet Union, which he portrayed as a socialist utopia. For example, when he described their treatment of children, he lauded that there were no poor, poorer or poorest children in the Soviet Union, they were all valued equally by a society that referred to them as 'the flowers of life'.⁷⁷ He praised the Soviet Union's proactive choice to train its citizens in guerrilla warfare and advised that Australia should replicate this in response to the threat of a Japanese invasion.⁷⁸ His political views inevitably made him the subject of controversy in mainstream society. Alan Seymour recalled that "he was thought to be a raving mad Communist instead of the mild libertarian that he probably was".⁷⁹ This was due to Western Australia's conservative political atmosphere, continues Seymour, and he explained that "the [government] powers did not like any form of criticism or even intelligent discussion".⁸⁰ Beeby's dissenting views marked him as a security risk by state and federal forces.

⁷¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 183.

⁷² Harry Smith to Grace Marsden, July 2, 1943, A367, C79568, item 22, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁷³ Smith to Marsden, July 2, 1943.

⁷⁴ Smith to Marsden, July 2, 1943.

⁷⁵ Smith to Marsden, July 2, 1943.

⁷⁶ Gilmour, interview.

⁷⁷ "Goodwill Meeting," *The West Australian*, March 30, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47186788>.

⁷⁸ "Guerrilla Warfare," *The Daily News*, March 30, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78271769>.

⁷⁹ Alan Seymour to David Crann, September 20, 1991, Patch Theatre Archives.

⁸⁰ Seymour to Crann, September 20, 1991.

Consequently, he was closely monitored and required to submit all his radio scripts to state censorship before airing them.⁸¹

Beeby's strong appeal to eastern European migrants concerned government observers. As stated in Chapter One, many eastern European migrants of the 1940s had already fled their home countries under fascist governments and became actively involved in anti-fascist movements in Perth during the 1930s. Their commitment to the cause persisted into the 1940s, evidenced by their support of Beeby and his League. The Spearwood branch of the Yugoslav Immigrants' Association organised a fundraising dance for the League in April 1944.⁸² They raised £42 to support Beeby's radio broadcasts.⁸³ In Manjimup, Beeby drew a crowd that comprised most of the town's migrant population, most of whom were from Macedonia and Yugoslavia, but a few were from Bulgaria and Italy.⁸⁴ According to a police report, he described the superior working conditions for the proletariat in the Soviet Union, alleged that the war was engineered by the 'big capitalists' and was as morally deplorable as the First World War.⁸⁵ He warned that if the workers did not unite they would suffer after the war ended.⁸⁶ His public talks worried the Deputy Director of Security for Western Australia, who believed that some of Beeby's statements could be construed as an attempt to incite a revolution in the migrant community to overthrow the government.⁸⁷ In August 1943, Beeby subtly signalled his support for communist insurgence in Australia to protest the politicians who he thought were the "enemies of the people's interest".⁸⁸ He framed his justification for protest through his commentary on the internal conflicts happening in Italy, suggesting that in "Italy today we have the spectacle for a surge of feeling amongst the Italian people finding outlets in demonstrations, which in many parts of Italy are bordering on revolution".⁸⁹ He then added later in his speech that Australians would be justified to "express themselves spontaneously and naturally in the same way as the Italian people are doing" in response to political corruption.⁹⁰ Although Beeby never issued a

⁸¹ Frank Strahan to Director General of Security, October 26, 1943, A367, C79568, item 2, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁸² "Slavs Support People's Session," *The Workers Star*, April 28, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article240605644>.

⁸³ "Slavs Support People's Session," *The Workers Star*.

⁸⁴ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 9th July 1943," NAA.

⁸⁵ Security Service, "Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 9th July 1943," NAA.

⁸⁶ "Security Service, Security Service Report – Western Australia Fortnight ended 9th July 1943," NAA.

⁸⁷ Director General of Security to the Deputy-Director of Security of Western Australia, July 20, 1943, A367, C79568, item 25, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁸⁸ Edward Beeby, extract from radio broadcast, August 3, 1943, A367, C79568, item 23-24, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

⁸⁹ Beeby, extract from radio broadcast, August 3, 1943.

⁹⁰ Beeby, extract from radio broadcast, August 3, 1943.

specific call to protest, government officials remained wary of his influence as evidenced by their continued surveillance of his activities.

Beeby conducted most of his political activism through the League and the radio show, but he remained somewhat involved in other avenues of mainstream politics. In 1942, he managed the campaign for W.G. Pickering for the Metropolitan-Suburban by-election.⁹¹ Pickering was an Independent who promoted himself as 'the people's candidate', campaigning on the back of workers' rights, promising to restore the state basic wage, ensure workers' purchasing power, and unite all political parties for the war effort.⁹² Pickering, like Beeby, advocated for an agreement with the Soviet Union and the opening of a second front.⁹³ Additionally, Beeby was involved in other left-wing or internationalist groups, often invited to speak as a guest with the Western Australian branch of the Medical Aid to the Soviet Union Committee and the Political Rights Committee.⁹⁴ This committee was one of the many groups that supported friendship between the Soviet Union and Australia that were established after the Soviet Union became an ally. He even acted in the play *Distant Point* as part of the Australia- the Soviet Union Relations Committee.⁹⁵ Beeby's political views also included supporting the rights of Aboriginal people. During a meeting of the Legislative Assembly in 1944, he criticised the Bill for the Natives Citizenship Rights Act. Beeby, in *The Workers Star*, reported that "[w]hile it was an advance on the existing setup, the conditions of citizenship and the clause permitting its cancellation were an insult to the original occupants of Australia," which was consistent with the CPA's stance on the matter.⁹⁶

Even though Beeby cultivated a loyal base of radio listeners, his political views drew criticism from newspapers, organisations and even state politicians. Labor's Arthur Watts, the leader of the opposition in the Western Australian parliament, criticised Beeby during a parliamentary debate in 1943, complaining that his broadcasts were seditious.⁹⁷ Watts said, "I venture to say that this man has done more to promote feelings of ill-will and enmity between different classes of His Majesty's subjects than any other person who has preceded him in Western Australia,"⁹⁸ – a bold claim, thus demonstrating the strength of the controversy surrounding Beeby. Watts, a staunch defender of

⁹¹ "Advertising," *The Daily News*, July 7, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78279007>.

⁹² "Advertising," *The Daily News*.

⁹³ "Advertising," *The Daily News*.

⁹⁴ "Perth Meeting Cables Moscow," *The Daily News*, September 19, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78812095>; "Political Rights Committee Raises £1750 for War Loan!" *The Daily News*, November 19, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78303967>.

⁹⁵ "A Russian Play," *The West Australian*, November 4, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47353738>.

⁹⁶ "Seek Legal Advice for Natives," *The Workers Star*, October 13, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article240606879>.

⁹⁷ Parliament of Western Australia, *Debates of Western Australia Parliament*, August 10, 1943, [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard1870to1995.nsf/83cc4ce93b5d4e0b48257b33001cfef6/0D5F6D05A23A852548257A4E00111D3D/\\$File/19430810_Assembly.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard1870to1995.nsf/83cc4ce93b5d4e0b48257b33001cfef6/0D5F6D05A23A852548257A4E00111D3D/$File/19430810_Assembly.pdf).

⁹⁸ Parliament of Western Australia, *Debates of Western Australia Parliament*, August 10, 1943.

Britain's position in the war, displayed contempt for Beeby's praise of the Soviet Union and felt that any citizen who criticised the British empire's decisions in the war should face legal consequences.⁹⁹ He cited Section 44 of the Criminal Code of which he (falsely) believed Beeby was in breach of.¹⁰⁰ While Watt's complaint issued an inquiry into whether Beeby's talks could be considered seditious, the Commonwealth's Deputy Director of Security for Western Australia found that although "there is no doubt that the cumulative effect of his talks is to belittle England and glorify the Soviet,"¹⁰¹ the broadcasts were not subversive enough to be removed from the air. Using Watt's complaint as impetus, the state executive of the Western Australian branch of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia launched a petition that only official government spokesmen should be allowed to broadcast on the radio.¹⁰²

This was not the only instance of government officials attempting to take Beeby off the air. In April 1942, the District Censor for Western Australia, who was also the State Publicity Censor, was anxious about the cumulative effect of Beeby's talks and so restricted his broadcasts, claiming that the military had ordered a ban.¹⁰³ After some of Beeby's supporters complained to various government officials, in particular how the ban constituted an attack on citizens' freedom of speech, an investigation into the ban was launched.¹⁰⁴ Military Intelligence found that the military had not issued a ban and the script for the broadcast had been appropriately submitted to the District Censor, who had approved it after making some deletions.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the District Censor was convinced that Beeby sought to divide Britain and Australia.¹⁰⁶ The investigation was then passed to the Prime Minister's Office as it concerned publicity censorship.¹⁰⁷ The Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department, Frank Strahan, reiterated the Deputy Director for Security and affirmed that

[t]he opinion is held, however, that the material in Mr Beeby's broadcasts, though perhaps at times bordering on unreasonable anti-Allied comment, cannot

⁹⁹ Parliament of Western Australia, *Debates of Western Australia Parliament*, August 10, 1943.

¹⁰⁰ Parliament of Western Australia, *Debates of Western Australia Parliament*, August 10, 1943.

¹⁰¹ Deputy Director of Security for WA to Director General of Security, October 15, 1943, A367, C79568, item 7, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

¹⁰² E.V. Raymont to John Curtin, December 7, 1942, A367, C79568, item 43, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>; Deputy Director of Security for WA to Director General of Security, December 30, 1942, A367, C79568, item 39-40, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

¹⁰³ W. J. MacKay to Director of Military Intelligence, June 4, 1942, MP508/1, 52/705/42, item 8-9, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=386707>.

¹⁰⁴ Assorted letters, MP508/1, 52/705/42, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=386707>.

¹⁰⁵ MacKay to Director of Military Intelligence, 4 June 1942.

¹⁰⁶ MacKay, to Director of Military Intelligence, 4 June 1942.

¹⁰⁷ F. M. Forde to Hon. A.S. Drakeford, July 7, 1942, MP508/1, 52/705/42, item 2, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=386707>.

be classed as seditious or even subversive, and it is thought that there is not sufficient reason to justify action being taken to prohibit his broadcasts.¹⁰⁸

Beeby was fortunate to be allowed to continue his broadcast, as state authorities had taken his son-in-law, John Thompson, off the air in 1939 after Thompson had remarked that the one good thing the war would bring about was an end to the British empire.¹⁰⁹ Whether the District Censor made a rogue judgement or was pressured by others in the government to ban Beeby's broadcasts, the incident demonstrates the government's apprehension and fear of his platform. After the ban was lifted, Beeby's commentaries were heavily scrutinised and censored, but he remained a troubling figure for the state's Deputy Director for Security. Like District Censor, A.L. Campbell, the Deputy Director, feared that the cumulative effect of Beeby's talks amounted to 'dangerous propaganda' as it glorified the Soviet Union, belittled Britain and the war effort, and weakened the relationship between Australia and Britain.¹¹⁰

The government was hesitant to officially ban or restrict Beeby's broadcasts as it feared it would make Beeby into a martyr for freedom of speech. Thus, officials explored other methods of suppression. Deputy Director for Security pointed out that Beeby was "clever enough to emphasise his points by implication and voice inflexion rather than by the actual spoken word".¹¹¹ One suggestion was to call Beeby up for enlistment in the armed forces, but as he was classified as a white-collar worker and was over the age of the maximum enlistment age of 45, he was exempt from service.¹¹² Instead, the government decided that the most effective solution was to launch an unofficial counter propaganda campaign. At the beginning of 1943, P.J. Trainer, a Trades Hall official, criticised Beeby's doctrines and ridiculed him at the request of the government.¹¹³ This criticism shows that Beeby was not universally supported by other left-wing individuals, unions and organisations, while demonstrating the diversity within left-wing engagement as seemingly Beeby and the unions were uncooperative and had conflicting ideas. Later in 1943, the government enlisted the help of Lloyd Thomas, another radio host, to contradict statements made by Beeby. Deputy Director for Security wrote that the "purpose of this campaign is not to make a personal

¹⁰⁸ Strahan to Director General, October 26, 1943.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 168.

¹¹⁰ Deputy Director of Security for WA to Director-General of Security, October 22, 1943, A367, C79568, item 3, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

¹¹¹ Deputy Director of Security for WA to Director-General of Security, October 15, 1943.

¹¹² Deputy Director of Security for WA to Director-General of Security, February 15, 1943, A367, C79568, item 32, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

¹¹³ Director-General of Security to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, February 12, 1943, A367, C79568, item 34, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

attack on Beeby, but to expose his utterances as fallacious and damaging to the war effort and public morale".¹¹⁴

Beeby and his supporters faced substantial criticism from the patriotic pro-war newspaper *The Listening Post*. Its editors condemned the 'preferential treatment' they felt Beeby was receiving from the Censor.¹¹⁵ One editor cautioned readers to be wary of the Anti-Fascist League as a subversive organisation that aimed at making a profit rather than contributing valuable work to the anti-fascist movement. The editor wrote that "we have yet to be convinced that the new league can achieve anything that is not already being accomplished more efficiently by properly organised shows which are not touting every night for people's spare ten bobs".¹¹⁶ The editor's scathing review describes Beeby as incompetent and his radio show as "poisonous and extremely stupid".¹¹⁷

Beeby found other opportunities to communicate a political message. From 1944 to 1946, Beeby became the proprietor and publisher of the left-wing newspaper *The Fremantle and Districts Sentinel*, which was the official organ of the League.¹¹⁸ The newspaper's first edition was printed in July 1943.¹¹⁹ In January 1945, the League also appears to have changed its name to the People's

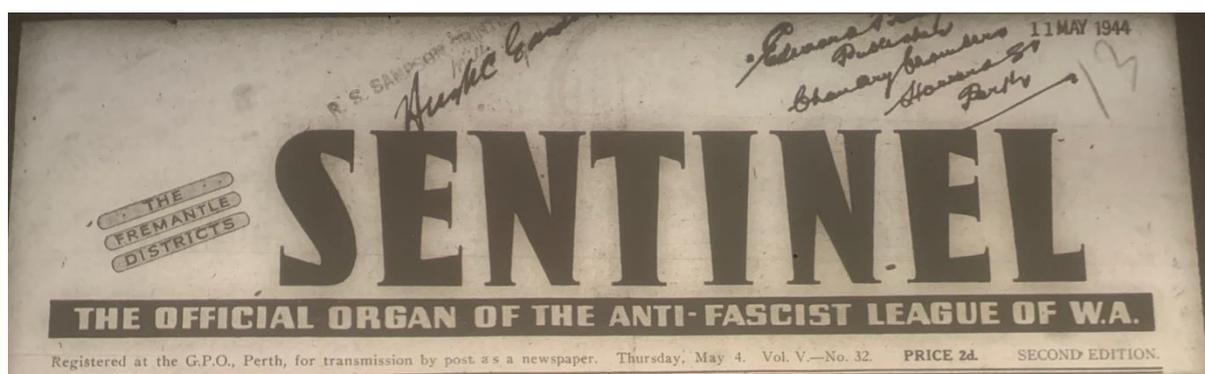


Figure 11. *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel* was the official newspaper for the Anti-Fascist League. The newspaper was reinstated as a non-partisan local paper in May 1946, Source: *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel*, May 4, 1944, J.S. Batty Library of West Australia.

Security Movement.¹²⁰ There were branches of the League in Albany, Fremantle, Manjimup, Marble Bar and Port Hedland, Baandee, Bassendean, Northam, Geraldton, Osborne Park, Yalgoo, Busselton, Herne Hill, Kalamunda, Miling, Northcliffe, York, Yanmah, Norseman, City Beach, Maylands, Bunbury, Carnarvon, Bruce Rock, and Gingin. It appears the League was popular at this time; in June 1945, the

¹¹⁴ Deputy Director of Security for WA, to Director General of Security, October 22, 1943.

¹¹⁵ "Subversive Radio Propaganda," *Listening Post*, December 15, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article257019533>.

¹¹⁶ "The Bombast of One, Edward Beeby," *Listening Post*, October 15, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article257019379>.

¹¹⁷ "The Bombast of One, Edward Beeby," *Listening Post*.

¹¹⁸ *Fremantle and Districts Sentinel*, Item 3/126, State Records Office of Western Australia, <https://archive.sro.wa.gov.au/index.php/fremantle-and-districts-sentinel-3-126>.

¹¹⁹ "No Middle Course," *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel* 5, no. 14, July 1, 1943

¹²⁰ *The Sentinel*, January 18, 1945.

branch in Albany had 60 people in attendance of a meeting; and Denmark recorded 50 members, one tenth of the town's adult population.¹²¹ Articles in the League's newspaper discussed a range of subjects, such as youth access to education, democracy, racial prejudice, Christianity, current political events, the war effort and strategy, health, and women's rights in the workforce. Beeby's passion for the arts was evident, as there were articles dedicated to music and poetry. Notably, there were no mentions of Patch in *The Sentinel*—suggesting that the operations of Patch were not sufficiently ideological to warrant attention of the League, and evidence that suggests Beeby's politics did not influence the activities of his theatre company. *The Sentinel* continued as the League's newspaper until May 1946, when it was restored as a non-partisan district journal for the Fremantle area following the general decline of the League's activities after the war.¹²²

While maintaining a busy career in political activity, Beeby also spent the war years running Patch with his partner, Mrs Beeby: he designed and built sets, created stage properties, and taught acting, drama and speech. He was also the choir master, stage manager and director of several plays. However, it appears that at certain times Mrs Beeby was left to run Patch by herself. The

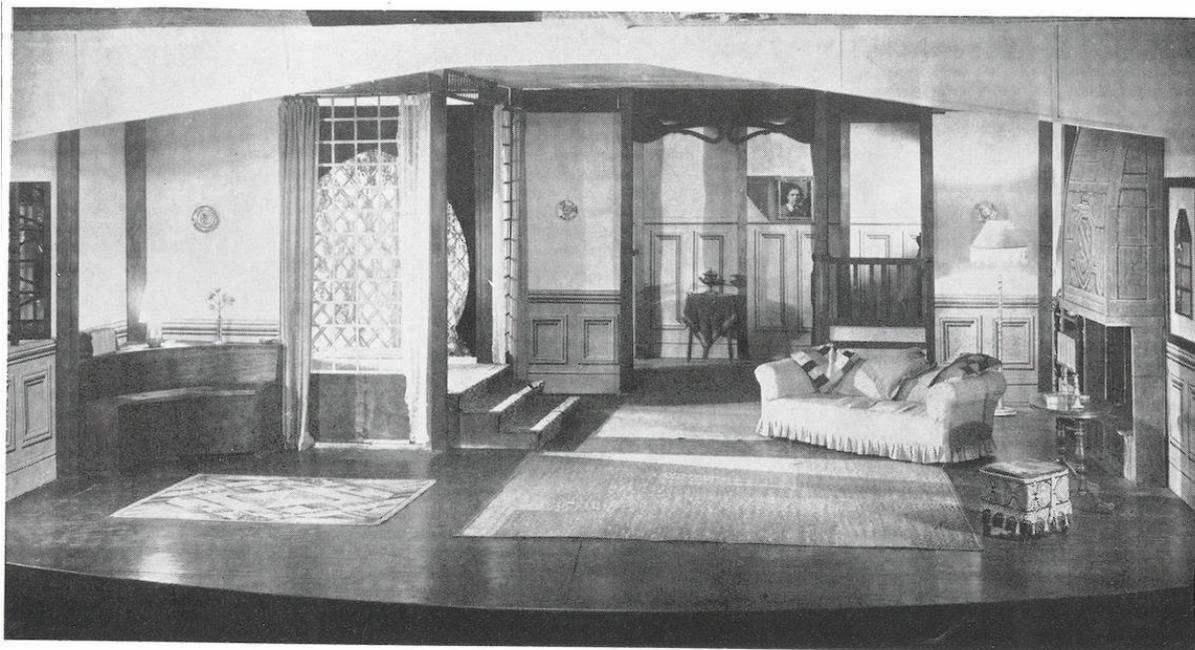


Figure 12. The set of *Ringmaster* at Munster House. Source: Artist unknown, *The Set in the 'Ringmaster'*, 1944, photograph, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth, WA: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

longest period in which Beeby was absent from Patch was in late 1943, when it was revealed that he was having an affair with a Patch dance student, Minnie.¹²³ Beeby's lover was one of Mrs Beeby's favoured students and the illicit relationship caused a scandal, especially after he left Mrs Beeby and

¹²¹ S. Howells, "Letters to Our League," *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel* 5, no. 14, July 1, 1943; "Branch Bulleting," *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel*, July 15, 1943.

¹²² "Federal Member's Message," *The Fremantle Districts Sentinel*, May 10, 1946.

¹²³ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 199; Bidy Walker, interview by Deborah Gare, December 2, 2020.

Patch for around ten months (Mrs Beeby refused his offer to stay and help with Patch during that time).¹²⁴ Patricia Thompson later wrote that everyone at Patch was disgusted by Beeby's behaviour and sympathised with Mrs Beeby.¹²⁵ While estranged from his partner and the company, Beeby and Minnie became members of the CPA—though his membership was never widely broadcast, as the League considered itself a more respectable institution than the CPA, and Beeby never attended CPA meetings.¹²⁶ In Thompson's opinion, Mrs Beeby hoped that Beeby would return to her, and even sought help from a psychic. When Beeby returned in 1944 to Mrs Beeby and Patch, Thompson felt that "Mrs Beeby's face was saved".¹²⁷

Overall, Beeby became a significant political figure within the Perth community during the Second World War. His dissenting voice equipped the working class, particularly in rural areas and among migrant communities, with an alternative way to view the war and the current economic, political, and social system in Australia during a period when the government was encouraging its population to be united and consensual. His anti-fascist and pro-Soviet opinions attracted both supporters and critics from across Western Australian society, and his radio platform allowed him to spread his message beyond the metropolitan area. His political activism hit its peak during the war years as, after 1945, the League's activities slowly petered out until Beeby departed from Perth in 1948.

The Politics of Patch

The politics were never part of the theatre.¹²⁸

During the Second World War, Patch grew considerably as a company and became well-known for its high-quality drama and dance instruction. After just a year at Bon Marché, the company had outgrown the residence and needed new premises. Beeby signed a 20-year lease for two rooms on the top floor in Munster House on Murray Street. This venue was considerably larger than the rooms in Bon Marché as the main theatre room was 22 by 14.6 meters and the adjoining studio was 7.3 by 4.9 meters.¹²⁹ It also included a separate ladies' and men's dressing room, 'set' workshop, costume wardrobe, sewing area and a kitchen/club room.¹³⁰ The success of the company was

¹²⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 199.

¹²⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 199.

¹²⁶ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 200.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 200.

¹²⁸ Patch Theatre, "Patch Theatre Tribute and Re-union [sic]," pamphlet, August, 2005.

¹²⁹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

¹³⁰ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946 – 51."

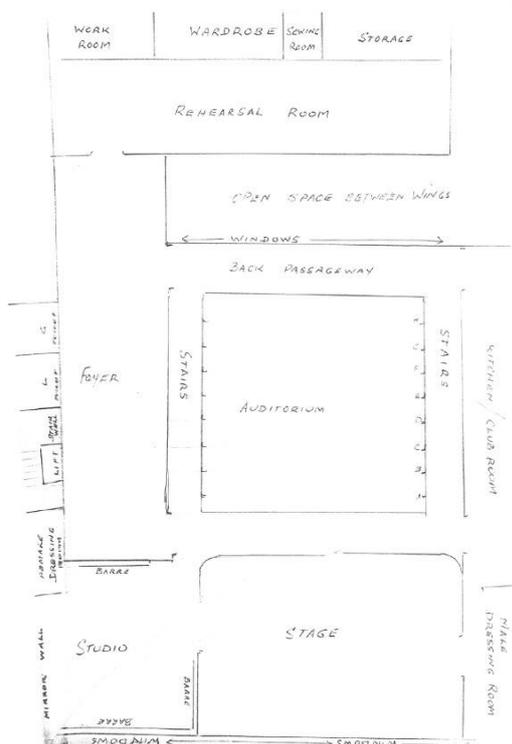


Figure 14a. Patch Theatre floor plan at Munster House. Source: Hazel Dawson, [Bird-Eye View Sketch of Patch Theatre Layout at Munster House], illustration, Patch Theatre Archives.



Figure 14b. Illustration of the entrance to Patch Theatre at Munster House. Source: Artist unknown, [Entrance of Patch Theatre], illustration, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth, WA: R.S. Printing Co, 1944).

evident as over £1000 was spent on renovating and refurbishing the entire top floor.¹³¹ The theatre was the largest amateur stage in Australia at the time and could seat an audience of around 180.¹³² 'New Patch' or 'Big Patch', as it was called by its members, was opened in November 1940.¹³³ The move was a success: theatre performances were popular and some performances sold out weeks in advance.¹³⁴ From 1942, Patch's popularity was so considerable that it was noted it could stand to double its current capacity and still fall short of the demand for seats.¹³⁵ Leslie Rees, a drama critic, reported that audiences "lapped up" Patch's production of *Lady with the Lamp*, and complimented the quality of the production. "Stage-lighting, costuming, grouping were very fine indeed," Rees wrote.¹³⁶ While Patch lost many of its early male and female members to enlistment in the armed

¹³¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³² Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³³ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁴ "Advertising," *The West Australian*, May 15, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46756307>; "Advertising," *The West Australian*, October 14, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44981907>; "Advertising," *The West Australian*, July 10, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46762346>; "Advertising," *The West Australian*, May 6, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44808595>.

¹³⁵ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹³⁶ Leslie Rees, "Drama in Perth," *The Australian Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1942): 117–119. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20631074>.

services, the company still managed to find enough male actors for its plays without having to resort to an all-female cast, as some amateur theatres in the state did throughout the war. The Workers' Art Guild's performances of *The Women* and *This Bondage*, the Drama Festival's Committee's production of *Morning Sacrifice*, and the Manjimup Repertory Club's *Men are Missing* were all produced in the 1940s without male cast members.¹³⁷

The popularity of Patch during the war suggests that Perth audiences remained eager for entertainment and community, perhaps as a distraction from the reality of life on the homefront. The theatre is often regarded as a space for audiences to escape their lives, suspend their belief in reality, and enter a fantasy world where their own problems cease to exist for as long as the curtain is drawn.¹³⁸ One woman described this experience when she went to see a show at Patch: "For a brief moment we glimpsed again this fantasia and then back once more to everyday life."¹³⁹ The large number of students who attended Patch also demonstrates the importance of the arts in



A TYPICAL AUDIENCE AT "PATCH."

Figure 15. Performances were often filled to capacity at Patch Theatre during the war. Source: Artist unknown, *A Typical Audience at "Patch"*, photograph, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth, WA: R.S. Sampson Printing Co. 1944).

wartime as a way to maintain community, combat boredom and sustain morale. The war affected all the amateur theatres in Perth differently, but at Patch the war had a positive impact. Students were drawn to Patch for something to do after they finished work and they were able to afford the classes

¹³⁷ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir"; "Play With 40 Women Scores Hit," *The Daily News*, April 27, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78486062>; "Woman's Rights," *The West Australian*, December 23, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47299254>; "Morning Sacrifice," *The West Australian*, October 9, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47350679>; "Men Are Missing," *Manjimup and Warren Times*, July 31, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article257341244>.

¹³⁸ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 182.

¹³⁹ Elsie Joy Derry, "The Patch Theatre," *Western Mail*, August 17, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38555202>.

as the economy convalesced. Similarly, audiences were drawn to Patch due to the theatre's ability to offer a brief escape from their lives and the stress of homefront conditions.

There are contrasting opinions about the degree to which Beeby's political views influenced the theatre company. Patricia Thompson, who produced and acted in some of the company's plays, wrote that despite Beeby's prominent reputation as the president of the Anti-Fascist League, and the Thompsons' own involvement with the CPA, "Mrs Beeby succeeded most successfully in keeping Patch clear of any political slur. There was never a whisper that the theatre was in any way involved with the political adventures of the family."¹⁴⁰ Conversely, in the Patch archive an unknown author wrote that the Beebys' vision for Patch was that it was built on communist and Marxist principles: "A private personal vision shared with prominent Communist Party friends and members, but isolated from the increasing numbers of students, trainee teachers, working class young men and women whose imagination and talents found expression in the Patch Theatre."¹⁴¹ Mrs Beeby's political opinions were never commented on by Thompson or any former Patch members, suggesting that she was more private in her political beliefs and that, while she supported Beeby, she was never obviously involved in his activism. One former dance student suggested that Mrs Beeby was not heavily involved in Beeby's politics: "she took an interest because of his interest but she never tried to talk to us. As far as she was concerned, you know, he could look after the politics and I'll look after the class".¹⁴²

An analysis of the wartime plays produced by Patch reveals that the company was not a political theatre or a reincarnation of the Workers' Art Guild. Yet it did produce some plays that highlighted social inequalities and issues with the capitalist system, and others that emphasised the need to fight the fascist powers in Europe. In July 1941, the Soviet Union entered into an alliance with Britain after Hitler broke the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. This was a significant development in the war for Australia's left-wing sympathisers, as the Soviets went from being enemies of the state to allies. Consequently, Patch was able to host events that supported the Soviet Union without seeming to be radical or anti-war. In 1942, the company accommodated a Lantern Lecture on housing in the Soviet Union by David L. Davidson.¹⁴³ In 1944, Patch members performed a pageant symbolising the Red Army victories at the opening for the public celebration of Red Army Day.¹⁴⁴ While these events did not implicate Patch as a political institution, they indicate that Beeby

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 198.

¹⁴¹ Patch Theatre Archive Miscellaneous Notes.

¹⁴² Interview with former Patch dancer [Anonymous] with Elizabeth Leong, September 24, 2021, University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA).

¹⁴³ "Advertising," *The Daily News*, July 24, 1942, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78279228>.

¹⁴⁴ "Red Army Day Tomorrow," *The Daily News*, February 22, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78794103>.

had some degree of influence over the company's work. Additionally, at the conclusion of the war, Patch printed an article in its newsletter that offers further evidence that some left-wing ideas made their way into the company. The article by 'N.V.S.' described the social significance of work and the failure of the market system to value those who worked in the sciences and the arts.¹⁴⁵ The author lamented that "we tend to glorify the individually useful from the financial point of view rather than the socially useful,"¹⁴⁶ thus demonstrating a failure of the capitalist system.

An analysis of newspaper advertisements, and materials such as pamphlets and newsletters from the Patch Theatre archive has revealed that Patch produced over 70 theatrical performances in its first decade. Of these, 31 were comedies and the remainder dramas. Many productions were social commentaries that dealt with the hypocrisies and unfairness of society. Those that I have reviewed featured such themes as marriage, love, romance, extra-marital affairs, false identities, and class prejudice. The diversity in productions was also notable—performances ranged from the sixteenth-century morality play *Everyman*, to downstairs comedies such as *Hullabaloo* by Philip Johnson. The company also performed works by Shakespeare as well as dramatisations of the lives

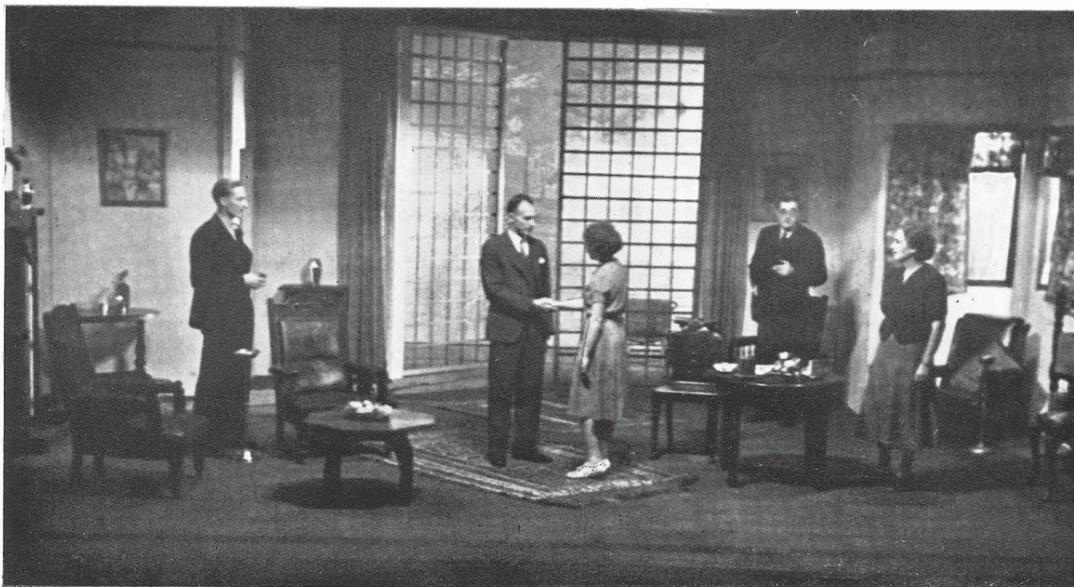


Figure 16. A scene from *Aren't We All* performed during the Second World War. Edward Beeby is second in on the right. Source: Artist unknown, *A Scene from 'Aren't We All'*, 1941, photograph, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth, WA: R.S. Sampson Printing Co. 1944).

of famous composers, such as Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin. In addition to full-length plays, Patch occasionally put on one-act productions that gave students the opportunity to perform. Normally these seasons involved a mixture of verse-speaking, dramatised items, and interpretative dances.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ NVS, "Blind Alley," Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1, (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, September 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

¹⁴⁶ NVS, "Blind Alley."

¹⁴⁷ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 2 (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, October 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

Scripts for most productions were usually imported from Europe or the United States and were often considered to be quite modern. In its first decade, Patch produced only three Australian plays: two of these were by the Perth playwright, Raymond Bowers, who also acted with Patch, and the other was by Sumner Locke-Elliott. In contrast, other amateur theatres in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the Five Arts Club, the Little Theatre and the Independent Players, helped foster many local playwrights.¹⁴⁸ Even the Workers' Art Guild, while importing the latest plays from the United States and Britain, performed many politically radical plays by local playwrights such as Bill Irwin and Katherine Susannah Prichard.¹⁴⁹ Patch's work included a mix of highbrow performances that contained serious, educational, or moral themes, in addition to lowbrow comedies. Peter Mann argued that Patch competed mainly with the Repertory Club for its audience, though was more daring in its productions.¹⁵⁰ While performances at Patch were not radical, some of them did critique society in subtle, and often entertaining, ways that encouraged their audiences to consider the current system's failings, which I will demonstrate later in the chapter. In this way Patch was subtly rather than overtly political.

During the war, most of the plays that Patch performed were popular light-hearted dramas and comedies. They intended to allow audiences to 'escape' their lives and the serious events of war, such as Stephen Philip's tragic romance drama, *Paolo and Francesca*, Moliere's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, C.K. Munroe's *At Mrs Beams*, and A.J. Cronin's *Jupiter Laughs*. Escapist entertainment was a key feature of life on the Australian homefront, as Kate Darian-Smith found in Melbourne: "With limited alternatives, the relative prosperity of the community, the psychological need to escape from reality, and importantly, minimal interference from the government, theatres and cinemas dominated mass culture during the war."¹⁵¹ Plays allowed patrons to suspend their belief in reality and enter a fantasy world.

While Patch catered principally for Perth residents, the company also accommodated Australian, British, and American servicemen in its audience. Nita Pannell, a well-known Australian stage actress of the twentieth century, remembered that while she was training and performing at Patch towards the end of the war, there were sailors from the submarines, the *Adamant* and the *Maidstone*, who came to the shows.¹⁵² Pannell acted as Maggie in *Hobson's Choice* by Harold

¹⁴⁸ P.A. Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," (PhD Thesis, Graylands Teacher College, 1962), 10; Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Patricia Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) from 1938 to 1980 and its Role in the Cultural Life of Perth," (PhD dissertation, Murdoch University, 2013), 55.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Mann, "Patch Theatre," in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 428.

¹⁵¹ Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime, 1939-1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), 117.

¹⁵² Nita Pannell, interview by Chris Jeffrey, April 7, 1976, https://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b1784705_40.

Brighouse, a romantic comedy, in what the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* implies was a break-out opportunity for her.¹⁵³ In an interview with Chris Jeffrey in 1976, Pannell did not mention Beeby, but described Mrs Beeby as “a marvellous teacher. ...Nothing in Perth ever touched her”.¹⁵⁴



Figure 17. Nita Pannell (right) and two Patch actors in *Hobson's Choice* at Munster House. Source: Artist unknown, [image of three actresses in *Hobson's Choice* at Patch Theatre], 1944, photograph, Museum of Performing Arts WA.

Hobson's Choice was a typical play for Patch: it combined a story of family and romance with a good dose of humour, and which granted its audience a reprieve from wartime worries.

Despite Patch's mostly mainstream repertoire, some of its works engaged with anti-capitalist or progressive values. In the Patch archives, David Crann noted that the company's “social critique was subtly socialist,”¹⁵⁵ as the community theatre was hoping to appeal to middle-class audiences. One common theme within the company's plays was the immorality of money and wealth, including Harley Granville's *The Voysey Inheritance*, which Patch performed in August 1941.¹⁵⁶ Barker was a progressive playwright and a vanguard of the New Theatre Movement in Britain.¹⁵⁷ His writings were infused with commentaries on contemporary political and social debates and, in *The Voysey Inheritance*, he criticised the corruption of new capitalism.¹⁵⁸ The play depicts an upper-class English family, whose patriarch, Mr Voysey, has defrauded clients for over 30 years to

¹⁵³ David Hough, “Pannell, Nita Veronica (1904–1994),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, published online 2020, accessed online May 2, 2022. <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pannell-nita-veronica-29916/text37034>.

¹⁵⁴ Pannell, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Author unknown, October 14, 2004, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁵⁶ “Advertising,” *Sunday Times*, August 31, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59154679>.

¹⁵⁷ David Farr, “Our Very Own Ibsen,” *The Guardian*, last updated April 25, 2006.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/apr/25/theatre1>.

¹⁵⁸ Farr, “Our Very Own Ibsen.”

fund a lavish lifestyle. The play opens with Beeby, as the son of Mr Voysey, discovering the truth of this corruption, made worse when he discovered that the family knew of the deceit. The Voysey family is condemned by its dishonesty, but the play also implicates the ideologies, institutions, and capitalist system of Edwardian England in their corruption. The theatre critic, Michael Billington, recently described the play as “a quasi-Marxist attack on the immorality of capital”.¹⁵⁹ This attack is best expressed through the character of the artist who designates all unearned income as corrupt.¹⁶⁰ Although *The Voysey Inheritance* was not a socialist play, it was the first play at Patch to invoke any political messaging and that provided a small indication of the politics of the company’s owners.

A similar critique of corruption was made by the company in its performance of William Somerset Maugham’s *Sheppey* in May 1942, which was later reprised due to popular demand in October 1945. *Sheppey* follows the titular protagonist who wins a large amount of money and proceeds to live according to the teachings of the New Testament. He shares his wealth and opens his home to a thief and prostitute, much to the dismay of his family and friends. The audience watches as those close to Sheppey, seeking to prevent him giving away further money, take him to a psychiatrist so that he can be declared insane. In perhaps the most revealing statement of the play, the psychiatrist announces that “a sane man doesn’t give his money to the poor—a sane man takes money from the poor”.¹⁶¹ Both *Sheppey* and *The Voysey Inheritance* accept a subtle Marxist view on humanity under capitalism, in which people are willing to exploit others for their own gain. The morality play *Everyman* is a sixteenth-century work from the Tudor court that Patch performed in 1941.¹⁶² It featured the ageless conflict between good and evil, and the impact of money on human nature. In *Everyman*, the eponymous protagonist, is shown to be living a sinful life due to his materialism, indulging in alcohol, food, sex, and money. These indulgences in material goods and pleasures are causing him to lose his soul. The character of Death, who God orders to summon Everyman so he can be judged at his reckoning, explains what fate awaits the wealthy: “He that loveth riches I will strike with my dart.”¹⁶³

Other plays at Patch that dealt with issues such as unemployment, feminism, and justice encouraged the audience to be introspective about society. Cedric Mount’s *Dirge Without Dole*, staged at Patch in May 1942, satirises middle-class amateur theatre and depicts the seriousness of unemployment.¹⁶⁴ In this play, the first scene reveals an unemployed husband, wife and their

¹⁵⁹ Michael Billington, “The Voysey Inheritance,” *The Guardian*, last updated April 26, 2006. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/apr/26/theatre1>.

¹⁶⁰ Billington, “The Voysey Inheritance.”

¹⁶¹ William Somerset Maugham, *Sheppey: A Play in Three Acts*, (United States: Arno Press, 1977).

¹⁶² “Entertainments,” *The West Australian*, November 22, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47170485>.

¹⁶³ Anonymous, *Everyman* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996).

¹⁶⁴ Don Watson, “‘Plays with Subjects That Matter’: Political Theatre and the Amateur Movement in the 1930s,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2020): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X20000093>.

children telling their life story, who are then given advice by a businessman, a bishop, a fascist, a scientist, and a communist on how they can solve their unemployment according to their institution's teachings. The fascist cries, "Down with the dirty Jews! That's your trouble, brother. The dirty Jew is getting fat on the things that are rightfully mine-and yours."¹⁶⁵ The businessman says he will build an armament in the middle of town to keep the world profitable; the scientist prescribes the families with vitamins to replace their meals; the bishop encourages the family to read the bible; and, lastly, the communist says that the man needs to win social justice by force, specifically through a working-class uprising where "the streets shall be rivers of blood—capitalist blood—and the workers shall rise up and govern the land".¹⁶⁶ The scene is presented in such a way that all these solutions are extreme, laughable and ridiculous. A revelation then occurs: the audience learns that this scene is a submission to a play-contest, when the 'adjudicator' comes on stage and criticises the play's political subject matter. He laments that the theatre is a place where audiences come to be amused. "It is a well-known fact that when the great British public goes to the theatre, it leaves its intelligence in the cloak-room, with its hats. ...The theatre should be a place of escape from the cares of life,"¹⁶⁷ a philosophy that Patch, for the most part, embodied in its repertoire of plays. Only the husband and wife characters later defend their play and impress on the other characters that their work would raise awareness of the hardships of unemployment. Through *Dirge*, Patch engaged with an issue critically relevant to its audience: unemployment.

These works, subtly charged with political commentary, were exceptions in the Patch repertoire. For most of the war years, the company provided 'escapist' entertainment to its audience. Then, in September 1944, Patch opened a season of Lillian Hellman's famous *Watch on the Rhine*, a contemporary play first performed in New York in 1941. Hellman was a member of the Communist Party from 1938 to 1949 and her plays were often controversial.¹⁶⁸ *Watch on the Rhine* depicts a woman, Sara, her German husband, Kurt, and their children, who escaped the war in Europe and are staying with Sara's mother, Fanny, and brother, David, in Washington DC. Another guest in the house, Count Teck de Brancovis, who associates with Nazi officials from the German embassy, discovers that Kurt is part of an anti-fascist resistance group and wanted by German authorities. Teck attempts to blackmail Kurt, who intends to return to Germany to help rescue imprisoned members of the resistance. Kurt refuses to be blackmailed and kills Teck. Fanny and

¹⁶⁵ Cedric Mount, "Dirge Without Dole," 481 in *Twenty-Five Modern One-Act Plays*, edited by John Bourne (London, UK: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

¹⁶⁶ Mount, "Dirge Without Dole," 483.

¹⁶⁷ Mount, "Dirge Without Dole," 486.

¹⁶⁸ John Earl Haynes, "Hellman and the Hollywood Inquisition: The Triumph of Spin-Control over Candour," *Film History* 10, no. 3 (1998): 412, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815233>.

David agree to help Kurt escape the American police and give him money to help him free his comrades.

At the time the play was written and produced, the United States had not yet entered the war. Hellman's purpose was to warn middle-class Americans about the pervasiveness of fascism and totalitarianism, and to urge the United States to support its allies who were at war with Nazi Germany. Hellman felt that many Americans were apathetic to the European conflict, and her play warned Americans of the risks posed to them by fascism and ignorance.¹⁶⁹ Sara, in a conversation with Teck about Germany and National Socialism, outlines the dangers of delayed intervention. "Too much talk," she says. "By this time all of us know where we are and what we have to do. It is an indulgence to sit in a room and discuss your beliefs as if they were the afternoon's golf game."¹⁷⁰ The play's setting, the living room of a country house outside Washington DC, implicates the home as a place in which political evil must be confronted. Duty and responsibility are central issues. Kurt feels that he cannot "stay by and watch,"¹⁷¹ while his countryfolk suffer under the Nazi regime; he feels compelled to return to assist his fellow resistance fighters, despite knowing he will probably die. Hellman showed, through her characters, that the war was not contained in Europe and that those at home had a duty to combat fascism.

While the performance of *Watch on the Rhine* in New York in 1941 intended to combat the United States' perceived lack of concern about fascism and the war, the context in which the play was shown in Perth was slightly different. An extract of *Watch on the Rhine* was first performed by Patch in July 1944 as part of the company's fifth anniversary performances, and the full work was directed by Mrs Beeby in September.¹⁷² However, the play had been chosen earlier in the year, as it was first advertised in May 1944.¹⁷³ This timing reveals something about the Beebys' possible motivations. Though the Americans had joined the Allies after Japanese aircraft bombed Pearl Harbour in 1941, and were making progress against the Axis powers, they had yet to launch a second front in Europe at this time—an intervention that Beeby had advocated for on radio and in print for years.¹⁷⁴ It is possible that, in choosing *The Watch on the Rhine*, the Beebys sought to reinvigorate support for the war amongst fatigued Perth audiences, and to maintain the community morale

¹⁶⁹ Vivian M. Patraha, "Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine*: Realism, Gender, and Historical Crisis," *Modern Drama* 32, no. 1 (1989): 131, <https://doi.org/10.3138/md.32.1.11>.

¹⁷⁰ Lillian Hellman, *Watch on the Rhine* (New York, NY, Dramatists Play Service, Inc: 1971 [first published 1941]).

¹⁷¹ Hellman, *Watch on the Rhine*.

¹⁷² "Advertising," *The West Australian*, September 9, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44977488>.

¹⁷³ "Advertising," *The West Australian*, May 6, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44808595>.

¹⁷⁴ "Second Front," *The Daily News*, April 27, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78275910>; Edward Beeby, "Anti Fascist League of WA," [radio transcript], October 20, 1943, A367, C79568, item 4-5, NAA, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=709428>.

required to sustain the fight against fascism.¹⁷⁵ The play was indeed popular with Perth audiences as performances were booked out weeks in advance.¹⁷⁶ One viewer, Greta, wrote:

By the way, took in the Patch show— 'Watch on the Rhine'— good too, I enjoyed it immensely; particularly Ray Angel's effort as the villain of the piece. He was grand. Really felt that the story didn't hold quite enough meat for a very able cast.¹⁷⁷

Despite this praise, it is unknown whether this play had the political impact that the Beebys might have hoped for.

The Paradox of Patch

After *Watch on the Rhine*, Patch returned to its repertoire of dramas and comedies that included social dilemmas of justice, family dramas, and romantic relationships. And here is the paradox of Patch: that Beeby, in particular, was a known political agitator in the war years, that Patch gave him a stage on which to act, and that, for the most part, the company eschewed ideological commentary in its work. Some performances even lauded the capitalist system. The company performed *Hobson's Choice* by Harold Brighouse in April 1945, which shares the success story of a hard-working daughter of a lazy shoemaker, who set up a competing business to force her father's company out of business. It was not until April 1947, with the performance of Sumner Locke-Elliott's Australian play, *Invisible Circus*, that Patch produced another subtly socialist work. *Invisible Circus* depicts the corrupt power of commercialism in radio on the creative nature of actors and writers. One character laments the effects of capitalism in the industry:

Radio has become blackmail on a national scale. From the sponsor right down the line. Boy you're part of the greatest national hypnotic force of all time... They'd sell heaven if they could get into cartons, and find a sponsor...buy your eternity now in the new cellophane package the handy size.¹⁷⁸

The 'invisible circus' of the play's title is explained as the great arena in which all the workers exist: a repetitive system that forces its participants to produce and sell their writings to make the most money, rather than to do so for satisfaction or enjoyment.¹⁷⁹

The great paradox of Patch was the surprising limits to its political messaging. We can only speculate why this was the case. The first reason may have been related to popular demand and

¹⁷⁵ Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, 42.

¹⁷⁶ "Advertising," *The West Australian*, October 14, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44981907>.

¹⁷⁷ "Merry-Go-Round of Perth," *Mirror*, October 21, 1944, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article76010334>.

¹⁷⁸ Sumner Locke Elliott, 'The Invisible Circus', typescript, (Brisbane: The University of Queensland, 1946).

¹⁷⁹ Anne Pender, "Theatre Animals: Sumner Locke Elliott's Invisible Circus," *Australasian Drama Studies* 68, no. 68 (2016): 67, <https://doi/10.3316/ielapa.150757814675693>.

social appetite. While the Workers' Art Guild had demonstrated that theatre was a useful tool with which to spread political ideas in Perth in the 1930s, and that there was at least a small portion of the population that would patronise these performances, war changed the atmosphere of Perth and this type of theatre became unpopular. Dylan Hyde wrote that in the political climate of 1940 "the public was in no mood for political sermons from the stage".¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, in 1940, Beeby agreed to conduct drama classes for the WA Labor Party with the purpose of producing 'Labor plays', undoubtedly so they could use theatre as another facet to voice their political beliefs and messaging. However, this failed to launch due to a lack of interest from its members. This is further indication of the unpopularity of political theatre at that time.¹⁸¹

This first reason leads logically to a second: economics. Mainstream comedies and drama appealed to a broader audience base, resulting in performances being well patronised and thus profitable. This tactic worked well for the Repertory Theatre, whose repertoire of conservative, light 'drawing-room' theatre had ensured that club survived through the Depression years.¹⁸² Patch was a business, and the clever Mrs Beeby must have understood that obvious politicisation of the company would have discouraged some cast members and students from joining. For the same

PLAYS AND
PLAYERS

Locke-Elliott's satirical comedy at Patch takes us behind the scenes in

The Broadcasting World

IN his play "Invisible Circus," young Australian playwright Sumner Locke-Elliott takes us back-stage at the Aurora Broadcasting Network, commenting mercilessly on what lies behind the smooth running and split-second timing of a radio programme and the listening public's reception and reaction to the matter provided for their entertainment and education.

There is no plot and little in the way of actual situations, the author depending entirely on his handling of the subject matter for results. Clever, witty dialogue; exaggeration and emphasis of character types, an atmosphere of mounting hysteria and moments of pure farce, brilliantly achieve his purpose and provide excellent entertainment and a certain amount of food for thought.

As idealist Bradley McGee, who sees radio as a vitalising educational force, Ray Connop showed more than a little promise and his work will be watched with interest. Roberta Darling playing Courtney Skipton, the only other normal person in the "circus" was not so at

home physically as she was mentally and emotionally but she will learn to impart smoothness and purpose—or should it be reason—to stage movement and to control the many meaningless and no doubt unconscious gestures and arm and

CALENDAR

REPERTORY

April 24, 25, 26:
"Murder Without Crime"

PATCH

April 24, 25, 26:
"Invisible Circus"

UNIVERSITY DRAMATIC SOCIETY, ASSEMBLY HALL

April 24, 26:
Three One-act Plays

body movements she makes during speeches. Every movement about the stage should appear inevitable and every gesture should have its purpose arising out of characterisation or dialogue.

Ikey Broadfoot did her best work to date as the apparently feather-brained radio actress Iris Mitchell who in the role of Gallant Brenda has entered the hearts and homes of thousands of listeners per medium of an everlasting serial. The high note of artificiality was extremely well sustained and she provided many enjoyable moments.

Rhoda Bone's Mrs. Goll was a gem of characterisation and the low steady note on which she played underlined the general atmosphere of the play. Full marks, too, for Dolly Randall as Freda Chase Edith Hume as Lottie Faircourte and Nancy Johnson as Madame Napolleti. J. B. Olliphant played by Edward Beeby impressed one more as a fatherly absent-minded old man than the blustering autocrat, the behaviour and description of his staff led one to expect. John McLennau, Tim Megaw, Peter Hartland and Henry Melville as script writer, producer and actor played satisfactorily with Jean Turner, Ross McKenzie, Frank Moore, and Phil Kroll filling minor roles.

Production was by Edward Beeby.



FRED SHAWN, who will pay a. extended visit to Perth by arrangement with Patch Theatre. This famous American dancer will conduct classes and lectures and will also give a number of personal recitals. He is expected to arrive in Perth at the end of the month.

Figure 18. A critique of Patch's production of *Invisible Circus*. Source: *West Australian*, 24 April 1947, 34, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page3843707>.

¹⁸⁰ Hyde, *Art Was Their Weapon*, 194.

¹⁸¹ "Women's Sphere," *Westralian Worker*, February 23, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article149618757>.

¹⁸² Kotai-Ewers, "The Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA)," 54; Virginia Kirby-Smith, "The Development of Australian Theatre and Drama: 1788-1964," (PhD thesis, Duke University, 1969), 219; Craig, "Radical and Conservative Theatre," 112.

reason, untried local plays were usually avoided by the company, as they were likely to result in less profit.¹⁸³

The final reason is, perhaps, the most important of all: Mrs Beeby's control of the company's artistic direction. The separation of Beeby's political career from his work with Patch suggests that he did not have the degree of influence there that he did on radio and with the League. This, and testimony from former students and cast members, rather suggests that Patch was left largely to Mrs Beeby while her husband's political career took off.¹⁸⁴ Thus, political education and activism were not the focus of Patch, and the socialist values of Beeby were only subtly evident on the stage.

Chapter Conclusions

While life on the homefront in Western Australia has been described as a period of conservatism, Beeby's progressive political beliefs indicated that the rise of liberal ideas and left-wing political activism that occurred in the 1930s did not disappear after the outbreak of war. As he emerged as a recognisable political figure during the war, Beeby had a considerable impact on Perth society, culture, and politics. He provided an alternative voice to mainstream politics through his meetings, radio show and League newspaper, and he helped educate his audience to internationalist, liberal and socialist ideas during a period of increased political repression.

Despite Beeby's strong political convictions, his political career was kept mostly separate from his work with Patch, and thus his activism only affected the company to a small degree. The overwhelming majority of the plays produced at Patch were designed to entertain without deliberately engaging with political issues. Perhaps Mrs Beeby wanted to keep Patch as an organisation that was predominantly dedicated to the arts rather than politics, or it could have been a decision motivated by attracting profit, as audiences would be easier to attract with non-polemical plays. It also seems that Patch was more under Mrs Beeby's direction as Beeby became preoccupied with his political career and romantic affair. Additionally, 'escapist' entertainment was popular during the war as people's everyday lives became more occupied with the stressful events of war. Furthermore, when Patch was established in 1939, the Workers' Art Guild was still functioning as Perth's principal political theatre, and it is likely that Perth's relatively conservative community had no space for a second radical theatre. Beeby also experienced the effects of the government's strong censorship laws when he was removed from air for a period, and so the Beebys may have shared a valid concern that the theatre could be shut down, damaging their livelihood, if they produced anything overtly socialist or anti-war, as the Workers' Art Guild had done during the 1930s. Patch's

¹⁸³ Kirby-Smith, "The Development of Australian Theatre and Drama," 219.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 182, 183.

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most political play, *Watch on the Rhine*, was the only occasion in which the company engaged directly with a political issue of urgency. While Beeby's political activism impacted Perth society, therefore, it did not dramatically inform the activities of the company. Mrs Beeby's values did, however. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, she had a significant impact on the company's engagement with the modern dance movement of the mid-century, which in turn introduced Perth audiences to new cultural experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

The Modern Dance Movement

*Throughout the ages people have always expressed themselves in dance. The history of the dance is the history of the human race.*¹

The development of western dance styles in Australia lagged behind that of Europe and America in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This was partly because Australians preferred to import dances and other cultural products from overseas, rather than innovate with local materials. Modern dance took longer to reach Australia's shores, though it gained popularity in the northern hemisphere from the late nineteenth century. The movement initially struggled to secure a foothold within Australia, which was instead dominated by ballet after the successful tours of the Anna Pavlova company and the various *Ballets Russes*. However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, modern dance slowly established itself as a high artform thanks to visiting artists and dance teachers. When Ida Beeby established a dance studio as part of the Patch Theatre Company in 1939, it was the first school in Perth to teach modern dance.

Mrs Beeby was ambitious in her vision for the dance school at Patch and her dynamic and forceful personality inspired both admiration and animosity in Patch students and theatre members. Her passion and respect for dance was evident as she referred to dance as "the mother of the Arts".² Mrs Beeby taught rhythmic dance lessons that subscribed to the modern dance style inspired by the precedents of Isadora Duncan and the teachings of Francois Delsarte. When the Beebys opened their studio in 1939, it was decided that Beeby would teach piano and voice production and that Mrs Beeby would teach singing, piano and dancing.³ However, it was the dance school to which Mrs Beeby became most committed. Although she had studied dance in New Zealand and Sydney (she took ballet lessons alongside her daughter Patricia Thompson at the Minnie Hooper School of Dancing), she was not classically trained and had no dance-teacher qualifications.⁴ Her lack of

¹ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1 (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, September 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

² Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

³ Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988), 165.

⁴ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 55.

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experience did not prevent her from setting up the dance school at Patch, and it seems that she was able to transfer her teaching experience in singing and piano to this new endeavour.

This chapter will assess the impact of Mrs Beeby on the development of dance in Perth and on the Patch community. First, I establish the international and local dance contexts of the 1930s and 1940s in which Mrs Beeby's work with Patch can be understood. Secondly, I examine the 1940s growth of the Patch dance school and demonstrate that Mrs Beeby made a significant contribution to the cultural development of Perth. Thirdly, I establish that Mrs Beeby had a significant impact on the students and cast members of Patch by examining student's testimonials in letters and interviews. Finally, I interrogate the significance of the Patch residency Mrs Beeby offered in 1947 to Ted Shawn, an early pioneer of American modern dance and the co-founder of the Denishawn School of Dance and Related Arts. This chapter employs primary sources from the Patch archives, Museum of Performing Arts WA archives, J.S. Battye Library archives, and local newspapers on Trove, in addition to Thompson's autobiography, interviews with Patch members, and a large range of scholarly works by various historians.



Figure 19. The Patch dancers had elaborate costumes that were created either by the dancers themselves or by Flo Barnard, the wardrobe mistress. Source: Artist unknown, [Patch dancers on stage], photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

The Influence of Isadora Duncan

I have discovered the dance. I have discovered the art which has been lost for two thousand years⁵ – Isadora Duncan

To understand the style of dance that Mrs Beeby implemented at Patch, we can look to the international context of modern dance and the influence of some key people. The modern dance that developed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was based on interpretive natural movements and was sometimes referred to as free dance, natural dance, new dance, Grecian dance, absolute dance, expressive dance, art dance, central European dance, and/or new artistic dance. As a form it constituted moving gracefully between poses and emphasised dramatic expression and free-flowing expressionistic movements.⁶ It was informed by the work of such American and European dancers as Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and Maud Allan.⁷ Germany and Austria fostered the strongest following of modern dance in Europe, which is why modern dance is sometimes also referred to as central European dance.⁸ Rudolf van Laban was Germany's biggest proponent, establishing a school in Munich in 1911.⁹ Gertrud Bodenwieser and Jan Veen launched schools in Vienna.¹⁰ They advocated that dancers, most of whom were women, could create, control and choreograph dances themselves.¹¹ As most English and American women had limited autonomy in this period, the bodily autonomy and creative control embodied



Figure 20. Through his sketches, artist Jose Clara suggests the way that Duncan moved through her entire torso, her throat, chest, midriff, abdomen, and thighs all rushing forward at once as a single surface, accentuated by the contrasting effect of her thrown-back head. Source: Jose Clara, [Sketch of Isadora Duncan dancing], illustration, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations Reproduced in Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* [1927] (New York & London: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 21.

⁶ Lynn Fisher, "Dance Class: A History of Professional Dance and Dance Training in Western Australia from 1895-1940," (MA Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1992), 219.

⁷ Jordan Beth Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body': Modernity, Physicality and Identity in Australia, 1919 to 1939," (PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2009), 181; Amanda Card, "History in Motion: Dance and Australian Culture, 1920 to 1970," (PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 1999), 18.

⁸ Edward Pask, *Ballet in Australia: The Second Act, 1940-1980* (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60.

⁹ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

¹⁰ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

¹¹ Fisher, "Dance Class," 223; Card, "History in Motion," 54.

within modern dance was a radical idea. It was no accident that the movement developed alongside the expansion of women's suffrage (full enfranchisement for American women was granted in 1920 and 1928 for British women).¹²

Mrs Beeby's main inspiration for the dance school came principally from the teachings and methodology of Duncan. It is apt that she admired Duncan as their lives contained many parallels: both originally came from middle-class families that endured financial hardship; both had partners who were left-wing sympathisers; both were, themselves, politically progressive. In 1922, Duncan launched her final international tour from the Soviet Union. She was declaimed as a traitor by American audiences, however, which compelled the premature cancellation of the tour.¹³ Perhaps Duncan's experiences influenced Mrs Beeby's determination to keep Patch as apolitical. Lastly, they both died in car accidents while middle-aged.

Duncan pioneered the establishment of modern dance in the United States and Europe and helped change the public's attitude towards dance. She created a contemporary image for the stage-dancer as a noble-spirited, bold and independent woman.¹⁴ She used modern dance to express herself, which was unusual as dancers typically portrayed characters on stage.¹⁵ Duncan moved the focus from the beauty of a dancer's body to their soul.¹⁶ She described dance as "not only the art that gives expression to the human soul through movement, but also the foundation of a complete conception of life".¹⁷

Duncan sought to legitimise dance as a "high" artform in her career, which required her to convince audiences that dance was a moral practice, not just entertainment.¹⁸ She linked dance to classical ideas of truth, beauty, and purity and connected it to the rich tradition of antiquity in which dance was viewed as noble.¹⁹ She also moved dance away from its association with the lower classes by courting privileged patrons, selecting eminent venues and projecting the impression of high art while embracing such composers as Beethoven, Bach and Schubert.²⁰ Indeed, music was an essential component of modern dance, determining how a dancer felt and thus how they moved.²¹ Yet Duncan also relied on racialised arguments that positioned her dance as separate from and superior

¹² Fisher, "Dance Class," 223.

¹³ Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), ProQuest Ebook Central, 15.

¹⁴ Fisher, "Dance Class," 225.

¹⁵ Fisher, "Dance Class," 225.

¹⁶ Fisher, "Dancing Queen," 58.

¹⁷ Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, ed. Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theatre Arts, 1928) 101.

¹⁸ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 10; Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 200.

¹⁹ Fisher, "Dancing Queen," 58, Daly, *Done into Dance*, 16.

²⁰ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 16, 10.

²¹ John Martin and Kathy Jacobs, *Modern Dance* (Hightstown: Princeton Book Company/Dance Horizons, 1989), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central.

to African American jazz dance, which she saw as uncivilised, profane and sexual.²² She made similar comparisons to other forms of dance, complaining that ballet and promiscuous ‘leg shows’ existed only for the purpose of exciting men.²³



Figure 21. This lunging dance position was inspired by a carving of a lunging figure engraved on the Nike Temple; a photograph of which Duncan had in her postcard collection. This position was adapted into Duncan’s dance vocabulary. Source: Artist unknown, [Isadora Duncan dancing], photograph, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Reproduced in Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), ProQuest Ebook Central.

Modern dance was, in many ways, the antithesis to ballet’s technical, rigid style. Duncan cultivated a romantic ‘anti-technical’ aesthetic that emphasised the paradigm of the ‘natural’.²⁴ Whereas ballet was examined by how well a dancer could perform techniques, Duncan encouraged young dancers to be creative and compose their own dances without fearing the strict need to adhere to a correct proper form. She eschewed the corset and pointe shoes, two defining features of a ballerina, thus emphasising her rejection of ballet’s rigidity and allowing the body to move freely

²² Daly, *Done into Dance*, 7.

²³ Fisher, “Dancing Queen,” 58.

²⁴ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 77; Martin and Jacobs, *Modern Dance*, 4.

and express a fuller range of motion.²⁵ Despite the opposing aims and philosophies of ballet and modern dance, the latter still relied on the former as its basis for movement. Modern dance had not yet invented an entirely new form with which to express its spirit.²⁶

Mrs Beeby was also influenced by Francois Delsarte's teachings and methodology, which emphasised a harmony of the mind, body and spirit.²⁷ In 1898 he had been called by Duncan

the master of those principles of flexibility of muscles and lightness of body should receive universal thanks for the bonds he has removed from our constrained members. His teachings faithfully given, combined with the usual instructions necessary to learning to dance, will give a result exceptionally graceful and charming.²⁸

Delsarte never published his notes or works and so his teachings have been disseminated through the publications of his pupils, which at times have been highly contradictory.²⁹ He was originally a singer and actor at the Paris Conservatory but disliked the stilted performance style it perpetuated.³⁰ To discover the dramatic method, Delsarte analysed bodily expressions to determine how meaning externalised itself physically.³¹ He devised a system based on art, science and religion in which his theory of the human system was embodied in his 'Principle of Trinity'.³² The trinity was composed of life, soul and mind, which were allocated to different zones of the body and a corresponding form of movement.³³ Life was communicated through the limbs and outward motion; the soul was articulated through the torso and balanced motion; and the mind was expressed through the head and inward motion.³⁴ Because Delsarte did not leave behind any documentation, his teachings were subject to adaptation and misrepresentation by self-proclaimed teachers of Delsarte expression.³⁵ Thus, by the late 1880s, Delsartism, was a popular craze in the United States and had lost some of its credibility.³⁶

Delsarte's ideas about the connection between inner-self and external behaviour (body and soul) were adopted by the physical culture movement that was becoming popular in the late-nineteenth century. Physical culture was a subsummation of gymnastics, sports and physical education but with a political and social awareness as it sought to provide an antidote to

²⁵ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 74.

²⁶ Martin and Jacobs, *Modern Dance*, 5.

²⁷ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 68.

²⁸ "Emotional Expression," *New York Herald*, February 20, 1898.

²⁹ Martin and Jacobs, *Modern Dance*, 26.

³⁰ Martin and Jacobs, *Modern Dance*, 27; Daly, *Done into Dance*, 123.

³¹ Martin and Jacobs, *Modern Dance*, 27.

³² Daly, *Done into Dance*, 123.

³³ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 123.

³⁴ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 123.

³⁵ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 125.

³⁶ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 125.

modernity.³⁷ In interwar Australia, physical culture aimed to improve the health of the Australian society and redirect individual desires for the good of the nation through its selfless quality.³⁸ Modern dance embraced many aspects of physical culture, including the emphasis that correct forms of dance could promote balance, control of the body and good health.³⁹ Physical culture maintained the belief that the inner self was malleable and could improve by changing outward behaviour.⁴⁰ Hence, physical culturalists thought that dancing was beneficial due to its integration of morality, health, recreation, social culture, freedom and graceful motion.⁴¹ This was crucial for Duncan as she advocated that dance could be used for social betterment.⁴² Supporters of physical culture and modern dance believed in the transformative power of their exercises as it would imbue young, white Australians with the necessary beauty, grace, health and individual agency.⁴³

Modern Dance in Australia

Australian dance culture in the early twentieth century was predominantly influenced by European and American trends. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance were overlooked or ignored by the mainstream white culture, and there were few other 'home-grown' styles of dance to speak of.⁴⁴ So, dance history in Australia often emphasises the impact of foreign and visiting dancers. Furthermore, Australia's geographical and cultural isolation often meant that it took longer to adopt imported cultural trends. All of this helps us understand the degree to which Mrs Beeby's influence on dance in 1940s Perth was progressive.

In nineteenth-century Australia, dance was popular entertainment and dancers were mainly professional working-class women and girls. However, during the twentieth century, following the trends in Europe and America, dance became more reputable and was an acceptable hobby for the daughters of Australia's middle class. During Mrs Beeby's time in Sydney and as European companies toured the country, Australia experienced a surge of public interest in ballet. The Anna Pavlova Company toured in 1926 and 1929 and three versions of the *Ballets Russes* toured in 1936, 1938 and 1939.⁴⁵ These tours helped challenge the Britishness of Australian popular culture and reinvigorated the development of European dance culture in Australia. When many dancers chose to stay in

³⁷ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 127; Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 79.

³⁸ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 79.

³⁹ Card, "Tethering the Flow," 140; Daly, *Done into Dance*, 26.

⁴⁰ Daly, *Done into Dance* 26.

⁴¹ Daly, *Done into Dance* 26.

⁴² Daly, *Done into Dance* 26.

⁴³ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 8.

⁴⁴ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 17.

⁴⁵ Pearl Davidson, "Popular Culture in Australia: The Ballets Russes," 2013, <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/handle/2123/10133/Pearl%20Davidson%20Venour%20V%20%20Na%20Prize%202013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

Australian and open their own dance schools, it helped invigorate the industry.⁴⁶ Ballerinas such as Anna Pavlova and Tamara Karsavina helped transform the dancer's image from indecent to virtuous and idealistic.⁴⁷ The popularity of the *Ballet Russes* and the acceptance of ballet as the highest form of dance (emphasised by ballet teachers and dancers), made it harder for modern dancers to establish their own place within the Australian dance scene.⁴⁸

In Western Australia, dance for women and girls during the early twentieth century was largely split along class lines and was limited to fancy dancing (the rhythmic stepping of the polka, waltz, and schottische), Irish dancing, Scottish dancing and ballroom.⁴⁹ Dance in Perth then experienced a shift in the 1930s predominantly due to Linley Wilson (1898-1990), who Paul Hasluck described as among the "young generation of native talent had begun to emerge and bring a new quality into the cultural life of Western Australia".⁵⁰ Wilson, born in Perth to an affluent family, studied dance in London for four years before returning to Perth in 1926, where she established her private dance studio at Durham house on Hay Street.⁵¹ She was the only accredited teacher of ballet



Figure 22. Linley Wilson with a cigarette in her hand surrounded by some of her dance students. Source: Artist unknown, Linley Wilson, photograph, Museum of Performing Arts WA, <https://www.mopa.ptt.wa.gov.au/item/cjz2nlkdj0dlcqr966he60hxx-linley-wilson>.

⁴⁶ David Throsby, *Dance in Australia: A Profile*, 2004. <https://ausdance.org.au/?ACT=73&file=1519>; Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon, *Australia Dances: Creating Australian Dance, 1945-1965* (Wakefield Press, 2010) 2.

⁴⁷ Fisher, "Dance Class," 223.

⁴⁸ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 199.

⁴⁹ Fisher, "Dancing Queen," 72,73.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Publishing, 2007), 97, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵¹ Fisher, "Dancing Queen," 70.

and ballroom dancing in the state.⁵² While other dance studios suffered during the Depression, Wilson's thrived due to her cultivated reputation as a high-class dance teacher and respectable role model, embodying the model of femininity popular in the 1930s.⁵³ Wilson was part of an inter-war shift in which dance lessons were no longer undertaken mainly by working-class girls as an apprenticeship or training for the professional stage, but were taken by middle-class girls as a recreational pursuit that taught grace and deportment.⁵⁴ Wilson's classes reinforced traditional artistic and bourgeois values with her British model of dance instruction.⁵⁵ Wilson helped make dance reputable in Perth and promoted classical ballet as an elite artform through her exclusionary classes, which only the affluent could afford. Her high fees, three shillings per lesson for a ten-week term, excluded many working women from taking the classes.⁵⁶ Patch, with its comparatively affordable fees, took the opposite approach. In what was arguably a political act as well as practical business model, Patch priced its lessons to allow the inclusion of working-class students.

While ballet enjoyed a steady rise in popularity and esteem, modern dance took longer to establish itself. The international origins of modern dance slowly helped establish its legitimacy in Australia. The first recorded instance of modern dance performed in Australia was in 1896 when the American dancer Bessie Clayton performed *La Femme de Feu (Lady of Fire)*, a piece created by Loie Fuller, the first internationally acclaimed dancer of modern dance.⁵⁷ It was not until Maud Allan toured Australia 1914 that the 'free dance' style was properly introduced.⁵⁸ Her six concerts in Perth were not well attended, which one newspaper attributed to an economic slump, though the city's audiences were eventually won over by her skill and ability.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the novel spectacle of bare-footed dancers and improvisational techniques attracted persistent criticism, as many felt it could not compare to the 'superior' style of ballet.⁶⁰

While not popular, modern dance was embraced by some Australian dancers and dance teachers, who disseminated its practices to their students after the First World War. Two early exponents of it were Joan Henry and Joan Joske in Melbourne. These women were introduced to modern styles of dance when they attended 'rhythmic movement' classes to help them overcome

⁵² Lynn Fisher and Geoffrey Bolton, "Wilson, Norma Linley (1898–1990)," Australian Dictionary of Biography, accessed online 15 November 2021., <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wilson-norma-linley-15798/text26997>.

⁵³ Fisher, "Dance Class,"; Fisher and Bolton, "Wilson, Norma Linley (1898–1990)."

⁵⁴ Fisher, "Dance Class," 237.

⁵⁵ Fisher, "Dance Class," 148, 151, 163.

⁵⁶ Fisher, "Dance Class," 251-252.

⁵⁷ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 59.

⁵⁸ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁵⁹ "Maud Allan Season," *The Daily News*, September 29, 1914, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article83521392>.

⁶⁰ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 177.

their minor physical disabilities.⁶¹ They transferred to modern dance in the mid-1920s when they attended the Melbourne dance studio of Lola Laban, the cousin of Rudolf Laban, a German dancer, theorist, and choreographer who had schools throughout Europe.⁶² Lola Laban had trained with Mary Wigman, a pupil of her cousin and one of the key pioneers of modern dance in Europe. Laban focused on teaching her students about the expressive ideas and abstract principles of modern dance.⁶³ After Laban returned to Europe, Henry established her own studio in South Yarra in 1927, The Studio of the Absolute Dance.⁶⁴

Despite the pioneering work of Laban, Henry and Joske in establishing modern ballet in Australia, it was not until the 1930s with the influence of Sonja Revid (later anglicised to Sonia) and Irene Vera Young that the modern dance movement became more popular. Revid, originally from the Soviet Union, founded her School of Art Dance and Body Culture in Melbourne soon after her arrival in 1931.⁶⁵ She was also a pupil of Mary Wigman, graduating from the Wigman Schule in Dresden in 1928.⁶⁶ Although she performed regular recitals with her students, who received both praise and notoriety for their work, her school did not enjoy permanent success.⁶⁷ She attracted critics who did not appreciate her skill and did not perceive modern dance as 'high' art. One critic, Basil Burdett, wrote that he felt there was no technique in Revid's performances.⁶⁸ He continued that this dance did not measure up to the technical superiority of classical ballet.⁶⁹ Some of these views suggest why the Australian public was slow to adopt modern dance. Still, Revid's art was staunchly defended by others who applauded her modern approach and the beauty of this new form of self-expression.⁷⁰

Irene Vera Young was the first notable Australian-born devotee of modern dance.⁷¹ She studied with Jan Veen at the Strauss School in the United States.⁷² When she returned to Australia, she was shocked by the revelation that modern dance was relatively unknown but after acknowledging that it had only been introduced and studied in New York for five years, she took it upon herself to spread her knowledge of modern dance as a dance teacher.⁷³ However, this reminded her of Australia's cultural remoteness; she wrote that "[o]ur very geographical isolation

⁶¹ Card, "History in Motion," 18.

⁶² Card, "History in Motion," 18.

⁶³ Card, "History in Motion," 20.

⁶⁴ Card, "History in Motion," 19.

⁶⁵ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁶⁶ Card, "History in Motion," 22.

⁶⁷ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁶⁸ Basil Burdett, "B.B." *Herald*, May 27, 1937.

⁶⁹ Burdett, "B.B."

⁷⁰ Card, "History in Motion," 49.

⁷¹ Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁷² Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁷³ Irene Vera Young, "The German Dance," *Dance Magazine*, July 1933.

places us in a position that forces us to wait for a space for the inspiration of the other parts of the world to reach us".⁷⁴ Young taught what she referred to as modern German dance in Sydney from the 1930s to the mid-1940s in her studio Irene Vera Young School of German Dance, Motion Choir and Body Culture.⁷⁵ While Young emphasised the supremacy of the German form and emphasised that modern German dance was distinct from Greek dancing or free rhythm schools, it can still be viewed as part of the modern dance category.⁷⁶ Young believed in populist principles, that dance



Figure 23. Irene Vera Young twirls barefoot for a dance performance. Source: Artist unknown, photograph, [Irene Vera Young twirling], Irene Vera Young - papers, 1901-1964, State Library of New South Wales, <https://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110094359>

should speak to the masses as well as the elite.⁷⁷ Her classes were taught at night and Young trained Sydney's business girls, the "milliners, clerks, typists and shop assistants", who, she believed, were transformed into "human beings" and "identities" through her German dance lessons.⁷⁸ This 'German' label served Young successfully during the 1930s and her emulation of the country's national philosophy was not problematic, but by 1941, with Australia at war with Germany, Young decided to change the name of her dance to distance herself from Germany.⁷⁹ Young also hoped to

⁷⁴ Irene Vera Young, "The Advent of the New Dance and its Rapid Growth in Australia," in Irene Vera Young—Papers 1910-1964.

⁷⁵ Card, "History in Motion," 66.

⁷⁶ Card, "History in Motion," 68.

⁷⁷ Card, "History in Motion," 68.

⁷⁸ Irene Vera Young, *Manuscripts: A Miscellany of Arts and Letters*, no. 9, May 22, 1934.

⁷⁹ Card, "History in Motion," 89-91.

elevate modern dance as a serious and formal style of dance by creating a syllabus for a modern dance technique, including examinations.⁸⁰ She enlisted the help of Gertrud Bodenwieser to compose this syllabus.⁸¹

Bodenwieser helped popularise modern dance in Australia after her arrival in 1939. She had a distinguished background as a modern dancer due to her career in Europe, and so was able to impart respectability and legitimacy onto the dance.⁸² After escaping Nazi occupied Vienna, Bodenwieser opened a studio in Sydney and formed groups of dancers who toured Australia throughout the 1940s and 1950s.⁸³ This, in addition to the many *Ballet Russes* dancers unable to return to Europe during the Second World War, demonstrates the impact of the war on the development of Australia's dance scene. Bodenwieser, on paper, rejected the connection between ballet and modern dance, seeing exponents of ballet as arrogant in their dismissal of other dance forms.⁸⁴ Modern dance, she argued, did not rely on a one-sided cultivation of gracefulness through fixed forms and technical foundations, but embraced expressionism where dancers had to look within themselves to perform exaltations of the soul.⁸⁵ However, in practice, Bodenwieser used ballet steps, barre and pictorial effects in her classes, demonstrating how modern dance was built upon and adapted some aspects of traditional ballet for its own purposes.⁸⁶

Aspects of modern dance filtered down and were adapted by Australian dancers and dance teachers, who liked the concept of what they saw as 'natural dancing'.⁸⁷ Some supporters of natural dancing in the interwar period in Australia were Annette Kellerman, an international celebrity performer, and Doree Brooks, a past exhibition dancer for J.C. Williamson Ltd.⁸⁸ Both of these women were inclusive in their approach to natural dancing. Like Mrs Beeby, they wanted to empower lower middle-class and working-class women to express themselves through music and learn better control and coordination of their bodies.⁸⁹

There was a growing interest by physical educators in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, created by Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, in interwar Australia. Dalcroze Eurhythmics combines musical, rhythmical

⁸⁰ Card, "History in Motion," 89.

⁸¹ Card, "History in Motion," 89.

⁸² Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 60.

⁸³ Marie Ada Couper, "Remembering Edouard Borovansky and his Company 1939-1959," (PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2018), 40.

⁸⁴ Gertrud Bodenwieser, *The New Dance* (Vaucluse NSW: Rondo Studios, 1970), 30.

⁸⁵ Bodenwieser, *The New Dance*, 31-32.

⁸⁶ Gertrud Bodenwieser, "Publicity Notes for South Africa tour of 1950," in *Gertrud Bodenwieser Archives, 1919-1997* (Canberra: The Keep Dancing! Collection/ National Library of Australia, 1950).

⁸⁷ Amanda Card, "Tethering the Flow: Dialogues between Dance, Physical Culture and Antiquity in Interwar Australia," in *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, eds. Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 146.

⁸⁸ Card, "Tethering the Flow," 146, 147.

⁸⁹ Card, "Tethering the Flow," 147.

and aural training based on the philosophy that movement is key to learning and experiencing music.⁹⁰ One lecturer in Sydney in 1923 described it as a “system of complete musical training which has music as its basis, and the body, the whole of the body, as its instrument.”⁹¹ Jessie Horton, the deputy principal at Highgate School in North Perth, discussed physical culture, eurhythmics, folk dance and their educational benefits with her colleagues and presented displays of the latest rhythmic work she had observed in England.⁹² Two other teachers, Lillian Mills and Ella Gormley also informally taught Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Perth.⁹³ This demonstrates that modern ideas about the connection between music, movement and rhythm existed in Perth prior to Mrs Beeby’s arrival.

While there were exponents of modern dance in the eastern states, before 1939 there were no modern dance teachers or dancers in Perth. However, there were those who experimented with modern approaches to dance. One was Alison Lee, a former student and assistant teacher of Linley Wilson and the only Western Australian professional concert dance artist before 1940.⁹⁴ In Lee’s *Dance of Terror*, she experimented with a modernist approach to expressive movement.⁹⁵ There was another dance teacher who opened her studio a year after Patch, Dorothy Fleming, who taught Greek dance. Greek dance shared similar philosophies and techniques to modern dance and the opening of these two schools within a couple of years of one another indicates that there was an increasing awareness and popularity of modern styles of dance in Perth. Fleming, a Western Australian-born dancer, learnt Classical Greek dancing and the Royal Academy of Dance system at the Ginner-Mawer School of Dance and Drama in London under Ruby Ginner.⁹⁶ Fleming also studied the dance philosophies of Lily Grove who, like Mrs Beeby, incorporated the theories of Delsarte.⁹⁷ Fleming was trained in ballet by Wilson prior to her departure for London, but disagreed with Wilson’s discipline and harshness in her teaching.⁹⁸ She returned to Perth in 1940 and established a dance school in Claremont with the aim of encouraging fitness and cultivating graceful movements in her students.⁹⁹ Fleming’s students practiced in bare feet and were encouraged to be creative and

⁹⁰ Joan Pope, “Dalcroze Eurhythmics: Interaction in Australia in the 1920s,” *Australian Journal of Music Education* no. 2 (2010): 139, <https://doi/10.3316/aeipt.185977>.

⁹¹ A. L. Kelly, “The Dalcroze Approach to an Understanding of Rhythm,” *Withrow’s Physical Culture Magazine*, January 1923, 7.

⁹² Pope, “Dalcroze Eurhythmics,” 140.

⁹³ Pope, “Dalcroze Eurhythmics,” 142.

⁹⁴ Fisher, “Dance Class,” 154.

⁹⁵ “Dance Recital by Alison Lee,” *Sunday Times*, August 16, 1936, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article58768664>.

⁹⁶ Diana Beck, “Tracing the Ancestral Roots and the Flow of Pedagogical Practices in the Development of Ballet Teaching from 1950 to 2016 in Perth, Western Australia,” (Master of Arts thesis, Edith Cowan University, 2017), 50; “Woman’s Realm,” *The West Australian*, November 25, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47293764>.

⁹⁷ Beck, “Tracing the Ancestral Roots,” 42.

⁹⁸ Beck, “Tracing the Ancestral Roots,” 50.

⁹⁹ Beck, “Tracing the Ancestral Roots,” 50-51; Fisher, “Dance Class,” 342, 343; “Advertising,” *The West Australian*, February 25, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47310306>.

use dance to express themselves.¹⁰⁰ Like Wilson, Fleming's students were middle-class girls. Lynn Fisher, in her 1992 thesis on dance teachers in Western Australia, wrote that it was Fleming who established modern dance during the 1940s in Perth, which overlooks Mrs Beeby's contribution at Patch.¹⁰¹

The absence of any dedicated school of modern dance in Perth before 1939 suggests that Mrs Beeby was modern, innovative, and perhaps even radical in her attempt to establish modern dance as a respectable artform among her students. While she was not the first to teach modern dance in Australia, and Perth was well behind America and Europe in terms of its dance evolution, Mrs Beeby's dance studio at Patch was among the very few dance schools to teach modern dance before the middle of the century.

Mrs Beeby's School of Dance

The ballets grow from the needs and capabilities of the young people who dance in them.¹⁰²

The dance school at Patch flourished during the war. As the war stimulated the economy, more students and their families were able to afford dance classes.¹⁰³ This provided an opportunity for young working women to study a respectable and 'high' art form of dance, something that was previously not an option for them. The proximity of Patch to the city workplaces of dance students made Patch more accessible, as other classes that catered to more affluent women were located in the western suburbs, an area mostly populated by affluent individuals and families.¹⁰⁴ Shirley Gilmour and another former Patch dancer both described how much they enjoyed Mrs Beeby's dance lessons.¹⁰⁵ Gilmour said that they were "just absolutely lovely".¹⁰⁶ Hazel Dawson wrote that the classes provided women with a wartime social outlet.¹⁰⁷ Patch's apparent growth coincided with a decline in enrolments of the other dance schools, such as Wilson's.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ "Advertising," *The West Australian*.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, "Dance Class," 342.

¹⁰² Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 5, (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, June 1, 1946), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

¹⁰³ Fisher, "Dance Class," 342.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with former Patch dancer [Anonymous] with Elizabeth Leong, September 24, 2021, UNDA.

¹⁰⁵ Shirley Gilmour, phone interview by Elizabeth Leong, August 20, 2021, UNDA; Interview with former Patch dancer, September 24, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Gilmour, interview.

¹⁰⁷ Hazel Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946 – 51," Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁰⁸ Fisher, "Dance Class," 342.

Patch's dance school developed throughout the 1940s as Mrs Beeby and her assistant dance instructor, Jean Wilkinson, gained experience and confidence with elements of modern dance. Mrs Beeby encouraged her students to experiment though collaboration with body postures, footwork and floor patterns.¹⁰⁹ They incorporated the foundations of classical ballet as the fundamental technique to support their dance, and to allow their students to better express themselves.¹¹⁰ Wilkinson recalled: "I did special studies with a teacher of classic ballet and then we introduced these to our classes, but modified and shall I say liberated to suit our more individual style."¹¹¹ Modern dance, for the most part, suited Mrs Beeby's style and intentions well. It was a 'high' art form of dance, fitting Patch's aims of bringing the higher arts to the working class, yet it was more progressive than ballet, which complemented Mrs Beeby's non-conformism.¹¹² There were also no examinations or strict syllabi at this stage, meaning that Mrs Beeby, who had no formal qualifications, was able to teach it. Mrs Beeby's dance was based on moving in various diagonals, missed beat rhythms and movement linked to music.¹¹³ Patch dancers were referred to as rhythmic dancers by journalists.¹¹⁴ Wendy Staples, who attended Patch as a child from 1943 to 1945, described Patch Dance as "softer" free-form dance.¹¹⁵ Mrs Beeby disdained the popular "jazzing and jitterbug" trends popular in the 1940s, which she felt were separate from her lessons on the "great Art of the Dance".¹¹⁶ In the company's fifth anniversary brochure, in an article most likely written by Mrs Beeby, it says,

Music and movement are more closely allied, folk, dance form is extended and utilised, and strength, beauty, truth are coming more and more into this greatest of all arts. The dancer is no longer an automaton, forced into stylisation by tradition, but a creature of individual expression, physically, psychologically and spiritually free.¹¹⁷

It is evident in this statement that Mrs Beeby's aim for dance at Patch was to liberate her students' expression of dance. She emphasised the link between music and movement, which echoes Delsarte's teachings while also underscoring the strength, beauty and truth in dance reiterating the arguments that Duncan used to elevate modern dance.

By encouraging working women to participate in modern dance, Mrs Beeby extended the principles of modern dance's respectability and legitimacy to a group who had previously been

¹⁰⁹ Jean Wilkinson, n.d., Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹¹⁰ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹¹¹ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹¹² Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 177.

¹¹³ Hazel Dawson, in conversation with David Crann, October 15, 2004, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹¹⁴ "Hepzibah," *The Daily News*, August 29, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78528973>.

¹¹⁵ Wendy Brown Staples, in conversation with David Crann, September 16, 2004, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹¹⁶ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹¹⁷ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

excluded.¹¹⁸ Her dance classes were held once or twice a week for 90 minutes, sometimes with special rehearsals on Sunday mornings that were followed by a lunch prepared by the secretary, Mae Meadows.¹¹⁹ They performed their shows during a six-week season each year.¹²⁰ At Patch's peak in the late 1940s, there were 100 adults and 300 children enrolled in the dance school.¹²¹ The drama school had also grown to include 100 adults and 60 children at this time, while the choir had 30 singers and the verse choir had 20 members.¹²² In 1947, Patch reported 700 hundred members from the ages of five to seventy.¹²³ While each of these groups practiced independently, there were still many joint projects that involved a collaboration of two or more of these groups.¹²⁴ For example, the choir sung Hebridean songs and sea shanties to accompany the *Fisher Folk* dance production, and the dancers were used as spirits in the play *Birth of a Poet* by Thornton Wilder.¹²⁵ Patch dancers established an admirable reputation during the 1940s, and one journalist wrote that the dancers were known for their "vitality and enterprise".¹²⁶



Figure 24. Group photo of Patch members in 1946, Mrs Beeby is at the front left wearing a long-beaded necklace with her arms around two women. Source: artist unknown, [Patch members], 1946, photograph, donated by Shirley Gilmour to Patch Theatre Archive.

¹¹⁸ Fisher, "Dance Class," 59.

¹¹⁹ Frances Lambert, in conversation with David Crann, September 17, 2003.

¹²⁰ Gilmour, interview.

¹²¹ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²² Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²³ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²⁴ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²⁵ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²⁶ "Dance Season at Patch," *Western Mail*, October 30, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52180490>.

The impact of Patch's dance school beyond its immediate audience and students is evident in the period after the Second World War, when Mrs Beeby's dance principles became part of the curriculum for primary education. Mary Senior, a Patch actor who joined in 1944 and assisted in dance classes, was an elementary school teacher, and she adapted some of the methods that Mrs Beeby taught into the primary school curriculum.¹²⁷ This was such a success that the Education Department supported Mrs Beeby to publish an educational book outlining dance exercises and movement for school children aged five to nine years old. Mrs Beeby published *Dance Child, Dance*, in collaboration with Jean Wilkinson, Mary Senior and Morris Hertz, in 1947. This book included illustrated exercises, simple footwork and dance games and piano sheet music, and was used as a resource for teachers across Western Australia.¹²⁸ This demonstrates that while Mrs Beeby was 'untrained', she was not unauthoritative and had culminated a growing expertise in modern dance styles and teaching by the late 1940s.

Mrs Beeby's dance style was what Hazel Dawson referred to as 'free dance movement' that, as stated earlier in the chapter, was based on the dancing of Duncan and philosophies of Delsarte.¹²⁹ While Mrs Beeby embraced many aspects of Duncan's teachings, such as the free-flowing movement, emphasis on expression, and Greek-style costumes, she also utilised characteristics of classical ballet to create a hybrid model. This was evident in the shoes that the Patch dancers wore. While ballerinas wore pointe shoes and modern dancers were barefoot, Mrs Beeby designed soft leather shoes that covered the front part of the foot, leaving the ankle part bare aside from a strap that went around the back of the heel to keep the shoe in place. The toe of the shoe made it easy for the dancers to turn and slide their feet across the floor while the naked heel allowed the dancers to feel and grip the floor.¹³⁰ Despite Duncan's disdain for ballet, Mrs Beeby did not harbour the same resentment, as shown in the dance edition of Patch's newsletter, *Patch in Print*, which included numerous articles about ballet.¹³¹ Furthermore, when the Borovansky Ballet came to Perth at the end of 1945 (a company established by Edouard Borovansky, a *Ballet Russes* dancer who stayed in Melbourne after the company's 1938 tour), the Patch community enthusiastically reported about this exciting opportunity for the public to see professional ballet and predicted the company would stimulate interest in the arts.¹³² There were other aspects of performance in which Mrs Beeby did not strictly follow Duncan's approach. Where Duncan used minimal stage lighting and no props or

¹²⁷ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²⁸ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹²⁹ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

¹³⁰ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

¹³¹ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 5, (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, June 1, 1946), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

¹³² Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 2, (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, October, 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

setting décor to highlight the pureness of the dance, Mrs Beeby designed lavish and beautiful settings, possibly to appeal to Perth audiences who may have found a bare stage amateurish or boring.¹³³

Another way that Mrs Beeby connected her dance at Patch to the dance of Duncan was by using the same classical music that Duncan did, including composers such as Chopin, Beethoven, Liszt, and Schumann. The importance of music for both Duncan and Mrs Beeby was evident. Music was the starting point for Duncan's dance, and she reportedly described the initial stages of her creative process as follows: "First comes the music and it acts upon me in such a way as to produce a mind state of which the idyll I dance is a portrayal."¹³⁴ Mrs Beeby taught her students the same process, that is, how to interpret 'form' in music and respond through their body to the mood of the music.¹³⁵ Frances Lambert, a Patch dancer from 1940 to 1942, remembers the athleticism of the dance Mrs Beeby taught.¹³⁶ She recalled that it had formalised movements but the aim was to express the mood of the music.¹³⁷ Shirley Gilmour described how Mrs Beeby "gave me the greatest appreciation of music, [Mrs Beeby] was a wonderful pianist. And so I just loved it and I made lots of friends there. And I mean it was just so much fun".¹³⁸ At the end of her classes, Mrs Beeby would often play the Grande Waltz from *Les Sylphides* and encourage the students to feel and interpret the music and then channel it into their own movements.¹³⁹ This practice was evident in their fifth anniversary performance in which Joan Tonks, Sybil Kennedy, Peggy Taylor and Jean Wilkinson performed a piece entitled *Interpretation of Chopin through Movement and Color [sic] Revolution*.¹⁴⁰ Mrs Beeby also embraced ideas around dance's connection to the earth and spirituality.¹⁴¹ One way of connecting the dancers to the ground was instructing them to walk around the room in circles and press their feet into the ground.¹⁴²

Mrs Beeby incorporated Delsartean philosophy on movement into her dance teaching. Through the lens of Delsarte, she wrote that expression was moving "the primitive purity of an idea unto ultimate splendour".¹⁴³ She continued:

¹³³ Fisher, "Dance Class," 225; Pask, *Ballet in Australia*, 59.

¹³⁴ Redfern Mason, folder 166, Irma Duncan Collection of Isadora Duncan Materials, DC, in Daly, *Done into Dance*.

¹³⁵ Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹³⁶ Lambert, in conversation with Crann, September 17, 2003.

¹³⁷ Lambert, in conversation with Crann, September 17, 2003.

¹³⁸ Gilmour, interview.

¹³⁹ Hazel Dawson to David Crann, February 16, 2006, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁴⁰ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

¹⁴¹ Dawson, in conversation with Crann, October 15, 2004.

¹⁴² Dawson, in conversation with Crann, October 15, 2004.

¹⁴³ Ida Beeby, "Delsarte," from the collection of Marguerite Aravena.

You still only want idea[,] mind and expression so long as you have a body trained for it. We have to have a physical medium. Until the body is trained to some degree of sensitivity, you will never be happy about what you do. That is what Delsarte has set to give you.¹⁴⁴

DELSARTE		
HEAD		
7. Head thrown back and from the object	Arrogance (Sham)	Strong revulsion
ZONES OF THE HEAD:		
1. Forehead	Mental	emotional
Top back	Spiritual	
Mask - lower face		Vital or physical
Mask - lower back of head & neck		
<u>Mouth, Lips & Jaw:</u>		
Jaw - lower	Self energy in force	
Upper lip	Sensitiveness	
Lower lip	Will in force	
Jaw slightly dropped	Suspension of energy in force	
Jaw entirely dropped	Paralysis of energy in force	
Jaw rigidly out and forward	Exultation of energy in force	
<u>Expressions of the mouth:</u>		
Lips slightly apart	Abandon or suspense	
Lips closely shut	Firmness	
Lips completely apart	astonishment	
Lips slightly apart corners of mouth depressed	abandoned disapproval or grief	
Lips closely shut corners depressed	disapproval plus firmness discontentment	
Lips completely apart corners depressed	disapproval plus astonishment appalling horror	
Lips slightly apart corners of mouth raised	approval plus abandon joy or pleasure	
Lips closely shut corners of mouth raised	approval	
Lips completely apart with corners raised	approval plus astonishment alacrity and laughter	

Figure 25. Ida Beeby's notes on Delsarte. Source: Ida Beeby, *Delsarte*, page seven, photocopy, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

Mrs Beeby emphasised the application of Delsarte's 'Trinity Triangle', splitting the body into mental, spiritual, and physical zones. She taught that "[a]ccording to what we want to express, so we go to this zone". She provided instructions on how to use certain body parts to convey emotions. For example, lifted shoulders were a sign of passion, action or surprise and eyebrows raised in the centre of the forehead conveyed self-pity.¹⁴⁵ With the latter, the influence of modern dance techniques is evident as this style required more expressiveness in the face and the hands than ballet.¹⁴⁶ In her Delsarte notes pictured in *figure 25*, Mrs Beeby listed nine expressions of the mouth and their corresponding meanings. The focus on expression to convey emotion was also one of Duncan's key principles.¹⁴⁷ Dawson remembered Mrs Beeby's insistence that all arm movements must originate from the torso and

any extension of the body should keep reaching until the last moment.¹⁴⁸ Dawson described how the dancers were supposed to reach out and move back naturally while embodying strength.¹⁴⁹ In addition to Delsarte's and Duncan's techniques and teachings, Mrs Beeby also experimented with incorporating political and social ideas and commentaries into dance at Patch, something more unfamiliar to Perth audiences.

Modern dance found legitimacy through its ability to connect performance to contemporary issues, which Mrs Beeby incorporated into her recitals at Patch.¹⁵⁰ It had the capacity to express ideas, and thus was more than frivolous entertainment.¹⁵¹ Three main inspirations for modern dance

¹⁴⁴ Beeby, "Delsarte."

¹⁴⁵ Beeby, "Delsarte."

¹⁴⁶ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 182.

¹⁴⁷ Card, "History in Motion," 77.

¹⁴⁸ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

¹⁴⁹ Dawson, in discussion with Crann, October 15, 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 200.

¹⁵¹ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 200.

choreography were current social and political issues, nature and folk-culture.¹⁵² The connection to contemporary social and political issues and ideas indicated the modern trends of the dance and demonstrated that it, unlike ballet, was an artform fully capable of conveying contemporary events and ideas.¹⁵³ Two dances within Patch's sixth anniversary dance performance, *War and Peace* and *The Flower Seller*, reflected the war's aftermath in Europe and indicated the political nature of some of the dances.¹⁵⁴ *War and Peace* depicted "the never-ending struggle between good and evil forces for ever surrounding us,"¹⁵⁵ concluding with the triumph of good. *The Flower Seller* experimented with movement and sound "with the repeated booming of the drum to represent the rhythm of life going on relentlessly".¹⁵⁶ The dance depicted an elderly flower seller who died alone and destitute, leaving her physical body to embark on a spiritual journey in which she was no longer impoverished. Mrs Beeby intended for the dance to have a political and social impact as the program says that "this presentation has a particular significance in days when so many millions are dying, destitute and alone,"¹⁵⁷ referring to the millions of people impacted by the war. Like the plays at Patch these political performances were few and did not constitute the majority of the productions, but they do suggest that while Mrs Beeby was not as active as Edward Beeby, she nonetheless was politically mindful and allowed this to occasionally inform her work.

Mrs Beeby predominantly choreographed dances inspired by folk dances and overseas cultures, perhaps as a way to reflect the idealism and essence of those communities.¹⁵⁸ Some of these performances included a set of Egyptian Dances, Spanish dances, French inspired folk and court dances from the time of King Louis XIV, and pieces entitled *A Gipsy Tale*, *The Village Don Juan*, *Fisher Folk* and *Slavonic Wedding*.¹⁵⁹ Reinterpretations of folk and national dances, particularly of Egypt, Spain, Romania and the Soviet Union, were not original—they had been present in ballet for over two centuries.¹⁶⁰ In both modern dance and ballet, these folk dances did not attempt to authentically reproduce traditional dances but combined recognisable elements of these dances with ballet steps and poses.¹⁶¹ The adaptation of folk dances demonstrates how modern dancers wished to connect their work with something greater and more timeless—very much akin with

¹⁵² Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 214.

¹⁵³ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 177.

¹⁵⁴ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1, (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, September 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

¹⁵⁵ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 178.

¹⁵⁹ "Patch Theatre," *The West Australian*.

¹⁶⁰ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 214

¹⁶¹ Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 215



Figure 26. Four ‘bridesmaids’ dancers, (from left to right) Biddy Walker, Margaret Corser, Nance Devenish and Hazel Dawson, in Slavonic Wedding. Source: Artist unknown, [Four ‘Bridesmaids’ dancers in Slavonic Wedding], October 1947, photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

Stravinsky’s provocative *Rite of Spring* (1913).¹⁶² But we also understand them now as forms of cultural appropriation. Perhaps these exotic dances offered a useful space between the real and the imagined.¹⁶³ One of the benefits of displaying the exotic is that it does not disrupt the local, national, or imperial dominant culture.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, as Australia continued to repress a ‘homegrown’ culture, depictions of the exotic imbued modern dance with a degree of high culture. Some of these interpretations of folk dancing drew from depictions of old English fairs, such as *Fete* [sic] *Fantastique*. One critic praised this performance, writing “[c]horeography by Ida Beeby was deft, sure and firm in a malleable, practised style. And the music by Ida Beeby for the charmingly vivacious *Fete Fantastique* was sprightly enough to beg for orchestration.”¹⁶⁵ Dance historian Jordan Beth Vincent suggests that the association with folk dance was also politically motivated as it distanced modern dance from German culture, something that was necessary at the end of 1930s and throughout the war.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Vincent, “In Pursuit of a Dancing ‘Body,’” 218.

¹⁶³ Card, “History in Motion,” 105.

¹⁶⁴ Roger Celestine, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁶⁵ Raymond Bowers, ‘Ballet Delights’, *Sunday Times*, July 18, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59483471>.

¹⁶⁶ Vincent, “In Pursuit of a Dancing ‘Body,’” 218.

Mrs Beeby was also inspired by 'nature rhythms'.¹⁶⁷ The choreography for *Sea Fantasy* was based around the emotions invoked by the rhythm of the sea, waves, and the movement of fish, while the story was based on a fairy tale type story. *Morning Ecstasy* involved seven episodes inspired by



Figure 27 & Figure 28. Scenes from *Sea Fantasy*, Jean Wilkinson is the central figure in the left photo and the second figure from the left in the right photo. Source: Artist unknown, [stills from *Sea Fantasy*], 1943?, photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

music from Elgar, Rimsky-Korskov, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. The titles of the pieces, *The Union of Night and Dawn*, *Ritual to the Rising Sun*, and *The Spirits of the Garden*, demonstrate Mrs Beeby's intention to connect her dances to nature.¹⁶⁸ In one instance, Mrs Beeby decided to immerse her students in nature by getting them to perform a dance in front of the rose bushes at the Government House Gardens. Shirley Gilmour fondly described the event:

one day Mrs. Beeby decided we should dance in the gardens there, government house garden and we had these little Greek sort of gowns on and I think there were a few old fellas there just wondering what all these young females are doing bouncing around the roses and the dreadful clover had prickles and I think we had bare feet, and just some of the flimsy gowns got caught on the roses just about all I remember. I don't think it was really successful.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁶⁸ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Gilmour, interview.

The gowns they wore were Greek-inspired tunics which associated the dancers with the influence of Isadora Duncan, who wore this style, and reinforced the connection of modern dance to the classical



Figure 29. Sisters Biddy Wilkinson (left) and Jean Wilkinson (right) dancing barefoot in the Government House Gardens, source: Artist unknown, [Biddy and Jean Wilkinson in front of rose bushes], photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

ideals of grace, beauty, and truth. The performances at Patch offered Perth audiences an opportunity to see dance presented in a way that was new and exciting and contrasted with the strict European style of ballet performed by Linley Wilson's students.

The Charismatic Mrs Beeby

To me, Ida Beeby was a most fascinating woman, charming and ruthless!¹⁷⁰ –
Hazel Dawson, former Patch dance student

Mrs Beeby's charisma, charm, and ability to inspire admiration in young people was at the core of the dance school's success. Mrs Beeby had a powerful impact on her dance students, who were mostly young girls, and was able to maintain a steady stream of enrolments throughout the 1940s. One aspect of Mrs Beeby's teaching at Patch was her habit of picking a favourite from among her students to act as a private secretary.¹⁷¹ In return, Mrs Beeby favoured the girl by making her dinners, designing her new clothes, and giving her makeup and hair lessons.¹⁷² Hazel Dawson, a

¹⁷⁰ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946 – 51."

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 198.

¹⁷² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 198.

dance student of Mrs Beeby's, felt the effect of Mrs Beeby's charisma: "It was always difficult to say 'No' to her requests as she always made one feel you had been specially chosen," she later recalled.¹⁷³ Mrs Beeby attracted a large number of students to the dance school, and at one point



Figure 30. Ida Beeby (second on the right) with her young dance students in 1942. Source: Artist unknown, [Ida and students], 1942, photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

there was even a waiting list.¹⁷⁴ They came mainly from Perth's new breed of 'business girl'—young women with working-class origins, who had often left school at about sixteen to work an administrative job such as a stenographer, assistant or clerk. These girls took classes for fitness and fun and generally left after getting married or having children. Additionally, Mrs Beeby was very active among Perth's social clubs and activities. She was a member of the Theosophical Society and gave addresses to the Housewives Association. Even here her progressive influence on women was significant—in August 1942, she delivered a speech to the Housewives' Association called 'Women's Part in the New Order'.¹⁷⁵

Descriptions of Mrs Beeby suggest she was ambitious, daring, caring, strict, forthright, and creative. Shirley Gilmour described Mrs Beeby as tall and good looking, with iron grey hair, concluding that "she was a very unusual and a very talented lady...she was really ahead of her time".¹⁷⁶ Mrs Beeby was seen as a 'modern' woman by her students, evident in her unconventional relationship with Beeby and as demonstrated by the clothes she wore. She preferred full-length silky culottes to skirts and dresses.¹⁷⁷ Valma Fountain-Smith wrote that she loved Mrs Beeby and thought her a wonderful person: "you could always talk to her and she was so supportive".¹⁷⁸ Judy Smythe

¹⁷³ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

¹⁷⁴ Dawson to Crann, May 18, 2005.

¹⁷⁵ "What Women Are Doing," *The West Australian*, August 20, 1942, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47344355>.

¹⁷⁶ Shirley Gilmour, phone interview by Elizabeth Leong, August 20, 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Gilmour interview; Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

¹⁷⁸ Valma Fountain-Smith to David Crann, Patch Theatre Archive.

wrote that Mrs Beeby “was a great influence on my life—I lived with her for a time at Hale Flats and she helped me over a very difficult period in my life”.¹⁷⁹ With the arrival of American servicemen in Perth in 1942, Mrs Beeby’s role included mentoring and counselling, as she helped many of her students deal with passionate romances, break-ups, illicit affairs, unwanted pregnancies and shotgun marriages.¹⁸⁰ There appears to be a degree of reverence with which Patch students and cast members later recalled Mrs Beeby. Even the great Ted Shawn¹⁸¹ complimented her warmly, describing her as a “wise and courageous leader”¹⁸² at the end of his residency.

Yet Mrs Beeby was also understood to be controlling and was acknowledged to be a blunt speaker. Mrs Beeby was unhappy when Gilmour announced she was leaving the company. Gilmour later mused that she “must have become a bit possessive of us”.¹⁸³ Dawson remembered Mrs Beeby as strict and forthright: “what she said went, she didn't muck around. She would let you know what she thought”.¹⁸⁴ Alan Seymour never forgave Mrs Beeby for the “trouncing of my young life,”¹⁸⁵ when she publicly castigated Seymour in front of the whole company, just before a one-act performance of *Deirdre* by W.B. Yeats. He later wrote: “I was stripped bare and never quite forgave her.... She seemed to intend only to humiliate and to destroy.”¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, Seymour describes that the encounter won him sympathy from many of the cast members and alienated those who were “beginning to rebel against her”.¹⁸⁷ Mrs Beeby was evidently a complex woman; she inspired love and admiration from some of her students, while alienating others. Mrs Beeby’s legacy continued at Patch through the Ida Beeby Award, which was awarded annually at Patch to the best student member of the theatre.¹⁸⁸

By the end of the Second World War, Patch had expanded to the point where Mrs Beeby could hire a dance assistant. The job went to the young Jean Wilkinson (later Jean Smith), a student of Mrs Beeby’s, who had joined Patch in 1939.¹⁸⁹ Wilkinson was born in 1918 and lived on a farm in Pingelly before moving to Bassendean with her family.¹⁹⁰ She was one of seven children and had a sister, Biddy, who also danced at Patch.¹⁹¹ Like most members of the Patch community, Wilkinson joined the

¹⁷⁹ Judy Smythe to Patch Theatre, June 29, 2005, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 188.

¹⁸¹ Ted Shawn and his career is explained in further detail on page 106.

¹⁸² Ted Shawn, *Patch Perth and Posterity*, 1947, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁸³ Gilmour, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Gilmour, interview.

¹⁸⁵ Alan Seymour to David Crann, September 29, 1991, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁸⁶ Seymour to Crann, September 29, 1991.

¹⁸⁷ Seymour to Crann, September 29, 1991.

¹⁸⁸ “Theatrical Training Commences,” *The Observer*, January, 1969.

¹⁸⁹ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁹⁰ Leon Smith, interview by David Crann, December 16, 2005; Biddy Walker, interview by Deborah Gare, December 2, 2020.

¹⁹¹ Walker, interview.



Figure 31. Jean, Bidy and Daphne Wilkinson (from left to right). Source: Artist unknown, [Group Portrait of the Wilkinson sisters], photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

company after a recommendation from someone she knew. As well as dance classes, she also completed four years of drama training and took private lessons in speech.¹⁹² She officially became Mrs Beeby's dance assistant in 1945, though may have been helping informally before that time.¹⁹³ The appointment was a success—Wilkinson was an enthusiastic supporter of Ms Beeby's new dance styles, while students liked her warm personality. One dancer later recalled that Wilkinson "was just an ordinary working girl same as I was".¹⁹⁴ Like Mrs Beeby, Wilkinson was often approached for help by her dancers. Her husband, Leon Smith, later recalled that students would often bring problems to discuss with her.¹⁹⁵ Wilkinson's role as an instructor required that she understood the philosophies and styles of both classical and modern dance methods, which she used to create choreography for rehearsals and performance.¹⁹⁶ Wilkinson's daily routine as an instructor at Patch involved spending two hours on the piano, two practicing on the barre, and teaching classes from midday to 8pm.¹⁹⁷ She was helped in class by Mrs Beeby, who played the piano and helped refine students' position and

¹⁹² Rosalie Carey, Patch Theatre Notes; Walker, interview.

¹⁹³ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with former Patch dancer, September 24, 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, in discussion with Crann.

¹⁹⁶ Hazel Dawson, in discussion with David Crann, October 15, 2004, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁹⁷ Smith, in discussion with Crann.

technique.¹⁹⁸ Wilkinson further developed her dance skills and knowledge under the tutelage of Ted Shawn during his residency at Patch, one of the highlights of Patch's history.

Ted Shawn

During the last fortnight there has been a happening unique in the annals of Perth theatre and art world. Nightly at Patch Theatre a male dancer unaided by partner, chorus or elaborate settings and with only a piano accompaniment, has held a capacity audience for two hours with a brilliant performance which aroused much comment and enthusiasm.¹⁹⁹

The greatest professional accomplishment that Mrs Beeby achieved in Perth was to host a key pioneer of American modern dance, Ted Shawn, at Patch in 1947. Shawn was an avid supporter of men's inclusion in dance, and he promoted many different theatrical and ethnic types of dances throughout his career. He married another pioneer of modern dance, Ruth St Denis, and they established the Denishawn School in Los Angeles in 1915.²⁰⁰ After their separation in 1931, Shawn established Jacob's Pillow, a dance school, theatre, and retreat.²⁰¹

Shawn and Mrs Beeby became acquainted with each other through written correspondence. Mrs Beeby sent a letter to Shawn, where he discovered they both shared similar attitudes towards life, art, and dance.²⁰² Shawn offered to come to Australia and teach at Patch if his travel and lodging costs were covered, conditions to which Mrs Beeby readily agreed.²⁰³ Over the course of his time at Patch, Shawn was asked why he came to Perth when other artists chose cities in the eastern states. He explained in his program notes that "there was at Patch a large and inclusive approach to the dance...the beginnings of such a movement as I had fathered in America".²⁰⁴ He continued, "Perth, due to its unique isolation, is ideally the place where a new dance form, growing out of this continent, using the forms of other countries and of the past as a sort of cultural 'humus' can be born."²⁰⁵ While Perth previously had visits from European and American dancers, these were only for a couple of nights. Never had there been such a famous international dancer who stayed for an extended residency, and who, in addition to performing, taught Perth students his skills and methods.

¹⁹⁸ Gilmour, interview.

¹⁹⁹ "Plays And Players," *Western Mail*, July 10, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38580555>.

²⁰⁰ Paul Scolieri, *Ted Shawn: His Life, Writings, and Dances* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2019), 95-96.

²⁰¹ Scolieri, *Ted Shawn*, 366.

²⁰² Shawn, "Patch Perth and Posterity."

²⁰³ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²⁰⁴ Shawn, "Patch Perth and Posterity."

²⁰⁵ Shawn, "Patch Perth and Posterity."

Shawn arrived in Sydney on 23 April 1947 and was greeted by Patricia and Jack Thompson, Mrs Beeby's daughter and son-in-law, and their son Peter before heading to Perth on 26 April.²⁰⁶ His visit was eagerly anticipated as newspapers reported "there is no doubt that cultural life in Perth will be considerably enriched by his visit".²⁰⁷ Upon his arrival, he remarked that "Perth seems to me like the Garden of Eden before the serpent got to it."²⁰⁸ He was greeted at a reception at the Adelphi Hotel by the Beebys as well as several notable Perth figures, such as the Lord Mayor of Perth, Sir Joseph Totterdell, and the Vice-Consul for the United States, Rudolph Hefti—further evidence of the importance of his visit.²⁰⁹

Mrs Beeby did not expect Shawn's openness about his own homosexuality.²¹⁰ As someone who did not conform to 1940s heterosexual norms, he must have shaken up Perth's conservative sensibilities, but his strong personality invited respect from his audience and peers.²¹¹ Shawn taught classes for eight weeks from 4 May to 27 June, followed by a fortnight of solo public performances at Patch.²¹² Shawn charmed Beeby but a veiled dislike grew between Shawn and Mrs Beeby, according to Mrs Beeby's daughter.²¹³ Nevertheless, Shawn elevated dance at Patch because, as an international dancer, he imbued dance at Patch with legitimacy and respectability, and attracted prominent students to his course. One notable student was the well-known runner Betty Judge, who was the sports mistress at Perth Modern School and engaged to Kim Beazley Senior in 1947.²¹⁴

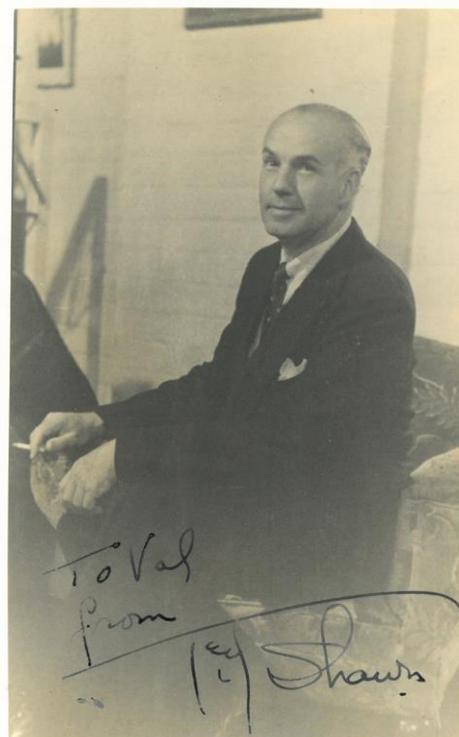


Figure 32. Val Clayton wrote "I was honoured to have him sign this for me, he was indeed a 'Very Charming Man'." Source: Artist unknown, [Ted Shawn], 1947, photograph, donated by Clayton to Patch Theatre Archive.

²⁰⁶ "Sydney's Talking About," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 24, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18023149>; Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²⁰⁷ "Plays And Players," *Western Mail*, May 22, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36950894>.

²⁰⁸ "Between Ourselves," *Western Mail*, May 8, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36949133>.

²⁰⁹ "Woman's Realm," *The West Australian*, May 1, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46280052>.

²¹⁰ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²¹¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 21, 216.

²¹² "Music And Theatre," *The West Australian*, February 22, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46264813>; "Overheard," *Western Mail*, June 19, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38580118>; "Music and Theatre," *The West Australian*, June 28, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46322066>.

²¹³ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²¹⁴ "Overheard," *Western Mail*.

Despite her alleged aversion to Shawn, Mrs Beeby strongly admired his dance and art philosophy, and his classes greatly enhanced the dance education of her students at Patch. In his classes, Shawn focused on the fundamentals of movement, emphasising the difference between a dancer who was an entertainer and one who was an artist.²¹⁵ He taught free and flowing modern dance movements derived from Delsarte’s teachings in conjunction with the foundations of classical ballet.²¹⁶ Wilkinson praised Shawn, recalling that “[h]is short period in our school enriched and

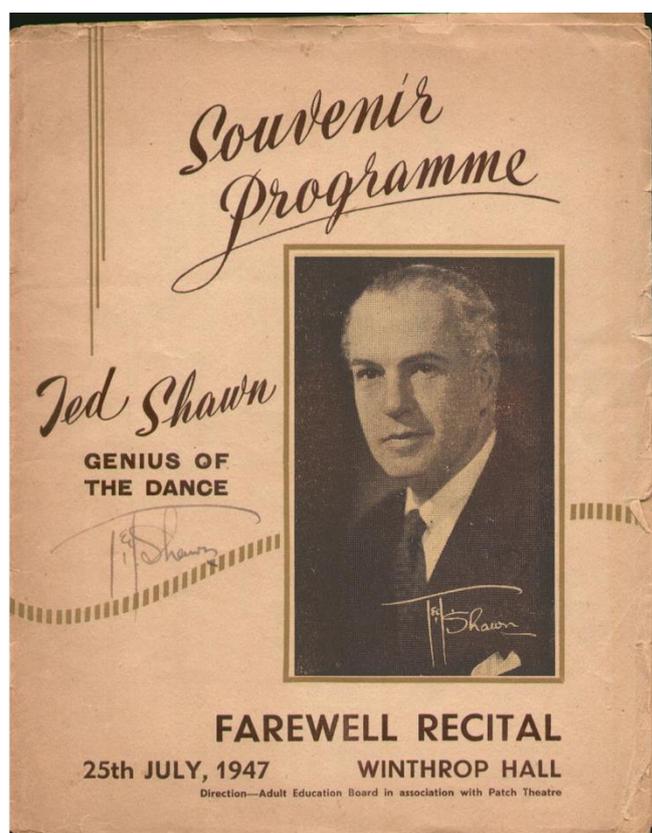


Figure 33. At the end of Shawn’s residency at Patch he performed a farewell recital before going on tour to the eastern states with Mrs Beeby, Morris Hertz, and Patricia Thompson. Source: Patch Theatre, “Ted Shawn Farewell Recital,” Museum of Performing Arts WA,

stimulated it.”²¹⁷ Beeby praised Shawn’s character and described his teaching ability as “superb”.²¹⁸ His performances were stimulating, and one journalist wrote of his unprecedented style and the approval from the audience:

Ted Shawn, the noted American dancer, gained fresh popularity when he presented his second programme at the Patch Theatre last night in the presence of a capacity audience. The programme of solo dances in which he mostly

²¹⁵ Ted Shawn, *Fundamentals of a Dance Education*, (United States of America, Haldeman-Julius Company: 1937), 5.

²¹⁶ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

²¹⁷ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

²¹⁸ Edward Beeby, “Shawn – A Personal Estimate,” 1947, Patch Theatre Archive.

discards conventional methods and substitutes original treatment of subjects, both classical and traditional, was enthusiastically received. One of his most impressive portrayals, described as a "music visualisation" of a Bach chorale, was given with spiritual restraint.²¹⁹

Shawn's 'music visualisation', one of Duncan's main teachings and a key characteristic of modern dance, possibly helped legitimise Mrs Beeby's choreography where she employed this technique.

Shawn's impact on Patch lasted for years after his residency. Hazel Dawson wrote:

Shawn's classes at Patch had a great bearing on the classes and performances [during] 1948-52. His dances in 16 rhythms and routines in class, and the very earthly Slavonic dance movements, especially for the men, certainly showed his influence.²²⁰

One outcome was the formation of a group of male dancers. He taught a class of 23 men for eight weeks at Patch.²²¹ While there had been previous instances of groups of all-male dancers in Perth, it was unusual, as most people believed that dance, especially ballet, was a feminine activity. The connection between dance and the female body meant that dancing was seen as antithetical to the Australian masculine identity throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and male dancers were often described as 'sissy'.²²² Some advocates for male dance attempted to counter this belief by referencing overseas attitudes where male ballet dancers were portrayed as strong and



Figure 34. Ted Shawn (far right) conducts a male movement class at Patch Theatre with a group of male students, including Morris Hertz (front left). Source: Artist unknown, 1947, photograph, private collection of Marguerite Aravena.

²¹⁹ "American Dancer," *The West Australian*, July 9, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46324563>.

²²⁰ Dawson to Crann, May 18, 2005.

²²¹ Beeby, "Shawn – A Personal Estimate."

²²² Dorothy Gladstone, "The Male Dancer," *New Graphic of Australia*, (September 6, 1935): 17; "Australians Think Male Ballet Dancing Sissy," *The Daily News*, April 5, 1945, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-articl78757159>; Vincent, "In Pursuit of a Dancing 'Body'," 132; Fisher, "Dance Class," 57.

masculine.²²³ In 1937 in Perth, Felix Demery, an examiner for the Royal Academy of Dancing in London, reportedly commented:

It's a pity Western Australia did not have a visit from the Russian Ballet. Just at this time, when an appreciation of the art of dancing seems to be gaining some foothold here, a visit from this famous company would have done much good, and maybe the fine type of male dancer in the company would have helped to remove the unfortunate misconception that operatic dancing is an effeminate occupation for men.²²⁴

Due to this stereotype, the majority of male dancers stuck to ballroom dancing, a dance style that was not seen as effeminate.²²⁵ This reluctance for men to train in ballet or modern dance was evident in Patch. In their fifth anniversary brochure, they lamented that “we cannot understand why Australians consider classic dance for men to be ‘sissy’...the Dance requires more physical and mental vigour than a game of football.”²²⁶ Shawn’s visit helped challenge this attitude, and as one newspaper reported at the end of Shawn’s visit:

Shawn has devoted himself to the purpose of raising the status of the male dancer to one of dignity comparable to that of writer, musician or actor and he could put forth no finer arguments in his cause than these recitals.²²⁷

The establishment of the group of male dancers at Patch after Shawn’s visit is a tangible indication that Shawn did to some degree raise the status of the male dancer in Perth.

In addition to Shawn’s progressive views on dance’s relationship to masculinity, he was interested in other non-European dance forms. He expressed the limitations of only knowing one’s own style of dancing and argued that studying dances of other cultures could enrich, strengthen, and deepen the quality of performances.²²⁸ Wilkinson recalled having special lessons with Shawn where he taught her Spanish, Hindu, and Javanese dances.²²⁹ Despite Shawn’s appreciation of non-western dance forms, he simultaneously harboured views of racial elitism. He wrote that the early cultures of humanity, “the childhood of the race” could be seen among “the primitive peoples today”,²³⁰ thus inferring the lack of development and infantile status of other cultures, echoing the enlightenment concept of the ‘noble savage’, and emphasising the cultural appropriation nature of his work.²³¹ Still,

²²³ “Male Ballet Dancers,” *The Courier-Mail*, July 22, 1935, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36753419>.

²²⁴ “Male Dancers Wanted,” *The West Australian*, August 27, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article41424259>.

²²⁵ Vincent, “In Pursuit of a Dancing ‘Body’,” 134.

²²⁶ Patch Theatre, “Patch Souvenir.”

²²⁷ “Plays And Players,” *Western Mail*, July 10, 1947, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38580555_

²²⁸ Shawn, *Fundamentals of a Dance Education*, 16.

²²⁹ Wilkinson, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

²³⁰ Shawn, *Fundamentals of a Dance Education*, 5.

²³¹ Shawn, *Fundamentals of a Dance Education*, 5.

Shawn was amazed and complimentary of the group of Aboriginal dancers he saw after his stay in Perth. In early August, Shawn witnessed a corroboree at Delissaville settlement in the Northern Territory. After the dancers were finished, Shawn said: "I have seen some of the greatest dancers in the world and this night I have seen them equalled."²³² Shawn saw the 'exotic' – essentially anything non-western – as a great form of inspiration for his dance. Just as Isadora Duncan's gimmick was the 'classical', Shawn and his ex-wife had built their careers using the gimmick of the 'exotic', often appropriating other cultures.²³³

After Shawn witnessed the corroboree in the Northern Territory, he went to Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney, where he presented a series of solo dances including *Invocation to the Thunderbird*, *Afro-Cubana*, *Japanese Spear Dance*, and *Flamenco Dances*.²³⁴ Mrs Beeby was Shawn's accompanist and she brought along her daughter, Patricia Thompson, who she asked to manage the tour.²³⁵ Mrs Beeby's skill as a pianist was remarked upon by one critic: "Ida Beeby's piano accompaniments indicated a nervousness in attack early in the programme, but her quality was given grateful recognition in the more musical scores."²³⁶ Accompanying Mrs Beeby and Thompson on the tour was a young Patch dancer, Morris 'Morrie' Hertz, who was to act as Shawn's dresser, stage manager and assist with other small tasks required in facilitating the tour.²³⁷ Hertz joined Patch as a teenager during the Second World War, around 1943, originally as an actor for the theatre.²³⁸ Hertz was born to Jewish parents, a Russian father and a Palestinian mother, in 1927.²³⁹ Shirley Gilmour described his boyish appearance: "he always reminded me of a tarantula spider, a huntsman spider. He was a tall, skinny,



Figure 35. Shawn appropriated a range of costumes and imagery from different cultures that inspired his dances, source: Artist unknown, [series of photographs of Ted Shawn's dances], "Ted Shawn Farewell Recital," 1947, photographs in pamphlet, private collection.

²³² "Superb Artists," *The West Australian*, August 5, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46330967>.

²³³ Daly, *Done into Dance*, 104 -105.

²³⁴ "Advertising," *The Courier-Mail*, August 9, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article49317077>.

²³⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²³⁶ "Shawn's Dance Artistry," *The Age*, August 12, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article206034666>.

²³⁷ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 217.

²³⁸ "Patch Theatre Guild," *The West Australian*, August 6, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46765139>.

²³⁹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 217.

sort of hairy kid".²⁴⁰ Thompson described Hertz on tour as "cheerful, unobtrusive and wonderfully efficient," adding that the young man adored Mrs Beeby.²⁴¹ He was an amazing dancer who received favourable reports from critics, one of whom reviewed Hertz's dancing as the '[b]est individual performance of the evening'.²⁴² Hertz performed a solo entitled *Revolution*, which portrayed "the emotions of youth today, faced with chaos, through rage and resentment to a philosophic outlook".²⁴³ Hertz was also the principal figure in *The Power of Thought*, which depicted a man in his struggle between good and evil.²⁴⁴

Thompson pronounced the tour a success, describing Shawn as "very handsome and colourful on the stage and audiences loved him".²⁴⁵ Newspapers commented on Shawn's dynamism, experience, athleticism, and virility: "There was a humanity about him which entirely captivated his audience."²⁴⁶ Despite the warm reception of Shawn by audiences, some critics were more reserved in their praise. One Sydney newspaper criticised the lack of emotional content in some of his pieces, stating that "it was sometimes impossible to find much more than anthropological interest in his work".²⁴⁷

Overall, Shawn's visit was a cultural success as Patch students embraced their chance to learn from one of the pioneers of modern dance and Perth audiences admired his performances. Indeed, Patch's reputation must have been enhanced due this achievement. Near the end of his visit, one reporter wrote that Shawn's three month visit to Perth "should prove of inestimable value to all who are interested in this art of dance of which we know all too little."²⁴⁸ Shawn was one of the first famous international artists to visit Western Australia after the war. The success of his residency encouraged Patch to host other international guests while reinvigorating Perth's international cultural connections in the post-war period. In 1951, the Indian dancer Rajkumar Priyagopal Singh and drummer Lakshman Singh were brought over in October 1951 by Louise Lightfoot to tour Australia and they performed at Patch.²⁴⁹ Another international guest, E. Martin

²⁴⁰ Gilmour, interview.

²⁴¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 217.

²⁴² "Art And The Stage," *Western Mail*, November 13, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52177273>.

²⁴³ "Patch Theatre," *The West Australian*, November 3, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46811486>.

²⁴⁴ "Ballet Season," *The West Australian*, July 19, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46922291>;

"Music And Theatre," *The West Australian*, July 17, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46922147>.

²⁴⁵ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 216.

²⁴⁶ "Theatre," *Smith's Weekly*, September 6, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article234630993>; Other newspapers praising Shawn: Clive Turnbull, "Shawn's Virile Dancing Delights Audience," *The Herald*, August 12, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article245093597>; Tatlock Miller, "Shawn Sacrifices Subtlety for Vigo," *The Sun*, August 31, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article229702398>.

²⁴⁶ "Ted Shawn's Diverse Solo Dances," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 1, 1947, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18040946>.

²⁴⁷ "Ted Shawn's Diverse Solo Dances," *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

²⁴⁸ "Plays And Players," *Western Mail*.

²⁴⁹ "Great Indian Dancer," *Kalgoorlie Miner*, July 11, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article256840654>.

Browne, the director of the British Drama League, also gave three public lectures at Patch about modern drama in October 1951.²⁵⁰

Chapter Conclusions

Although Mrs Beeby was a talented musician, singer, and actress, it was her passion and enterprise for dance that allowed her to embrace concepts of modern dance and bring international modern styles to Perth audiences. No schools of modern dancing existed before Patch was created, indicating that Mrs Beeby was a pioneer in its establishment in Perth. Mrs Beeby impressed on her students the teachings of Delsarte and Duncan as she encouraged free flowing and expressionist movements in her classes and choreography. She formed close bonds with her students, and her classes provided a creative and social outlet for many during the war. Her repertoire of folk, exotic, natural and serious dances that depicted contemporary issues provided Perth audiences with something new and exciting to watch, a contrast to typical ballet performances. Arguably, her most significant cultural achievement was hosting Shawn in Perth for three months, where he enhanced students' skills and technique and influenced the company to implement his teachings. Mrs Beeby was a unique individual who, at fifty years old, co-founded a new theatre and dance school whose impact on the Perth's arts scene and community was significant. She furthered the development of modern dance in Perth and created a community at Patch where her students were grateful for her mentorship and teaching.

²⁵⁰ "The Stage Architects Plan Revolutionary Changes in Future Theatre Designs," *Western Mail*, September 27, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52182722>.

CONCLUSION

The Social, Political and Cultural Impact of the Patch Theatre Company

In short, "Patch" is a workshop in the Arts within the reach of everyone who is willing to make a sincere application of time and effort.¹

By the late 1940s, Patch Theatre Company was an established amateur theatre company and school whose members shared common interests in theatre, dance, and music. The company had many long-serving members and staff, and classes were well attended. With over 750 students and multiple performances a year, Patch had achieved impressive levels of success for an amateur theatre company and school. Yet the running of Patch was a considerable effort for Ida and Edward Beeby, and their relationship, already threatened by Beeby's affair in 1944, was strained. By 1947 they were tired, overworked, financially strained, and heading into their sixties.² Company members witnessed the forming of cracks in the Beebys' relationship. Rosalie Carie, a dancer, later recalled the couple's last public argument while the company was rehearsing the Slavonic Dances. The routine required the chorus to stomp their feet on the stage, which caused the gramophone needle to jump. Mrs Beeby asked Beeby to prevent the music from jumping, to which he replied: "tell them not to stomp so hard". Mrs Beeby retorted that the stomping was essential, which prompted Beeby to leave. This was the last time that most of the dancers saw him, for their relationship ended soon after. When Mrs Beeby returned to Perth after the Ted Shawn tour, she found that Beeby had left and subsequently moved to Adelaide.³

Mrs Beeby continued to manage Patch on her own for a short time but left Perth in 1949 and formally relinquished management of the company in 1950. She made succession plans to ensure Patch's continued success by encouraging the long-serving Patch actor and student, Timothy Megaw, to accept the Trusteeship, positioned Jean Wilkinson to take over the dance school, left Jean

¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944," (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

² Rosalie Carey, n.d., Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

³ Carey, Patch Theatre Archive Notes; Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988), 217.

Conclusion

Rule and Mary Senior to run the theatre, and was assured that Mae Meadows would continue as secretary.⁴ The dance school declined over the next decade after the departure of Wilkinson in 1952,



Figure 36. David Crann has been involved with Patch Theatre for over fifty years. Source: Ken Hotchkin, "David Crann, actor at Patch Theatre, 21 April 1967," April 21, 1967, photograph, State Library of Western Australia, <https://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b2554>.

though the theatre continued to thrive. Eventually and incrementally, however, the Beeby generation retired from the company: Rule in 1960, Megaw in 1961 and Senior in 1964. In their place, Patch experienced significant renewal of cast and crew in the 1960s, led at first by Colleen Clifford as director from 1959 and then David Crann from 1966.⁵

In this concluding chapter, I address the fourth aim of my thesis. Having considered in previous chapters the cultural context in which the company was formed in the late 1930s, the political influence of Beeby on the company's activities, and the influence of Mrs Beeby on its progressive engagement with modern dance, we can now determine the social, cultural, and political impact of Patch in its first decade. Importantly, I return to the research problem and research aims as they were discussed in the introductory chapter and demonstrate how this has been resolved. Finally, I provide an epilogue—of sorts—that ends the story of the Beebys and acknowledges their long-term legacy in the continued operations of Patch.

⁴ Carey, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁵ David Crann, reviewed by Elizabeth Blair – Barber, "Typed Summary of History of Patch Theatre."

Resolution of the Research Problem and Aims

In the introduction of this thesis, I explained my intent to investigate the history of the Patch Theatre Company from 1939 to 1950 by examining the influence of the Beebys on the company's development. I aimed, particularly, to consider the degree to which Edward Beeby's political activism may have informed the activities of the company, and the cultural impact of Ida Beeby through her engagement with the international modern dance movement. Finally, I declared my aim to determine the company's social, cultural and political impacts while under the leadership of the Beebys. Patch grew significantly in the 1940s, spurred on by the dedication of the Beebys and the company to train students and audiences in the performing arts. Along with the Repertory Club, Patch was one of Perth's main sources of theatrical entertainment during the war, and it was during this time that strong bonds of community were formed within the company. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the company meaningfully impacted Perth society and culture, and, to a lesser extent, its politics.

The Beeby Charisma

The first aim of this thesis was to examine the origins of the Patch in the social, political, and cultural context of 1930s Perth, and how this was formed by the background of Edward and Ida Beeby. Chapter One outlined the proliferation of amateur theatre in the 1930s, noting that the closure of many commercial theatres due to the Depression allowed amateur theatre to flourish. Thus, when the Beebys decided to create Patch, they launched it in an environment that was receptive towards such companies. This chapter contextualised the politics of the late 1930s by examining the rise in radical political activism throughout the decade and how this was precipitated by the crash of the stock market in 1929 and the growing awareness of the political situation in Europe, notably the rise of fascism. Branches of organisations such as the Communist Party of Australia and the Movement Against War and Fascism were established in Perth, indicating a shift for many towards progressive, leftist political philosophies and a growing awareness of international politics.

In addition to the cultural, social, political, and economic consideration of 1930s Perth, Chapter One traced the lives of Edward and Ida Beeby prior to their arrival. Drawing on various newspaper articles, Patricia Thompson's autobiography, previously un-used materials from the Patch Theatre archive and scholarly literature, I outlined the life experiences that prompted the Beebys to open an amateur theatre and dance school in wartime Perth. An analysis of these sources revealed Mrs Beeby's involvement in the arts since her childhood and her unconventional romantic life, Beeby's proximity to left-wing politics and his involvement in amateur theatre and faulty business proceedings, as well as their life in Sydney surrounded by an artistic community. When they fled

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notoriety in Sydney due to their personal and professional lives, this complex background culminated in the creation of Patch.

In Perth, the origins of Patch can be found in the community that the Beebys gathered to attend lectures on music, theatre, and the arts. As more people joined, there was a desire expressed by the students to perform on stage, and so the school became a part amateur theatre. The wartime context of the company's origins was an important influence. The company was forced to be thrifty and frugal, relying on the voluntary collaboration of its members. It also aimed to be accessible socially and financially to students and audiences, charging comparatively little for lessons, and providing tickets by donation.⁶ The war possibly contributed to Patch's early success due to people seeking out community, purpose, and entertainment, all of which Patch provided. The rapid growth of the company in its first years precipitated a move to a bigger studio and was evidence of the Beebys' success.

The Politics of War and Stage

The second aim of this thesis was to evaluate the degree to which Patch and its performances were shaped by the left-wing political activism of Beeby. He appears to have inherited his left-wing beliefs, interest in theatre, and legal profession from his father, Sir George Beeby, who was a Labor parliamentarian in New South Wales. As a broadcaster and leader, Beeby became a public figure in Perth during the Second World War, known for his political activism that denounced fascist ideologies. Analysis of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation records about Beeby and various newspaper articles, including the Anti-Fascist League's newspaper, *The Sentinel*, reveals that he was highly active during the war and espoused strong leftist beliefs. He was an avid supporter of the communist system in the Soviet Union and of international workers' rights. Yet, while Beeby was a prominent wartime political activist in Perth, performances at Patch do not appear to have been widely used as a conduit for his activism.

Patch was, in this way, the opposite of Perth's left-wing activist theatre, the Workers' Art Guild, which capitalised on the New Theatre movement and the increasing interest in socialist politics in Perth in the 1930s. The existence of the Guild in Perth prior to and during the early years of Patch's establishment may have influenced the Beebys' decision to keep politics 'out' of Patch. The Guild was already producing leftist plays for Perth audiences, therefore making the need for another amateur theatre to do so superfluous, and with the wartime suppression of communist and radical political organisations, the Workers' Art Guild's popularity decreased. Perhaps this indicated to the Beebys that Patch needed to remain mainstream in its productions in order to survive the

⁶ Patch Theatre, "Patch Souvenir."

war, and reason enough to avoid radicalism. However, since its inception, Patch's purpose was always explicitly focused on the arts rather than politics and it seems that it was this aim that motivated Patch's activities. Despite avoiding explicit political intent, the political ideologies of its founders were evident in other ways, such as the company's commitment to accessibility to the arts, affordability of its fees, commitment to public education, and the occasional anti-capitalist and anti-fascist messaging of its performances. Plays such as *The Voyage Inheritance*, *Sheppey*, *Everyman*, *Dirge Without Dole*, *Invisible Circus* and *Watch on the Rhine* subtly allude to the leftist politics of Beeby.

The Progressive Force of Modern Dance

The third aim of this thesis was to assess the impact of Mrs Beeby on the development of dance in Perth and her impact on those within the Patch community, specifically her students within the dance school. While theatre at Patch mostly delivered standard fare, its dance school was progressive and engaged with international trends. Mrs Beeby's work with modern dance in her lessons and performances had a large impact on the development of dance in Perth as she helped establish a relatively new dance style, hosted the world-renowned dance pioneer Ted Shawn, and helped modern dance philosophies to be integrated into physical education for primary school children. Dance in Perth until the Second World War largely consisted of national dancing, such as Irish and Scottish, and ballet. Before 1938, there were no modern dancers or schools of modern dance in Perth.

Mrs Beeby had a significant impact on her female students, which is evident in the records we have of interviews, memoirs, and letters. While time may have distorted memory, the positive relationship between Mrs Beeby and her students is a consistent theme in such records. The Second World War helped increase Patch's popularity, as employment opportunities grew and more working women could afford to attend dance classes. The high-art aspect of modern dance fit into Patch's ethos that sought to educate others about the arts and to make the theatre widely accessible. Mrs Beeby was a beloved mentor and teacher to the company's students and, although she was strict and forthright, she developed close relationships with her students. Although many at Patch emphasise the positive impact that Mrs Beeby had on their lives, her at-times straightforward and appraising nature meant that some students recalled her less fondly.

Despite this, Mrs Beeby was respected for her professionalism and internationalisation, basing her classes on the teachings of Francois Delsarte and Isadora Duncan and emphasising free-flowing movements and natural expression. She was not afraid to meld aspects of classical ballet with modern dance philosophies to suit her own style and introduced Perth to many reinterpretations of folk and national dances through this modern style. Mrs Beeby worked also with

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children and Perth's schools. Her book, *Dance Child, Dance*, was used in primary schools, and demonstrates that Mrs Beeby's cultural and social impact extended beyond Patch. Her work meant that many school children were encouraged to develop the ability to express themselves through dance and free-flowing movements. Shawn's residency at Patch had a significant impact on the development of Australian dance as his visit claimed legitimacy for modern techniques and shifted the public's perception of the male dancer.

The Social, Cultural and Political Impact of the Patch Theatre Company

Finally, the fourth aim of this thesis was to determine the social, cultural, and political impact of Patch while it was under the Beebys' direction from 1939 to 1950. The social impact of Patch is evident in the connections that were formed within the company and how fondly its members remember the community at Patch during and after the war. Valma Fountain-Smith was an early cast member of Patch. She described the company as a "Big Happy Family" and a "home away from home,"⁷ suggesting that Patch's positive social impact was due to its ability to impart a sense of belonging in its members. The people who studied, performed and volunteered at Patch became a part of a group that was built on cooperation, accessibility and appreciation for the arts and, as noted by Judy Smythe, also an early cast member, members of the company often forged life-long connections.⁸ For example, Hazel Dawson, who became friends with fellow Patch dancer Daisy Wright, became the godmother of Wright's son.⁹ Shirley Gilmour and Fountain-Smith also emphasised how wonderful their time was at Patch, a sentiment that Gilmour felt was shared by others as she remembered that Jean Wilkinson had said to her that she felt sorry for anybody who had not gone to Patch.¹⁰

Patch contributed meaningfully to the social history of Western Australia during the Second World War. It went beyond the entertainment of residents and visiting servicemen—it also encouraged positive relationships, offered mental stimulation, encouraged creativity, and boosted community morale. It was, in short, an important contributor to the wartime well-being of its community. It was not alone in this venture, for theatres and cinemas dominated Australia's wartime popular culture. Many contributed to the spread of wartime propaganda, intending to boost morale; others offered an escape from reality, with their light-hearted content. Indeed, many

⁷ Fountain-Smith to David Crann, Patch Theatre Archive.

⁸ Judy Smythe to Patch Theatre, June 29, 2005, Patch Theatre Archive.

⁹ Hazel Dawson to David Crann, February 16, 2006, Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁰ Shirley Gilmour, in discussion with author, March 12, 2021; Valma Fountain-Smith to David Crann, Patch Theatre Archive.

popular films in wartime Australia avoided themes related to war, such as Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, which showed for over a year at cinemas.¹¹ Similarly, Patch entertained its community in the early 1940s with light-hearted plays, including Harold Brighouse's *Hobson's Choice*, Keith Winter's *Ringmaster* and A. J. Cronin's *Jupiter Laughs*. In her interview with Chris Jeffrey many years later, Nita Pannell recalled that many within Patch audiences were British sailors "who longed for a bit of entertainment".¹² Patch therefore imbued its company members with a sense of purpose—their labour was understood to contribute to Australia's effort on the home front. Pannell admitted as much. She joined Patch, feeling compelled to "do something".¹³ Dawson added that the Patch dance classes provided women on the home front with an outlet, seemingly for their social and creative needs.¹⁴ Thus, Patch's impact on Perth society was evident on both a personal and broader societal level.

The cultural impact of Patch has often been overlooked by scholars, largely in favour of the more prominent Repertory Club or the more provocative material produced by the Workers' Art Guild. Yet Patch was culturally significant for several reasons: the company made 'high' cultural products accessible to the working classes; their theatre and dance performances were a source of entertainment for the public during and after the war; and Patch helped introduce modern dance to Perth. Furthermore, as Patch was a teaching school its cultural impact can also be measured by the impact its students later made. A number of the company went on to have successful careers in the arts. Alan Seymour became a famed playwright and dramatist in Australia and Britain. His most notable work is arguably his fearless play, *The One Day of the Year*, but he also had a long-standing career in creative content with the BBC. Margaret Ford was an accomplished comic actor, acting in productions with the Company of Four, Hole-in-the-Wall Theatre Company, National Theatre Company and at the New Fortune Theatre.¹⁵ Notably, in 1980 she toured with Arthur Lowe in New Zealand for the farce *Beyond a Joke*.¹⁶ Nita Pannell was an actress and director, and co-founded The Company of Four.¹⁷ Her role as Dot Cook in the Trust Players' production of Seymour's *The One Day*

¹¹ Mary Ann Gregory, "World War II and American Entertainment: The Stage, the Cinema, and Books in Periodical Literature, 1942-1945," (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1968), 18; Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime, 1939-1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), 117.

¹² Nita Pannell, interview by Chris Jeffrey, April 7, 1976, https://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b1784705_40.

¹³ Pannell, interview.

¹⁴ Hazel Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946 – 51," Patch Theatre Archive.

¹⁵ Bill Dunstone and Maurice Jones, "Margaret Ford," in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.

¹⁶ Dunstone and Jones, "Margaret Ford," 233.

¹⁷ Ivan King, "Nita Pannell," in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons, and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995), 424.

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of the Year in 1961 took her to Sydney and London, though most of her career was in Perth, where she acted with the Hole-in-the-Wall Theatre Company until she was in her eighties.¹⁸

The cultural impact of Patch in the areas of music and drama are considerable as it exposed Perth audiences to popular plays from Britain and the United States and helped develop knowledge and interest in the works of famous European composers. One of the most culturally significant plays performed by the company was Lillian Hellmann's *Watch on the Rhine*, which opened at Patch in 1944 only three years after its original debut in New York. In addition to its normal theatre performances, Patch hosted one-act plays in which students performed pieces, helping build their confidence and ensuring a range of different performances for the audience.¹⁹ Rosalie Carey, a Patch member, wrote that Perth owed a debt of gratitude to the Beebys as they introduced Perth to the works of creatives such as August Strindberg and Oscar Wilde.²⁰ Dance students recalled developing an appreciation for classical music in Mrs Beeby's classes as they would sit on the floor of the studio to listen to her playing classical music on the piano after their class.²¹ Patch also hosted cultural evenings on Sunday nights after the war. During these evenings, a lecture was presented, interspersed with dramatic depictions on the lives of famous composers and musicians.²² Part of these productions would include presenting the music of these composers with interpretive dances.²³ Patch's cultural impact was limited, though, to imported cultural materials, as most of Patch's plays were from international sources, meaning that Patch failed to substantially support any local playwrights and artists, except Patch member Raymond Bowers, during the 1940s. Despite this, Patch's repertoire of traditional and modern plays, cultural night performances, and modern dance choreography demonstrates that the company did expand the cultural life of Perth.

Patch's contribution to Perth's dance scene is another example of its cultural impact. Before the 1940s, dance was separated by class as working women saw dance as a respectable recreational pursuit that emphasised grace and deportment, while dance for working-class girls was a fun hobby that could potentially lead to a career as a chorus girl.²⁴ Mrs Beeby, however, offered dance lessons to working women backgrounds, not just as a bit of fun but through the lens of dance as an art form. She was the first to teach modern dance in Perth, followed shortly by Dorothy Fleming, thus helping

¹⁸ King, "Nita Pannell."

¹⁹ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 2 (Perth: Patersons Printing Press, October 1945), Museum of Performing Arts WA Archive.

²⁰ Carey, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

²¹ Biddy Walker to David Crann, May 17, 2007, Patch Theatre Archive; Shirley Gilmour, phone interview by Elizabeth Leong, August 20, 2021, UNDA.

²² Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 2.

²³ Patch Theatre, *Patch in Print* 1, no. 2.

²⁴ Lynn Fisher, "Dancing Queen: A Story of Dance," in *Farewell Cinderella: Creating Arts and Identity in Western Australia*, eds. Richard Rossiter, G. C. Bolton, and Jan Ryan (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 60.

establish this style of dance to locals. Dance historian Lynn Fisher argues that it was the context of the war and the change in social values that allowed Mrs Beeby to be “less socially conformist and middle-class in orientation”.²⁵ By introducing the city to international modern dance trends, Patch helped contribute to the development of dance in Perth.

Arguably, Patch’s biggest cultural achievement for Perth, especially for dance, was the residency of Ted Shawn in 1947. His lectures, demonstrations and performances introduced a new level of dance and culture to those who attended and studied under him. “The Beebys were astonishing, to have brought such a maverick figure all that way to a tiny theatre in that isolated Australian city,” wrote former Patch actor, Alan Seymour.²⁶ To have a pioneer of modern dance in the United States make the considerably long trip from Massachusetts to Perth was a testament to his perception of Patch’s progressive ethos and cultural value. The impact of Shawn’s visit was not just felt in dance but also drama as Seymour described how Shawn “linked dance and drama and all physical expression in a way which has now become commonplace in post-modern theatre but then was a rarity”.²⁷ Many students wrote about the impact that Shawn had on their lives and their understanding of the arts. It was Shawn’s visit that prompted the creation of the group of male dancers at Patch, something extremely daring and rare for Perth due to the associated femininity of ballet and dance.²⁸ Patch had wanted more male dancers for years before Shawn’s visit, but it appears that his demonstrations and lectures provided enough evidence to convince at least some men that dance was a worthy pursuit.

Interestingly, Patch does not appear to have had the same degree of political impact in Perth, even though Edward Beeby had a significant wartime role as a political activist and broadcaster. Unlike the Workers’ Art Guild, which was obvious and deliberate in its dissemination of socialist ideas, Patch’s political impact was perhaps most evident in the company’s ethos to “bring these arts within the reach of every purse”.²⁹ Their affordable classes and performances encouraged more working-class people to become involved in drama, dance, and music. Patch’s intent to democratise the ‘high’ arts in its theatre and school was a political act as entertainment and recreational pursuits were largely divided along class lines and could be used as an exclusionary social barrier. Thus, Patch’s accessibility to the working class demonstrated its style of subtle politics.

Some of Patch’s plays did involve subtle critiques of capitalism, although they were largely framed as morality tales about the corrupting power of money and wealth. Harley Granville Barker’s

²⁵ Fisher, “Dancing Queen,” 62.

²⁶ Alan Seymour to David Crann, September 29, 1991, Patch Theatre Archive.

²⁷ Seymour to Crann, September 29, 1991.

²⁸ “Ballet Delights,” *Sunday Times*, July 18, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59483471>.

²⁹ Patch Theatre, “Patch Souvenir: On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary Performance, July 1944,” (Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing Co, 1944).

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The Voyage Inheritance, William Somerset Maugham's *Sheppey*, and the late fifteenth-century play, *Everyman*, explore the theme of the immorality of capital. Lillian Hellmann's *Watch on the Rhine* was Patch's most left-wing political play as its hero was a resistance fighter who explicitly opposed the Nazis and their fascist ideologies. Other plays also highlighted the issues under the capitalist system such as Cedric Mount's *Dirge Without Dole*, which depicted the pervasive and serious nature of unemployment, and Sumner Locke-Elliott's *Invisible Circus*, which showed the degrading ability of consumerism to destroy creativity within a radio organisation. These plays at Patch encouraged their audience to reflect on the failings of the capitalist system and indicate that Patch did convey leftist political beliefs to their audience to a limited degree.

The End of the Beebys

The Beebys' relationship ended when Edward Beeby left Western Australia—and Ida Beeby—in 1947. He moved to Adelaide, where he co-managed the South Australian Ballet Club.³⁰ Beeby continued to be involved in amateur theatre as he was the stage manager for a production of *Carmen* at the Tivoli Theatre in July 1948, designed the set for the Drama Festival Committee of the Student Theatre Group in August 1948, and was a member of the New Theatre League, producing *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller in May 1949.³¹ This later foray into a more radical theatre suggests it was Mrs Beeby's influence that may have tempered the politics of Patch. Beeby then moved to Auckland in the early 1950s, where he opened a studio and conducted singing lessons.³² He met and married a woman, Katherine, and they migrated to the United Kingdom. After living in London, possibly so that Katherine could attend London's Trinity College of Music, they returned to Adelaide where they had two children.³³ Katherine and Beeby taught piano, voice production, singing and music theory and harmony in Adelaide.³⁴ Beeby also taught a public speaking class at McLaren Vale School.³⁵

Mrs Beeby left Patch in 1950.³⁶ Her departure shocked everyone, as it was accompanied by the news that the young Patch dancer, Morris Hertz, would join her and that they intended to marry in Sydney. There was a 38-year age gap: Mrs Beeby was then 61, while Hertz was just 23.³⁷ Different

³⁰ "Artist's Visit," *News*, November 30, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article129889362>.

³¹ "Rehearsing For Opera," *The Mail*, July 24, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55901561>; "Winter School of Music," *The Advertiser*, August 11, 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article43778360>; Harold Minear, "U.S. Play by Local Group," *News*, May 18, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article130193289>.

³² Carey, Patch Theatre Archive Notes; Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

³³ Carey, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

³⁴ "Advertising," *The Coromandel*, March 24, 1961, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article261058247>.

³⁵ "Adult Education," *Victor Harbour Times*, October 2, 1959, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article186016987>.

³⁶ Jean Wilkinson, n.d., Patch Theatre Notes.

³⁷ Alan Seymour to David Crann, September 29, 1991, Patch Theatre Archive.



Figure 37. Ida Beeby with her third husband and fourth long-term partner, Morris Hertz. Source: Artist unknown, *Ida with Morris Hertz*, photograph, from Patricia Thompson, *Accidental Chords* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 1988), 219.

justifications for what was perceived as an unusual relationship have been given by former Patch members: some thought that Hertz married Mrs Beeby to conceal his homosexuality; others, such as Mrs Beeby's daughter, Patricia Thompson, believed it was truly a love match—a 'Harold and Maude'³⁸ romance.³⁹ Ida and Morris Hertz moved to Auckland, where they continued to teach dance and drama at their newly created Blue Door Studio.⁴⁰ She suffered a long undiagnosed illness while in Auckland and, after her recovery, the couple moved back to Sydney, where they settled in Wollstonecraft.⁴¹ Ida settled into retirement while her new husband worked at a marketing agency. In 1957, both were rushed to hospital following a motor vehicle accident.⁴² Hertz suffered minor injuries, but Ida's were fatal, and she died in hospital two days later.

³⁸ Harold and Maude is a 1971 film following the titular protagonists, 20 year old Harold and 80 year old Maude, who meet at a funeral and develop a romantic relationship.

³⁹ Thomson, 217; David Crann, n.d., Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁴⁰ Dawson, "Patch Theatre 1946-51."

⁴¹ Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 217.

⁴² Thompson, *Accidental Chords*, 232; Mann, "Patch Theatre," 429

Patch After the Beebys

Preceding Ida Beeby's departure from Perth in 1950, two significant events occurred. First, the theatre was chosen to be part of a documentary, "The Theatre in Australia", by Dr Kirk Sternberg for the Department of Information.⁴³ The film unit captured shots of Patch's curtain, the theatre, Mrs Beeby directing everyone, and scenes from *Chance and Mrs Buffington*, starring Timothy Megaw and Shirley Geddes.⁴⁴ Secondly, the company was threatened with closure by the Health Department as it was unsure whether Patch could afford the necessary building renovations needed to meet their safety requirements.⁴⁵ The company was forced to split its activities between two venues. Fortunately, it was able to perform its plays at the Repertory Theatre before returning to Munster House in May 1951.⁴⁶

After Mrs Beeby left Patch, the theatre operations continued under the new leadership of Jean Rule and Mary Senior, while Jean Wilkinson took over as the director of the dance school until she left in 1953.⁴⁷ True to its roots, Nita Pannell, who also helped manage Patch, said that Patch would continue to operate "on the lines of an ideal 'little theatre' while carrying out the functions of a teaching school".⁴⁸ Patch continued to produce high-quality theatrical productions throughout the 1950s, although some of its performances were criticised for the shortcomings of various cast members. In one 1952 production of Emyln Williams' *Night Must Fall*, the *West Australian's* drama critic felt that the acting of the lead performer was "deeply disappointing".⁴⁹ The critic did, however, praise other Patch performances. For the company's production of *Granite*, the newspaper recorded: "The production, by Pannell, was one of the best of recent months."⁵⁰ *Granite* also won four of the five awards in the Theatre Council's 1951 Drama Festival.⁵¹ In 1951, Patch started doing country tours under the auspices of the Adult Education Board. In October of that year, the company

⁴³ "Film Man Pleased," *The West Australian*, May 17, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47663821>.

⁴⁴ "Lights... Camera... Action," *Western Mail*, May 19, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article39094743>.

⁴⁵ "Health Order Puts Patch on Spot," *Sunday Times*, June 12, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59490642>.

⁴⁶ "Patch Theatre Will Split in Two to Carry on Work," *The Daily News*, June 17, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article82390387>; "Advertising," *The West Australian*, July 22, 1950, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47876105>; "Scenes for Play Made from Scrap," *The Daily News*, May 16, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article265045635>.

⁴⁷ "Scenes for Play Made from Scrap," *The Daily News*, May 16, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article265045635>.

⁴⁸ "Scenes for Play Made from Scrap," *The Daily News*.

⁴⁹ "Terror on Stage at Patch," *The West Australian*, January 7, 1952, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article49009062>.

⁵⁰ "A Drama of Passion," *The West Australian*, June 2, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48199547>.

⁵¹ "Granite Gives Revived Patch Theatre Four Awards," *The Daily News*, June 25, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article265047693>.

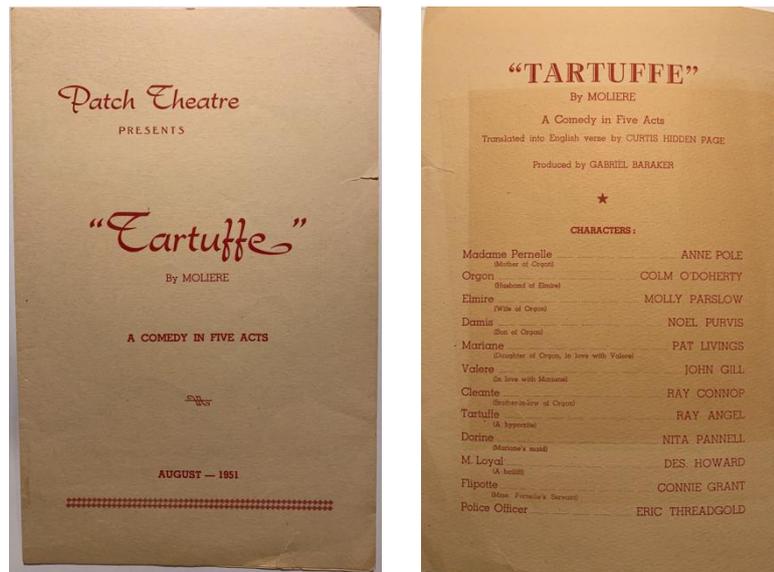


Figure 38. Patch Theatre program of Moliere's *Tartuffe*. Source: Patch Theatre, "Tartuffe", program, Museum of Performing Arts WA.

toured the state with its production of Moliere's *Tartuffe*.⁵² Throughout the 1950s, most of the plays that Patch produced were highbrow comedies and dramas imported from Britain and America and created by such playwrights as Somerset Maugham, Joan Temple, and Emyln Williams. Patch was still booming in the mid-1950s. One journalist commented in 1955 that they had never experienced such a continuous run of high-standard live shows, mainly from The Repertory Club and Patch.⁵³

Despite the continued success of the theatre, the quality of the dance school suffered after the departure of Mrs Beeby. One critic, 'P.K.', wrote in 1953 that the general standard of Patch's dance recital did not meet the quality expected of a public performance. He wrote that "Inadequate technique was the main fault which, unfortunately, outweighed imaginative treatment of theme and colourful costuming."⁵⁴ Wilkinson's departure further signalled the decline of the dance school at Patch as there was no one to take over as director. However, the drama school and performances continued, and Colleen Clifford became the principal teacher and director in 1959.⁵⁵

When the lease ran out for Munster House in 1961, the theatre was forced to obtain new premises. The company considered a place on the first floor of an old garage at 267 William Street in Northbridge and a space above Boan's department store that ran between Murray Street and Wellington Street.⁵⁶ The place on William Street was convenient for parking but required major

⁵² "Music and the Theatre," *The West Australian*, October 13, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48994528>.

⁵³ "Around The Town," *Mirror*, May 7, 1955, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article75794662>.

⁵⁴ P.K. "Patch Show Contains Mixed Fare," *The West Australian*, October 12, 1953, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52933949>.

⁵⁵ Mann, "Patch Theatre," 429.

⁵⁶ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

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renovations for use as a theatre.⁵⁷ Many objected to this space as it was seen as being on the ‘wrong side’ of the train tracks, and tensions ran high. The company split—most went to William Street, while a breakaway group moved into the space above Boan’s.⁵⁸ The breakaway group only lasted a few years before dissolving.⁵⁹ For the main group, the move to Northbridge required a lot of work as the new place was smaller than Munster House. Some members volunteered to help move furniture and props into storage (often into their own garages).⁶⁰ Patch received its first and only federal grant of 1000 pounds from Senator Vincent Seddon to help with the refurbishment.⁶¹

The move to William Street divided the theatre from its past and its traditional programming disappeared.⁶² There was a new and younger cast and members preferred a combined programme of classical, traditional, and radical materials.⁶³ David Crann joined the theatre in the early 1960s. He became its co-director with Maude Michelle in 1966. Ross Kendall and Adele Hills took the directorship in 1970, though Crann has remained the company’s principal leader to this day.⁶⁴ He remembered one example of Patch’s continued thriftiness when he asked Mae Meadows for money to buy nails and kalsomine for the set of *Granite*.⁶⁵ She replied incredulously, “Buy? Buy? Did you say buy? There’s no such thing as buy here.”⁶⁶ She then proceeded to show him how to pull nails from the flats backstage and use a hammer to bang the flat so that lumps of kalsomine dropped on the floor, which she swept up and put in a tin and pounded it into a powder.⁶⁷ In 1970, the same year that Ross Kendall and Adele Hills took over the leadership, Patch began annual urban and regional tours.⁶⁸

Tragedy struck in 1970 when a fire erupted in the Northbridge premises. While no one was harmed, Patch lost much of its repository of costumes, props, and archival records. The fire triggered a mass exodus from Patch. However, a small, dedicated group remained and relocated to St Mary’s Church Hall on 40 Colin Street, West Perth, for two years.⁶⁹ This was Patch’s last centrally located venue, as the company then moved to Victoria Park in 1972. In 1991, Patch moved to Kitchener

⁵⁷ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁵⁸ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁵⁹ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁶⁰ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁶¹ Crann, Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁶² David Crann, “Foreword,” n.d., Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁶³ Crann, “Foreword,” Patch Theatre Archive Notes.

⁶⁴ Patch Theatre, “Patch 70th Anniversary,” pamphlet, 2009.

⁶⁵ David Crann to Karen and Katherine, September 19, 2013, Patch Theatre Archive.

⁶⁶ Crann to Karen and Katherine, September 19, 2013.

⁶⁷ Crann to Karen and Katherine, September 19, 2013.

⁶⁸ “Junior Bear’s First Visit to N.W.,” *Hamersley News*, March 27, 1980, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article214554342>; Patch Theatre, “Patch 70th Anniversary.”

⁶⁹ Patch Theatre, “Patch Theatre Tribute and Re-union [sic],” pamphlet, August, 2005.

Avenue, before moving to 443 Albany Highway for a decade between 1994 and 2004.⁷⁰ The company eventually settled at 47 Kitchener Avenue.⁷¹ Under Crann's direction, Patch achieved a number of significant accomplishments, such as the creation of the Colony Room Theatre, an adjunct to Patch, for student actors.⁷² Patch also participated in the Singapore Festival of Arts in 1990.⁷³ In the last decade, Patch's activities have declined significantly, and it is currently not operating as an active theatre or school.

By outlining the activities of Patch after the departure of the Beebys, it is possible to argue that while Patch's success during the 1940s can be attributed to the charismatic personalities and dynamic partnership of the Beebys, it appears that the success of the company did not depend entirely on them. In 1962, twelve years after the Beebys had left, Patch remained popular and successful, as indicated by the scholar, P.A. Doherty, who wrote in his thesis on amateur theatre that "today this group [Patch] has developed into a very active and popular theatre".⁷⁴ The group that the Beebys had trained and left in charge of Patch: Megaw, Wilkinson, Rule, Senior, and Mae Meadows, did an admirable job of managing Patch and allowed it to thrive in the 1950s. Its subsequent directors, notably Crann, ran the company for the rest of the twentieth century. Thus, the Beebys were integral to the founding, but not necessarily essential to the ongoing success of the company.

Significance of this Study and Opportunities for Further Study

This study offers new understandings of social and cultural history in Australia and Perth through an examination of Patch and its founders from 1939 to 1950. The company was part of Perth's thriving amateur theatre scene and has thus far been undervalued in histories of theatre and dance. Patch's founders, Edward and Ida Beeby, were notable figures in Perth during the 1940s. Throughout this study I have demonstrated that they impacted Perth socially, culturally, and politically, and demonstrated the significance of their respective activities in political activism and modern dance. My work contributes new knowledge about the activities of Patch, the Beebys in Perth, the Anti-Fascist League, and the modern dance school at Patch. This thesis has examined the political activism of Beeby and the activities of the Anti-Fascist League, which has not yet been addressed within scholarly literature, creating new understandings of left-wing political activism during the

⁷⁰ Patch Theatre, "Patch Theatre Tribute and Re-union."

⁷¹ Patch Theatre, "Patch Theatre Tribute and Re-union."

⁷² "Theatrical Training Commences," *The Observer*, January, 1969.

⁷³ Patch Theatre, "Singapore Festival of Arts," brochure, 1990.

⁷⁴ P.A. Doherty, "The History of Amateur Theatre in Perth since 1920," (PhD Thesis, Graylands Teacher College, 1962), 16.

Conclusion

Second World War. My work also highlights Mrs Beeby's pioneering contribution to the development of dance, specifically modern dance, in Perth through her classes, performances, association with Ted Shawn and her book, *Dance Child, Dance*. This thesis challenges the 'parochial' view of Perth culture as the Beebys were artistically and politically engaged both nationally and transnationally. The significance of this research goes beyond my thesis, for the project team has also drawn together a major archive of Patch materials, which will be handed to the State Library of Western Australia for preservation and future use.

This thesis is the first dedicated study of the Patch Theatre Company and the Beebys during the 1940s. Opportunities exist for further research of the post-Beeby age, particularly the development of the company under Crann and Kendall. Applications of alternative methodological frameworks, such as Marxist, postcolonial, feminist and/or queer theory, to Patch could provide more insightful and nuanced histories of the theatre. A gendered history of Patch, for example, that focuses on the vital work of the female staff and members (especially during the war) and Mrs Beeby's leadership, could provide valuable knowledge about gender, war, and the theatre in a Western Australian context. This work has raised questions concerning the activities, popularity and influence of the Anti-Fascist League, its relationship with other leftist groups and left-wing activism during the war. Additional research also needs to be conducted about modern dance in Perth including other exponents of modern dance in Western Australia and how modern dance influenced the development of dance in the state.

Patch's Legacy

The colourful patchwork curtain of Patch embodied the communal spirit that was at Patch's core. It was stitched together from donated 'patches' of material by a group of dedicated volunteers. In the same way that the curtain could not have been created without Mrs Beeby's creative ideas and the work of Patch members, the company itself could not have functioned without the leadership of the Beebys and the commitment and dedication of all those who performed, helped behind-the-scenes, and attended classes. Patch has nurtured interest and passion for theatre, dance and music through community and a commitment to high-quality artistic expression for over seventy years. Patch's legacy as an amateur theatre and school has made it a significant part of the cultural history of Western Australia and the development of the arts in Perth.

APPENDIX A



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10 August 2020

Professor Deborah Gare
School of Arts & Sciences
The University of Notre Dame Australia
Fremantle Campus

Dear Deborah,

Reference Number: 2020-123F

Project Title: "History of the Patch Theatre Company, 1930 – 1950."

Thank you for submitting the above project for Low Risk ethical review. Your application has been reviewed by a sub-committee of the University of Notre Dame Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, updated 2018). I am pleased to advise that ethics approval has been granted for this proposed study.

Other researchers identified as working on this project are:

Name	School/Centre	Role
Paul Reilly	School of Arts & Sciences	Project Officer

**All research projects are approved subject to standard conditions of approval.
Please read the attached document for details of these conditions.**

On behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee, I wish you well with your study.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Natalie Giles
Research Ethics Officer
Research Office

cc: Dr Robbie Busch, SRC Chair, School of Arts & Sciences

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APPENDIX B

Sample Questions for Interviewees

1. Name/Birthday/Address in the 1940s
2. What did you do during the war?
3. When did you start at Patch and why?
4. What did you do at Patch?
5. What did your parents think of you going to Patch?
6. Were politics or left-wing ideas ever discussed at Patch?
7. What were the other people like? Why did other people join?
8. Describe your experience at Patch.
9. What was your experience of the living in Perth during the war?
10. Why do you think Patch grew during the war?
11. Describe Mrs Beeby and your relationship with her? Mr Beeby? Jean Wilkinson?
12. Did Patch compete or cooperate with other amateur theatre clubs?
13. For example, the Repertory Club or the Workers' Art Guild
14. Why did you leave Patch?
15. Do you remember any funny or interesting stories from Patch?
16. How did the teachings of Isadora Duncan come into Patch?
17. Was it a collaborative environment?

APPENDIX C

Table of Patch Theatre Plays 1939-1949

Play	Date opened
Paolo and Francesca	Sep-39
Glass Houses	Aug-40
Anna Christie	Jun-41
One Act Plays - "Master of the House", "Smoke Screens", "Dumb and the Blind", "They Refuse to be Resurrected"	Aug-41
The Voysey Inheritance	Aug-41
Paolo and Francesca	Oct-41
The Fisher Folk, Everyman	Dec-41
A variety entertainment	Feb-42
Untitled morality play	Feb-42
One Act Plays - "Nicodemus." "The Mask." Mr. Sampson. and "The Proposal."	Feb-42
Jack Straw	Mar-42
Sheppey	Mar-42
Dirge Without Dole	May-42
At Mrs Beams	Jun-42
The Importance of Being Earnest	Sep-42
Lady With a Lamp	Oct-42
Christmas Variety (Saint's Comedy)	Dec-42
Jupiter Laughs	Apr-43
The Doctor in Spite of Himself	Jul-43
Touch Wood	Sep-43
Life with Father	Nov-43
Ringmaster	May-44
5th Anniversary Performance - "Good Men Sleep at Home", "The Watch on the Rhine", "The Long Mirror", "Family Album", "The Shining Hour"	Jul-44
Watch on the Rhine	Sep-44
Hobson's Choice	Apr-45
Chopin	Aug-45
Mozart	Sep-45
Sheppey	Oct-45
Various Acts	Nov-45
Hullaballoo	Feb-46
Claudia	Mar-46
Ice for Breakfast	Apr-46
The Barretts of Wimpole St.	May-46

Conclusion

Dumb and the Blind	Aug-46
Leith Sands	Aug-46
The Doctor from Dunmore	Aug-46
Orange Blossoms	Aug-46
Autumn	Sep-46
Blind Man's Buff	Dec-46
Yes My Darling Daughter	Mar-47
Invisible Circus	Apr-47
The Importance of Being Earnest	Feb-48
The Younger Greysmith	Mar-48
Lot's Wife	Apr-48
The Old One Smiles	May-48
Gaslight	Sep-48
Take a Knife Gently	May-49
Graduation Ball show	date unknown
Aren't We All	date unknown
Elizabeth Refuses	date unknown
Beethoven	date unknown
Home for the Hunter	date unknown

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