

The World Première of  
**MEAN DEEDS**



By Heather Nimmo

“They say this town is full of cozenage,  
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,  
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,  
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,  
And many such-like liberties of sin”

*Comedy of Errors*

**THE HOLE  
IN THE WALL  
THEATRE**

**THE  
STUDIO**  
AT THE SUBIACO THEATRE CENTRE

# MEAN DEEDS

by Heather Nimmo

Bartholomew (Bart) ..... Geoffrey Gibbs  
Bertram (Bert) .....  
Artemis ..... Susie Edmonds  
Flis ..... Christine Ewing  
Rich ..... Douglas Walker  
The Inspector .....  
Mrs Worth ..... Faith Clayton

The action takes place in Bart's office. Since he is something of a recluse, the office is situated in his house, in a large, new, two-storey mansion in an exclusive Perth suburb. It is one evening in the present.

There will be one 15 minute interval.

DIRECTED BY AARNE NEEME  
DESIGNED BY MARK THOMPSON

Production Manager ..... Michael Tasker  
Stage Manager ..... Jenny Poh  
Properties ..... Tanya Dytlewski-Socorro and Michael Betts  
Wardrobe Co-Ordinator ..... Cathryn Ashton  
Production Assistants ..... Angela Lefante & Iris Whitelock  
Set Construction ..... Tom Williams and Phil Hope  
Sound Engineers ..... Edo Brands, Jon Farkas and Carol Brands  
Production Photography ..... Chris Ha

Opening night of this production, the first in The Studio at the Subiaco Theatre Centre, 28th March 1990.

The staging of this first production in the Studio would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of The Minister for the Arts, The Hon David Parker M.L.A., and that of officers and members of the Perth Theatre Trust, Subiaco City Council and Department for the Arts.

Special thanks to Mike Webster (Building Management Authority) and Dave Barrett (Public Health Department). Seating by Mal Taylor Stages. Electrical installations by Brian Clough and Norbert Krawczyk. Sound equipment by Kosmic and theatrical lighting by arrangement with the W.A. Theatre Company, Chisholm College, Wallow Theatrical Services and Kosmic

Thanks to Supa-Valu, The Persian Carpet Centre, Fantasy Furniture  
and

 **Kentucky Fried Chicken**

**SANYO**  
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## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

One chilly April morning in 1987 during a week which saw frantic, almost farcical activity on the world's sharemarkets, the words, 'Greed Breeds Mean Deeds' were chalked all over the pavements of Melbourne. It was as if the words had risen up out of the stones of the city.

But at that time, newspapers, films, political commentators, financial columnists and politicians were telling us that greed was good; that we should admire and emulate the dealmakers, the corporate cowboys, the raiders and the pinstriped pirates.

Here in Western Australia, one of our own dealmakers was reported to have said about himself and the other members the Perth 'mafia': "We come together when there is a deal. There is not an awful lot that happens that doesn't end up going across one of our desks."

I don't want to live in a society that believes in nothing but making money, that is governed by leaders who see only as far as the next balance of payments deficit, and that takes as its heroes men who are rich in goods but who, I fear, are poor in spirit. If I can make an audience laugh at greedy people then I can, in a small way, reduce the attraction of these people and the lives they lead.

Farce seemed the right theatrical form to use for it creates, according to Eric Bentley "a closed mental system, a world of its own, lit by its own lurid and unnatural sun. If we were not laughing so hard, we would find such worlds terrifying. Their workings are as perilous as acrobatics. One touch, we feel, and the whole thing might go spinning into space."

And I decided to use the traditional figures of farce - the avaricious doctor, the corrupt policeman, the foolish girl, the adulterous wife, the dishonest merchant, the cunning servant - and give them a 1990's twist.

I am very pleased that my play MEAN DEEDS will be the first play performed in what will become the Studio at the Subiaco Theatre Centre and I thank the Hole in the Wall Theatre Company and Aarne Neeme for choosing the work of a W.A. playwright for this historic occasion.

*Heather Nimmo.*

"So the time has come to claim this space.

Not for The Hole in the Wall, not even for the Perth Theatre Trust, but for its rightful owners - the profession - the only ones who can breathe life into an empty space.

For our writers to see their own and other new work. For the actors, designers, technicians and directors to meet the challenge that new work offers.

And for our audience to take part in the crucible or hothouse of creativity. Not just to be amused and diverted, but to grapple with new ideas and the new ways of expressing them, in an immediate, rough and ready manner."

**Aarne Neeme, Artistic Director, Hole in the Wall Theatre Company, announcing the establishment of The Studio, at the Opening Night of WALLFLOWERING, 14th February 1990.**



### **AARNE NEEME, Director**

Aarne Neeme has recently been appointed Artistic Director of Hole in The Wall Theatre Company having for the last five years been Head of the Theatre Department at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

Between 1963 and 1965 Aarne was a member of the Emerald Hill Theatre Company and then directed many productions whilst a student at the University of New South Wales. From 1969-71 he was Resident Director at the Octagon Theatre here in Perth and then Resident Director of Sydney's Nimrod Street Theatre. In 1973 he returned to Perth and was appointed Artistic Director of the National Theatre Company

at the Playhouse, the predecessor of what is now the W.A. Theatre Company.

In 1978 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship and studied theatre in England and Europe for nine months. In 1980, after several years freelancing, he was appointed Artistic Director of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company.

He was Artistic Director of the Australian National Playwrights' Conference in 1983 and subsequently worked in New Zealand, directing professional productions and teaching at universities as inaugural Trans-Tasman Fellow.

Aarne directed Jill Perryman and Kevan Johnston in our highly successful Festival production, WALLFLOWERING and will direct the next two main-house productions, AS YOU LIKE IT and SERIOUS MONEY.

He is delighted to have the opportunity to direct the first production in the new Studio Theatre.

POST, April 10, 1990,

# Plenty of laughs in new play

New plays and experimental ones are always risky in a commercial sense and the Hole in the Wall Theatre, Subiaco, deserves commendation for creating the 98-seat Studio Theatre for them.

The first production there *Mean Deeds*, was playing to a small audience indeed the night I attended, about one-quarter of capacity.

But it was an audience that laughed loudly enough to satisfy any Thespian.

The most impressive aspect of this play is the tremendous energy of the cast.

*Mean Deeds* is a satirical play about the evil of financial greed.

Bart, a billionaire allergic to the poor, and Burt, his twin brother — a jailbird who decided robbing banks was easier than fiddling them — are both superbly played by Geoffrey Gibbs.

His was a Tour De Force with one charac-

ter running out of one door and the other character running in with the briefest of pauses between. His energy alone was to be applauded.

The pace and fun was carried through by the rest of the cast in a play that though dealing with a serious aspect of the business world, is presented in a vaudeville style production.

There were lots of asides to the audience, plenty of over-punctuated jokes and an abundance of "milking" the audience for laughs.

Although this style is not everyone's cup of tea, it is a pleasure to see an Australian play, dealing with current and relevant social issues.

*Mean Deeds* plays

Monday to Saturday at The Studio, Subiaco Theatre Centre, to April 21.

Bookings can be made at the centre between 10am and 7.30pm. — Sarah McNeill

April 1st 1990 Sunday Times

# High farce dig at WA's high fliers

**T**HE Hole in the Wall's first production in its new intimate Studio theatre, is high farce with a distinctly WA flavor.

With *Mean Deeds*, WA playwright Heather Nimmo has produced a light, frothy, fun piece both easy on the mind and outrageously scathing of its victims – the flamboyantly wealthy we love to hate.

She lampoons those she describes as corporate cowboys and pin-stripped pirates as her reaction to 1980s "greed is good" ideology.

"I don't want to live in a society that believes in nothing but making money," she has said.

"If I can make an audience laugh at greedy people, then I can, in a small way, reduce the attraction of these people and the lives they lead."

The action centres on Bart, a mega-wealthy recluse who is allergic to the poor, so well off he can blithely tell his secretary he will call "Mr Bond" back tomorrow, and who never receives guests worth less than \$100,000.

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By LLOYD DONALDSON

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But Bart and his Petty Enterprises are in for more than they bargain for when a Marxist feminist cat burglar breaks into the office in a bid to expose his shady money grabbing schemes.

A twin brother bank robber, a Swindle and Rank stockbroker named Rich disguised as a doctor, a cop on the payroll of a mafia mamma and a host of long-forgotten babies add to the hilariously contorted plot.

*Mean Deeds* is a bit rough around the edges but so mischievous to WA audiences in the know that few will notice or care.

Topical references to Alan Bond and in-jokes on government involvement in shonky billion dollar deals (in this case impishly dubbed by Nimmo the "hot water deal") that will be obvious to those with even a cursory knowledge of recent WA affairs lend the play an appeal that had the audience in stitches.

Geoffry Gibbs is superb as the Bart-/Bert twins while Susie Edmonds handles to perfection his rich-bitch wife, a woman turning 40 two hours hence and so desperate for a baby she continually monitors her fertility with a thermometer.

"My womb is calling!" she cries as she lurches into another attempt to induce Bart to her bed.

But Rich (Douglas Walker) stole the show in a scene where he employed Bert's takeaway chicken to demonstrate the behind the scenes machinations of shady business brokers.

That Gibbs "lost it" in the face of Walker's ardent delivery – increasingly incoherent and finally lost altogether amid a mouth-full of unchewed poultry – is no slur on his professionalism.

His unstaged giggling fit soon set off a chicken spluttering Walker and then the entire audience in a fit of hysteria rarely witnessed in public.

*Mean Deeds* is a must. The season runs at the Hole in the Wall until April 21. Tickets are \$21 and \$15.

# A big business farce gets legal scrutiny

□ Heather Nimmo learnt of the dangers of defamation when she wrote her latest play, a farce about Perth's moneymakers and wheelers and dealers. **RON BANKS** reports.

**T**HE legal eagles have been poring over Heather Nimmo's rewrite of her play *Mean Deeds* with the fastidiousness normally reserved for billion dollar contracts.

They've been looking for defamatory lines in the script, and in fact Nimmo has had to change the script in seven places, altering names and certain topical references because the lawyers considered there was the chance someone might identify themselves and sue.

The cause of all this careful scrutiny is the subject matter of *Mean Deeds* — a satirical look at Perth's corporate wheelers and dealers and the morality of easy money.

A major source of Nimmo's inspiration for the play has been the financial and court pages of *The West Australian* in recent months.

Its central character is Bart Petty, a millionaire addicted to deals and allergic to poverty, which he thinks should be a notifiable disease.

Bart runs a conglomerate of companies that get into trouble in the stock market crash and are bailed out by the intervention of the government in a heavy water plant deal.

"It's been said that defamation is the last refuge of the businessman, so the theatre company doesn't want to take any risks of being sued," says Nimmo.

*Mean Deeds* opened last night as the first production in the new studio theatre at the Hole in the Wall in Subiaco.

It is also Nimmo's first attempt at political satire. She has written several children's plays, and her adult play *The Hope* was produced at the Playhouse in 1987.

*Mean Deeds* might be more correctly termed a farce. Besides the central character Bart, it includes his twin brother Bert, a former bank robber. Both parts are played by Geoff Gibbs, the dean of the drama school at the WA Academy.



Heather Nimmo

Then there's Bart's wife Artemis, whose father's money helped found Bart's billion-dollar empire. The couple hate each other, but stay together for the sake of the money. If they divorce Artemis's inheritance goes to the Moral Majority.

Mixed up in the farcical carry-on is Flis, a girl who breaks into rich people's homes to re-educate them with graffiti; there's Rich — a stockbroker with Swindle and Rank; and a woman police inspector from Applecross who's on the take from drug-trafficking.

"As far as I know, there are no female police inspectors who really do live in Applecross," says Nimmo.

The farce uses the classic case of mistaken identity when twin brother Bert breaks out of jail and turns up at Bart's home.

An old-fashioned crim, Bert is appalled at the new-style criminal

activity of making money from drugs.

A final element is the appearance of five Supa Valu plastic shopping bags, which get mixed up.

Nimmo says her style of political satire has been influenced by the works of writers such as Dario Fo and Oscar Wilde, who combine knockabout comedy and sharp one-liners.

"*Mean Deeds* examines the values of a society that makes heroes out of the rich simply because they are rich. A society which uses wealth as the driving force needs to look closely at itself.

"If I can make an audience laugh at greedy people then I can, in a small way, reduce the attraction of those people and the lives they lead."

Nimmo is a full-time writer, most days of the week working from her office in the Australian Writers' Guild in Museum Street, Northbridge.

Although born in Scotland, she grew up in South Australia and gained an honours degree in English and psychology.

However, the early part of her career was spent working a tin mine in Tasmania with her husband Nick.

"We were tin scratchers, really," she says. When the bottom dropped out of tin mining the couple moved to Kalgoorlie, where her husband took a job as a geologist.

Her play *The Hope*, the story of a young couple's move to a gold-mining town, was written while she was in Kalgoorlie.

*Mean Deeds* was originally written in 1987 with a grant from the WA Department for the Arts.

But since then the stock market crash and political changes have led to extensive rewrites to maintain topicality.

## Madcap comedy carries serious message

Is it farce?

Is it pantomime?

Is it political cabaret?

Who knows and who cares if the product is as entertaining as *Mean Deeds*, a new comedy by Heather Nimmo.

*The Hole in the Wall*

Theatre has made the perfect choice in opening its new performance space, The Studio, with the premiere of Nimmo's madcap comedy.

Nothing and nobody is sacred. Politicians, money barons, police, gov-

ernment, entrepreneurs, all get a beating.

The one liners come thick and fast like a Mae West movie.

Enjoy the fun, even the predictable puns, before the bitter aftertaste of the message behind it all

takes over.

For Heather Nimmo is a severe social critic.

Technically the play is still in its infant stages and it is a bit rough around the edges.

But with the help of Aarne Neeme, who di-

rects with a light hand and at breakneck speed, this clever little comedy will soon blossom into adulthood.

The heart and soul of the performance is Geoffrey Gibbs, who plays a double role.

**Viva!**

# The high cost of laughing



THERE'S something rotten in the State of Denmark, and there's something definitely amiss in the city of Perth.

According to playwright Heather Nimmo, who penned the play *Mean Deeds* now playing at the brand new venue The Studio at The Hole in the Wall, there's a wash of wicked deeds taking place in our fair city.

Inside a billionaire's two-storey mansion in an exclusive Perth suburb there's a deal taking place which includes the rich man, Bart Petty, a \$100,000 pay-off to a firm of solicitors, Swindle and Rankin, and a State Government.

The now very likely trio are attempting to stitch up a hot water deal for the State which will, of course, bring in millions of dollars for the taxpayers of Australia.

If you think that sounds familiar, you're right.

The action is fast and, at times, furious as the billionaire's plan is unearthed by a budding Yuppie, Rich, who is attempting to claim the \$100,000 on behalf of Swindle and Rankin, and a representative of WAR (Women Against the Rich), Flis, who discovers the money after breaking into the house.

A corrupt policeman is thrown in and Petty's wife, Artemis, who spends her time organising charity balls, adds spice when she tells her husband that at the age of 40 she wants a child.

Flis' catchphrase is Greed Breeds Mean Deeds — one which Mr Petty strongly denies. He truly believes today's billionaires, including someone called Mr Bond, have a lot in common with old folk heroes like Ned Kelly.

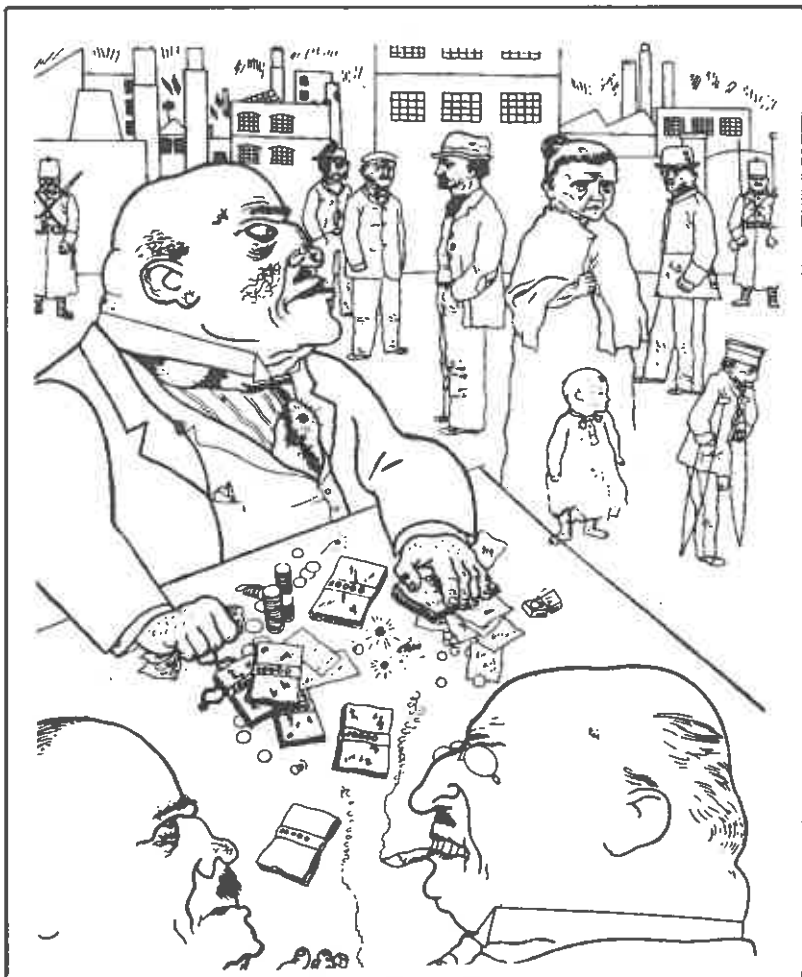
But, as the play comes to its conclusion with Bart safely behind bars, it becomes obvious that in Heather Nimmo's eyes greed does indeed foster unethical dealings.

Nimmo chose to pen this play as a farce, because it creates "a world of its own, lit by its own lurid and unnatural sin."

She adds: "If we were not laughing so hard, we would find such worlds terrifying."

— PAUL BIRD





HEATHER NIMMO'S OUTRAGEOUS SATIRE  
**MEAN DEEDS**

**We check out the corporate cowboys  
 and the pinstriped pirates!!**

STARRING FAITH CLAYTON, GEOFF GIBBS, DOUG WALKER,  
 CHRISTINE EWING AND SUSIE EDMONDS.

DIRECTED BY AARNE NEEME DESIGNED BY MARK THOMPSON

PRESENTED BY

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## New era of intimacy

By VIVIENNE SWANN

**THE new Studio in the Subiaco Theatre Centre opened last night with the outrageous satire *Mean Deeds* by Heather Nimmo.**

The theatre seats 98 people and will be an interesting alternative to the larger Hole in the Wall Theatre.

Simon Dawkins General Manager of the Perth Theatre Trust said: "It's a stimulating time. The Studio will become the home of innovative writing which can flourish in the intimacy of a small venue."

*Mean Deeds* is an especially appropriate play to open Perth's new theatre venue — it's all about big business skulduggery by corporate cowboys and pin-striped pirates.

"It might be possible to spot a few well known board-room bandits from Perth," hinted a Studio spokesman darkly.



◆ Faith Clayton, alias The Inspector, investigates big business shenanigans at the Studio

WANNEROO TIMES 31st APRIL 1990

# HILARIOUS FARCE SETS THE PACE

The Studio, the new mini-theatre at the Subiaco Theatre Centre, got off to a great start with its opening production, Heather Nimmo's Mean Deeds.

An hilarious farce, set in a prestigious Perth suburb in 1990, Mean Deeds effectively targeted the greed of business tycoons, while also taking the mickey out of many other sections of the community.

All the traditional fig-

ures of farce were there but with a 1990s twist.

The audience roared with delight from beginning to end as they recognised the veiled, or not so veiled, references to issues which had made headlines.

The police, doctors, the media and many of Perth's tall poppies were caught by Heather Nimmo's talented pen.

But no matter how talented the playwright, a play is not successful without a strong cast.

In Mean Deeds there was no weak link in the acting chain.

Geoffrey Gibbs, who played the greedy business entrepreneur, cracked us up completely with his Spanish dancing relaxation routine.

Susie Edmonds was a completely contrived ham as she played the part of the adulterous society wife to perfection.

Christine Ewing as the young girl caught up in causes, Faith Clayton as the policeman and servant, and Douglas Walker as the corrupt sharebroker and fake doctor also gave top performances.

The cast had the audience completely on side.

My immediate reaction to the ending was one of disappointment. I felt it was something of an anticlimax. But on reflection I realised that it was fitting.

All Bart has, and others like him, is his money