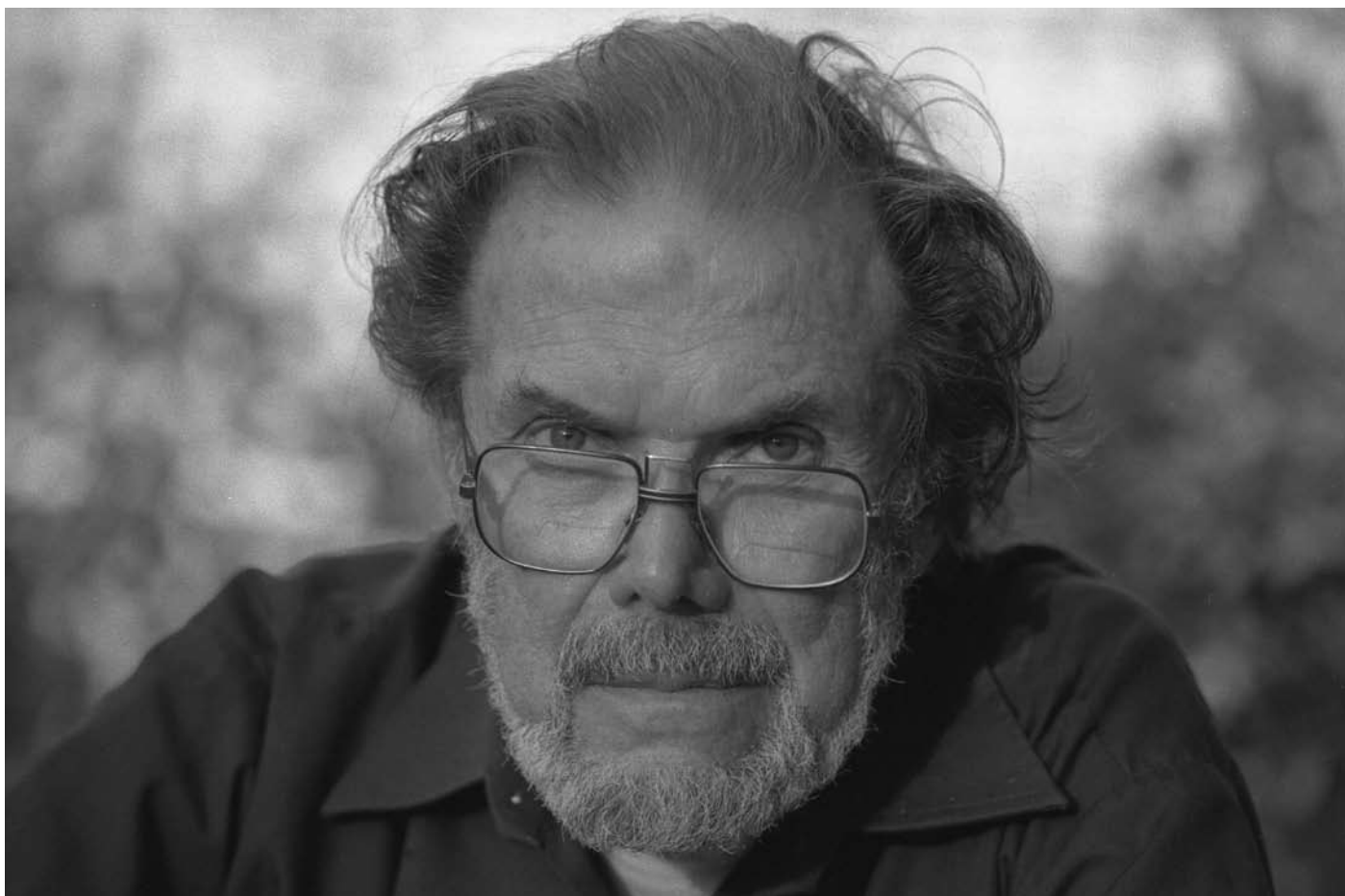


AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

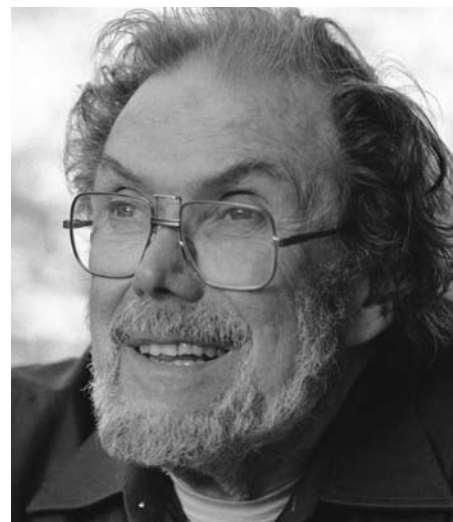
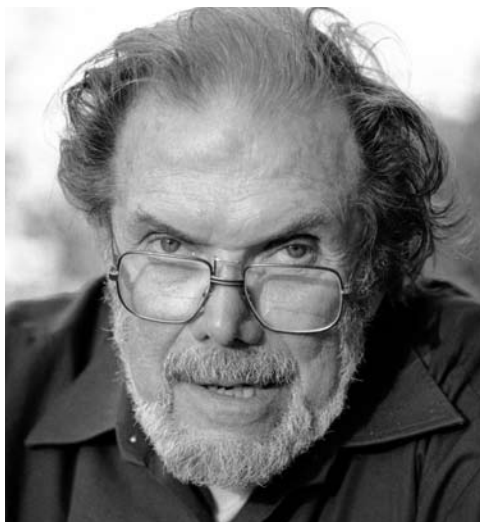
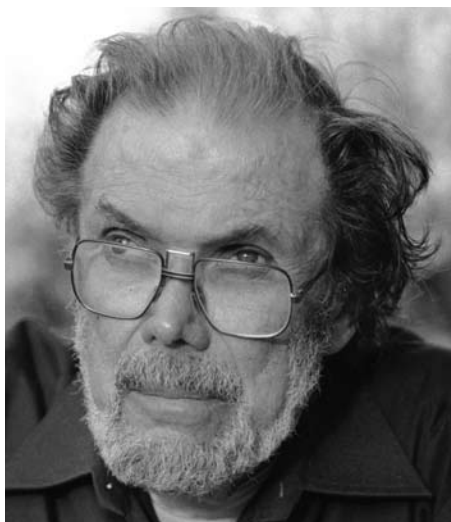
SERIES 3

A SERIES THAT PROFILES SOME OF THE MOST
EXTRAORDINARY AUSTRALIANS OF OUR TIME



HAYES GORDON

ACTOR AND DIRECTOR



HAYES GORDON (1920-1999)

INTRODUCTION

This program is an episode of *Australian Biography* (Series 3) produced under the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories—of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

SYNOPSIS

Hayes Gordon was born in 1920 in Boston, USA. He studied pharmacy and worked as a chemist in New York's Pennsylvania Station. He became an actor quite by accident and eventually worked with people such as Rouben Mamoulian, Jackie Gleason and Karl Malden.

Hayes moved to Australia in 1952, performing lead roles in the shows *Kismet* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. In 1958 he founded the Ensemble Theatre at Milsons Point, which became a theatrical landmark in Sydney and was responsible for many innovative and challenging productions.

After his close association with the Ensemble came to an end, Hayes returned to the stage to play Tevye in two productions of the highly successful *Fiddler on the Roof*. It was to become the most celebrated role of his Australian career.

In his later years, Hayes Gordon wrote the book *Acting and Performing*. He received an OBE and an Order of Australia for his services to the arts.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Drama, Music Studies, Media, History, SOSE/HSIE and Civics and Citizenship.

Growing up

Given Hayes Gordon's early years in difficult family circumstances, it seems hardly likely that a successful career in American and then later Australian musical theatre production would have taken place at all.

- Before looking at Hayes' childhood, carry out the following background research activities:
 - » Draw a map of the United States of America, positioning and labelling the cities of Boston, where Hayes was born, and New York, where he later lived and worked. Draw and label the boundaries of the states of those two cities. In order to place these into a visual, national context, add America's capital city, Washington, to the map, plus two or three other prominent cities, such as Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami.
 - » Describe in about 100-200 words the main historical facts of what has come to be known as the Prohibition era, when it began, and why, and when it finished. Why is Prohibition associated with the violent gangster wars of the 1920s? What does 'bootlegging' mean?
- In class, discuss then write a short description of Hayes' parents and their problems and struggles, including a comment on why Hayes refers to his mother as 'vindictive' yet also 'open-hearted' and 'generous'. What kind of business did his parents run, and why was it considered to be illegal?
- Plan and write a short fiction story drawing in any way you feel appropriate on the anecdote Hayes tells about the police raid on his parents' small general store.
- In referring to the police raid, Hayes briefly mentions Joseph ('Joe') Kennedy, the father of American President John F. Kennedy. Why? Was Joseph Kennedy a Prohibition era bootlegger? Carry out research on Kennedy, then write a short biography of his life and activities, particularly the early years to the 1930s, looking at this question. (See website references to Joseph Kennedy.)
- Why was Hayes' father considered to be local community hero? Using desktop publishing software, re-present and re-imagine the details Hayes tells us about this in the style and format of a report written by a journalist for a local suburban newspaper, with eyewitness accounts and interviews. Include a headline and, if desired, an illustration with a caption.

Early career choices

Hayes' first career choice of becoming a chemist arose from political and social idealism, observing and questioning the world around him. However, it is interesting to note that later, after entering what seems to be the entirely different world of show business, those same traits, reactions and attitudes followed him here, too, and in a sense eventually led to his decision to leave the USA for Australia, where he became well known for his involvement in theatre as a means of social and political criticism.

- First carry out some background research then discuss in class the Great Depression era that began in the late 1920s. What was the Great Depression? How were 'ordinary' citizens affected by it? How does any of this relate to the anecdote Hayes tells about the cases of oranges he saw being thrown away? Why was it economically more viable to destroy

the oranges rather than distribute them to unemployed people and their families? Why did Hayes make up his mind to become a chemist, and what did he intend to achieve as a result?

- As though you were a radio news reporter of the 1930s, turn the story of the oranges into a direct, on-the-spot news report. Script the report, rehearse it aloud and revise as necessary. Record your report as a sound file for playback.
- Despite hunger and unemployment or poverty, the destruction of perfectly good food before it reaches a market still takes place in modern times. In pairs, research and write a short report about why this situation happens, with examples of when and where it has occurred in recent years. Has it happened in Australia in the past few years? Is it fair to lay blame for food destruction on any one sector or group of people? Are there any positive and workable solutions to this problem that you have found or could suggest?
- Write a short description of how Hayes Gordon entered show business.
- In groups, plan and draft a script for a play scene about Hayes' New York audition for a chorus role of a bass baritone in the new musical of 1943, *Oklahoma!*. You will need to decide on location setting and character roles. (You may fictionalise the events and situations and add extra story detail as required. Will characters be required to sing?) Carry out a rehearsal reading of the script, edit and re-draft if necessary, then present a reading or a performance to the class.
- Research the history of *Oklahoma!* (including the 1955 film version) and how it came to be written and composed by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Why is it considered to be one of the most important of American stage musicals? In pairs, plan and write an illustrated item about *Oklahoma!* for a popular magazine aimed at young teenagers who may never have heard of the musical.
- Research and in your own words write a short biography of stage and film director Rouben Mamoulian.
- All members of the class are to listen to a stage recording of *Oklahoma!* or view the film version. Individually, or in pairs or groups, select one of the songs, rehearse and perform a rendition to the class. (Alternatively, you may wish to carry out this activity by selecting tunes from any of the other well known stage musical productions in which Hayes had a role in America, such as *Show Boat* or *Brigadoon*.)

McCarthyism

By the early 1950s Hayes Gordon's career in American show business was practically over, after he had been accused and publicly named as being a Communist sympathiser. This era of anti-Communist sentiment in America began around 1947, led principally by powerful politician, Senator Joseph McCarthy (hence 'McCarthyism'), and continued throughout the 1950s. Americans considered to be Communists were regarded as a threat to their fellow citizens and to the sanctity and security of the American way of life. Those who associated and worked with such people, afraid of being similarly tainted and 'outed', felt unable to support them.

- Carry out research, then in class discuss and take notes about the effect of McCarthyism on Americans in show business accused of being supporters of communism. Why were people in show business, and particularly those in the Hollywood film industry, targeted? What was the Hollywood Blacklist? What was the role of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC or HCUA) during the McCarthy years? (See website references.)
- View the 1976 feature film, *The Front*, then write a review of it in 350-450 words, discussing its relevance to McCarthyism and American show business (in this case, the Hollywood film industry). Note that a number of actors in *The Front* were personally affected by McCarthyism years earlier; you may wish to research this and include relevant background information in your review. (If *The Front* is unavailable, view a more recent film about a similar topic, *Good Night, and Good Luck*.)
- Carry out research then write a definition of the Loyalty Oath many Americans, including Hayes Gordon, were asked (or told) to sign during the McCarthyist years. Why did some people refuse to sign it? In general, what were the consequences for those who didn't sign?
- Discuss in class the events and reasons that led to Hayes Gordon becoming unemployable in American show business in the early 1950s. He could have saved his career in the USA, but didn't. Why? Comment on his principles and beliefs. Would you have reacted similarly in the same situation?
- As though you were Hayes, write a personal-style letter to a friend (perhaps one of the black cast members in *Showboat* referred to during the program), in which you express your feelings and thoughts about the situation you've found yourself in.
- Drawing on your research and from the program, plan and write a short fiction story, about someone in show business caught up in the McCarthyist fervour (some refer to it as a 'witch hunt') of the 1940s-1950s.
- Carry out research and write a descriptive report in 400-500 words about anti-Communist sentiment in Australia around the time Hayes Gordon arrived and settled here. For example, were there any federal government inquiries into the activities of Australians suspected or accused of being Communist sympathisers? What was the attitude of the establishment news media towards communism and leftist politics in Australia? Was there any political censorship? Were leftist visitors banned from entering Australia?
- Discuss in class and take notes on whether contemporary Australia has any form of official loyalty oath to the Australian Commonwealth and/or to the British monarchy. For example, are new Australian citizens required to undertake an oath of allegiance? If so, what is the wording of that oath? Are applicants for citizenship required to take a written test about their knowledge of the Australian way of life and of Australian 'values'? If so, what kinds of questions are they asked and in what ways do you think those questions give new citizens an understanding of the Australian people and help to make their introduction to Australia a positive and beneficial experience?

Australian theatre career

Arriving in Sydney from the USA with employment already organised in advance for him, and with a very good curriculum vitae of professional stage productions behind him, Hayes Gordon's theatre career began a second time.

- The stage musical in which Hayes first starred on arrival in Sydney, 1952, was *Kiss Me Kate*. Who wrote the music and lyrics of *Kiss Me Kate* and what other productions for the stage and the movies is he famous for? Name the play by William Shakespeare that *Kiss Me Kate* was based on.
- In class view the 1953 movie version of *Kiss Me Kate* (available on DVD), then write a review of the film in 350-450 words. Include in the review whether the film version of this musical is faithful to the original Shakespeare play, and if not, what the essential differences are (you may need to carry out some research about the play's plot and characters). Comment on the film as an entertainment. Give the film a star rating.
- Discuss in class Hayes' comments about the state of Australian theatre, its strengths, weaknesses, its potential, and his view of the Australian people in general. From what he says, write a set of personal diary entries as though you were in his place, about your feelings, thoughts, observations, hopes and concerns for a new life. You may elaborate, alter and fictionalise as required.
- Research and prepare a magazine item, website page or display poster about the essential differences between the traditional school of stage and film acting, and the 'Method' style of acting, referred to by Hayes during the program.
- Following from the above, you may wish to work in small groups to prepare and rehearse a dialogue scene from a play or film, and to attempt to act it out in both traditional and Method styles.
- Discuss in class and make notes on the reasons behind Hayes' development of the Ensemble Theatre. Explain its 'experimental' nature and the concept of 'co-operative theatre'. (See website references.)
- In small groups, drawing on the methods Hayes and his Ensemble troupe used to construct socially and politically relevant plays, prepare and script a drama scene (or collection of scenes) that you can rehearse, revise and enact to the class. This will involve examining the daily newspapers and TV news and current affairs programs for ideas that can be developed into narratives.
- Hayes' greatest stage success in Australia was *Fiddler on the Roof*. View the 1971 film version and write a review of it, examining the story and music both for its entertainment value and its treatment of serious and important social, cultural and religious themes.
- As with the activity on *Oklahoma!* (see 'Early career choices', above), individually, in pairs or groups, select one of the songs from *Fiddler on the Roof*, rehearse and perform a rendition to the class.

Personal viewpoints

Carry out the following activities:

- Of his life, and his contribution to the theatre, to acting and to teaching, Hayes draws upon the metaphor of a pebble thrown into a pond. Discuss in class what he means and how it may be relevant to your own life, then plan and write a short story incorporating this metaphor as a central theme.
- Hayes refers to the role an actor plays, suggesting that it is not an adequate metaphor for the role we play in real life. What does he mean? Discuss in class, then either present a written viewpoint or prepare an illustrated display poster examining the truth or otherwise of the concept that an actor's role can be compared to the ways we pursue our real lives. For example, do we 'play' roles at all in real life? Is acting an escape from real life, or can it reflect or even expose and explain our lives?
- What does Hayes regret, when looking back over his life, and why? How does he live with, or cope with, those regrets? Can you relate his reactions to situations in your own life? Write a short, introspective, personal piece about this.
- Discuss in class what Hayes means, at the end of the program, when he speaks of an actor 'fighting the giant every night' when on stage. Who is the 'giant' and why does it need to be fought? Take this concept and turn it into a short story.

Media studies

Carry out the following media-related activities:

- Discuss in class why the program starts with music, stage scenes and 'stills' from *Fiddler on the Roof*, then cuts to Hayes in the present tense referring to his 'moderate talent'. What is the purpose of concluding the program with a verse from one of the songs from the musical *Annie*? Are the words of this verse relevant to us? (Note that *Annie* is a stage musical in which Hayes Gordon starred during 1979-1980 - see '*Annie*' in website references. *Annie* is based on the newspaper comic strip serial, *Little Orphan Annie*, and is not to be confused with the musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, in which Hayes starred in 1953.)
- Write a review of the program in 350-450 words for a magazine or a TV program designed for young teenagers.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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Film

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Norman Jewison (director), *Fiddler on the Roof*, Fox, 1971
Martin Ritt (director), *The Front*, Sony Pictures, 1976
George Sidney (director), *Kiss Me Kate*, Warner Brothers, 1953

TV documentary

Michael Kantor (director), *Broadway: The American Musical*, Roadshow, 2005

Websites

Annie song lyrics:

<http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/a/annie.shtml>

Ensemble Theatre and Studios:

www.ensemble.com.au/index.asp

www.ensemblestudios.com.au (Note: More biographical detail about Hayes Gordon is on this site.)

Hayes Gordon:

www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s60900.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hayes_Gordon

Joseph Kennedy:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_P._Kennedy,_Sr.

www.straightdope.com/classics/a3_159.html

Loyalty Oath:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyalty_oath (Note: Scroll down to 'Truman era'.)

http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/~ucalhist/archives_exhibits/loyaltyoath/timeline1950_1.html (Note: This is one example of the Oath, at the University of California.)

Joseph McCarthy:

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmccarthy.htm

McCarthyism, movies and show business:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollywood_blacklist#The_Red_Channels_list

www.jacknilan.com/senatorjoe/

<http://drhill.tripod.com/ssi3240/pdf/lecture8.htm>

Method acting:

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www.moderntimes.com/palace/method.htm

Oklahoma!:

www.geocities.com/joecable1996/mr/oklahoma.html

AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY: HAYES GORDON

A Film Australia National Interest Program

Director/Producer: Frank Heimans

Executive Producer: Sharon Connolly

Duration: 26 minutes

Year: 1993

Study guide written by Roger Stitson.

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