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COOKBOOK

PERSONAL Lee Child

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MEAL PLANS
Sarah Wilson

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Andy Griffiths

THEATRE

The Sound of Music, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse
St James Theatre, until September 28
Reviewed by Ewen Coleman

Sublime singing

WHEN one of the best known and most loved, musicals of all time, *The Sound of Music*, hits town, an air of excited anticipation abounds. Not only from those who grew up with the songs but those who have heard it talked about and may have only ever seen the film with Julie Andrews. Yet how is a musical that began life 55 years ago going to stack up with a modern-day audience? In this production absolutely amazingly and of all the musicals in town this year, this is the one to see. Created in London in 2006, this version by Andrew Lloyd Webber, David Ian and The Really Useful Group has incorporated a couple of the songs from the movie and added in some film-like qualities while retaining the essential elements of the original. How a fun-loving singing nun Maria Rainer (Bethany Dickson) becomes governess to the seven von Trapp children, falls in love with their authoritarian father Captain Georg von Trapp (Mark Rayment) who all then escape from the invading Nazis is known to everyone. And while often seen as saccharine and superficial with nothing to commend it except for the music, this production brings depth and humanity to the characters, creates believable tension between the internal emotional turmoil of Maria and Georg and the foreboding from the outside world.



Caption1: Soprano Lesley Garrett as Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music*.

And the children pluck the heartstrings in their plight of being caught up in the world of the adults. Musically the production is spot on, with the cast not only being excellent actors but giving depth and vitality to the songs too. Lesley Garrett is superb as The Mother Abbess. As well as a being great actor her singing is sublime – rarely has a first act ended so spectacularly at the St James Theatre as it does with Garrett's *Climb Ev'ry Mountain*. And the amazing sets, lighting, costumes and brilliant orchestra all add to this rare gem.

ALL CHOOK UP

Photographer Ans Westra and sculptor Jeff Thomson have feathered Wellington's Bowen Galleries with chooks for a new exhibition. They talk to **Diana Dekker**.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ans Westra, of *Washday at the Pa* fame, and sculptor Jeff Thomson, dubbed the corrugated iron man of Australasia, have together rounded up a flock of chooks for a new exhibition at Wellington's Bowen Galleries.

Thomson, 56, has been responsible for a mass of iron chooks over the years but Westra, 78, stumbled across them recently as subjects when she stopped for a break in a journey.

"I'd often noticed them on the side of the road when I was travelling," she says. "These ones came to me on a very bright day driving to Taihape on State Highway 1, a bright subject, a whole family of chickens scrambling around. They are wild escapees from various places. These were particularly colourful and I was lucky enough to have a bit of bread on me. I stood near the car and threw bits of bread, to get them where I wanted them to be." She wanted them positioned harmoniously in the light and shade of their surroundings "and at times I can see my own shadow".

"I tried to be a tree. They fought over the bread, a whole group, a whanau."

Westra, an Arts Foundation of New Zealand Icon artist, suggested the exhibition, a combination of her burnished images and Thomson's bright red and white chooks. She and Thomson share more than an appreciation of a shiny feather. They have been friends for decades.

"We share, perhaps, a certain directness, an honesty of approach, and creativity," she says.

Thomson remembers meeting Westra in the late 1980s, long after she had become famous for her controversial *Washday at the Pa* series of photographs, subject of a school bulletin in the 1960s but quickly withdrawn from primary schools at the request of the affronted Maori Women's Welfare League. They met for a coffee.

"She was famous and I was not. I felt nervous meeting her."

They swap work. Thomson, says Westra, is pondering the mechanics of a nikau palm he made for her Wellington garden – "to make sure it doesn't fall on top of me."

Chooks are a departure as a subject for Westra and a departure in style for Thomson. His earlier



Chicken run: Photographer Ans Westra. Photos: FAIRFAX NZ



Iron man: Artist Jeff Thomson.

chooks were pre-painted but these are powder-coated in one colour after completion, and made with a type of industrial mesh he hasn't used before.

There are 11 corrugated, perforated, life-size metal chooks in the exhibition, an impressive bunch, but tiny compared with the crowd of 130 he spent six months making for an Australian exhibition.

"That was five or six years ago, the largest amount I've ever done, never to be done again."

Chooks, he says, are a small part of his output, 80 per cent of which is commissioned work, but they would, if gathered together, "be a fabulous flock".

Thomson is best known for his corrugated iron HQ Holden, in which he drove around New Zealand and Australia. It's now parked in Te Papa. Over the years he has made everything from life-size giraffes and cows to a giant boot for gumboot town, Taihape. Commissions, though, are mostly for animals and birds – and some of them chooks. He turns them out from a studio with the heavy machinery of a sheet metal works in Helensville.

His fondness for feather and fur translated into the hardest of material started when he was a



Free range: One of Jeff Thomson's new metal chickens on show at Wellington's Bowen Galleries.



Here chook: One of a series of photographs by Ans Westra which accompany Jeff Thomson's metal equivalents in Bowen Galleries' exhibition. "I'd often noticed them on the side of the road when I was travelling," she says.

poor art school graduate. "I did a lot of walks in New Zealand, sleeping on the side of the road as I went and I became interested in roadside paraphernalia." His bright idea for a money-making scheme was to put fliers in all the rural letterboxes between Bulls and New Plymouth advertising individual letterbox adornments – "tractors and diggers and a foot for the chiropractor, and a lot of livestock, all out of plywood".

"Then I did a small cow out of corrugated iron and someone wanted one and bought it."

The chooks began as origami-like little metal sculptures. He made one for a couple in Wadestown in the mid-1980s and followed it up with a penguin. "So the roots of what I do go back a long way. I've worked with other material, but predominantly corrugated iron."

It's possible, says Thomson, that Westra thought of him and

his chooks while she was taking her photos.

"She has one of my chooks, a couple of them, but anything becomes her subject matter."

The sculptor has several projects on the go, including making a sculpture for the Headland Sculpture on the Gulf exhibition on Waiheke Island which opens in late January next year.

His last big project was the creation of giant kangaroos for Canberra's airport. A touring survey exhibition of 25 years of his work opens in Expressions Arts and Entertainment Gallery in Upper Hutt on October 11. Because his work sells, and needs to be made, internationally, he keeps metal roll-formers, for corrugating, at his Helensville base, in France and in Australia – "and there's one going to [artist] Fatu Feu'u's property in Samoa".

Westra's last major project was a photography tour of New

Zealand to places she became familiar with earlier in her career. For that, and for her chook photos, she used a small digital camera rather than the Rolleiflex film camera she once used exclusively.

It has the advantage of not running out of film, but an image still needs to be considered and composed.

"Too many people shoot anything and select later and those pictures are quite bland," she says.

Westra says taking photographs still holds magic for her. She is now photographing her grandchildren as she once photographed her own children half a century ago.

"If I didn't work, I would be no longer around. It's sort of essential."

THE DETAILS
Chooks – Jeff Thomson and Ans Westra, Bowen Galleries, Wellington until September 27.



Quick jaunt: Comedian Steve Wrigley performs on Wednesday and Thursday.

WRIGLEY PLUS

Kiwi comedian **Steve Wrigley** will be back from the United States this week for a 7 *Days* election special at Wellington's Opera House on Wednesday. But as an added treat, Wrigley will also perform his show, *New Zealand vs America*, which he has been touring around New York over the past year, at San Francisco Bath House on Thursday, 7pm. For tickets go to eventfinder.co.nz.

MORE GIGS ONLINE

Wellington can rightly grumble about some big acts that occasionally bypass the city for other New Zealand centres – including of late Bob Dylan and, coming up, The Black Keys. But there's still plenty to choose from in the coming months, with **Hot Chocolate**, **The Lemonheads**, **CW Stoneking**, **Slash** and **Elton John**. Check out our guide at dompost.co.nz/culture.

TODAY'S ALBUM

INDIE

The Magic Numbers – Alias (Universal) ***
For about a year, The Magic Numbers were a must-hear British indie pop band, and refreshing, too, as neither the Stodart and Gannon families could be described as svelte. A set at the Big Day Out in 2005 prefigured their big-selling debut album later that year. But since then it seems to be diminishing returns from the band. Notably *Alias*, their fourth album, only got as high as No 57 in the British charts since its release last month. Compare that to double-platinum sales in 2005. But sales aren't necessarily an indicator of artistic quality. While *Alias* isn't outstanding – I find singer Romeo Stodart's faux country voice weak and whiny – some songs deliver, including *Roy Orbison, You K(now)* and, with some Neil Young-style guitar antics, *Shot in the Dark*. *Thought I Wasn't Ready* is the standout, helped by Michele Stodart's vocals. She's so good you wish she'd taken lead throughout the album and put her brother on backing vocals. There's a hint of that on catchy soul slow-burner *E.N.D.* **TOM CARRY**



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