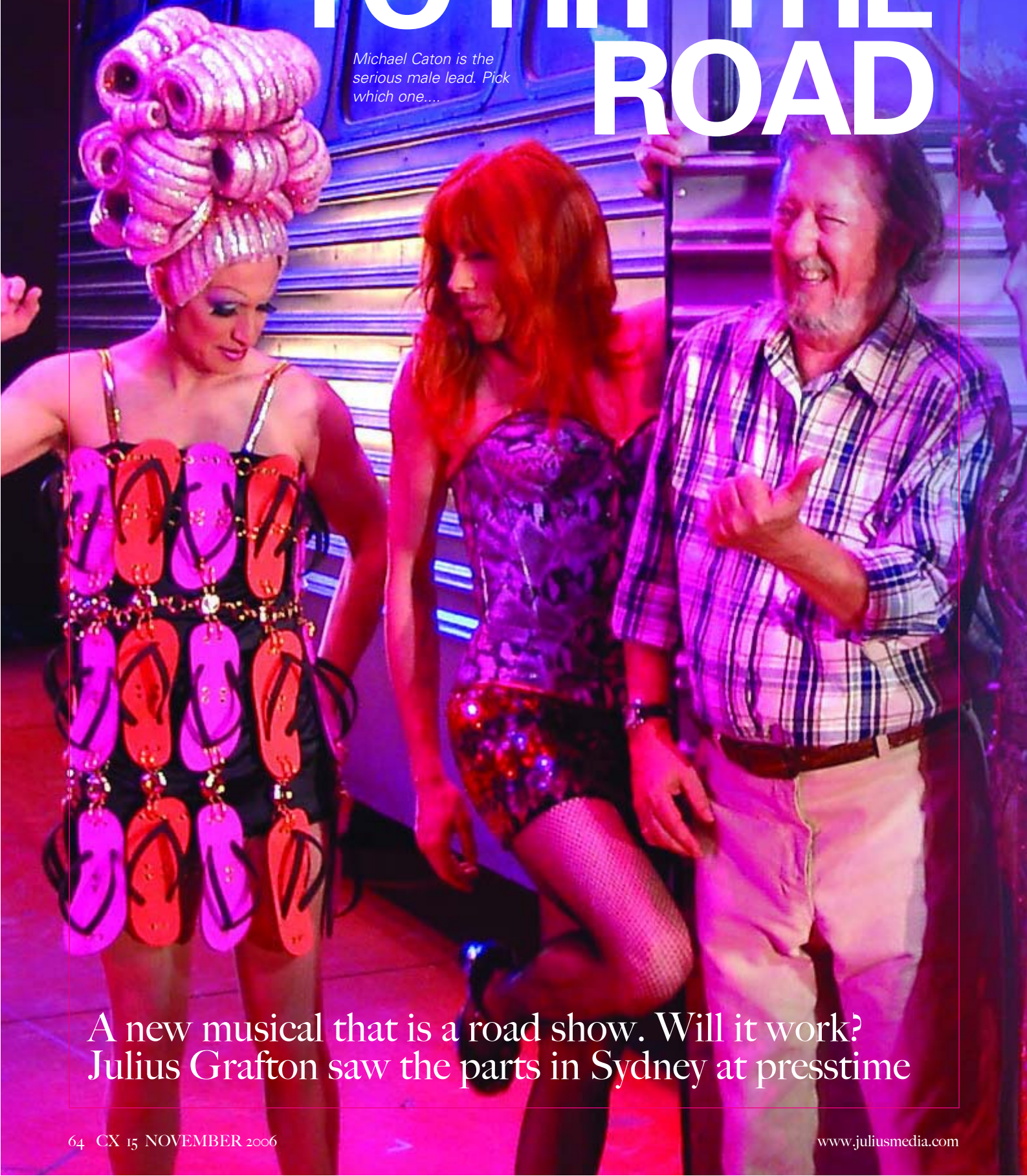


PRISCILLA SET TO HIT THE ROAD

Michael Caton is the serious male lead. Pick which one...



A new musical that is a road show. Will it work? Julius Grafton saw the parts in Sydney at presstime

By **JULIUS GRAFTON**

A new musical that is a road show. Will it work? Julius Grafton saw the parts in Sydney at presstime

Nick Schlieper is strangely relaxed in the days leading up to previews of Pricilla Queen Of The Desert - The Musical. His lighting design was implemented, with 500 fixed luminaires and 60 moving lights hanging in the air at the Lyric Theatre in Sydney. And the bus wasn't working as advertised.

This is one of the most anticipated new Australian musicals of modern times, and some would say one of the riskiest. When the idea of morphing the movie into a musical was first floated, many in the industry were openly skeptical. Some of the skeptics were at the workshop in January, and left impressed enough to invest in the show.

This is a road show, which is more about the journey than the beginning or the end.

"What is to gain by the translation from film to the stage", questions



Liz Coops and cast member.

Nick. He collaborated closely with designer Brian Thompson to bring the show to life, and at rehearsals it certainly looks like it has the parts of a winner. The opening, as this issue is printed, will confirm whether

Director Simon Phillips, Choreographer Ross Coleman, and Musical Director Stephen Murphy have meshed the promising elements into the winner that is required.

The producers are Garry McQuinn

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Nick Roadkill.

and Liz Koops, of Back Row Productions, who have sold shares to Michael Chugg, Specific Films, John Frost and Allan Scott. Bryce Hallett wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald that the show was costing around five hundred thousand dollars a week to run; and that it needed 65 percent houses for 37 weeks to break even. Certainly there is optimism, as the Lyric Theatre is said to be penciled for seven months before it tours – if it does. Talk about the future is part muted, part boundless. These shows take on a life of their own. The crew are circumspect.

There is interest from afar, with talk of a Vegas version. The Americans were enamored with the film.

Nick Schlieper is keen to show me just what The Bus will do. He has had it wired for LED to within an inch of its chasis. The bus itself is probably the icon of the show, as it was in the movie. Measuring 9.5 metres, it is the final of three concepts that were designed, and then the winning concept was made by Stagemwelt in

Melbourne.

“Scale factor is a major part of this”, says Nick. “The stage is not a small space. We will use theatre to the max here, and theatre has its own language, the close up is different to the film closeup.”

The stage is trimmed with a surround framework that is stylized to remind of the Australian outback. Legs and borders are themed in outback orange, with pink through to purple colouring.

“The box is completed with three backdrops, so there are three depths of stage. We have the classic downstage half scene, the three quarter, and the full depth. Before the action even leaves Sydney there are some classic Sydney icons shown. Into that we have added a number of specific, stylized objects, like the pub wall at Broken Hill. This is seen from behind. Then as we move further outback, more corrugated iron creeps in.”

Then there is The Bus. It looks remarkably real, indeed it has real



Simone Parratt.

parts stuck on. It has a sense of movement, even while static. But it also has a tonne or more of batteries stashed inside to run the rivers of lights that Nick has specified. The ones that are causing grief when I call around.

“The bus needs to change colour, and unlike the film, we can’t just have a bunch of people paint it pink. It has been long and involved to get the design so it works”.

Likewise the automation is not behaving either, since the bus must not only drive forwards but it needs to traverse sideways as well. The side needs to open up, as a scene is scheduled to be performed within it.

Actors on the bill include Michael Caton who says he is the serious and strong male lead. There are 380 costumes. Rehearsals started mid August.

There is plenty of eye candy, as if the costumes are not enough. There are two LED webs of 10 x 17 metres, hung slightly offset, with a cutout for the bus. Nick has a run of digital light curtain, several flood bars, and 14 new Vari-Lite VL 3500Q’s. “There are six Source 4 auto-yokes – these are revolutionary”, says Nick. “It’s a real coloured light source, with a scroller, not a mix.” The balance of the moving lights are Martin Mac 2000s.

“It’s like having one and a half lighting rigs – one conventional, to light a play with music and one automated one over the top”.

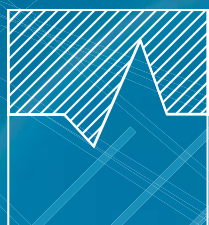
Nick has to go and figure something out, so I take leave. “Don’t forget to mention Tony Davies and Chameleon, they have been fantastic. And very patient with the changes we have made. The gear is in fantastic nick, we even got 120 new Wybron scrollers.”



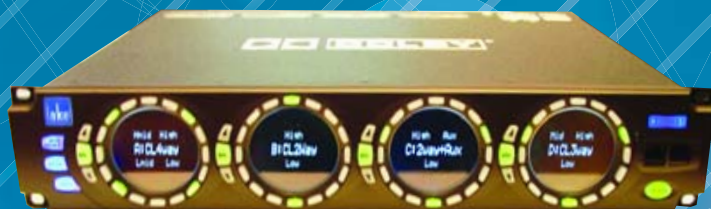


FOOD ON THE ROAD

In entertainment, designing a touring show based on a kitchen cooking segment is almost too hard. That's why no one did it before now.



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In entertainment, designing a touring show based on a kitchen cooking segment is almost too hard. That's why no one did it before now.

Jamie Oliver has, and his show is a hit everywhere it tours. The show recently sold out in Australia, and CX send our resident cooking trainer Amalia Portelli along to review the lights. She doesn't know anything about lights, but boy – she can cook!

Amalia reports that at show time the house lights dim and two guys (Black Sheep 1 and Black Sheep 2) appear in black curly afro hair wigs. Black Sheep 1 has 70's flare trousers and does some dance moves at his DJ equipment.

Black sheep 2 moves the camera through the audience, surprising people and zooming in, audience members projected with cheeky captions. So the vision team are the show opener.

Jamie Oliver is sitting in the audience waving, grinning and

reading his own cook book. The music gets louder, faster and he runs on. The stage was set like an open planned living area in your home. The kitchen is centered; to its left is a dining table for two, in the far back right corner is a stage with a drum kit and in front of this is a lounge setting area.

With a loud bang "Jamie" starts the evening with a drum act then moves into his first food demo. There are no dull moments, as part of the audience you are either captured by what "he" is doing, the camera man, and waiting for the cheeky comments to pop up on the large screen.

Some are chosen to participate on stage and get a prize from the "Dolly Trolley" - a lady who comes out on stage pushing a shopping trolley full of Jamie Oliver memorabilia, accompanied by the theme music from The Price is Right. Or maybe its best you don't get chosen; Jamie might get you to kiss a stranger on

stage or crawl on all fours in a race to get the "Side Car" a strong, or let's say alcoholic drink served in a martini glass.

The show is consistently visual, interactive and you won't want to miss a thing. Black Sheep won't let you.... you can even see Jamie looking straight back at you when his looking into his refrigerator via a mini camera in there.

There are video segments at cued points, a support act in Gennero Contaldo (Jamie's mentor), whom with audience support make a batch of home made pasta and rolls it out to 42 feet. Plus a fine musician who serenades the audience from time to time during the show.

A fantastic fun show, lots of food smells, sing a longs and heaps to see, says Amalia.

Black Sheep's Ben Alcott is the director, and tours with Jamie around the world to supply video and vision. Richard Neville was the lighting designer for the Australian tour. CX



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