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Trends

Doing it our way

PERSONALLY, when it comes to creative matters, I think we should all give it a go. That's why when I come across my husband pirouetting down the hall, shrieking weird, atonal shrieks and halting now and then to pose like an Egyptian hieroglyph, I am impressed. I don't rush for a straightjacket. I throw in the odd whimper and graceful arabesque for good measure, because I am not above giving it a go myself.

This week I am especially cultural because I have been to a theatrical production that incorporated all of the self-expression I just described, and more. You had to sit on the floor, which meant I provided an interesting side-show myself. What with the pregnancy, I have taken to making the same noises my arthritic grandmother makes when she moves, and I had to make them quite often because we kept sitting on the set and having to move. You can't tell these things so easily at an avant-garde production.

Anyway, it was all worth it. In just over an hour the production dealt with the meaning of life, whether God exists, and the concept of infinity. Nothing too taxing. We were intrigued by an orgy sequence, the dissociated cries of the performers (non-verbal for more elemental communication), and one very attractive cod-piece.

We knew it must be art because we came home none the wiser to polish off the banana cake. We took it for granted that it was all a bit over our heads. I mean, there were some people with glasses there, and they didn't fidget. We supposed they were intellectuals, who appreciate these things. The concept of infinity is all in a day's work for them.

What I liked best about the production was that it was so New Zealand. It was borderline patriotic. Nobody was put off by having nothing new to say, for example, or not having studied movement, or acting, or voice. They knew that performing is just being yourself in front of a lot of other people, and takes no special skills. As a New Zealander, I understand this absolutely. I, too, distrust professionals at anything, who want to get paid for their skills, and go out and get training. They're trying to prove that they're better than me, and that's just not on. We are all alike, and we are all entitled to have a go.

Just about everyone I know is a writer, for a start. They just need the time to get round to it. They know that their family is worth a novel, and they started one once, on Croyley lined writing paper. They have this idea for a play rather like *Under Milk Wood*, only set in Tokoroa. They have written poems about lost love, and loss of innocence, and good sex. They can do stream of consciousness



with one hand tied behind their back. All you do is leave out the punctuation.

And then, most people can paint. All you need is the right materials, and the time to get round to it. At any art exhibition you'll find us saying we could have painted it ourselves, especially if it's abstract. That's the easiest, because it doesn't have to look like a house and a cow. We do, however, have some respect for things that look as if they took a lot of effort. That means we would have had to have given up a lot of time, and that gives us an even better excuse for not having done it ourselves.

New Zealanders being so highly artistic, just about every group that has common ground of some sort can stage a theatrical production. There are gang shows, and feminist polemics with tampons thrown into the audience at half-time. There are school rock operas. There is the group we went to see. None of them are ashamed to ask a fee to watch them, either. It's not like begging, or anything. We are all artists.

Even outside the arts we are a talented lot. Who needs professionals when we can be our own carpenters, joiners, paperhangers, dressmakers and mechanics? Each of us is capable of being all of these, if we just happened to have the time.

One area that gets a pretty good going-over is psychology. I think we would all agree that there is no need to actually do formal training in this area when we are all experts in human behaviour and what makes other people tick. We can all solve each other's problems extremely well, and do so every day of our lives, over

our coffee breaks. The idea of making a job out of that is as ridiculous as getting paid for acting, writing or painting.

It follows, naturally enough, that anyone who is a professional is a rip-off merchant. Anyone who gets paid in the arts is beyond a joke, because they're getting paid to do something we all do as a hobby. Nobody should charge more than \$50 for anything they produce, because there's nothing special about anything anyone makes. We could all do the same thing if we had the same idea, and we all know that ideas are free.

The same goes for tradesmen, who want to get paid large fees for unblocking our loos, wiring our houses, building extensions and so on. They are only doing something that we could do ourselves with the aid of a *Reader's Digest* manual — and the time.

In my household, this is the reason why we admired the avant-garde production we saw so much. People were giving it a go, which is just great, but most important, they were doing it just like we could do it ourselves. In fact, we have done passable imitations for the past week, and enjoyed them, very much.

There is much to be said for being a pregnant hieroglyph, uttering dissonant, strangulated cries in the avant-garde manner. They attract an audience, too. Today there was a serious-looking ginger tomcat attracted by my cries, who seemed to be looking for something.

I guess he wasn't an intellectual. He didn't hang around.

ROSEMARY McLEOD