

# The truth is it's funnier as fiction

**U**NDISPUTED master of the shaggy dog story and once self-appointed king of ridiculously long theatre productions, Ken Campbell is still peddling a lot of old material in his one-man show. The question is, is there something to these yarns or has he just run out of ideas?

He has, for example, been flogging a pet theory about the bifurcation of English literature in 1938 for at least 10 years. This apocryphal event was when Science Fiction was bound in lurid covers and banished to railway termini. Allied to this is the story of his Damascan conversion to the Sci-Fi genre in general and Sci-Fi conferences in particular.

Then there is the story of how, following the success of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Nicholas Nickleby* back in the Seventies, he contrived to despatch a series of letters to leading theatrical luminaries from the then director of the RSC, Trevor Nunn. He announced the RSC was to abandon the bard and become the RDC — deriving its inspiration from Charles Dickens.

The main story in this show, however, concerns the search in the desert for "the lost universal language" once undertaken by revered ex-pat director Peter Brook. Where Brook gallantly failed, Campbell accidentally stumbles on a potential universal language after advising a fellow thesp that he had a vision that the thesp

Theatre Stories ★  
*Cottesloe, National Theatre*

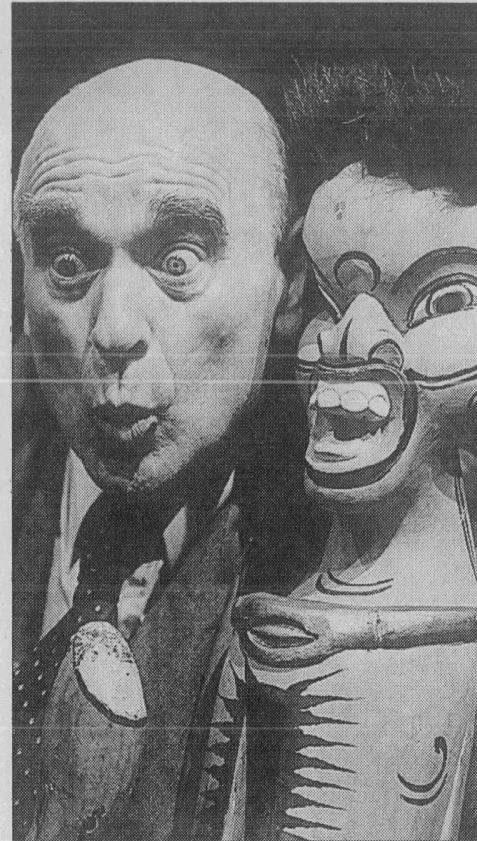
**PATRICK MARMION**

must see every one of comedian Ken Dodd's live shows for a year. The project took the thesp to the South Pacific where he was not only catapulted to celebrity status among the New Hebridean tribes people, but also found a potential universal language - pidgin English.

Unpacking his lifetime's collection of unlikely yarns, Campbell poses as a beaming amateur, the kind of guy you see lurking in public libraries and pray will not button hole you with paranoid fantasies.

But do not be fooled. This chirpy cockney, affecting nerdishly nasal whine and sporting a pair of comedy eyebrows on his shaven head, is no loon. He is, in fact, an extremely sophisticated performer adept at juggling an extraordinary number of convoluted stories to mesmerising effect.

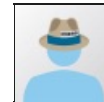
It is perfectly reasonable to ask whether these stories amount to anything after two-and-a-half hours, but the question turns out to be missing the point. The mischievous message is that all stories are tall stories and besides, all these stories are very good fun and well worth hearing over again.



Alastair Muir

Facing fantasies: Ken Campbell in Theatre Stories

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