AWARD OF HONORARY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS

BARRY HUMPHRIES, AO

(John) Barry Humphries was born in Melbourne on 17 February 1934. He was educated at Melbourne Grammar School and the University of Melbourne where he studied arts and law.

Barry Humphries, perhaps the most successful solo comic performer in the history of the stage, has a career spanning 45 years in theatre, film and television. At the University of Melbourne, where he held his first Dada exhibition, he wrote and performed in University revues and with the newly formed Melbourne Theatre Company.

The creation of Edna Everage in 1956, in the original one-man shows *Excuse I* and *A Nice Night's Entertainment* immediately established Humphries as a ferocious critic of our cultural gaucheries. He took his ugly Australians, especially Dame Edna, Les Patterson and Sandy Stone, to the London stage in 1969 and then developed them further in the glare of mass-market television. Dame Edna rapidly became a television megastar, reaching her zenith perhaps in the *Dame Edna Experience* which was awarded the Golden Rose of Montreux in 1991. Other television shows include *The Barry Humphries Scandals, Audience with Dame Edna* and the *Dame Edna Special*.

Humphries' cast of characters have steadily evolved. This has allowed him not merely to lampoon but to play right into the insecurities manifest in the cultural strut, so familiar in the 1970s and 1980s. Dame Edna recently declared herself a Republican.

Barry Humphries' films include *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own*, 1974, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, 1972, and *Sir Les Saves the World*, 1986. His numerous one man shows include *Back With a Vengeance* 1988, *Tears Before Bedtime*, 1985, *An Evening's Intercourse*, 1981-2, *A Night With Dame Edna*, 1978-9, *Isn't Pathetic At His Age? 1978, Housewife, Super-star*, 1976-7, *At Least You Can Say You've Seen It*, 1974.

Humphries, unlike most modem comics, writes his own material. The first two volumes of his well regarded autobiography have recently been published. His publications include *Bizarre 1*, 1965, *Innocent Austral Verse*, 1968, *Bazza Pulls it Off*, 1972, *Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, 1973, *Bazza Holds His Own*, 1974, *Dame Edna's Bedside Companion*, 1982, *Les Patterson: The Traveller's Tool*, 1985, *Dame Edna: My Gorgeous Life*, 1989, *More Please*, 1992, *Women in the Background*, 1995.

Humphries is often described as a comic genius. His writings and witticisms have been compared with Oscar Wilde. Certainly the depth and brilliance of his performance, the constantly evolving satire, the sheer volume of his work would seem to justify the comparison. Unlike that of other famous ex-patriots, his knowledge of Australia in its current configurations - its politics, its history, its sociology - continues to deepen. His audiences are cross-generational and ever growing. He performs in this country every few years and maintains strong connections with the place.

His work has made an immense contribution to this country's sense of itself - and of Melbourne's place in the culture.

His awards include Comedy performance of the Year Society of West End Management London 1979, TV Personality of the Year 1990. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1982. In 1994 he received an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University. The Melbourne City Council made Barry Humphries one of the first recipients of its Honoured Artists Award in 1997.