

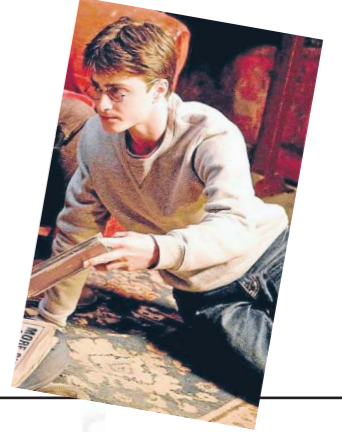
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The Southland Times

# Lowwind

**HARRY**  
... is back D4



**Prepping:** Alex Derby, right, rehearses a scene as Professor Higgins with *My Fair Lady* director Bryan Aitken. Photo: JOHN HAWKINS 144241

## Swine flu: here little piggy

**MATE**  
MARK WILSON



**W**HAT started out touted as the world's next great flu pandemic, placing civilisation at the edge of an abyss and threatening to squeal at us until we jumped, is now becoming the butt of many a bad joke, theme of costume parties and source of endless fodder for cartoon artists. First there was bird flu, now there's pig flu. What's next? A New Zealand and Australian-brewed batch of possum flu? Are we going to go back through every strain of influenza known to have afflicted humans and rename them after an animal?

Or is this a new phenomenon dreamed up to stir media interest and help raise public awareness of the risks?

As far as I know about seven Kiwis have, unfortunately, been taken by the swine since the pandemic started in the backwaters of Mexico, but the New Zealand health service reports that during the 1990s between four and 95 people died annually of various non-fancy, ordinary-named strains of influenza, between 266 and 874 people were admitted to hospital each year and one year up to 160,000 people visited their GP or other health professional complaining of flu-like symptoms. Do the other strains of the flu get less attention because their names are not as cool? Can you imagine the news media picking up on Influenza H10N7 and selling out paper stands with the bold headlines?

Old flu pandemics were named after the region where the flu originated or had the most severe effect - for example the Hong Kong flu epidemic of 1968, or the good old Asian flu of 1957 - maybe it's seen as a little harsh in today's PC world to pin it all on one country so we choose animals instead?

In some necks of the woods it's fashionable to have the flu; if someone's got it you better darn well have it or you will be the only one not popping Sudafed and hippy lemon and ginger teas all day. No one wants to be the only one with nothing to moan about. It's almost a competition to see who has the worst flu. I reckon there are women in the toilets at work who, instead of doing their make up, are reddening their eyes and practicing their sick voice to outshine their ill workmates or friends.

I'm not even going to start on man flu! I'm sick of hearing about it. It's just another strain of the flu and we will become immune to this one just like every other kind. I ate food off the ground when I was a kid so I tell myself "I'm immune to swine flu, bird flu, Asian flu and for good measure pink eye, STDs and whooping cough. Whether it's the power of positive thought, a decent immune system or good luck, I'm not sick and do not intend to be. Swine flu will never get me!

# Language infatuation

By STEVE MASON

**A**LLEX DERBIE has some strong similarities to Henry Higgins, the man he plays in the coming production of *My Fair Lady* in Invercargill. He is not dissimilar physically to the character popularised by Rex Harrison and, like Higgins, came to marriage later in life. But it is an infatuation for the English language that he shares with the character. He speaks well, every word carefully pronounced, perhaps with what was once known as a BBC accent. It's plummy by New Zealand standards, but that's a

standard that maddens him, as it would the fictional Higgins. His dictionary of "New Zillund" includes irritations such as watching the West Undies play cricket, talking to kuds, climbing a hull, breathing in clean ear, waiting for loiter evenings or asking for a bull in a fush rushtront. He borrows a line from Higgins: "Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?" He doesn't expect an answer when he wonders what has happened to the Kiwi way of speaking. We are much more class conscious than when he left the country 30-some years ago, he says; a change not matched by our speech. "What's happened?" he says. "Is there less emphasis on grammar and spelling in

schools? Has no one heard of articulation?" He accepts that language is an evolving beast, particularly with regional accents, but is dismayed at the possibility of students getting through secondary school without studying Shakespeare. "It's so important to learn the history of the language, to know its roots and to appreciate the majesty of it." As if to underline the personal similarities, during the interview for this story he quotes extensively from Higgins to illustrate his views on language, on society and to women. Dangerous ground in the nouveau PC era, but Derby - like Higgins - does not shrink from speaking his mind.

*My Fair Lady* is based on *Pygmalion*, the play written in 1913 by George Bernard Shaw. As explained by Wikipedia, it tells the story of Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics who makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can successfully pass off a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, as a refined society lady by teaching her how to speak with an upper-class accent and training her in etiquette. Lerner and Loewe turned the play into a musical that opened on Broadway in 1956, starring Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews.

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