

Fans beg Rowling to 'Save Harry!'

LONDON (Reuters) — Thousands of Harry Potter fans have signed a petition urging J.K. Rowling to keep writing novels about the boy wizard after she admitted she could "never say never" to more books.

The "Save Harry!" petition calls on Rowling to reverse her decision to end the bestselling series with the seventh and final



instalment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

"Millions, perhaps billions of us, love reading his adventures and we never want them to end," says the online petition, launched on Monday at www.saveharrypotter.co.uk.

After spending 17 years writing the books, Rowling said she was both "euphoric" and "devastated" that it's finally over.

But in a television interview she left fans with the tantalising, if remote, possibility that she may one day return to the magical world of Hogwarts.

"I think that Harry's story

comes to quite a clear end in book seven," she told the BBC at the weekend. "But I have always said that I wouldn't say never."

"I can't say I will never write another book about that world, just because I think: 'What do I know, in 10 years' time I might want to return to it.' But I think it is unlikely."

Even if she does write another book, it is unclear whether some of the main characters, including Harry, would play a part.

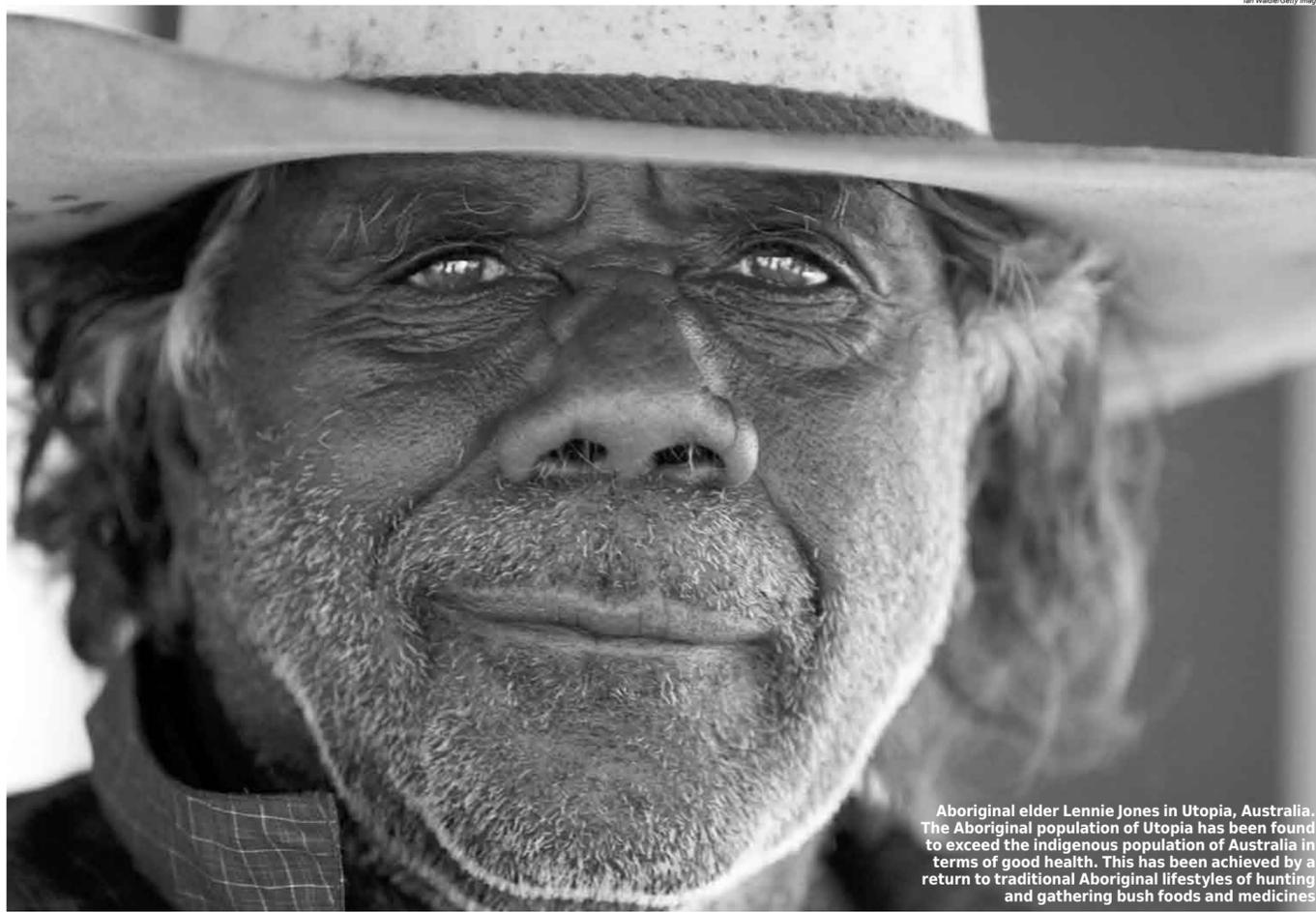
Rowling said some characters will die in the last book, but wouldn't say if the boy wizard is among them. "It's not a bloodbath but it's more than two," she said.

Book retailer Waterstone's, which set up the petition, said Rowling could still write more Harry Potter books even if the title character is killed.

"Sir Arthur Conan Doyle famously killed off Sherlock Holmes, yet brought him back after years of demand from his fans and publishers," said Waterstone's Wayne Winstone. "Couldn't the same happen for Harry Potter?"

Rowling's publicist could not be reached for comment.

More than 325 million copies of the first six books have been sold worldwide, helping to make Rowling the first dollar-billionaire author. The final book is out on July 21st.



Aboriginal elder Lennie Jones in Utopia, Australia. The Aboriginal population of Utopia has been found to exceed the indigenous population of Australia in terms of good health. This has been achieved by a return to traditional Aboriginal lifestyles of hunting and gathering bush foods and medicines

Australian aborigines dream of 'grog'-free days

ALICE SPRINGS Australia (Reuters) — Aborigine Daryl Allen, 60, sits cross-legged in the dirt dreaming of the good times when his outback people lived by hunting kangaroo and working as cattlemen, instead of drinking themselves to death.

"They were happy days — no drinking," says Allen as he awaits the return of the camp's drunks who will binge drink late into the night and most likely fight.

"They will come back drunk tonight. They drink and fight and cut one another with knives. Children and women crying, mother and father drinking, poor little ones hungry for food," says Allen in broken English.

The Hidden Valley aboriginal camp on the outskirts of Alice Springs is a garbage-strewn place where mangy dogs wander through thousands of empty beer cans.

A recent report found a "river of grog" or alcohol was destroying aboriginal communities in the outback Northern Territory and fuelling violence against women and children.

Prime Minister John Howard declared a national emergency and sent police and troops to end the binge drinking, violence and sexual abuse.

Reuters visited the aboriginal camps around Alice Springs 16 years ago and despite hundreds of millions of dollars being spent trying to improve the lives of Australia's Aborigines, people here still live in third world conditions. Yet a short drive away there are five-star hotels and air conditioned homes.

Aborigine William Tilmouth, head of the Tangentyere Council which manages Alice Springs' 18 aboriginal camps says the reason his people are still struggling to improve their lives is because they feel powerless and continue to encounter racism.

Australia's 460,000 Aborigines make up two per cent of the 20 million population and have a life expectancy 17 years fewer than white Australians. They have far higher rates of unemployment and imprisonment as well as alcohol, drug abuse and domestic violence.

In the Northern Territory,

with its reputation for heavy drinking, alcohol causes an Aborigine's death every 38 hours.

"If you have nothing in your life people just sit down and drink," said Tilmouth. "When people come into town they binge drink. You get murders, domestic violence and sexual abuse."

The camps around Alice are not marked on the map but are home to around 3,000 people and are the product of an old law, which banned Aborigines from entering town.

Hidden Valley camp, a dusty stretch of ground wedged between barren hills, is one of the most violent. Broken doors and barred windows are constant reminders of the violence that lives here.

Recently two drunken aboriginal women stopped brawling only when one was stabbed and the other bashed with an iron bar.

"There is more violence here than in other areas," said Cait Ryan at the camp's community centre, citing over-crowded housing and a lack of basic necessities like reliable plumbing

and electricity as major factors behind the violence.

Hidden Valley's 21 dilapidated houses and six humpies, or tin sheds, are home to up to 300 people. "Often the toilets and drains get blocked. When 20 people in one house try and have a shower and the plumbing is blocked, it's a disaster," said Ryan.

Those living in tin sheds must use a communal toilet block but it is filthy with faeces smeared over the toilet, the door smashed and the shower broken. The cobwebs are evidence that no one has actually used the amenity for a long time.

On the day Reuters visited Hidden Valley was like a ghost-town, with many residents in the main town, drinking.

A cool wind whipped biting dirt into Belinda's eyes as she lay on a filthy mattress in the ground outside her humpy. She was sick and coughing, but had no one to care for her except her seven-year-old daughter Treshina, who lay beside her.

Treshina knows the emptiness of camp life as well as the violence and knows where

she would rather be. "Shooting kangaroo in the bush," she says with a wide smile.

"If you don't stop the drinking, the violence will never go away," said Aborigine Roseanne Morris who used to hide behind a shed when her drunken father and mother started fighting.

Almost 1,152 cans of beer were poured onto the ground by police in May under a public drinking crackdown. In August Alice Springs will become a dry town with a ban on alcohol consumption in all public places, but many Aborigines fear the ban will simply mean more drinking in the camps outside town.

To curb alcohol abuse, hotels serve only low alcohol beer until noon, full strength beer until 2 p.m. when the take away outlets open, and fortified wines from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

But the new trading hours have made little difference with drunken Aborigines simply moving from hotels to the street from 2 p.m., drinking in the nearby dry Todd River or in camps.

"The hotels don't care as long as they get the money," said Aborigine, Eileen Hoosan, who runs an alcohol rehabilitation centre.

One hotel, nicknamed the Animal Bar, concerns Hoosan the most. "If they raised the dress standard so aboriginal people did not have easy access it would be better. If we could do anything about grog, I'd shut that one down," she said.

But it is not just Alice Springs where the grog runs free and aboriginal communities are wracked with violence.

Before the two hotels near the Borroloola community lost their licence in 2006, Aborigines were drinking eight pallets, or 8,640 litres, of beer a day.

Although the majority of aboriginal land in the territory is supposed to be alcohol free, "grog runners" target remote communities, selling beer at double the price. Every year police confiscate about 100 cars suspected of smuggling alcohol into remote communities.

THEATRE

The Drowsy Chaperone Novello Theatre

By ZARA RABINOWICZ
Special to The Epoch Times

Some people love theatre and some people live for it. *The Drowsy Chaperone's* narrator, played by Bob Martin, falls firmly into the second category. His love of musicals is so all-consuming that his own rundown apartment is transformed into the breathtaking spectacle that is the play. He muses on fame and fortune and plays his beloved classic soundtrack to the show. The musical begins with him conversationally addressing the seated audience in the dark. This provides an insight into his existence; that of a lonely man whose obsession with classic musicals has overtaken his whole life and whose wistful, reflective voice contrasts with the over-the-top extravagance of the proceedings. The anticipation he evokes through his reflections neatly mirrors that of the theatregoer, a contradiction in terms as we sit in the dark watching him, in turn, sit in the dark.

The show revealed however is a lighthearted spoof with high kicks aplenty and merriment and abundant mirth in store. It speeds along, charting the course of wedding nuptials where the glamorous showgirl, Janet van de Graaff (Summer Strallen), is set to marry her beau, Robert (John Partridge). That is, if nothing goes awry. Cue a drunken, sarcastic chaperone (Elaine Paige) to ensure the bride and groom don't see each other before the ceremony, and we have the premise of the plot. Paige ambles along, draped in black fur, chain smoking and swilling vodka, lending an eclectic panache and a dry sense of humour to events.

Add a couple of gangsters, a slapstick duo, as well as some synchronised dancing and you have an ensemble that creates a dazzling spectacle of colour and comedy. The songs come thick and fast. Some memorable ones include 'I Don't Want to Show Off No More' in which Strallen manages to effect three costume changes amongst flashing camera bulbs and dainty pirouettes, and the engaging 'Accident Waiting to Happen' throughout which she is carried by a blindfolded Partridge on rollerskates.

The action is broken up by Martin's narration of the events interspersing the show with trivia and commentary, the effect of which is charming. Martin has some of the most entertaining lines in the production including, "overtures are the appetiser; it's musical foreplay" and peppers his conversation with a mixture of mundanity and social awkwardness. Joseph Alessis excels as Adolpho, the nefarious lothario who tries to tempt Janet away from George and who struts across the stage stroking his moustache and rolling his R's. The drama is high but never serious and the play revels in its own frivolity and ridiculous elements. A world is neatly created where reality is suspended and the play revels in the sheer ludicrousness of events. George manages to cheat on his fiancée with his fiancée, monkeys with cymbals even put in an appearance and there ensues a great spitting scene.

The chaperone may be drunk but the show certainly ain't drowsy, so be prepared for a riotous whirl through musical history. Sit back and enjoy the show.

Booking until Feb. 23rd, 2008

First International Chinese Classical Dance Competition concludes

By XIN FEI
Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK — After three days of intensive competition, the first International Chinese Classical Dance Competition concluded on July 8th, 2007 in New York City. Twenty-two contestants from across the world gave splendid performances and high level displays. Expressed through different dance styles, they presented the rich and colourful inner meanings of Chinese dance.

Tickets were sold out for the final competition. During the performance, each act surpassed the preceding one, and there was un-

ceasing applause from the audience. Many audience members said that this was the first time they had ever seen such a great dance competition as it was so splendid, graceful and harmonious. The audience also thought the competition displayed traditional Chinese culture and set up a bridge connecting Eastern and Western culture. They hoped that such a competition would continue to be held year after year. Some audience members also said that this competition had created the noblest kind of dance in the world, and Chinese dance will surely become popular across the world.

The dance competition award ceremony was also held on July 8th. During the ceremony, video clips of the contestants' fabulous per-

formances were shown on a big screen on the stage. The theatre was a full house and everyone was eagerly awaiting the final results.

The audience's excitement was palpable as the host announced the winners. The champions for the four divisions were Yuhuan Chou, Jason Shi, Michelle Ren, and Yung Chia Chen. President Li Cong of the New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) and chairperson Guo Xiu of the contest's judging committee made the awards to the four champions. The gold award was \$10,000 and a cup, the silver \$3,000 and a cup, and the bronze award \$1,000 and a cup.

The winners' list is as follows:

Gold Award:

Junior Division, Female: Yu Hsuan Chou
Junior Division, Male: Jason Shi
Adult Division, Female: Michelle Ren
Adult Division, Male: Yung Chia Chen

Silver Award:

Junior Division, Female: Serena Liang
Junior Division, Male: Po Hung Lin
Adult Division, Female: Hsiao Feng Chang
Adult Division, Male: Yi Chun Chang

Bronze Award:

Junior Division, Female: Cindy Liu, Hsiang En Mao

Adult Division, Female: Xiaoyan Ni, Min Liang

Adult Division, Male: Tim Wu, Seongho Cha

Performance Prize:

Fan Meng, Serene Xian Lin Tan, Sio Lok Chan, Ming Chi Lo, Meng Chun Tsai, Liang Cai, Leon Chao, Jianhui Shen

Li Cong warmly congratulated all prize winners. He said that in the last few days, the competition had been more and more splendid and the contestants performed very well. Though the preparation for the competition encountered many twists and turns, it had concluded successfully. He said, "As Chinese, we all hope that our country will become strong. A strong country relies on a strong culture. Given the growing global interest in China, this is the momentum for reviving Chinese culture. We have joined together to accomplish this competition at a time of favourable geographical and human conditions. This is only the beginning. We will hold it every year and I hope everybody will participate enthusiastically."

"We will sigh with emotion when in the distant future, we look back at the grand occasion of this first dance competition. This is the beginning of the revival of Chinese culture. The Chinese culture will be reborn after suffering numerous disasters. You have such outstanding Chinese dance talents and are fortunate to meet at this historic moment. Let us contribute together to the revival of Chinese culture."

The host revealed that contestants came from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, North America, Europe and Australia. For the winners, this was a special honour in their chosen art and a new start for their career. For other contestants, this was also an excellent practice and learning opportunity.

