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The Times Diary

Stereotype 2

Any party which threatens "free booze, free sheilahs and salacious entertainment" is bound to be (a) Australian and (b) a let-down. Barry McKenzie's chunder party was, to hoot, sweaty and over-crowded. It was given by a record company to promote a collection of rude Australian songs. My reporter escaped and sent this dispatch:

Martin Lewis, the public relations man responsible, was wearing a sailor top (hullo, I thought) and a radiantly optimistic smile. I asked him about the free sheilahs. "You just walk up to a sheilah and ask if she's free", he said.

Barry McKenzie is the Australian stereotype created by Barry Humphries in a *Private Eye* strip cartoon and now in a film. The film has done well at the box office in Australia but has provoked criticism there. Humphries, a discerning man who left the party early, explained:

"All Australian thinkers are obsessed with national image. They believe it's all right to satirize people on the stage, but not on film which is an exportable commodity. They are frightened that people overseas might get the idea from the film that Australians are rough, crude, beer-drinking people when, of course, the reverse is the truth. We are dignified, refined and cultivated."