

CLASSROOM TO BALLROOM

Formals season is here. Do you keep yourself nice or is it bigger than Brownlow night? **Liz Cincotta** talks to those who hope it will be all right on the night.

THE STUDENTS

Hannah Batty, 18, and Hannah Ross, 17, from St Leonard's College, will celebrate their school formal in June.

HANNAH BATTY

WHETHER the school formal is considered a big deal depends on the person. This year the theme will be a masquerade party; last year the theme was *Casino Royale James Bond*.

I don't worry about what I'm going to wear. Being a boy is a lot different from being a girl in that regard, we just play it by ear. I'm wearing my boyfriend's suit. I'll choose one a couple of hours before the event.

Last year we hired a party bus. We didn't consider a limousine because the bus was more cost-effective.

There are people who do the formal with little expense and there are people who can afford to spend more. I don't think it's necessary to go overboard. Everyone looks pretty good on the night regardless.

The kids here are pretty well behaved. The same school rules apply at the formal and people know that. We probably won't have an after-party. We'll have

awards for the "king" and "queen", which is a bit tongue-in-cheek, and an award for the most gay-friendly. No one gets offended. We're a pretty close school.

HANNAH ROSS

I DON'T go last year because I was overseas, so this is my first formal. It's the same formal for years 11 and 12, but both year levels approach it differently.

I think it's about everyone coming together. It's not celebrating the end of the school year but it's something that the whole school can do together.

I think girls do see it as a big event. I think you want to look the best you can. As long as you feel happy about it. Some people stress about it a lot more than others and go all out with their dress, hair and make-up, but everyone looks gorgeous on the night.

I'm not sure if I will go to an after-party. There's talk about it, but I'm not sure if anything will happen. I think it will be a last moment thing.

Usually one of our friends will have pre-drinks at their home. Parents definitely feel a part of it. I think they like to be involved.



THE LIMOUSINE DRIVER

Keith Vendrick of Lords and Ladies Luxury Limousine Hire has been driving students to their school formals for 21 years.

WE have taken thousands of teenagers to their school formals. Formals have changed over the years. They used to be small affairs that finished early but now they are huge. When the kids finish at the first venue, they go to an after-party at another venue and may not all night. Today the kids are noisy but well behaved. In the early days, kids thought they had to act like rock stars and destroy everything, but after they were tossed out of the limousines they soon passed the message on that you behave or you get dumped.

The girls' dresses are nicer today. They used to turn up in

black but now they dress in many vibrant colours. The girls are more independent and more sure of themselves.

At the house, we introduce ourselves and then wait at the rear door of the limousine. The interior sparkles with multicoloured lights. When we drive off, the music is wild and loud; everyone talks excitedly. At the end of the hour, as we approach the venue, we instruct the kids on how to leave the limousine correctly so the photographer will get the best pictures of them. We open the door and they exit the limousine like the rich and famous. Then we turn the music down from the deafening max, reset all the knobs and buttons, clean the seats, straighten seatbelts and head off to the next job.



Seen to swap school clothes for formal wear: Hannah Batty and Hannah Ross of St Leonard's College.

MAIN PICTURE: SIMON SCHULTER
OTHER PICTURES: ERIN JIM



THE FASHION DESIGNER

Fashion designer Nicole Williams has many clients shopping for their formal.

I HATE describing what I wore to my school formal in 1990. I made it myself—it was an electric blue sequined dress with a turtleneck and an underskirt of rainbow organza. It was made from Thai silk purchased in Thailand on a family holiday. At Noolangala, we specialise in occasion wear and have had school formal clientele for the past six years. One of the most popular designs has been a silk-waisted, belted, dress. It's an unstructured style. It comes in at the waist and we run it in 17 different colours. Most of

our dresses are priced between \$350-\$500. Usually girls will start shopping around with their friends but end with their mums. Dress choice is very much about what the girls want. It's different to when I was shopping for my formal, which was about what my mother wanted. We keep a register of the girls who have bought dresses, the style of dress and the event, so that the same dress isn't worn to the same formal. It's important that the girls have exclusivity with their dress.

Some girls want to show flesh while others want to be conservative. At the end of the day, the girls want to look the best they can.



THE CHAPERONE

Peter Ford is head of senior school at St Michael's Grammar School in St Kilda.

THE school formal is a much anticipated event. It's a bit of a rite of passage. I write to the parents informing them of the arrangements and outlining the school's expectations. I tell the students our expectations, our philosophy of why we have it, and our position on a couple of issues to do with after-parties. We don't promote or condone after-parties. The formal is the occasion.

Our philosophy is that it gives the students an opportunity to gather together as a year level in a very friendly, supportive but formal environment. It's a shared experience for them but it is equally important for the

staff who are supporting them through their final year. We are in this together and we are there to celebrate and enjoy the evening together. There's no "us" versus "them" mentality. All normal school rules apply on the evening, particularly in relation to smoking and alcohol. The rules and expectations we have are designed to bring about a positive atmosphere of mutual co-operation. And we trust the students implicitly. We don't promote contrivance. It's not a competition. We want a night where none of our students feel any pressure to conform to any standards in terms of anything in terms of being the best dressed. It's about setting the scene and making clear your expectation and the students rise to the occasion.