

**THEATRE COUNCIL OF TASMANIA  
TASMANIAN THEATRE AWARDS 2023  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 3 MARCH 2023**

**[Vice-Regal Salute is played]**

Good evening. I warmly welcome you all to this reception to mark the 2023 Tasmanian Theatre Awards.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I acknowledge the impacts of colonisation upon our First People and commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- The Honourable Elise Archer MP, Minister for the Arts
- Lord Mayor Councillor Anna Reynolds
- Benedicta McGeown, Theatre Council of Tasmania Senior-Vice President
- Board members of the Theatre Council
- Judges of the awards
- and of course, our many nominees.

It is wonderful for Government House to host you all on the eve of your awards which take place tomorrow. The Covid pandemic put a brake on our entertainment sector events in the past few years. In fact, the pandemic was more of a wrecking ball on your sector. So that's even more reason to enjoy being together here tonight.

As we are hosting the Theatre Council and nominees for theatre awards here at Government House, it is appropriate to recount to you a most unusual theatrical performance, with a Government House connection, that took place at our Theatre Royal nearly 130 years ago. At that time, Irish aristocrat Lord Gormanston, Governor between 1893 and 1900, gave Tasmania a first,

being first colonial Governor anywhere to personally insult Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

This happened when the Earl of Yarmouth, as a young English peer and actor, visited Australia, giving flamboyant live performances. One newspaper recorded Queen Victoria was, and I quote, “incensed when she learned that the Earl had been received at Government House in Tasmania in view of his operatic performances, and it was further alleged that the Government House [in Melbourne] had been closed against him.”<sup>1</sup>

The following was reported and I quote:

“Probably the most remarkable theatrical entertainment ever seen in the southern hemisphere was given in December 1894 at the Theatre Royal, Hobart, when the Earl of Yarmouth... performed...

The Earl of Yarmouth ... at present staying at Government House, is a young man of 23 with a strong predilection for the stage, and the announcement that he would appear at the Theatre Royal excited a great interest ... Governor Lord Gormanston and many members of Parliament were present, as were also the officers of *H.M.S.S. Katoomba* and *Goldfinch*, now lying in the harbour ...

...When the Earl of Yarmouth appeared on stage in a loose white wrapper, with blue ribbons, and a flowing wig of soft brown hair falling below his shoulders, there was something like a gasp in the dress-circle ... He sang with great verve and danced with the utmost abandon ...

His lordship, whirling his drapery in each hand in the most approved fashion, gyrated before the astonished throng in one wild blaze of kaleidoscopic colours and danced with unabated vigour ... Thunders of applause greeted him, and several large bouquets were thrown to the almost exhausted nobleman ...

Responding to the inevitable encore, he gathered all his energies for one more effort, and the curtain fell upon the unique picture of a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen depicted on a ballet-dancer's skirts worn by a peer of England.<sup>2</sup> (The Earl of Yarmouth)

Well, on that theatrical Governor's faux pas, may I end by saying:

- congratulations to the Theatre Council of Tasmania for your huge support for Tasmanian theatre;
- thank you judges for what is always an unenviably tough task;
- and all the very best to the fully deserving nominees. Only one more sleep to go!

Thank you. David ... [invites Benedicta McGeown to respond]

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<sup>1</sup> The Pittsburgh Press (Pennsylvania), Sunday 26 January 1908 page 47.

<sup>2</sup> Riverine Grazier (Hay, NSW), Tuesday 18 December 1894, page 4.