

FRIENDS OF THE THEATRE ROYAL RECEPTION
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MONDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2021

Good evening and a warm welcome to this reception for Friends of the Theatre Royal.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

As Friends of the Theatre Royal, may I congratulate you all for your longstanding and important work in promoting the cultural and historical significance of the Theatre Royal, and its programs and events to the people of Tasmania and Australia. You contribute to the Theatre by providing support for the Student Subscription Program, which assists young people from a variety of organisations to attend the Theatre. You fundraise and provide archival and research support.¹

I also note that you have arranged a matinee later this month entitled, "A conversation with Essie Davis." Christopher Waterhouse will be the interviewer and he is with us tonight. After seeing Essie perform in *The Maids* at the Playhouse, I can assure you this will be a very entertaining event.

Don and I are especially pleased to be hosting you this evening, as we have been attending and enjoying many events at the Theatre Royal over many years. I can recall sitting in the "gods" as a child and also in recent years.

We are all very proud of Australia's oldest continually operating theatre and its historical and ongoing archival record. People have been enjoying drama, music, dance, comedy and other entertainment in the Theatre since 1837. The legendary Noël Coward once called it "a dream of a theatre."² And equally

¹ <https://www.theatreroyal.com.au/about/friends-theatre-royal> accessed 1/11/2021.

² Wikipedia "[History of the Theatre Royal](#)". *Theatre Royal, 29 Campbell St Hobart*. Retrieved 24 May 2013. pp. 10–11.

²Wikipedia "[Australia's Oldest Theatre The Hobart Theatre Royal](#)" (PDF). *Australian Heritage*. Australia's Heritage Publishing G.P.O. Box 5390 Sydney NSW 2001: Heritage Australia Publishing. Spring 2009.

legendary Laurence Olivier launched a national appeal for its reconstruction in the 1940s.³

May I acknowledge the significant holdings of the Theatre Royal Collection. This Collection includes costumes, programs, photos, tickets and invitations, posters, scrapbooks, press clippings, reviews, plans and drawings, correspondence, historical records and more.

Our Theatre Royal has volumes of stories. I would like to relate just one, which appears in the recently published history book of Government House Tasmania, written by my predecessor Professor Kate Warner and Official Secretary David Owen. Amusing today, it was scandalous at the time.

Irish aristocrat Lord Gormanston, Governor between 1893 and 1900, and who shares his name with the West Coast mining town, gave Tasmania a first. No other colonial Governor anywhere had ever managed 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.”¹

An abbreviated version of what happened in Hobart was reported in some detail in another newspaper, which 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.ⁱⁱ

End of quote!

May I conclude and say that I am sure we are all delighted that live performances are returning, albeit slowly, after our COVID lockdown. Equally, I am sure that our actors, directors, designers, choreographers, backstage personnel, front of house personnel and management are relieved be able to resume performances.

Don and I therefore extend our thanks to you all and wish you, as Friends of the Theatre Royal, all our best for all your efforts to encourage renewed audience participation in our historic jewel.

Please now enjoy the reception.

Thank you.

ⁱ The Pittsburgh Press (Pennsylvania), Sunday 26 January 1908 page 47.

ⁱⁱ Riverine Grazier (Hay, NSW), Tuesday 18 December 1894, page 4.