

**REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA & MRS  
UNDERWOOD AT A RECEPTION TO CELEBRATE THE 175<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE  
THEATRE ROYAL HOBART, TUESDAY, 6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2012**

Good evening everybody and a great big welcome to you all from me and my wife to this reception to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Theatre Royal. As you all are no doubt well aware the first performance at the Theatre Royal was given on this evening - 6<sup>th</sup> March - exactly 175 years ago. It was a double header, "Speed the Plough" and "The Spoiled Child."

The foundation stone of this beautiful building was laid in November 1834 when the name, "Theatre Royal" was chosen for the building. However, what is not so widely known I think is that at that time there was already a theatre operating in Hobart. It was built into a pub on the corner of Liverpool and Argyle Streets and called the "Argyle Rooms".<sup>1</sup> There were many who thought that the new theatre should not be built because the Argyle Rooms catered well enough for the theatre going people of Hobart. Notwithstanding, the building progressed, but during the 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years between the laying of the foundation stone and the first performance at the Theatre Royal, the manager of the Argyle Rooms usurped the name "Theatre Royal" for his theatre much to the consternation of the management of the New Theatre, as the Theatre Royal was first known to the citizens of Hobart. Rivalry between the two theatres

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<sup>1</sup> "A History of the Theatre Royal Hobart from 1834 by Michael Roe. Published by the Law Society of Tasmania on behalf of the National Trust (Tasmania) and the National Theatre and Fine arts Society of Tasmania

was intense at first and all suggestions that the two should amalgamate were resisted.

The Hobart Town Courier for Friday 10<sup>th</sup> March 175 years ago published a review of the first performance at the New Theatre and with respect to the rivalry said this:

“We take the liberty, however, of observing, for the benefit of Theatricals generally, that we hope to see this absurd schism amongst them speedily removed. One Theatre, well conducted, may be made an agreeable recreation for the public, and beneficial to the proprietors and performers; but the attempt to keep open two theatrical establishments in Hobart town, will soon prove ruinous to one, if not both of them.”<sup>2</sup>

And so it did for it was not long after the first performance at the New Theatre that the two establishments amalgamated and the Argyle Rooms gave way to the New Theatre. At first it was known as the Royal Victoria Theatre but by 1857 it reverted to its original and beloved name, “Theatre Royal.”

And so we gather this evening to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first performance at the Theatre Royal and its continued existence over all those years despite the many vicissitudes

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<sup>2</sup>*Hobart Town Courier Friday 10 March 1837 page 2.*

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she has had to overcome during that long history. To mark this major event my wife has arranged a little surprise for you which I will ask her to tell you about.

***MU*** I thought that we could not let this celebration go by without a performance and so we asked two people whom all those connected with theatre in Hobart know and love, Maria Lurighi and Andrew Legg - neither of whom was at that first performance at the Theatre Royal!!!! But, both of whom have contributed an abundance of riches to cultural life in Tasmania. So, to help you celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that first performance Maria is going to fill this 155 year old exquisite ballroom with glorious sound, accompanied of course by Andrew. Ladies and Gentlemen Maria Lurighi and Andrew Legg.