

TASDANCE PICNIC, PORT ARTHUR

[6.27 p.m.]

Mrs BUTLER (Lyons) - I rise this evening to congratulate the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority on the marvellous picnic held last Sunday, 30 March which featured the fantastic TasDance, our contemporary dance company from Launceston. They were just wonderful.

In the beautiful old autumn gardens of Port Arthur, hundreds of people had a wonderful day. My family and I enjoyed a tasty local produce lunch, great coffee and good fun. Our lunch was prepared by the Chief Executive Officer of the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority, Steven Large, who shook hands with plastic gloves on, which felt a little strange to me.

Entertainment at lunchtime was provided by the Underwater Tiger Wrestlers who were serenading local people, including Lola Smith, and delighting international and interstate visitors. They had great harmony and were terrific musicians.

TasDance's program, 'One for Sorrow, Two for Joy', was exciting and uplifting. The choreography was innovative and stretched the dancers in moves that were intensely demanding of their physicality, yet stirred the imagination and emotions of the audience - the struggles involved with so many aspects of human relationships, hard work, migration, setting up new homes and the fragility of happiness were represented in various dances. One dance, 'Two for Joy', featured costuming reminiscent of convict clothing and was performed by two male dancers as though they were mirror images. It seemed poignant to think of the prisoners who must have endured years of imagining that they had a parallel existence in freedom.

The dance entitled 'Five for Silver' stands out in my memory. It featured five dancers who were connected in one costume. The shining silver floating fabric slid and glided with the breezes in a dance that was smooth and fluid. My granddaughter thought the story was about building new houses from a burnt area covered in ash with the grey base, while I saw the performance perhaps as the struggle for growth and life itself from ashes to ashes. Other family members had different interpretations and strong emotional reactions.

The dancing was extremely skilful and beautifully executed in spite of trying weather conditions, including strong winds. The setting gave a special poignancy to the whole event, given the theme of survival in the face of unimaginable hardship.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the annual Port Arthur picnic of 2008. It was a brilliant day. It is so good to see Tasmanians doing what we do best, celebrating our people, our environment and our culture.

