



Speech by

# STUART COPELAND

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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Hansard 21 June 2001

## **CALAMITY JANE; BLACKROCK**

**Mr COPELAND** (Cunningham—NPA) (12.10 am): I rise to highlight the very vibrant cultural scene that exists in Toowoomba. Last week I had the great pleasure of attending two fantastic performances in that city, the first of which was held at the Empire Theatre. If members have not been to Toowoomba and visited the Empire Theatre, I can say to them that it is the most amazing theatre in any regional city not only in this state but also this country. It certainly rivals anything that exists in any of the major cities. It is an art deco theatre, I think built in the 1930s, that was renovated by the Toowoomba City Council a number of years ago. It is an absolutely brilliant facility that any city would be proud of.

Last week the Toowoomba Philharmonic Society put on their annual production at that theatre. It was a production of *Calamity Jane*. It is a show that a lot of people know well and it is certainly a show that continues the long tradition of the philharmonic society's annual productions being absolutely first class and professional. It is an organisation that has a very long history. It has been going in the Toowoomba city for an incredibly long time and it has a terrific reputation for the productions that it puts on.

The star of the show, both in terms of the title of the production and in terms of performance, would undoubtedly have been Ruby Slipperz, who is a very well known local radio station celebrity in Toowoomba. Ruby was absolutely brilliant in the title role of *Calamity*. It was as if she was born to play the role. I think that she has aspired to play that role ever since she was born. Ruby was completely believable as *Calamity*, and I think even more so than Doris Day could ever have hoped to be. You could actually believe that Ruby could fight and run with the best of them.

Joseph Duke filled the role of Francis Fryer. He is an outstanding young talent. He is 15 years old, still at school and playing on the stage with all of the command and ability of people much older. He is a young man with an incredibly big future. The rest of the cast were just as good: Don Burge as Wild Bill Hickock, Barry Ledger as Lieutenant Danny Gilmartin, Roxanne Beer as Katie Brown, and Adrian Smith and Amanda Holland Chalmers in supporting roles. The entire ensemble cast was absolutely brilliant.

The second show was very different, but no less impressive. It was put on by the USQ performing arts department, which is a very well known and very capable department. It was a performance of Nick Enright's *Blackrock*. Many people would know this play. Some years ago it won an AWGIE award and has also been made into a film. It was put on by the final year acting students. Production support was supplied by the stage management students and it was directed by guest director Sue Rider, a Queensland Matilda award winner and former artistic director of La Boite.

It is a very dark but very moving and interesting play. Certainly it has a lot of relevance for young people. The USQ performance centre was filled with very large audiences made up largely of school students not only from the Darling Downs region but also from places as far afield as Brisbane and further west.

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