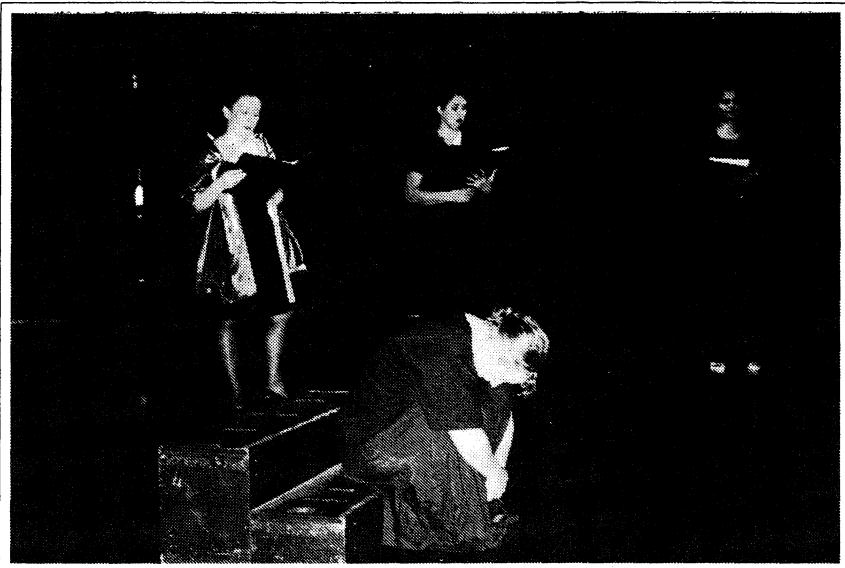


NT Women Lawyers' Association

Trials Through Time – A Law Week Highlight



NT women lawyers read from the trial of Tuckiar

The theme of Law Week 1998, *Make Sense of the Law*, was tackled head on by members of the Northern Territory Women Lawyers' Association who presented a series of dramatised trials in a public performance on Sunday 17 May at *Brown's Mart*.

They performed to a full house, including the entire year 12 from Katherine High School, members of the public and interested members of the profession.

Their presentation received considerable acclaim from the audience, with general consensus being that it was not only first-class entertainment, but also a thought-provoking analysis of some of the changes in the law throughout time.

The presentation – *Trials Through Time* – was made up of dramatised readings from the trials of Joan of Arc and Tuckiar and from *Wardley v Ansett*. Each of these had been chosen to illustrate shortcomings in the law as it reflected social attitudes of the time.

Commentary on these led the narrator, Theresa Van Gessel, to the point

where she was able to remind the audience of the input that lawyers had into legal reform. This was cleverly contrasted against some unflattering lawyer jokes, making the point that whilst lawyers are not incapable of laughing at themselves and will wear their "bad press", they were also responsible for and active in the serious business of providing access to justice.

The Joan of Arc piece, based on George Bernard Shaw's play, illustrated a conflict between the Church and what would now be perceived as justice. The staging of this piece and the others that followed it, using black costuming and stark lighting created a most convincing isolation effect which allowed the audience to concentrate on the message that each reading carried with it.

Whilst the performance pointed to the legal peculiarities of the Tuckiar trial, including a lack of correct legal representation and interpretation for the defendant, the commentary then reminded the audience that appropriate

interpretation services for Aboriginal people were still lacking in today's court system.

The absurdities evident in the discriminatory attitude of Ahsett Transport Industries in *Wardley* provoked laughter in the audience but provided a serious reminder of the effort that had gone into revealing this discrimination for what it was.

NTWLA members who took part in the performance included Tracy Reeves, Britt Lardelli, Traci Keys, Tasha Quoll, Robyn Davis, Asha McLaren, Melanie Little, Theresa Van Gessel and Mary Lyn Griffith. The scripting was a joint effort, largely driven by Barbara Tiffin. Merran Short and Robyn Dyall provided backstage and front-of-house assistance.

NTWLA acknowledged the support of the Law Society Public Purposes Trust for funding, Justice Dean Mildren for provision of historical material, *Brown's Mart* and its staff for their assistance, Kevin Green for lighting expertise and the Law Society for its encouragement of the project.

As a contribution to the public education offered by Law Week, this performance was invaluable and NTWLA is to be congratulated not only for the concept, but also for the quality of its execution.



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