



**NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

*Member for Fong Lim*

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**HANSARD EXTRACT**

**DARWIN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

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*This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory*

As we talked to people, we developed a new idea for our Easter egg hunt this year. We will have a scavenger hunt to identify local birds in exchange for Easter eggs. Yes, I promise they will be chocolate, and people will get them at the end in a little nest. We are partnering with two of our amazing local organisations, BirdLife Top End and Rapid Creek Landcare. Atticus, a wonderful 13-year-old artist and a keen bird lover has drawn wonderful local birds for our bird hunt. Rapid Creek Landcare Group will celebrate our local flora and fauna and help people learn all about the environment we live in and depend on.

I cannot wait for this fun community event, bringing people together, celebrating and enjoying the wonderful Water Gardens that we are so lucky to have in Johnston, and bringing together organisations that connect our community with our electorate's beautiful, natural and unique environment.

Our community Easter Egg Hunt will take place in the Jingili Water Gardens on Thursday 17 April, and we extend the invitation to people from beyond Johnston to visit the most fun electorate in the Northern Territory.

**Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on your promotion and ascent to the Speakership, albeit temporarily.

This past Saturday I had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Arts at the Darwin Symphony Orchestra's 2025 inaugural season opening concert, *Romance and Revolution*. It was an extraordinary performance of three works, *The Chairman Dances* by John Adams, excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Brahms' *First Symphony*.

It is a privilege to hear such high-quality concert programming in Darwin, and it is something that a lot of us take for granted. I note that the performance was supported by the arrival of a new concertmaster, and a series of new principals. For the uninitiated amongst you, that is 10 high-calibre musicians who have moved to Darwin from all over the country to take up professional paid chairs in the orchestra to improve the orchestra and help it to grow. Welcome to those new section principals and the concertmaster; I hope that you will be with us for a long time and enjoy your stay.

For the first time in a decade the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is going on tour through the Territory and taking music back to the people. It is worth remembering exactly what this institution represents for the Northern Territory.

**Mrs Hersey:** Hear, hear!

**Dr RAHMAN:** Member for Katherine, I take your interjection. On Tuesday 8 April the Darwin Symphony Orchestra will be performing at the arts and culture centre in Katherine.

On Thursday 10 April the orchestra will perform in Tennant Creek. Member for Barkly, you will be delighted to hear that, as I know what an avid lover of classical musical you are.

Member for Braintree, on Saturday 12 April the orchestra will perform in Alice Springs at the Desert Park in association with Parrrtjima—A Festival in Light. The open-air orchestral performance will be set against the ancient MacDonnell Ranges. It is a program that is worth celebrating. In addition, there will be a DSO deconstructed chamber music concert on Saturday 13 April at the Araluen Arts Centre.

Notwithstanding the professionalism that I alluded to and the new hires that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has brought on board, it is important to recognise that this is an orchestra of the people. It is an orchestra for the people with deep community roots. The orchestra's story goes back a long way. In order to get an accurate picture of how far back it goes, I got in touch recently with Darwin's original maestro, Professor Martin Jarvis OAM, who was kind enough to share with me some of his reflections on the orchestra.

A symphony orchestra for the Northern Territory was high on the agenda of Chief Minister Paul Everingham, according to Daryl Manzie—all the way back then. Every state at the time had its own federally funded orchestra via what was then called the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It was something of a status symbol; every other capital had an orchestra, and the government wanted us to have one as well.

There were so many music lovers in that CLP government that at one point it even considered self-funding it when the Australian Broadcasting Commission rejected the offer to fund an orchestra in-house. However, the government realised that it would be cheaper to charter airbuses and commute everybody from here to Sydney Symphony Orchestra concerts in the Opera House than it would be to fund a homegrown Northern Territory orchestra. Therefore, it remained an objective, or maybe a dream, for a long time for a number of people in the Northern Territory to have that kind of ensemble and artistic outlet.

It was not easy, but that dream was realised over many years, and it was by the dedication and devotion of many people in the community who have performed for the love of music and sharing it with others. When federal funding was finally achieved in 2005 it became the first and still is the only non-professional orchestra in Australia that is centrally funded by the ABC. Since its inception in 1989 it has been an extremely high-profile orchestra; it has garnered a lot of media attention and exposure because it has such a unique status and reputation.

Some of you may not be aware, but the Darwin Symphony Orchestra over the years has performed in locations like Katherine Gorge, literally floating on pontoons; in Gove in the Member for Mulka's electorate; at Nourlangie Rock; on Groote Eylandt; in the Todd riverbed in Alice Springs; in front of the escarpment at Glen Helen Gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges; and in Borroloola in the Gulf country.

The Darwin Symphony Orchestra is a cultural institution. It is not a bit of elitist nonsense that goes on in the Entertainment Centre; it is an orchestra for the people, and it has been making music for the benefit of the Northern Territory for a long time.

The roots of it go back a long way. It has been a 50-year gradual evolution since the 1970s when we had a Darwin Chamber Orchestra which gradually led to in 1983 the Darwin String Ensemble and in 1984 the first performance as the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, but it was a one-off performance at the time. I located some of the letters written at the time by then Chief Minister Ian Tuxworth who wrote individually to every member of the orchestra to thank them for bringing this important marker to our city, which is a city on the rise. That first concert combined the Darwin City Brass Band, the concert band, the string orchestra plus members of the Youth Orchestra, and it had to be held at the Marrara Indoor Stadium because there was nowhere for an orchestra to make that kind of music at the time.

The project to build the Darwin Performing Arts Centre was led by Tom Pauling QC at the time. He later went on to become the Administrator of the Northern Territory. When the soft opening for the DPAC was finally held on 3 and 4 May 1986, it was the Darwin Symphony Orchestra that provided the entertainment.

The permanent Darwin Symphony Orchestra was re-established from 1988 onwards. It was based on the Darwin Chamber Orchestra and its partner in crime, the Darwin Chorale, finally moving towards us having a fully-fledged orchestra. From June 1989 we finally had the Darwin Symphony Orchestra the likes of which we now regularly see.

That is a crude history of that institution. I am reliably informed that Professor Martin Jarvis at CDU has a book in the works in which he will talk about the evolution of that organisation over time. I very much look forward to reading it when the time comes. You can expect some other interesting stories in that book. It is worth marvelling at the orchestra's association with the Kangaroo 1989 Military Tattoo and the Katherine Gorge floating pontoons. Can you imagine an orchestra playing *Bolero* on floating pontoons?

**Mrs Hersey:** Amazing.

**Dr RAHMAN:** I take the interjection; the Member for Katherine was there.

If any of you have not seen it, the ABC documentary *Have Orchestra Will Travel* is hilarious and worth watching for one of the tours, which I think was run in the mid-1990s.

I draw attention to the longstanding beneficial association that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has with Charles Darwin University. In fact, it is so longstanding that it predates Charles Darwin University, going back to the Northern Territory University and the Darwin Institute of Technology. I hope that partnership will endure because the university is richer for having the orchestra based there, providing another outlet and hive of activity in that place.

Whilst quirky and parochial, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is truly Territorian and for the community. It is not the London Symphony Orchestra, and it does not purport to be, but it performs music of a really high standard, is increasingly professional and, most importantly, maintains a commitment to making music for the people. We are lucky to have it.

Fellow members of the Assembly, I encourage you all to please support the orchestra in its upcoming endeavours. If you have occasion to see the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in Katherine, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs—those of you in bush electorates—please make the time to go and support the orchestra. The work it does is for the good of the community. It offers something unique to our landscape in terms of contributing to our lifestyle across the spectrum.