FOOD AND WINE FROLIC

Festival opening brings a message of hope

THEATRE

By HELEN MUSA

Dreams for a Better World, opening spectacular for the International Dragon Boat Festival, Canberra Theatre, March 18 1994. *Community Theatre event.*

A multicultural spectacular devoted to the concept of a better world was the idealistic project selected to open the Dragon Boat Festival on Friday. A catchy new song composed by Jeff Evans and Louise Hilyard and delivered by vocalist Trish Delaney with the little Gaudeamus singers, spelt out the message of the night: "tomorrow will bring a better world."

The Glowworm and Bapu National Dancers presented the Aboriginal aspirations for such a world in a series of haunting but funny dance stories. I predict we will see more of the Bapu Dancers with their wealth of tales and considerable technical skills in dance and didgeridoo.

Creative dancers Winiarta and Henry Wang brought unusual cultural perspectives to the concept, the Gaudeamus Eurhythmy and Creative Movement group added a touch of the abstract and the lighthearted Spanish dancers *Raices de Espana* completed the picture of a multilayered Australia, a picture which could have been better coordinated into a dramatic format.

The key piece of the evening, however, was Splinters Theatre of Spectacle's production of a play, *The Legend of Qu Yuan*. Directed by David Branson and making use of the considerable composing skills of Jonathan Nix, this was a production hinting at, but never fully explaining, the connection of the philosopher-poet Qu Yuan, who drowned himself to protest at tyranny in 278 BC, to the dragon boats.

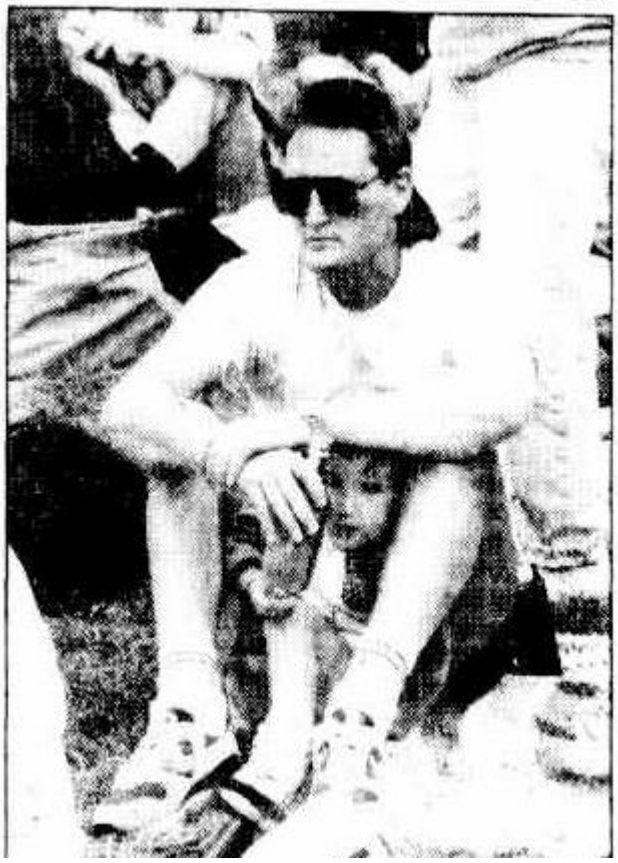
In an eclectic mix of Eastern and Western theatrical techniques best seen in Cristy Gilbert's imaginative costume adaptations, the company mimed and danced this ancient story to a voice-over narration and some impressive drumming. The central figure, Qu Yuan, played by Adam McConvell, was never allowed to emerge in his humane dimensions, he was rather a backdrop to spectacular staged battles and movement.

Hovering over *The Legend of Qu Yuan* were the familiar signatures of Splinters — huge masks, effigies and tantalising lighting effects. I felt certain by the conclusion that this should have been performed in an outdoor arena where the full potential of the spectacle could have been explored. In this way, Qu Yuan's very fine dreams for a better world might have been brought together more successfully with our own.



Picture: MARTIN JONES

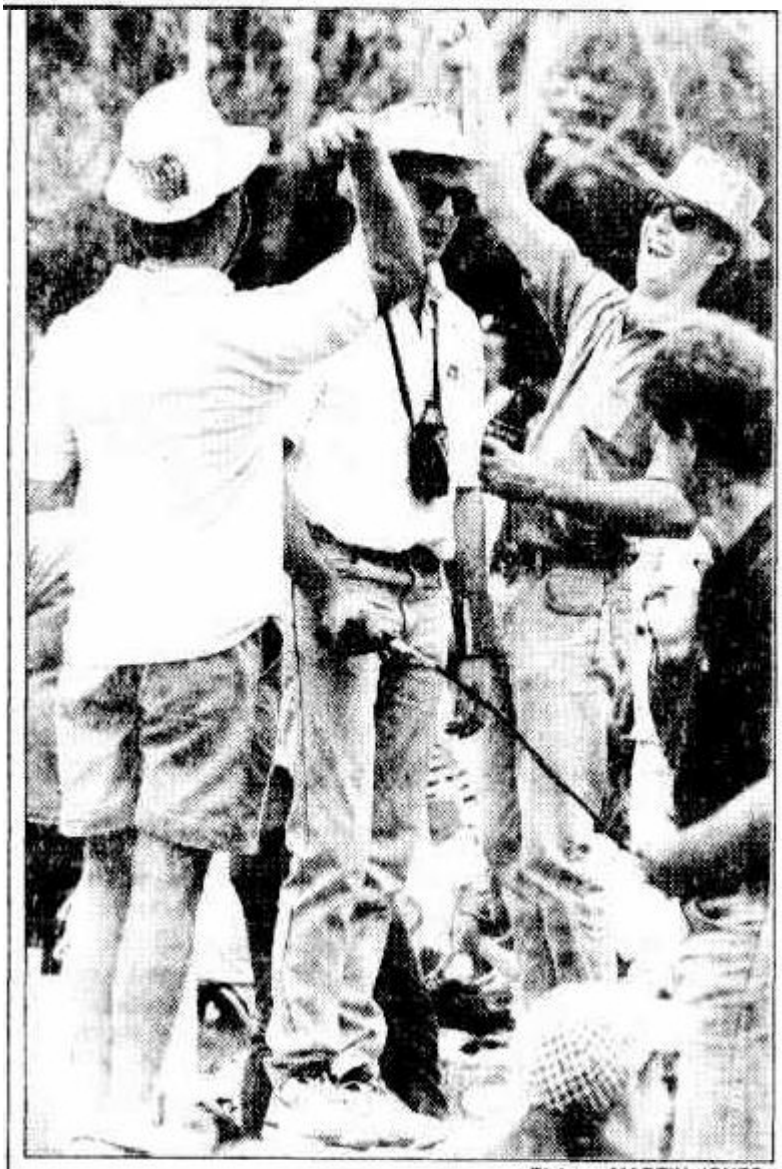
A plate of pancakes helps Saini Copp, 7, and her sister, Natania, 5, get into the spirit of yesterday's annual Canberra frolic in Commonwealth Park.





Picture: MARTIN JONES

David Taws, of Isabella Plains, enjoys a beer as his son, Kayne, 3, thinks of the next soft drink.



Picture: MARTIN JONES

Sunshine and record crowds enabled patrons to enjoy the Food and Wine Frolic in Commonwealth Park yesterday.





Picture: MARTIN JONES

A large crowd enjoys a country and western performance at Stage 88 in Commonwealth Park during yesterday's Canberra Festival activities.