

For once, Parliament sounded harmonious

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On Tuesday, and just as one thought one would never again hear Parliament House emit any sweet sounds (this present Parliament is a notoriously vile and bitter one and its broadcast debates and question times batter the ears and give us headaches), a choir performed there.

A Chorus of Women gave a soulful lunchtime concert in the marble foyer. All sorts of Parliament house folk, unused to gentle and ethereal sounds in this arena of combat (and the acoustics of the foyer have spiritual, cathedral-like qualities) came out to listen.

What was going on was that Tuesday was the 10th anniversary of the day in 2003 when 150 women materialised in this same foyer to sing a lament for the Iraqi people. On that very day in Parliament, former prime minister John Howard, doing what the US president wanted rather than what the Australians wanted, announced that we were going to join in the invasion of Iraq.

Today, the lament sung on that day seems tragically prophetic since there have been perhaps 120,000 violent civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003. Tuesday's program of generally lugubrious, deep and wise songs opened with the same *Lament* that was sung in 2003.

On Tuesday, after the chorus of women, all in purple and arranged along a balcony, had serenaded the appreciative audience below them on the marble floors, we spoke to chorister Glenda Cloughley. She wrote the words for the *Lament* sung in 2003 and on Tuesday. "It was very emotional for us today. Judith Clingan [also there performing on Tuesday] and I wrote the *Lament* just four days before we sang it."

One of the verses of the *Lament* says:

Weep for our sisters in danger. Weep for our brothers and children.

Sound the cries of grief and despair. Sound the lament for the dead.

We put it to her, just to try to seem more dispassionate than we felt, that perhaps it was a waste of time to sing against war. It did not work in 2003.

Surely warmongers do not listen to peace songs?

"Well, that's a conventional [approach]" she chided us.

"No, we didn't stop the war but we did give a voice to all those people, the 75 per cent of Australians [opinion polls showed] who did not want this war. It seemed to be a song that was wanted.

"What we've been trying to do all along is sing out the voice that used to sound in the old Greek theatre ... the voice of the citizens' chorus ... And so while we have very adversarial debates here in this place, we have committed ourselves to singing in a non-adversarial voice. So we don't oppose things, we sing the emotional truth. The *Lament* is the emotional truth, because people died."

Pearls string together a stylish tale

We don't portray nearly enough unadulterated glamour in Gang-gang and so here, to make amends, is the latest piece from Amelia Thompson's fashion label Stranger than Fiction.

It is her *Something Borrowed*, 2013, and involves polyester, cotton, glass pearls and a brooch.

The photograph is by Peta Rudd and the model is Melissa Obst. It will be part of the exhibition *The Kitchen Table* that opens at the M16 Artspace in Griffith on March 28.

Thompson explains *Something Borrowed* draws on elements from three generations of wedding dresses (of the 1920s, 1950s and 1970s) of just one Canberra-based family.

Window seat for centenary teddy bear

Teddy bear enthusiasts (this columnist has a small collection including a 70-year old Merrythought bear, three years my senior, who has been my companion all my life) will prick up their ears to learn that a limited edition (just 40 of them) "CB" or "Canberra Bear") - pictured - has emerged from hibernation.

It is sometimes a fine line between reporting that a product exists and inadvertently advertising it but I swear I have no pecuniary interest in Canberra Bear, the latest creation of long-established and gifted teddybearatrix Eunice Eiseman of Stanley Bears.

She explains that "he" (for somehow almost all teddy bears are male) is made of light blonde German mohair and has one of his big beary feet embossed with the legend "Canberra 1913-2013."

The medal around his blonde, beary neck is a special, Royal Australian Mint "encapsulated" (sealed in plastic) centenary-commemorating 20¢ coin. My 70-year old is very envious and I will have to buy him one.

Eiseman's first thought had been to make a vaguely teddybearish Walter Burley Griffin soft toy (when she consulted me on this I'd suggested a companion Marion Mahony Griffin to go with it). But the centenary movers and shakers counselled against this. And so Canberra Bear it is, the 19th in a menagerie of special commemorative bears Eiseman has made.

Correction

Blush. In Monday's column I spelled the surname of legendary ACT policeman Bill Mackey as Mackie.

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/for-once-parliament-sounded-harmonious-20130319-2gdt3.html>