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PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET CENTRE
MELBOURNE - 18 FEBRUARY 1988

It is a very great honor to be here to open the new Australian Ballet Centre with my friend and colleague John Cain.

I was interested to note, when the invitation was extended to me to be here today, that a Gala Performance of "Sleeping Beauty" is to be staged later this evening.

It is of course a Ballet of great distinction, and I am looking forward to what will I am sure be a performance of excellence - the kind of excellence and strength and discipline that ballet audiences in Australia and around the world have come to expect of the Australian Ballet Company.

I wondered however whether there was any significance - perhaps any compliment to my Government - in the choice of a ballet called "Sleeping Beauty".

I mean no disrespect to Tchaikovsky, but I wondered whether his title "Sleeping Beauty" refers to the state of the Australian nation before it was awakened, in the years following the election of my Government, by our policies to revive the economy, and reinvigorate the social and cultural life of our nation - including through our support for the arts.

But I realised that this was not an occasion for partisan considerations.

I finally realised that "Sleeping Beauty" must refer to this part of Melbourne before it was revived and redeveloped into an arts precinct of a concentration and quality unrivalled in this country.

When we think back to the Yarra banks before the National Gallery moved here and before the Arts Centre was built, we realise that here was a site that indeed was a Sleeping Beauty.

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With the Victorian College of the Arts and the Performing Arts Museum and now the Australian Ballet Centre, that site has been converted into a brilliant Arts City of international stature.

This Centre will be the new home of the Australian Ballet Foundation and the Australian Ballet School, as well as providing office space for the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

The Commonwealth Government, through the Bicentennial Commemorative Program and through its annual subsidies to the Foundation and the School, is pleased to have played its part in funding and creating the new Centre.

I pay tribute to the Victorian Government and the Ballet Centre itself for their efforts in raising the funds to create the Centre.

I wish everyone involved in the Ballet Centre good luck in their new home - and that is a safe prediction because I know the Australian Ballet will consolidate and build on its already outstanding contribution to the cultural life of Australia and of the world.
