



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF AUSTRALIAN FILM, TELEVISION
AND RADIO SCHOOL
SYDNEY - 12 OCTOBER 1988**

I'm not the first to comment on the nexus that seems to exist between Australian films and Australian politics.

I don't want for example to refer tonight to anyone's Brilliant Career, or to the fact that our new Parliament House might seem to be a Palace of Dreams. I certainly don't want to make any comment about Cane Toads, or about Malcolm.

But an observation of relevance tonight is that while 1987 may well be remembered as the year of The Year My Voice Broke, 1988 will be recalled, at least so far as the Australian performing arts is concerned, as The Year the Records were broken.

Because there can never before have been such a big year for the completion of new, and enduring, arts institutions.

I can assure you the Government is a proud and active sponsor of this activity.

In February, I had the pleasure of opening the Australian Ballet Centre in Melbourne - and in April, it was the new headquarters in Kensington of NIDA, the National Institute of Dramatic Art.

May saw the announcement of the very significant package of assistance measures for the Australian film industry - measures which virtually saved the industry and which gave it a new surge of confidence for the future.

And tonight we are opening the tremendous new facilities of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, now surely one of the best equipped and most professional institutions of its kind in the world.

It is a pleasure to know so many figures from the School's formative days are here tonight to see this next stage in the School's development.

Jerzy Toeplitz, the School's first director, is a particularly welcome return visitor to Australia from Poland.

My colleague Barry Jones, who was the foundation chairman of the School, is also making a return appearance.

The saga of the Australian film industry is one of survival and success against all the obstacles facing national arts industries.

In the Depression Years of the 1930s, the once flourishing Australian feature film industry was virtually killed off in part because of foreign distribution monopolies and in part because of the introduction of the Talkies.

Talking films posed a great problem for Australian films: as in Canada, which also suffered, our local dialect was not easily understood in the major cinema markets. Worst of all, the action films in which we had specialised became anachronisms. Where our characters had leaped on their horses, fought bareknuckle or robbed banks without having to go too far into their motives, we were fine. Once we had to explain ourselves or to have a sustained dialogue, we seemed to be lost. It was many years before we made successful Talkies, other than Dad and Dave and the comedies of Mo and George Wallace.

The advent of television in the 1950s did little to help the production of Australian drama and documentary.

Indeed, in the late 60s, when the notion of a National Film and Television School was first conceived, local production was non-existent outside the work of the Crawfords in Melbourne and of course the ABC.

We had all become accustomed to hearing American or British accents delivering American or British scripts about American or British perceptions of life. Our thoughts, our own views, were more rarely voiced.

But the revival in the local production industry did come - and it coincided with the stirrings of a renewed sense of national pride in Australia and the beginning of the end of the aptly named 'cultural cringe'.

It's not too strong to speak of this process as a renaissance.

The subsequent success of Australian film and television productions has been greeted by the Australian public and by audiences world-wide.

Australian films, actors, writers, directors and producers have become household names at home and abroad. Even George Bush referred in his presidential debate with Michael Dukakis to Crocodile Dundee.

Australian TV programs and feature films dominate the local scene and are increasingly valuable and respected exports overseas - including to the nations that once dominated our screens.

Importantly, box office success has not been at the expense of the uniquely Australian character of our work. Acclaim for Australian productions at Festivals and by critics around the world proves we have not had to sell our soul.

In all of this, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School has made a great contribution.

Last year's top rating television show in the UK, "Fields of Fire", was directed and co-written by a graduate of this School, Rob Marchand, only one year after he graduated.

Another full-time graduate, Laurie McInnes, won the coveted Golden Palm Award for the Best Short Film at the Cannes International Film Festival.

In the previous year, another graduate, Jane Campion, won the same Award with her film "Peel".

It was the first time the Award had gone to film-makers from the same country in two consecutive years.

Today, the School's graduates work in every role from Director to Editor to Producer, in feature films, documentaries and television series, in Australia and overseas.

The School also continues to attract outstanding professionals from Australia and overseas, both as visitors and lecturers.

In short, no other Film and Broadcasting School has such an extensive and totally professional national training program covering all sectors of the industry; none can match your record of achievement; and now, with tonight's opening, none can equal your facilities.

This outstanding building sits on land generously leased by Macquarie University at a peppercorn fee.

Three film and television studios, radio studios, editing suites, and a screening theatre are all fully equipped to a professional level.

At \$26.5 million for construction and equipment, the School's first permanent facilities haven't come cheaply. But the Commonwealth has recognised that training in film, television and radio is essential if this industry is to continue to prosper.

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In the same vein, we provide assistance to NIDA, to the Australian Film Commission, to the Australian Children's Television Foundation and to the National Film and Sound Archive.

Appropriately, we have been assisted by private sponsors within the industry, through scholarships and sponsorships as well as through access to facilities for state-of-the-art training.

These new premises provide a magnificent resource for the industry, so it is important, and proper, that industry uses the facilities and makes a financial contribution to them.

The commitment shown by all its sponsors to this new building is a tribute to all the talent, the triumphs, and the traditions already established by the School itself.

It will be a source of inspiration for all students and teachers seeking new ways to assist their industry, and evolving new approaches and techniques in all aspects of their craft.

And it represents my Government's confidence in, and commitment to helping, Australian talent in this vital industry.
