

**PRIME MINISTER**FOR PRESS7 JUNE 1976OPENING OF GRANT STREET THEATRE, VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF ARTS

It gives me special pleasure to be able to perform this opening ceremony today. Twenty-three years ago, someone was asked their opinion of the opening of a similar venture - the Melbourne Theatre Company - and said "it won't last a week."

The prediction was used by Geoffrey Hutton as the title of his book on the Melbourne Theatre Company. The Melbourne Theatre Company is still alive and thriving. I can only hope that the same kind of testimonial will be written in a quarter of a century's time about this theatre when the author will be looking back on a long line of successful productions.

You at this college have good reason to be proud of the kind of theatre you are creating here. From all accounts, it is the logical offspring of its parent, the school of drama, which opened here last month, with an intake of thirty students, to do a three year course in the dramatic arts.

This drama theatre has been converted from the old police drill hall. I am sure that it has witnessed many rigorous police training programmes. It will now serve as a locale in which students will be turned in fully fledged members of a skilled and disciplined profession.

A moment ago, I referred to the Melbourne Theatre Company. At roughly the same time as John Sumner was busy establishing the Melbourne Theatre Company some 23 years ago, the Australian Government began providing financial assistance to the performing arts through the Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

Nineteen years later, with the reorganisation of the Australian Council for the Arts, the number of professional theatre companies had risen to 25. State regional and alternative theatres have grown in strength and number.

The theatre board of the Council required a budget of over \$3 million in 1973/74, and the following year this climbed to over \$5 million.

Another reason why I am pleased to be present today is to take the opportunity of reaffirming the Government's firm commitments to support and encourage the development of the arts throughout the Australian community.

Our provision of \$33.6 million to the arts (exclusive of the Australia Council's administrative costs) indicates this support. The present Government does not, however, see Government as the sole, or necessarily the main source of patronage for the arts. We believe a genuinely vigorous and stimulating artistic climate can emerge only when governments - both State and Commonwealth - individuals, private enterprise and corporations, are actively and cooperatively offering decentralised and diversified patronage.

A diversity and plurality of support can only strengthen the arts to the general common good. The fact that the finance for the School of Drama's 1976 operation was provided by the Victorian Government, by the generosity of several private bodies as well as a grant from the Australia Council, attests to the effectiveness of patronage supplied from several sources. This Government's general approach is to broaden support for the arts, to have more funds flowing from different sources.

We are not seeking to find substitutes for Government assistance, but to expand on that necessary base. In this connection, the Government is having examined the possibility of taxation concessions or other incentives for the arts, and ways and means of encouraging individuals and private enterprise and corporate patronage.

We have also taken a number of decisions relating to a more effective organisation of the Australia Council. The Council itself had recognised that there were administrative and financial inadequacies and had commissioned a separate enquiry into its operations by McKinsey and Company. The Administration Review Committee also noted a number of difficulties in the Council's operations.

The changes made are designed to correct identified problems and deficiencies: to make administrative and financial arrangements more efficient, to reduce administrative costs, so that more will be available for the arts, and to enter into new and improved arrangements which might lead to greater involvement of State and local governments and enterprises.

Changes are proposed to the structure, and size of the Council and boards and to the term of membership. These changes will increase effectiveness and reduce costs, but at the same time ensure continuity and diversity of advice. Two new positions will be created: deputy Chairman of the Council (part time); and general manager - will be the chief executive officer of the Council. This office will be a statutory one, and its occupant will be an ex-officio member of the Council.

The Australia Council's Film Radio and Television responsibilities will be transferred to the Australian Film Commission. The Film Radio and Television Board of the Australia Council will be abolished.

This last change had led some people to voice concern about the future of the Commonwealth assistance for experimental film and television. The fact is, as I have said, while the Board has been abolished, the responsibility will be continued by the Australian Film Commission. This is merely part of a general rationalisation and drawing together of like activities.

Assistance for experimental film and television will be assured by an appropriate amendment to the Australian Film Commission Act, and a specific allocation of funds will be included for the experimental film and television purpose in the Commission's votes.

To increase the involvement of State, Territory and local governments, and other appropriate regional organisations, the Council will consult with appropriate authorities to begin a programme of devolution of grant-giving activities.

Community arts activities and small grants to individuals or groups are areas where the programme of devolution might begin. The Government aims to widen involvement in the arts, and encourage more support from other areas.

In line with this object, the Council will be asked by the Government to seek to establish arrangements whereby: support for national organisations (e.g. the Arts Council of Australia, the Crafts Council of Australia) and performing arts companies in the States - would be on a matching basis with either the organisations or the States.

It is not our intention, however, that it should be an inflexible rule which might impede the development of any arts activities. The precise degree of matching arrangements will be a matter of determination by the Council.

You have created a live theatre which will be a logical extension of a vocational training school, as well as being, I am told, an excellent alternative venue for the venue for the Melbourne Theatre Company. The relationship with the Melbourne Theatre Company will undoubtedly be of great benefit in helping you find your feet.

The concept of vocational schools in all the various art forms, established within institutions such as Colleges of Advanced Education - as against purely academic study of the arts - is one with which my Government is in entire agreement. It must be a source of great satisfaction to this College to see the establishment of the School of Drama, and the opening of this new theatre.

Until now, no tertiary education for acting, directing or other professional careers in the theatre, has been available in Victoria.

It is to everyone's credit that the need was recognised for a tertiary school of drama to be located close to the performing arts complex of the Victorian Arts Centre, and that such provision was made in the original plans for the Victorian College of the Arts.

I am sure you are all very much aware of the distinguished history of the College - the arts school dates back to the period when Lola Montez was displaying her talents to the Victorian gold miners, and Nellie Stewart was making her debut in the Haymarket. Nellie must have been held in especial affection by the politicians of her day, for I believe she sang the memorial ode at the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament in 1901.

But apart from its links with past history, this college is also breaking new ground. It brings the education of the fine and performing arts in to one complex. They are usually separate appendages to various educational institutions.

As well, the college links the arts with the community. The calibre of its teachers is enhanced by the fact that each is a practising artist in his own right.

I am sure that theatre in Victoria is about to enter a new and distinguished era with the completion of the theatre complex at the Arts Centre in St. Kilda Road.

State and civic authorities will no doubt be as anxious as the Commonwealth Government to help ensure that the theatre here develops in a highly professional way, and remains truly representative of the best in Australian drama.

It is with great pleasure that I declare this theatre open.
