



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
STRICTLY BALLROOM PREMIERE RECEPTION, THE MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY, 19 AUGUST 1992**

E&OE PROOF COPY

Thank you very much, Ita (Buttrose), Annita and I are delighted to be here. We have seen the film, so the pleasure you had here tonight we had a little earlier about a week ago. And in fact my whole family saw the film and I must say they loved it, all of them.

There are a lot of people to be congratulated – the producers, the actors, the director, the choreographer. I think it is going to have a marvellous reception and Strictly Ballroom deserves it for the faith that everyone has had in it., right from its conception.

It's a light hearted film, but of course it springs from deep traditions of Australia which those who are old enough to remember would remember. And there's a few of us around here tonight.

It comes from that old music and dancing tradition of Sydney. And there was a namesake of mine called Jack Keating who used to run a ballroom studio in Newtown. Some of you here won't remember it. He was really an institution. And whenever you walked in there it was always the same sort of hall with the same sort of trusses across the ceiling, the same sort of posters on the wall, and the steps and the rest. And old Jack would sidle up to you to see what you were made of and you'd do a couple of things, and if you weren't any good he'd just dismiss you quietly, and if you showed any promise he'd follow you for five minutes and he would then turn one of his trusted former pupils onto you and they'd take you on to learn dances.

And I can see a lot of Jack Keating in Barry Fife. The only thing is when Jack was going he had receding hair, where Barry had a very bad rug on. And Bill reckons he's still got it on. I think the way I'm going, I'm going to need it. But the thing was, I think it came from that old tradition, and as a refuge myself from many a ballroom dancing show, the scrublands at Marrickville, or over at the Hurstville Civic Centre where a couple of thousand would line up every Saturday night with the girls on one side and the boys on the other, everyone cycling each other off, not knowing whether one would cross the

divide and actually ask the question, and often get a refusal. All of that was in the great tradition of ballroom dancing. And the great competitions that my own father and mother were ballroom dancers and competitors at these various things - the Trocadero, the one at the Sydney Showground that's the Horden Pavilion now, and at various other places where it was all done, the old Calais, and all the various spots around Sydney. And it came from that tradition.

And what I think is wonderful, that we had that supported by a family which has a great tradition in Australian entertainment and radio, the Albert family. But it also came from NIDA which was another payoff for that long term investment in the nation's cultural development. And I think the same can be said of the Sydney Dance Company, with that brilliant performance by Paul McCurio and Tara Morice, which of course has sprung again from the equally brilliant Graham Murphy and his Company. And other Australian cultural institutions like the Sydney Theatre Company, the Film Finance Corporation, who benefited again in the Budget last night ... well if you don't get a clap for \$60 million, you're never going to get one. The Australian Film Institute, the New South Wales Film and Television Office.

So there are many institutions involved in this. The real heart of Australia is involved here. And the concept is a peculiarly Australian thing, and it's great to revive that sort of thing in this year 1992, when not so long ago it was all the vogue. But as we all know, ballroom dancing has come back, I won't say it has come back into its own because I don't think it has, but it is coming back as a form of dance, and it's obviously attracting many people again.

It's a lovely film, a happy film, and a lovely ending, a nice happy ending. The nasty old bugger who was running the show ended up being sidelined, and Mum and Dad, Dad came good at the end, and Mum, you could have choked her couldn't you? But in the end he picked her up, she decided to be in it as well, which is a really quite a marvellous thing.

But it's a sweet, sweet show. It's also of course a charity event tonight. And I do need to say the AIDS Trust in Australia, M & A Film Corporation and Ronin Films, thank you for organising this event. Just as we congratulate those people who made the film, we also would like to give credit and thanks to those whose efforts helped so much to restrict the spread of AIDS in Australia. The Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, to whom the funds from this event will go, is one I want to pay tribute to.

I also mean those in the gay community where AIDS remains largely confined, who, in the midst of the tragedy, have worked hard to provide education and support, the Government has been in there helping them. I would like to pay tribute tonight to those people from the scientific and medical professions and other walks of life who have given so much time and skill to deal with the complex scientific, social and legal issues which the epidemic has raised.

I might also take the opportunity to thank those on both sides of politics who have set aside differences to deal constructively with the threat of AIDS.

We've done well in Australia, I think, to contain it and better in fact indeed than in most countries. I know that's very small comfort for those who have lost friends and relatives, and for those who are suffering from the disease. I doubt if there's anyone here whose lives have not in some way been affected by AIDS. Of course, with it the nation's life has also been affected. We've lost some of our best people.

And tonight I think is the best possible response— the celebration of an artistic triumph, as a way of helping the fight to deal with AIDS.

So this is quite an event. It's always an event in Australia to produce a feature film which has that peculiarly Australian quality to it, and at the same time is commercial and attractive and successful, and restoring, bringing out some of the old Australia while we're doing it, entertaining ourselves with the work of an enthusiastic cast, producers, director, and backers, and while we do, help in one of the worthier causes of the nation, fighting this terrible epidemic.

So congratulations to everyone involved. Thank you very much for having me along. Annita and I loved the film, so did our kids, and I hope it's a huge success for everybody involved.