

Embargoed Until 8:30 pm



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
LAUNCH OF ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR, MELBOURNE CONCERT HALL
18 NOVEMBER 1992

It's my great pleasure to be here tonight to enjoy this concert and, particularly, to take part in the launch of a new arrangement of the Australian National Anthem.

I understand this is a curtain raiser for Australian Music Day celebrations on 28 November, and that over 1,000 events promoting Australian music and artists have been arranged by Ausmusic for the month of November.

The adoption of *Advance Australia Fair* marked a change, not just in the song we sang, but in the way we thought about ourselves.

It has to be said that some people are more equipped for change than others.

It's unfortunate when sometimes those who lack the imagination for it hold the others back.

Too often in our history Australians have been held back - and the changes that have been made in the last decade are proof of that.

We have taken on more change in the last decade than perhaps we did in the previous forty.

We do things very differently.

We are more open to the world than we have ever been, more a part of it, more a player in its affairs.

We are much more a part of our region.

We are much more open and phobia-free.

But we are no less Australian for the change.

Notwithstanding the permanent barrage of American popular culture that we endure along with most other countries in the world, we have kept our best traditions.

In fact I think we have etched them deeper.

And we should continue to.

When the idea of a distinctively Australian National Anthem was raised in the seventies, the people who instinctively shy away from change, cried anarchy and treason, and sacrilege and blasphemy, and how dare you cause offence to our past and our cultural superiors.

But those who welcome change when change is due persisted, and in due course they won bipartisan support, and now - even if a lot of people still don't know the words - we stand for our own national anthem and we are moved by it.

The words go like this - I learnt them a long while ago

In a moment you will hear them recited much more tunefully.

Now it's true that some of the words are a bit old fashioned, and so are some of the sentiments.

They come from an age when Australians felt that the richness and immensity of the land, combined with their love of it, guaranteed them a golden future.

They are pre-industrial lyrics, and pre-multicultural. The second and fourth verses are so anglophile and Victorian they're almost pre-Australian.

But the words of most national anthems are old fashioned, the British and the French included.

Both of those prattle on about scheming enemies and hateful tyrants plotting the overthrow of virtue.

If nothing else *Advance Australia Fair* is more hopeful and less paranoid.

It is my duty tonight to thank all those people who have taken *Advance Australia Fair* into the realms of a more modern world, and into, perhaps, the grandeur a national anthem deserves.

In particular I want to congratulate Ausmusic and Lachlan Wilson.

I heard some of Lachlan's music at the recent laying of the wreath ceremony for Vietnam veterans, and I understand that that music was actually composed while he was on active service.

I also know that he is an old rock musician and that he was drawn to this project by a desire to make such an important expression of our national life more contemporary and more widely appreciated. And more easily played and sung.

I thank Lachlan for his stirring efforts, and also Ausmusic for its initiative and follow through - and among the latter I have to single out the irrepressible, inescapable and undeniable Executive Director, Pete Steedman.

It's a great thing to have the new arrangement - an even better one to have it published and recorded on CD and sent around our schools and other institutions, so that all Australians may come to know and take pride in the Australian National Anthem.

So on behalf of everyone here I thank them all.

As we go into the nineties and the next century we will need a bold and unmistakable identity.

We will do best if we have no doubt about who we are, and if we leave the world in no doubt.

A re-vitalised and popularised anthem will help.

There are a lot of Australians, I know, who retain some doubts about *Advance Australia Fair*.

I'm not one of those. It touches a patriotic chord in me, as I think it does in most Australians. It is unmistakably our anthem.

I share with many Australians a sentimental attachment to *Waltzing Matilda*.

But it is hard to sing solemnly about a jumbuk.

If *Advance Australia Fair* is our National Anthem, *Waltzing Matilda* is our national song - and I think we should make it clear that it is our national song.

There is nothing unusual in this. The United States has the *Star Spangled Banner* as its anthem, and *God Bless America* and *America the Beautiful* as its national songs.

God Save the Queen is the British anthem, but *Rule Britannia* and *Land of Hope and Glory*, among others, are equally well known and inspire no less popular sentiment.

So to those who say *Waltzing Matilda* is the definitive Australian song, I would say there is no reason why it shouldn't remain so.

And no reason why it should not sung and played more often on public occasions.

We can have both - the formal anthem, and the popular song.

And if those who have done such great works with the anthem feel there is something to be gained from doing much the same with *Waltzing Matilda*, I'm sure all Australians would be delighted if they took on the task.

Let me thank Ausmusic and Lachlan Wilson once again and all the performers - the Australian Girls Choir, the Melbourne Youth Music Council and the Percy Grainger Youth Orchestra.

We look forward to hearing the new improved *Advance Australia Fair*.

And we look forward to singing it.

Thank you.