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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
OPENING OF THE ABC SOUTHBANK CENTRE, MELBOURNE
5 NOVEMBER 1994**

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Thank you indeed Mark, Mrs Armstrong, David Hill, Haddon Storey and Mrs Storey, my ministerial colleague Michael Lee, Senator Alston, the City Commissioner, distinguished members of the ABC board, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here at this, the opening ceremony of the Southbank complex because for too many years the ABC has lived in rabbit warrens in Sydney and Melbourne – Melbourne the same as Sydney and I was delighted, in the years I was Treasurer, to try and assist the ABC into a major focus facility in Sydney and we have been able to do it as well here in Melbourne, and I congratulate the board and the Managing Director for seeing these great developments come about. It is, as the Chairman said, a delight that it is in Southbank, and Southbank is a delightful area. It is an area...Melbourne has always had the view...there has always been the view that Melbourne has had the lungs of the great parks around the city, and it has. But I think Southbank proves another point, and that is the breadth and the breathing has got to be in the built environment too, and we see it in the great cities of the world like Paris. and we have seen it in cities that have seen their best and may be coming again – cities like Berlin, where the built environment matters, and Southbank has shown this to Melbourne. And there is, I think, now somewhat of a celebration about it, and I was also pleased to be involved – if only in a small way –with a number of Premiers who have been developing this – John Cain and Joan Kirner – who is with us today – and now the current Government of Victoria.

This is a great development for Melbourne, and I felt the other night when the Festival was on – the opening of the Festival at the Canadian Opera, where I might say that the MSO sounded tremendous...strength was coming from them.

Afterwards we went down to the Riverside, and there was a real celebration there. And there was even a clap for the Melbourne Casino – they even got their hands together as the candles lit up, everybody put their hands together, so there was a great feeling of joy about the place. And why shouldn't there be?

The fact is, to have the ABC here – right in the centre of all this – is, as Mark said, we're going to see Southbank become the area – a focused area – for television production and multi-media as well. Indeed, a real milieu of arts and culture, and it's entirely significant that the ABC should be here as Australia's pre-eminent cultural organisation, because the ABC is undoubtedly and absolutely Australia's pre-eminent cultural organisation, an essential part of the cultural fabric of this country. There is a word that is being thrown around at the moment called convergence. You now, in this day and age of acronyms and words, every couple of years there is a new big one that floats around – the current new big one is convergence. It means many things, but I think in this context it means the convergence of what the ABC has to offer, and what Melbourne has to offer. Because I think there is a real convergence here, and we saw it the Festival which was directed very competently by Leo Schofield in the last few weeks – we saw it in that flood of energy, and we have seen it over the years with the fact that Melbourne is a great city – a city of ideas, of art of music, of football, of sport – and the convergence of these two gives us a chance...if Creative Nation means anything, we'll certainly see a lot of creativity here at Southbank with the ABC.

In the Creative Nation statement I had the pleasure of launching just a few weeks ago, it was my very great pleasure to see and to announce that the Commonwealth would establish a national music academy here in Melbourne, that Melbourne would be the home of the \$60 million television production fund, and also the home of the Australian Cultural Foundation and six multi-media centres. And I am hoping that, along with all things else which Melbourne has in terms of art and cultural sophistication, that these things will add new dimensions to Melbourne, and see it emerge as – in South-East Asia – as one of the places where art and culture – and particularly Australian culture – can emerge. There is a great chance for Australia in the information technology, and in art and culture, because we have always had – whether it be in literature or in music or in film and television and last night we were celebrating our film awards – the capacity to really add something to the technological availability of educational and entertainment materials. Entertainment has been an industry which has largely been locked up with the United States – I think we now have the chance to challenge that, and we can challenge it in the market to which we are closest and which shares the same time zone as us. And that must give us enormous opportunities to be up there, because many other cultures...the information technology culture has, and it will not be exclusively an English-speaking culture, but there is a very large component from the English-speaking countries there. And I think there is a real cultural impediment – certainly at this point of its

development – of some countries which have mastered very great technological advances, such as Japan, running into something of an impediment in dealing with information technology. But there is no such impediment on Australia.

So that's why I think it is important to get our culture and our technology together, and I suppose as Mark and David said earlier, eloquently, this building is going to be a mix of the two – fifty studios, eight of them entirely digitalised – being the home of all this creative capacity. It's the very essence – if we have to find it in a building – of what this jump into multi-media means, here at Southbank. But I think this capacity to project ourselves into this world is very great indeed, but that's why I say "you can't do this unless you're confident about yourself". You can't be out there as some sort of derivative culture saying "oh, is there a place in here for us?". You have got to go out there and bang the doors in, and you can only ever do that when you are entirely confident about where you are and what you have become. And that is why I have always thought the republic means so much to us – not simply so much for the constitutional change, but for the sense that it brings. You can't go around the world saying "here we are, here's our culture, here's what we can add, but by the way, we're borrowing the monarch of another country while we're at it." Now, we all know that act is over, it's just a matter of when it runs out. And I always say to my Tory friends, "come on board, better late than never – there's always a place for you".

Anyway, what we are talking about is energy – it's the energy of the city, of Melbourne here, it's the energy of the ABC, it's the energy of the creative people. If multi-media, the transmission of our values, the transmission of our thought, of our culture is about anything, it is about energy. And we are seeing a real stir in the energy of this country – someone has put a big acupuncture needle into Melbourne and Sydney, and in Perth and Adelaide, and the energy is well and truly flowing. And so what we have to do then is sort of direct it around the world so we can enjoy it and so can others. The ABC, of course, has been a bearer of culture and tradition for this country for as long as any of us can remember, and not just that, a trailblazer – it's not just the bearer, it's also a trailblazer. And its charter has been to focus on Australian culture, and I think this charter is going to be more important as the years go on – as we see homogenised entertainment around the world, as Hollywood tries to extend its hegemony over the world information highway. As we start to see the capacity for major broadcasting companies to actually have that sort of impact, standing by one's culture is going to be, and promoting one's culture and developing one's culture – is going to be exceptionally important to this country. Not just for what we can do abroad, but most particularly, what we do at home. So the charter values of the ABC – its charter role in news, current affairs, sport, drama, ideas, information – all the things it does, and does well, we will need it to do even more of as the, if you like, the international assault comes, and come it will with

pay television, and with satellites and with the computer linkages through the information highway.

So let's think that in developing this building at Southbank, we are getting ready. We are getting ready to be able to project our culture and to develop it in the context of this great international change which is with us. The ABC, of course, has responded to this challenge not just now, but has in these years and in a number of ways – with Australian Television International as a case in point, which is an entirely valuable projection of our values and our culture. And I am often told, when I go to Indonesia for instance, that the Indonesian cabinet – many members of it – watch ATVI news of an evening, and if you are really lucky, if you get the time right, you can even watch Question Time – it comes through, and then you appreciate that part of the Standing Orders which takes the interjections out and all the rest. But it's there. And that healthy, robust celebration of our democracy we have on our news services and in our Parliament, is out there and the values are being transmitted. And I think that's a tremendous thing.

And the same with pay television – the Government, with the Board and the Managing Director, have seen a role for the ABC in pay television. It's going to be tricky getting it right, as it is for anybody in this business. Whether it's going to be satellite delivered or terrestrially delivered, the fact is the Government believes that the ABC – if we're going to have pay television transmission into homes then the ABC should be there. It will be up to the ABC as to who it packages its product with, how it does it and where it gets the value. But the fact is it has got two channels there, and of course, in the end as many channels as it likes as the fibre-optic cable is rolled out, and as much as it can sell in programs and packages. But it should be there, and it can be there, and I think it is important that it is there.

We have also seen remarkable changes with radio. I think it has been a great job done with radio across the continent – great variety, great quality. In the last year we have seen five major international awards to ABC radio, fifteen major Australian awards and in the last five years, we have seen an increase in the audience reached from 25% to 40% of the population. That is a tremendous change – that is a revolution in communications really for a medium which has been around a very long time. And all of the networks lead in Australian content. Of course with that, Radio Australia is now, still at this point, broadcasting to about 50 million listeners, and JJJ – that ground-breaking network for young Australians – is now being extended to rural Australia. So there has been a tremendous change in radio, and we all appreciate the quality of ABC radio because I think almost one-third to half the country listen to it every week. So this is another thing.

But the ABC has its history also in what it does in drama and in music, and let me say a couple of things about the orchestras, given that we have made them the subject of some discussion in the Cultural Statement, and the MSO is with us today. I have always doubted whether Australia could actually – with 18 million people – build an orchestra of the standard of the Berlin Philharmonic or the Vienna or others, but it has always been my great ambition that we could. And given the fact that because the ABC started the city orchestras as radio orchestras, we have over a period of time, been able to give our cities very high standard orchestras, and that has been a great thing for Australia. We are a tremendously urbanised country, with two very large concentrations in Sydney and Melbourne, and the SSO and the MSO have sought to service those communities with their orchestras. So the Government has had two approaches to this: one, that we try and establish a national music school that can actually feed an orchestra by the people who operate and teach in it, and by its product, and maybe build one organically – continue to build an orchestra organically – or another approach, which is essentially to try and encourage the individual development of an orchestra by getting the cheque book out and trying to develop it and to buy in the skills we need to make it into that international standard. We have chosen that route for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and that option is available for the MSO. My advice to the MSO is to say to Aunty "thank you Aunty, we love you, but we are leaving you – but please leave us room to come home occasionally". But that is a matter for you, and you can make your mind up about that.

One of the things we are seeing from this....I'm delighted that the ABC has said that the MSO will be its flagship orchestra – that has already encouraged the Victorian Government to donate \$600,000 a year towards it, to expand its string section and make it stronger. Well today, I would like to top that up to \$1 million so at least the orchestra can expand its string section, and we can see what the ABC is prepared to do with it. I will be very interested to see, we have always had some competition between the SSO and the MSO, and what a good thing competition always is, and we are going to see more of it, and the nation will be the winners from that and not just here, but abroad as well, so good luck to you.

Could I just say a couple of things about the Managing Director, because he has been in the news these days? I say this David, after 8 1/2 years you have got the right to leave anywhere. When I walked into my Chairman after 8 1/2 years as Treasurer and told him I was leaving, he wasn't particularly pleased, but I still left. Admittedly I came back a bit later to do something else. An old friend of mine, Jack Lang – I'm always getting Jack Lang quoted back to me by my opponents – said to me "The only reason they will ever take you Paul" he said, "is if they really want you". Well, you can make those sort of comebacks in public life – I'm not sure if you can leave as Managing Director of the ABC and then make a comeback – probably that is a bit of a tall order. But, 8 1/2 years is a very long time, and for an institution...and David has certainly knocked a lot of

the rough edges off the ABC, and all the developments I have spoken of – this building, the building in Sydney, and they are not just buildings – they are actually the bringing together of hubs of creativity – the shift into Asia, the growth in radio, the changes in the management of the ABC – are very great changes indeed, and they should be logged in the national consciousness as we see the ABC move through these various eras of change, at the pace of change today with multi-media coming the way it is, with pay television coming the way it is, getting ready for that, and working it out – and let me tell you this, nobody quite knows where all these technologies are going, and trying to keep a foot on all of them is one of the things which the ABC has done under David's leadership, and I think this is something well done on its behalf. I did see today across the headlines in The Australian: "Hill forced out says Downer". Now I thought he was referring to Robert Hill. Now I know it is a teensy-weensy bit horrid of me to say that, but the fact is moderates – I don't know what price they have on the scalp of moderates in the Liberal Party, but it is very high. At any rate, it wasn't...it turned out you had to read down the story to see he was talking about you David, and that's is why I thought I would say that whenever you go – and I think you have said you were going in June – after 8 1/2 years, it is one hell of an innings, and good on you.

So perhaps let me conclude where I began and say it is more than a pleasure to be here. To see these complexes put together, and to know it is such a tremendously strong underpinning of the ABC, and to know what the ABC has meant to Australia down throughout the decades, and to know now as we see the threat of homogenisation heading towards us, just how centrally important this unique cultural institution is. To be here, at Southbank, in this year, when these changes are right upon us, there's a sense of poignancy about it which I think we all feel and understand. Annita and I are delighted to be here today, and it is with very great pleasure indeed that I declare the Southbank Complex open. Thank you.

ends.