



**PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
INTERVIEW WITH PETER ROSS, ABC TV 'REVIEW', 6 NOVEMBER 1994**

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PR: Thank you very much, Prime Minister for being with me, giving your time.

PM: Good, Peter.

PR: When you consider 'Creative Nation', the cultural statement measured against Mabo it seems almost as big. It is as though they are the two big political initiatives in the last, say, six months. I wonder why it was so important for you and your Government?

PM: I think the arts define any nation and this is most particularly true of Australia at this time and, I think, to put what the Chinese call 'chee' - the life force, the spirit - into the country, I think, Mabo was one of those issues. People now feel good about Mabo, they think that something wrong has been righted or put right. In respect of the arts, the arts pick up these edicurrents in our national life and it actually pushes them along as well. So, I see all these things as a flux, but it seemed to me that the arts, we needed to put some air, some breath into the structure which has got a bit monolithic and open it up a bit and give it the capacity to push itself along. Whether it be in the performing arts or in some of the newer areas such as extending arts into the electronic realm.

PR: You gave the impression of being particularly comfortable when delivering that speech. I guesit it is fairly close to you isn't it?

PM: I was involved with this right the way through, but I have had a lot of good helpers, of course, starting with Michael Lee, but our personal staffs made very large commitments here and the end result is, I think, a good one.

- PR: I suppose you are often confronted by the sheer fact of the privilege that comes with office where you can initiate things and see them come to pass. That must be very rewarding for someone who has an aesthetic for example?
- PM: It is, but you have got to be around a while to be able to do it. I mean, we have been in office now since 1983 and for my part I have been Prime Minister for nearly three years, I mean, it is not something ... everything fits into its time. One needs to be around to be able to (a) know what should be done and then be able to do it, but in the right part of the cycle, in sync, in if you like, political, economic and social sync.
- PR: So, how do you judge that?
- PM: This is all part of the Minister or the politicians craft - getting those things right. But, you can and, of course, the thing about power, the thing to do is use it, but use it wisely. Power is about drawing down influences and power other people have to a common good. Now, a lot of that went on in the statement, but in doing it there has been, really, a couple of years of thought in that. These issues and ideas have been brewing in the minds of some us now for a couple of years and in some respects longer. But, the fact that you are going to make a statement makes you concentrate on them, bring them up, refine them and finally get them into a package.
- PR: It has never been a cause of concern to you that a government should or should not support the arts. It has always been clear in your mind that the arts need support and the government is there to do it.
- PM: I think the nation needs the arts and given that we don't have a great history of private philanthropy in Australia there is probably a greater role for government than might otherwise be the case in other societies. At any rate that which we have spent, I think, has always been spent wisely and well and indeed with say this funding of the Australia Council, part of that funding is actually to get more private sponsorship. I mean, part of what we are doing here is actually bringing a bit more private sponsorship in. So, as we roll on it won't be just the government funding these major organisations or artists, but other people as well. But, your point is correct. I have always seen the government having a role in the arts and rejoicing in the arts. I think it is important for the government to say to the community that the arts are fundamentally, intransigently important, that they do pick up the drum beat of Australia, they do reflect what we are and what we have become and then most important now, especially important now, as our identity is becoming much more clearly set in the public mind.

PR: I have friends in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, they had a big party on the night of the Cultural Statement. I wonder whether Melbourne was quite so ebullient?

PM: Well, I don't know, but I mean the thing about the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is Sydney is the site of the Olympics in the Year 2000, it will certainly be part of the centennial celebrations of federation, we have got all this coming along internationally, probably because of the Opera House and the Opera House being associated obviously with music and opera. In a sense Sydney marks itself out as a place internationally in Australia. Therefore, I think, we ought to be giving the Sydney Symphony Orchestra every opportunity to live up to its accommodation.

PR: That's one way of putting it.

PM: And, it is a very good Orchestra already.

PR: Sure.

PM: But, it can be better. So, what we did was add money to expand it, to bring it to super Orchestra size and given that this kind of change will allow a change to the remuneration arrangements and selection arrangements bring the Orchestra's quality up. A couple of years ago the USSR's State Symphony Orchestra came to Sydney and it played amongst other things Tchaikovsky Manfred Symphony, but it had a sound about it. This is one of the things that has happened around the world. There has been the homogenisation of orchestras. One time orchestras had an idiosyncratic sound, one could tell the Chicago from the Vienna and the Vienna from the Berlin, now there is a somewhat homogeneity about them which I think is a pity. So, I am hoping that Ado Devart? can actually put a stamp on this orchestra and bring it up and that the players themselves will commit themselves given the opportunity that the government is now funding them, adding to it, giving them a real terms guarantee and really saying you are on your own, but you are not on your own.

PR: Yes, I understand.

PM: You are free to do your best, but you are going to get a lot of help.

PR: He was very insistent on more string?? ...

PM: Yes, that's what we funded in the Cultural statement. We are providing them with (inaudible) to bring it to the super size, to get the large sound, but as well as that maintaining that vote in real terms over the next five years.

PR: I won't canvass the rock and roll days of Paul Keating, but somewhere along the road to Damascus, something happened to you didn't it, something twigged and you decided that you loved and had a passion for the classics?

PM: These things are not easy to discern back in your life, but for me it is quite easy this. I was at a friend of mine's place, we arrived at his place on bicycles and he said come inside. I met his parents and his father had a classical record on and it was the Warsaw Concerto which is actually ...

PR: It is actually ...

PM: Yes, and it is not really a classic piece. It was a mini concerto written for a movie played by Lenard Peniro.

PR: This is going back a bit.

PM: Yes, this is back a bit and the other thing on the disc was Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, also played by him. So I couldn't keep my ears away from the thing. So I bought the disc - the vinyl - myself a week or two later. I think it was a world record club...

PR: You're right.

PM: ...and that's where I started. And then I started on other, I bought other things and, as you do, you then start to get your ear in. And of course, in my happy days with EMI in the sixties, I used to rat the library.

PR: I get the set-up..

PM: Well they used to say to me - I had a very nice fellow who was the Chief Executive Officer of Management, Kevin Ritchie - who used to invite me to go through and sort of basically take what I like. Those were the great days of Walter Legge, who was the producer of probably the best titles of EMI library. His wife was Elizabeth Schwarzkopf - he had Callas, he had Otto Klemperer and the London Philharmonia which was then just about the best recording orchestra. And so I had stacks of that product - nearly all of my vinyl library has *factory sample - not for sale* stamped across it.

PR: It's a great archive.

PM: So that's how I got into it.

PR: I see.

PM: I got into it in the salad days of the sixties when Legge was triumphant. I mean he was a tyrant, but the quality of the sound was fantastic.

- PR: Mrs Legge could sing as well, beautifully.
- PM: Beautifully. She was terrific.
- PR: In terms of popular culture, do you have time to watch TV?
- PM: A little bit. But I mostly watch current affairs, or I'll get into some other program which is...
- PR: Like "The Liberals"?
- PM: No. I didn't see it. I mean, I will probably see bits of it. No, they're not really my interests. I go for things which are....I like nature programs - "The World We Live In" and this sort of...all these sort of programs. I can't remember the titles - "Nature's World" and all that sort of stuff. They're the things I like most. I also like...if I watch films I like happy ones. I don't like the very heavy sad ones - when you finish you're a bag of nerves and you don't know whether you feel good about it or not.
- PR: It's not good for you?
- PM: I like it nice and happy.
- PR: OK. I'll just finish on a couple of questions about architecture and design..(inaudible). What are the forces that are still there that prevent good buildings going up and good designs happening?
- PM: Oh, I think the fact that there is no notion of precinct development. It's all single block development, so of course the worst example is the worst of suburbia where the quarter-acre block dominates and everyone builds their project house to suit themselves. If you look at the great blocks of Australia where you have got some uniformity of housing styles but some variations - like Paddington in Sydney and parts of Melbourne - they have invariably been precinct developments. One developer has developed a precinct. But we have now got architects who want their monuments, so they don't care often about the - particularly in the CBD - they don't care about the precinct, they just want the tower or their stand-alone thing. They don't care about it's relativity to the streetscape.
- PR: I think I know who you're talking about - without mentioning names.
- PM: Certainly not litigious names.
- PR: No.

- PM: And the other thing is, I think there is no - unlike European cities - we don't have aesthetic directors like most of the European cities - certainly in the 19th Century and part of the 20th Century have had. It's inconceivable today that planning authorities would say, "look, we just don't like the look of the building - we're not having it. You have to do this or that with it, or we won't take it". This would bring a great cry...
- PR: (inaudible)
- PM: The other thing is I think grandeur comes from uniformity. If you look at a mountain chain, it's grand because it's got massing and uniformity.
- PR: True.
- PM: Or a beach view - same. Or a Paris Boulevard - same. Six stories and not every building the same, but it's got the massing, and therefore the grandeur. Variety is, I think, the antithesis of grandeur. Tall buildings, short ones, different set-backs, different styles is the antithesis of grandeur. And I think we look for the grand, but we're not getting it. I think the..
- PR: So how can we...(inaudible)?
- PM: Only by centralisation - I don't believe there is a place for "the market" in town-state development. I don't. I think developers should only have the right the community confers on it. No other rights. Whereas in the broad economy I think the market and market-forces matter a great deal, but developers dragging clock ratios out of little sites that they happen to get on with the City Engineer Planning Department...
- PR: At that particular time.
- PM: At that particular time, or they happen to get on with the City Development Committee and what have you - all of that sort of thing is the reason why we have got, basically, why we are getting cities which are less human scale, more impersonal and even uglier.
- PR: There is nought we can do about it?
- PM: Well, what you can do about it is you can...
- PR: Maintain the rage?
- PM: It's a bit like Peter Finch in that movie "Lifting Up The Windows" saying "We have had enough and we're not taking any more".
- PR: That's right.

PM: That's the thing for people to do - to say we have had enough. And this is why I speak about. I think the word "beauty", or the notion of "beauty", has gone out of life. People now think beauty is confined to whatever thing they can see within their own house or within a studio, or within a conservatory of some kind. A picture maybe...

PR: But no expectations of seeing it publicly?

PM: No. Not publicly. And while ever we have got State Governments dishing us up mush - which is basically what they do - and Local Government Administrations where you have got the separations between health, building and surveying, but no overall responsibility for the final product and what it looks like - while ever we have that dichotomy of power in local Government, I don't think we will see it. So, you have the City - unless you have a consolidated City Government with very clear notions and people with some ideas..

PR: Yes, sure.

PM: ...about consolidation and beauty - I don't think we will see it. But we should keep talking about it.

PR: Last question then. What big project - what grand project - would you like to see happen in this country, in one of our cities?

PM: Well the one I have been concentrating on is getting the Cahill Expressway down in Sydney. Circular Quay is the founding site of the nation, and it seems to me that the founding site of a nation - particularly with the Olympics coming up - needs special attention. And particularly where it's contiguous to the Opera House. So that's something I think...

PR: There is a compromise going on at the moment?

PM: No. What's going on at the moment is a hotch-potch - that's what is going on at the moment. But I think consolidating for this international occasion is a good thing to be doing - that's not to say from my point of view. We might do that under that Better Cities Program - we're doing it in Perth, we're doing it in Brisbane, we're doing it in Adelaide, we're doing it in Melbourne etc. You have got major projects there, and I'm speaking to State Governments perpetually about those.

PR: We should finish on a high note, but I'm not quite sure how. Suggest an idea, Prime Minister?

PM: Well, the high note is I think that this period you and I have been speaking about a bit - this is towards the end of this decade and the end of the century - I am sure we will be a republic. I think the person to open the Olympic Games should be an Australia person. And in the

Cultural Policy the other day, we made \$100,000 available for the writing of a national symphony for the occasion of the centenary. So, what I like to think is if you and I get the chance then to be involved, we would hear that symphony played in an Australian republic.

PR: I look forward to it. Many thanks indeed, and good luck.

PM: Thank you. Anyway amongst other things, let me congratulate you on eight years of bringing arts and culture to Australians, because maybe, your program has been the first CD-ROM of it's kind, on-line service, because you do think that just from my own viewing experience over the time, watching the variety and the diversity of the subjects you have covered - in music, in decorative arts, in culture generally - have been, I think, a real eye opener to Australians and making the arts much more accessible than perhaps they would have been.

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