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## PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
SPEECH AT THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY FUNDRAISER, SYDNEY  
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### **E&OE PROOF COPY**

Thank you very much indeed. What you can do with a tram shed. It just shows you what a little imagination and flair can do, and to Rachel [Ward] and Anne [Schofield], and all the people in the arts and costume and the decorative departments of the company, and all those other people who put their backs into this - it's got a wonderful ambience, and a wonderful feel. And if the Foundation goes anything like as well as this night has gone, it's going to be a great success.

A few electric candelabra, a bit of smoke, an elephant, Andrew Denton, and there you are - one explosive mixture. It's very nice to be associated with the Sydney Theatre Company, and to be asked to speak at this - the launch of the Foundation. Because it is not an old Company - 18 years is not so old, but it's had such an impact upon the life of this country, and theatre, and I think that we should count our blessings that we have developed a Company such as this, and needs things to support it. Now, there is a rumour going around at the moment that it's pretty scratchy, the arts at the moment - pretty scratchy. And there's a bit of a debate going around that there's too much public money in it. But, there should be State sponsorship of the arts, and I'm determined for one to maintain it. It takes a long time to develop an artistic inheritance - it takes a long time to develop an arts culture. But, we all know - all of us in this room - that the arts define any nation, and the arts more than anything else have defined Australia. All the politicians think they defined Australia, but I think most of them defined it after the artists defined it first. And that's why our playwrights, and the ones that have been associated with this Company, like David Williamson, and Louis Nowra and Nick Enright, and Karen Mainwaring - people such as that, are the people who chronicle the life of this country - put it down in the most interesting ways, tell it to us and show it to us in a way we might not otherwise understand, and burn it into our consciousness. These are the things that theatre can do.

And we need to continue what has happened, and what has occurred to us at this time, and this is the point of the Foundation - to try and bring some private money to the arts. Other than that, it comes from the Government. This year, I think the Commonwealth provided about \$1 million to the Company, and I think the State of NSW about the same, and the rest of it comes, of course, commercially. But, this is about opening up the pockets of those that have got more than they need, and who can drop and sprinkle some of their funds and money around in the places where it will do a lot of good. And if a show like this doesn't get some money out of them, well nothing else will.

Of course, the people who have most of the money never come to things like this. You know, if we could get Kerry or Rupert here, and spend a bit of money on the theatre instead of just the football - we got those heart-starters out of Kerry of course, when he took a bit of a jolt years ago. And he's a kinder fella than that - he's done a lot of other things the rest of us don't know about, but there's more he could do, and the same goes for Rupert. Now, the thing about the big-hitters is that they are always giving money to charities - and you say to them what charities? "Well, you know, charities" [they reply]. Which charities? "Charities". It's always done with such feeling - such commitment. But if they just decided what they could do by taking an interest in organisations, like some of you are taking in this Company - a personal interest in the way it runs, who manages it, its commerciality, its problems, its artistic development - all of the things that we know make a business like this work - a Company like this work, then they could be so powerful. Now, maybe there's a cheque in the mail - I don't know. But, most of them have still got their play lunch money - most of them, not all of them, but most of them. But, there's a lot of money around these days - I mean, Labor Governments are good for employment, they're good for battlers, but they are also good for the wealthy. When I became Treasurer all of those years ago, the All Ordinaries Index was 453, and today it is 2150 - there's a lot of money in between, and we only want a little bit of it here - just a little bit, just a trickle.

But I don't know why it is that we have so many scrooges in Australia, and we can never get any philanthropic interest from them in supporting the arts. Now, it's always left to Governments, and Governments do their best, and we have bodies that help us - we have now got a thing called a Major Organisations Board, and I know you are pleased that the Sydney Theatre Company is one of the star turns with the Major Organisations Board. And, we have got the Australia Council, and Michael Lynch is here tonight because he has had great association with this company, and Hillary McPhee battling away to get the right money in the right places for the arts. And it's hard going. But this is where the bulk of it comes from - we still need that State sponsorship of the arts, but we need not just the money privately, but the interest that comes with it, and getting people interested. I always think that once you have had an emotional connection with the arts, you can never leave it off, because it makes very clear what your future with it will be. A lot of people have never had an emotional connection with the arts, they have never had the thump to the chest, and they think it is something just up in the

ether. They don't realise that it is something that actually feeds the soul, lifts your consciousness, defines the country and does all those things - they think it is something, some superficial thing.

At any rate, this is a valiant attempt to get a private Foundation together, to put money back into development of young people, artists, actors, people who design the sets - all of the things that a company like this needs to bring young people along, and to encourage them, and to see the Company grow with even stronger roots and foundations than it has today. That's the point of the Foundation - to try and get that sort of commitment from private sponsorship. Now, the Americans have done it so well for so long, and I don't quite know why it works in America but not here - maybe simply because there is more money around. But there's a lot of money around here now, and what we have got to do is get people to make the commitment. At any rate, I would like to congratulate Rachel [Ward] and Anne [Schofield] for obviously the huge effort that has gone into this to make a statement. To make a statement about the arts, and to make the effort to make it count.

Can I say for the Government's part, we have tried to keep that strong sponsorship of the arts - in Creative Nation we have now got nearly \$100 million of those funds expended this year, we have developed this multi-media corporation, because we think multi-media will be a strong outlet for the arts, just as film was all those years ago. And, of course, we are still supporting through the Major Organisations Board, the major Companies, and of course the film industry. Now, there has been some controversy about Rupert and the Showground, but we have only ever had one film that's made the big box-office earnings, and that is *Crocodile Dundee*, although, of course, we have had many great films produced in this country. And I think it is a good thing that we can get Fox, and get that belief internationally in Australian films, films made here, and Bob Carr and I have committed ourselves to getting that business up and running, and I don't think we will have any problems, either, with Rupert Murdoch - I think he is very committed to it. He sees a good thing to be done here, and I hope you feel that too. Because when we develop the film industry further, we are developing the whole profession further because so many people move between the stage and film.

So, could I conclude my remarks again by thanking you very much for the invitation - you have done me proud in asking me. It's a great...the ambience tonight was fantastic - when I walked in, there was a lot of smoke and dust about, and it had all of the feel of a medieval place - I thought I could have brought John Howard along and he would have got a few progressive ideas. I think he's just moving out of the 14th Century into the 15th now. But, I think he's not quite on this wavelength. Anyway, it's been a lovely night and a great show - I loved the Celtic dancers: a bit like the Tap Dogs. The last show I saw at the Sydney Theatre Company was the Tap Dogs, and they have done so well internationally, too - so there you are, they started here. All the way from Newcastle to Sydney, and after Sydney, the world. So, thanks very much for having me along - I wish the Foundation well, I will do what I can to support it, Burrows and Ted will keep me up to the mark if we

slip back. But it is about private sponsorship, and I think it is a chance to lift that awareness of people - the consciousness of people - that more can be done for the arts, and if they have got some loose change to play with, they could put it into something good - because as we all know, giving money away is a lot harder than making it. It takes a bit of style to give money away, and what we will do tonight is try and develop a bit of style for those people who haven't had - to this point - a lot of it. Thank you.

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