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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

Keynote address APRA/AMCOS Song Summit

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[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

“The Politics of Art”

Thank you to APRA/AMCOS for the invitation to give the keynote speech at the inaugural Song Summit Sydney, and I want to recognise the support of the NSW Government for this event, an event which I note is entirely carbon neutral – well done.

Is there a more appropriate location than the legendary Hordern Pavilion to hold a gathering like this one? Is there a more iconic Sydney location to talk and think and act to make music matter? I doubt it.

I want to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land past and present the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the land on which we stand.

Now that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has apologised to Australia’s Indigenous peoples by saying ‘sorry’ we come to this place, confident relations between Indigenous Australians and ourselves are on a surer footing, although there is much still to do.

I also want to commend APRA for taking the initiative to hold a summit of this scope. As well as giving people the opportunity to develop the suite of skills needed to make a go of it in the music industry, this summit is part of a great re-energising movement for increasing local music and local content I see across the country.

So I want to welcome APRA's involvement in the efforts to bring live music back onto the streets, in encouraging and skilling a new generation energetically engaging with new technologies, and of course in the organisation's strong representation for the rights of songwriters and composers-rights articulated in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he (sic) is the author."

I stand in front of you as a peer, and acknowledge the many friends and colleagues I'm privileged to have in the music industry, a number of whom are in this room.

I stand in front of you as someone who loves to perform, to write and to sing, and who loves his country, and chose to sing about it, proudly, in an Australian accent, who has travelled that long and bumpy road, from countless Australian beer barns, and quixotic clubs in diverse cities across America and Europe and eventually ending up in major arenas and concert halls around the world.

And finally I stand in front of you as your representative in the national government, as a Cabinet Minister responsible for arts and culture in this country- a tremendous opportunity which I take very seriously.

I'm still pinching myself as I'm sure a few of the rough heads I've encountered over the years are pinching themselves too. But the fact is my public life has been, and still is, immersed in the politics of art, which in my case has been music.

So it's only natural that I think songs matter, that music matters, indeed I know it does. Music is a major cultural reference point for people of all ages. Songs are often the poetry of the moment, and can reflect the politics of the moment too. And songs and compositions are the bread and butter of music, especially popular music, in a sector worth approximately \$7 billion and rising.

In other words songs fuel the economy as much as they feed the soul; and now and in the future music, particularly new music, will make up and drive content on new technological platforms. These new distribution models including online, mobile, user-generated and self-distribution are challenging traditional business models and creating new opportunities for music-makers.

So when the 'tele' is switched on each Sunday morning for a dose of *Video Hits*, mums and dads might only see music for a generation – big hair, leather pants and piercings. I see a generation of entrepreneurs, marketers and creators of Australian culture driving an industry that helps define who we are and where we're going.

When discussing the politics of art in the music industry the question is often asked about whether or not a song has the power to change the world, and the role of the artist as a political actor.

I noticed that 'Keef' Richards, still standing after all these years, observed recently that songs can change the world "but you'll never know which one" - thanks Keith.

On these questions I've always had the same view.

Music doesn't change the world, people do. Yes, music often is a partner in that change, a soundtrack for the times. But when all is said and done, it is the continual striving, back-bending, and often heartbreaking effort of people involved in the resolution of intense political struggle, in campaigns to redress a wrong, who ultimately change the world.

How else to describe one of the best known modern tales of bringing on political change, namely the journey into democracy of the people of South Africa, led by Nelson Mandela.

It is worth spending a moment focusing on this great historical moment, with a thumb nail sketch to illustrate.

To begin with the people of South Africa were faced with the conundrum of how to change a system, which was unjust and immoral by any standards.

Growing up under the policy of apartheid, where black and white were considered separate despite sharing the same country, black with greater population but far fewer rights and enjoying less opportunities, South Africans embarked on a tumultuous struggle.

Introduced in 1948, the ensuing decades under apartheid included civil disobedience, armed resistance, a massive international campaign, and eventually culminated in a political solution, arrived at by the major players of the time (and involving, as politics often does, compromises by each side) of which the most visible act was the release of Mandela from jail, after 27 years of incarceration and his ultimate election as President of South Africa in 1994.

As the worldwide campaign for Mandela's release picked up momentum, musicians and the music industry got involved, and it's a relationship that has continued with him to this day. Songs, amongst them 'Free Nelson Mandela', demanding his release were recorded, concerts were held to raise awareness and funds for the campaign, including the famous Wembley Stadium concert in 1988 - music and politics merged, and the rest as they say is history.

Now it wasn't the songs that got Mandela out of jail. Indeed that final event was a consequence of decades of campaigning by the African National Congress, included support from the churches, led by Bishop Desmond Tutu, the engagement of unions particularly in the international domain, and the day to day grind of communities of South Africans - black and white - who united to oppose the apartheid regime and demand change, all these actors and more played important roles.

But music was there too, both in South Africa where the local music industry supported change, and abroad, and is remembered for its transcending role. It was of the moment, responding to the politics and channelling the energy and concern of generations who wanted to bring on the change - in this case Nelson Mandela's release.

Incidentally Midnight Oil toured South Africa not long after that. Concerts were still uncommon, although western music had been freely available. I distinctly recall looking down from my hotel room in Cape Town where I could see Robben Island clearly visible - as say Goat Island is in Sydney Harbour - where jailed as he was for so long, Mandela had been held.

Now for the most part, and especially in the early period in detention he was without a voice at all, silent.

His actions spoke louder than words but in time songwriters and singers of songs became a kind of 'other voice' in spreading his message, or at the least drawing attention to the struggle he led.

One can't help noticing that in his recent campaign to free the world and especially the subcontinent of Africa from the scourge of HIV/AIDS, Nelson Mandela has again joined with musicians in concert.

That relationship built from that time continues today, and I'm sure that it is not only that musicians united can bring large numbers of people together but also that music can lift an issue, bring it into public prominence, start a public conversation, and in Mandela's case, provide a concrete example of the politics of art that has seen the relationship endure.

But it needs to be quickly said that at the same time art, including music, also exists on its own terms and can be understood and enjoyed without reference to politics.

The fact is that the relationship/interaction between the song maker and the song taker has nearly as many possibilities as there are stars in the Milky Way.

Indeed the writer may intend a specific meaning from a song, yet the listener may adopt an interpretation light years away. Bruce Springsteen's scorching attack on the treatment of Vietnam veterans in 'Born in the USA', whilst a hit record, was immediately misunderstood and then rendered a jingoistic anthem, appropriated by the very forces he was criticising, and is just one example of many.

Incidentally Springsteen, a phenomenally popular artist in the US in particular, is a compelling example of the songwriter as political activist, as his involvement with a number of causes makes clear, including the 2004 "Vote For Change" concerts which were held in swing states across America in the lead-up to the Presidential election.

In Australia Paul Kelly and John Butler similarly stand, amongst others, as artists who bring their social and political sensibility to their life's work. It doesn't have to reflect in a particular song although in Kelly's case it sometimes does. For instance "From Little Things Big Things Grow" co-written with Aboriginal songwriter Kev Carmody which has emblematic status in the saga of reconciliation with Aboriginal people, is one of his best known examples. But there are plenty of others he's done, consider these opening lines, "Have you ever seen Sydney from a 727 at night...", to illustrate this point.

At the same time Kelly involves himself in particular issues, like the situation faced by Indigenous people and John Butler has done much work in aiming to lessen the impact of his activities on the environment and raise public awareness on this issue.

But there is always involvement, whether formally in political issues with the 'Rockin' for Rights' concert held in the run up to the recent election featuring,

amongst others, “Something for Kate”, “Hoodoo Gurus” and “The Whitlams”, or providing support and raising awareness about global warming and dangerous climate change at the recent Live Earth concerts with Missy Higgins, “Eskimo Joe” and “Crowded House”. I salute them all.

In my new role I’ve come to appreciate the genuine and knowledgeable interest and thirst many Australians have in, and for, the arts.

Increasingly Australians are demanding opportunities to experience the arts and culture in all its forms. We have wide interests and high expectations for local product. As an industry the sector is growing, both in output and recognition.

Just yesterday the Australian Major Performing Arts Group, in association with Live Performance Australia and the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, launched an advocacy campaign at the Sydney Opera House to promote and recognise the critical role of the arts.

The campaign, titled *We All Play A Part*, has a straightforward but highly necessary aim: to lift local awareness of the success of Aussie artists and arts organisations by sharing in their success.

It reflects a new confidence and determination from the arts and culture sector - a new direction.

This confidence is a result of a number of factors including, I would assert, the change in political direction the country has chosen, but as well there is simply sheer weight of numbers.

More and more Australians are finding a vocation in the arts and cultural sector. Almost half a million people receive their pay-check through cultural employment, while 3.5 million undertake either paid or unpaid work in the cultural sector.

Around 85 per cent of the population 15 years and over has attended a cultural venue and event. And economically the arts and culture sector contributes over \$530 million worth of export goods.

The argument in favour of the arts is evolving, as it must. No longer can we, or should we, merely argue arts for arts' sake. I have no hesitation in standing here, as a former practicing artist, and say the arts are inherently valuable; they are a public good.

But the arts also make an enormous contribution to our identity, community and economy.

Parents are becoming aware of the clear benefits arts education can bring to a child's development. The growing evidence which shows a clear link between arts education and increased numeracy and literacy levels means parents are seeking schools which offer a comprehensive arts curriculum including the provision of music education.

Local communities are demanding greater access to creative experiences in the places where they live. There is growing recognition that creative communities are more cohesive and happier communities.

As innovation becomes increasingly central to growing new and sustainable economies, there is amplified recognition of the role that creativity and the arts plays as a key driver of innovation.

At the last election we took a detailed set of arts policies to the people underpinned by the principles of access, equity, education, excellence and innovation.

And recognising the role it plays in our arts sector a focus of the policy, unashamedly, was our music industry. There's work being done at the states and territories level to reduce barriers to live performance and I commend that.

At the federal level there is a critical leadership role for the Commonwealth Government.

Many of you will know of the Contemporary Music Working Group (CMWG) which was formed in 2003 in the interests of achieving greater industry cooperation and cohesion in what has often been a highly fragmented industry.

In 2006 the CMWG made a submission to the previous Government requesting whole-of-government support for the industry through an Industry Action Agenda (IAA).

Unfortunately these action agendas, which ranged from pharmaceuticals to aerospace, had, in the Howard era, become synonymous with government inaction.

In essence it was clear the industry required co-ordinated, whole-of-government support as this would significantly aid the industry's development and commercial growth.

The arts policy Labor took to the election included a commitment to work with the industry in developing a Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan.

I'm really keen to ensure the excellent work of the CMWG is not wasted and look forward to working with them to implement this plan.

The Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) Contemporary Music Development Working Group (CMDWG) was established by Arts Ministers at the CMC meeting on 22 September 2006 to identify opportunities for collaboration between the states to expand the potential growth of the contemporary music sector.

Membership includes officials from my department, the Australia Council and all state and territory government arts agencies.

Our intention is for a more cooperative and coordinated approach to government support for contemporary music across Australia.

At the most recent CMC meeting on 29 February 2008 (my first as Minister), members endorsed the expansion of the working group's role to embrace active engagement with issues including export market development, barriers to live performance, planning and licensing regimes as well as Indigenous contemporary music.

Current CMDWG activities include:

- Commissioning the Australian Music Industry Network (AMIN) to develop 'Control', a business skills training project for music managers, the three-day residential workshop stage of which will be delivered in September 2008;
- Developing strategies to encourage the reduction of rules and regulations which are barriers to live music; and,
- Preparing a draft action plan on Indigenous contemporary music for consideration at the next CMC meeting on 2 October 2008.

I'm especially pleased to see that on Saturday APRA is hosting its Live Music Revolution Forum, involving the Australian Hotels Association, Clubs NSW and Restaurant & Catering Australia. APRA, and indeed John Wardle, who has been working hard on this issue, should be congratulated on their efforts so far.

I know how hard it is to write songs that connect with people and last as a tangible work. And I know first hand what is needed to take on the world, even if you're still recording on the Mac at home.

Whilst the technology has changed, and the career paths are more diverse, it's still the case that the song/composition, the 'work' as it is known to writers, will drive the musician's career and will fuel the music industry.

I've been privileged to work in a band - with two fine songwriters like Jim Moginie & Rob Hirst, and a strong-headed manager Gary Morris - that whatever its flaws, worked hard at its craft, and was better for the effort that was made. The serendipity – that magic instant - results in a song working often tends to emerge when the long hours have been put in, and when the cycle of inspiration, perspiration, and ultimate creation produces something that sounds right. Yes, you can be lucky and occasionally it drops out of the sky, but you don't want to die waiting, and the warm-up tends to make for a finer final product.

Because this has always been an industry where you literally have to do it yourself when you start out, especially in the early stages of your career, so being self motivated and self sufficient are important qualities for song writers and musicians generally, whether sending files across the net or playing down the road.

Songs need audiences too so, for some, playing down the road is still a big part of being a musician and in terms of live performances, as I've said before, we do something quite unique in this country; namely, we take a room with four walls and if we're lucky a stage and not much else, and transform it into a special concert space - in a different town or suburb, night after night.

Most people have training or an education in an area in which they specialise. But not only must a muso play and sing, write their songs, often produce and self promote - in the early stage of your career and sometimes at the end of it, you need to be a manager, book-keeper, security guard, competent negotiator, travel agent, mechanic, computer and instrument repairer, YouTube guru, and so the list goes on.

I began this keynote speech by saying I stood before you as someone who has been in the place where some of you now are but who was able and lucky enough, to ride a sweaty twenty five plus year wave with five others and together, make music which meant something to us, which we ended up sharing with lots of people.

Along the way we brought our political values into the frame, sometimes through songs, sometimes through actions. As musicians it was the music that came first and it was our “reason for being” in a band.

But we were also citizens of this country, and toured across the world and in time we wanted to react to and be involved with issues confronting us. Some people call it politics; I'd also call it life.

So I wish all the participants here well with their careers and hope that this summit is a huge success. Words and music have always been an indispensable part of the human experience, a marker of our lives and of the place we live, from the ‘Road to Gundagai’ to the ‘Wide Open Road’.

In the meantime if we want to change the world as we know it, then we can write songs that reflect that desire, we can join with others to address issues that count and we can vote for someone to take up the charge as Australians did last November.

In the long term we define our national progress by how we treat the less well-off and disadvantaged, and by the advances we have made as a society, in meeting standards such as equality before the law, freedom of expression, and fairness in the work place. None of these markers of a fair and democratic society have been reached without political action and poetical actions too. Songs, and those who write and sing them, have always been a part of that journey - long may it continue.

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