

Wednesday, 28 March 2012
University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony
Douglas Gautier CEO & Artistic Director, Adelaide Festival Centre

Deputy Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, members of staff and especially graduates and your accompanying family and friends - thank you for inviting me to present your graduation address today. Firstly may I offer my congratulations on your achievement.

Not surprisingly I will take this opportunity talk a little bit about the contribution and potential of arts, culture and creativity to our community and to our lives. And I note that your chosen fields of study prepare you well for diverse creative opportunities and contribution in the future.

This venue, the Adelaide Festival Theatre is of course familiar territory for me, and hopefully in the years ahead it will become that for you too, if it isn't already. My first job after graduation was in this Centre and I was part of the opening night's performance nearly 40 years ago. This Theatre opened in June 1973 by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and his dear wife Margaret, and designed by the distinguished Adelaide architect John Morphett –

four months before the Sydney Opera House – It opened on time and under budget.

It is still one of the great lyric theatres in our country and at the time represented great audacity and vision by our States then leaders and great community aspiration and support.

These days, the entire Adelaide Festival centre continues as a great cultural hub for our city with strong national and international connections.

Almost 900,000 people attend our activities annually and it will be the arts and entertainment hub for the developing Riverbank Precinct.

Now why do I bother to tell you all this, on your day of graduation? Well whether you are a long-time South Australian resident or someone who has come here to study – you will know of the reputation of South Australia as the Festival State, - even if it is only from reading automobile licence plates. There is of course a lot more to it than that.

And why is this reputation and aspiration important to our community and to anyone who has any connection with our city – resident or not?

It is because there is a genuine and widely held belief here of the value of culture (in the broadest sense of the word), in fostering tolerance, enlightenment and understanding and its value in supporting social cohesion in changing times.

The ABS tells us that two years ago 89% of South Australians attended at least one cultural event as against 49% for one sporting event. Now this is not an either/or contest (most people have an interest in both) – but cultural- events, ideas, and celebrations are clearly a central part of our lives, including yours and will continue to be so in ever more diverse and changing forms. And this community has always recognized the particular power and value of arts and culture in this respect.

The most successful cultural centres or hubs, in the world, including this one, are those that have adopted a “program and ideas” led approach that engages and sustains artists, audiences and which provides accessibility and welcome to all sections of their communities.

These Centres are strong innovators and advocates for creative ideas and initiatives with long-term horizons and commitments.

And among the most significant contributions and responsibilities these Centres will have in our increasingly multicultural societies are to be places where a diversity of cultural programs and influences are welcomed and celebrated, - as part of that ongoing quest for tolerance and understanding., that makes for successful civic societies and civilizations.

And to you, the leaders of tomorrow, it is worthy of note, that this city and community has often been a leader in this ongoing quest, and continues to be so.

For instance, many of you will know that our country's relationship with Asia is currently being examined in a national enquiry headed up by former Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry. This relationship with Asia is important now and will be to you in the future; certainly it is to your university, this city and to the Adelaide Festival Centre.

Because here we believe alongside politics, economics, trade etc. – that the “people to people” dynamic of cultural engagement will be a key to the success, of Australia in Asia in the 21st Century. Your century!

So our aspiration is to develop this centre as a national and regional hub for Asia/Australia cultural engagement.

Central to this was the establishment of the OzAsia Festival here in 2007. The only large national arts event devoted to exploring links between Australia and the cultures of our Asian neighbours.

It also places Asian cultures in an Australian context. New generations of Asian-Australians are now celebrating their traditions and stories, to help realise our collective potential and history as a multi-cultural nation.

Together with many community groups and stakeholders including your University, we are providing a platform for the cultural influences of Asia that already exist and are developing in our society.

Our approach is also based on a strong belief in the need for reciprocity – i.e. Asian artists and cultural workers spending time in Australia – thereby progressively creating a sympathetic, pro-active alumni network in Asia for positive engagement with Australia in the future.

Indeed one of our internship programs here at the Centre, for young Arts administrators from China is named for a great Australian leader, a friend of China and tireless advocate for understanding between nations and peoples, - ex Prime Minister Robert Hawke – the only South Australian born PM. And of course, a great supporter of and mentor for your university.

So, as you go out into the world I'd ask you in future to consider pausing from time to time, to remember your graduation ceremony in this theatre and centre, which in many ways epitomize this city's appreciation

of and faith in arts and cultural activities as a means to encourage enlightenment, tolerance and understanding. And in so doing, that wherever you maybe you will again find affirmation, good memories and even inspiration from your association with this city, community and your university.

Thank you for your attention.