

JANET DONALD'S SPEECH GIVEN AT THE OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN MUSIC CENTRE'S NEW PREMISES ON 16TH JUNE, 1986



Janet Donald, Chairperson of the AMC, welcomes the Honourable Barry Cohen, Minister for the Arts, Heritage and Environment to the AMC's new premises.

Mr Cohen, members and friends: it is my great pleasure, on behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Australian Music Centre, to welcome you to the opening of our new premises here in Broadway.

We greatly appreciate the fact that you have come to Sydney, Mr Cohen, to formally open the Centre. As we rely heavily on the funds of your Ministry for our operations, we are pleased to have this opportunity to meet you personally and to show you how those funds are used. Thank you very much for accepting our invitation.

Before introducing you, Mr Cohen, to our members and guests, I would like to present some important facts about Australian composers and composition to you.

Before doing this, I would like briefly to raise two basic questions about your Ministry's funding and our operations.

The first is "Why should the Government provide funds for composers?" The second is, "Why do composers need a body to represent them?"

The answer to the first question lies in the perpetual irony of cultural development—namely, while a nation's culture develops from the work of its creative artists, that work is not readily accepted by people in general at the time of its creation. This is particularly the case with new music, which seems to present a greater shock and challenge to established patterns of perception than literature, theatre, dance or any of the visual arts. It therefore becomes the task of governments and private bodies of varying kinds to pay the food and rent bills of a country's creative artists. In Australia, private bodies, in the form of endowments, trusts, societies, private sponsors, etc, are scarce on the ground in all the arts, which means that governments have a particularly heavy responsibility.

In answer to the question "Why do composers need an organisation to repre-

sent them?", it is necessary to understand that Australia's composers are very fragmented as a group, living all over Australia. On the whole they have no resources to promote themselves by making their work known to performing groups and others, selling copies of their scores, and so forth. To compound the problem, only a handful of them are represented by commercial publishers, since the market for their music is too small in commercial terms to make it attractive to publishers. Given the general lack of knowledge and understanding of new music that exists, agencies like the Australian Music Centre are seen as the vital link between composers and their potential audiences. Many countries have a national agency for composers and composition, including Canada, the United States, Great Britain, France, Holland and Sweden—all are funded substantially by government. I would now like to discuss the exhibits I have drawn up, so that I can draw to your attention, Mr Cohen, how much composers are in need of resources from your Ministry.