

**AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE TRUST CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS FOR 2005
PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE
AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE TRUST**

**BY
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE WADDY
ON 18 MAY 2006**

This year, our 51st, is time to consolidate our fortunes and plan future directions.

LIVING HISTORY

The Trust's past achievements over 50 years are now recorded and archived on compact discs of over 120 live interviews with the managers, directors, producers and artists who were involved in the development of the many performing arts companies the Trust started. These memories of those early pioneers provide us with an invaluable history informal and informed of the development of the performing arts in Australia from 1954. It is our hope that in time funds may be found to turn this fascinating story into an oral history able to be publicly released in a CD box set.

THE FUTURE

Notwithstanding the many important achievements of The Trust in its fifty years, it is the future which holds the greatest interest and excitement of your current Board and The Trust's General Manager. That future is full of the promise of the wonderful results our music scholars are beginning to demonstrate. From 1999, when our first overseas music scholarships were awarded until now we have been able to assist 80 scholars with grants of assistance totaling over \$1,000,000. In 2005 further financial assistance was given to five singers, three instrumentalists and one conductor and grants totaling \$134,563 were awarded. By 2007, if not earlier, we hope to be able to present many of them in concert at The Independent.

THE INDEPENDENT – A VISION

In the close relationship the Trust has enjoyed with the Seaborn Broughton Walford Foundation, members will recall our cross-support of mutual endeavours. Without Dr Seaborn's generosity in the 1990's the Trust may well not have survived.

Then, when the SBW Foundation, former owners of The independent Theatre, was looking for new management of The Independent, as SBW continued its restoration, The Trust became a tenant and volunteered for the job. When the SBW Foundation decided to sell The Independent, the Trust exercised its right of first refusal and purchased the freehold. It is the first theatre the Trust has ever owned.

Since then your Board has retained the finest consultants available for heritage architectural, technical and acoustic advice in the adaptation of the complex of buildings. The result has been a breathtakingly beautiful Edwardian interior of parchment flecked with gilt for the auditorium, new lighting and the commissioning of a new sprung stage in front of the proscenium arch, to be installed by July 2006.

We envisage the auditorium as the finest venue of its kind in Australia to showcase and continue to develop the skills and careers of our scholars. We see it as a seat of education at tertiary, secondary and primary levels in theatre craft. We see it as a venue of excellence for music and all the performing arts. So, too, we see a future for resident opera, theatre companies, and musical organizations, whose repertoire suits the venue.

All this is to be supported by expanded corporate usage and the availability of the several venues at The Independent to North Sydney Council, local groups, churches and community organizations.

50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Some of The Trust's most accomplished music scholars performed at The Independent, in a gala showcase concert produced by our General Manager, as a highlight of our 50th anniversary celebrations. The evening marked the re-opening of The Independent after completion of a significant phase of our continuing refurbishment. Even more work on the technical facilities, stage and front foyers is in hand for 2006.

FUTURE PLANS

Recognising the necessity to complete the imaginative restoration work started by the SBW Foundation The Trust is planning further improvements to The Independent and the repair of essential items of a heritage nature. We will seek public funds to achieve some of these outcomes. Already, due to the generosity of Dr. Seaborn, a commitment up to the sum of \$100,000.00 has been received from Dr. Seaborn and the SBW Foundation for repairs to the historic Cupola which sits over The Seaborn room at the front of the building. Certain other external works are also in contemplation.

Already we are observing an increase in Theatre hires by musical producers and performers who recognize the unusually fine acoustic that the auditorium has to offer for their productions. With an intimacy arising from the small number of seats (303), perfect sightlines and a fine acoustic reception at all seats within the Theatre, the venue provides a wonderful opportunity for the presentation of intimate recitals, work-shops and master-classes by soloists, chamber ensembles and small music groups.

TRUST GENEROSITY

To attract product to The Independent The Trust provided financial assistance in 2005 by way of subsidised rental and sponsorship to those producers who were prepared to present community, artistic and educational events and dramatic productions. Examples include:

- North Sydney Council's Naturalization Ceremony on Australia Day;
- the "*Page to Stage*" program selecting secondary students with promise as budding young playwrights, directors, producers and actors;
- educational theatrical productions and concerts for school children;
- Musica Viva's *Coffee Concert Series*, generally attended by music lovers who find access easy and affordable;
- public concert by Trust music scholars;
- production of the new Australian musical, *Rosie*, by our scholar Peter Stannard and Frank Hatherley;
- performances by emerging young opera singers in Pacific Opera's brilliantly engaging production of W.A. Mozart's *Così Fan Tutti*; and
- a book launch for the Stanton Library, North Sydney.

In all we have provided subsidy or sponsorship exceeding \$50,000.00. The result in all cases has been to assist community access to The Independent, provide a wide cross section of educational events, launch new artistic endeavors and bring The Independent to the notice of the Sydney community as a place where excellence, in the highest form, is to be found in artistic and educational performances, and where easy and friendly access by the public is guaranteed for relevant community events.

The Independent is also gaining a hard-earned reputation for fine coffee, fine cakes and fine catering.

Your Board is proud of our past and have belief and confidence in a brilliant future. The Trust has always filled a cultural niche when needed. It now rises to meet the present challenge with the exciting development of the potential of The Independent and the provision of substantial scholarship support for musicians, singers and conductors.

The Trust is proud to provide The Independent as an accessible community centre for the benefit of all in North Sydney who welcome excellence in both the productions and the facilities to be experienced at the theatre. At the same time its worth is being recognized by an ever widening circle of devotees who are keen to enjoy its unique facility. It is far from a merely parochial asset.

GOVERNANCE

I take this opportunity to thank each of my fellow Directors for the dedicated commitment and expertise they so generously bring to each meeting and their continuing support and encouragement for The Trust and its challenging future. I also thank them for their individual financial support of our endeavours.

I also thank our General Manager, Mr. Warwick Ross, for his exceptional efforts on behalf of The Trust and his vision for the future which has guided your Board. He has again worked tirelessly for very extended periods of time on the many areas of challenge we are pursuing. He has been ably supported from time to time by our marketing consultant, Gloria Scott. Carolyn Antony has done sterling work, also, in researching prospective audiences.

Finally, I thank those members who in their philanthropy have been staunch donors to The Trust, helping us to realise our objectives, some for over nearly five decades. Continuing financial support will be essential if our Trust is to continue to realize our vision of achieving “Excellence in the Arts in Australia, for Australians, by Australians”. We hope all will continue to feel proud to be part of such a mission, proud to bring your friends and acquaintances to The Trust’s showplace Independent, and proud to invite all devotees of music and the arts to join with The Trust in even greater service, nationwide, in the future.

Lloyd Waddy
Chairman