



Event: TSO Chairman's Lunch May 2017

Date: Friday 26th May 2017

Venue: Henry Jones Art Hotel, Hobart

Key Note Speaker: Sir Jonathan Mills AO

Transcription from voice recording

Ladies and gentlemen the great maverick Aussie composer, Percy Grainger, provocatively said “if something was worth doing it is worth doing badly”. What did he mean? He meant take a risk, get going, try something out and don't be worried of failing. The world is dying of good taste; the world is dying of people who take no risks whatsoever. My exaltations to all of you is to suggest that you are on the cusp of something truly great in Hobart, and in Tasmania, and this is the time to re-double your efforts on behalf of culture and ensure culture can do for your community in what I have observed first hand of what it has been able to do for a community like Edinburgh in 1947.

Let's cast our mind back to what it might have been like to that first winter, that very very bleak winter, after the second world war, almost 70- years ago. Petrol and food rationing were still in place in the UK until the mid-50's. There was no tourism strategy, there were no hotels, there was nothing, and indeed to even had a festival of that ambition in 1947 there was really only two or three cities in could host it. Couldn't have done it in London because of the bombing, couldn't have done it in Coventry, Birmingham, Manchester or Liverpool or Glasgow, certainly only Oxford, or Bath and Edinburgh would have a sufficient amount of cultural infrastructure that hadn't been damaged could do it. Oxford and Bath weren't that interested and they were too close to London in case things got nasty again. As luck would have it, and these things do need luck, the first Director of the Edinburgh Festival, Sir Rudolf Bing, who went on to become a very distinguished Director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, having been raised in Salzburg arrives in Edinburgh and discovers that actually the castellated city of Edinburgh is even more magnificent than the castellated city of Salzburg. With the dominant castle surveying all the lands he said “ah I have returned!” but with the



spirit of the Scottish enlightenment “I am sure this weird place will be a perfect sight for a festival”, and of course it took another six months for him to convince the “*toon coouncil*” (sic) to give him enough money for the festival; and in the typical Scottish way they didn’t give quite enough, just enough to shut people up and not enough to host the event. Another piece of good luck, the Countess of Rosebery, well in fact her husband Harry Rosebery, was big into horses and after the second world war whatever people were doing they were betting, and they were betting because they could, simply because life was worth betting on again. His horses won almost every single race in that season enabling Lady Roseberry to say “*those are not your earnings darling, they are for the Festival*”. £10,000 pounds he earned came to the Festival. Think of all of this in a town as parsimonious as Edinburgh, the birthplace and the place of John Knox, and all the puritans, and you understand why an Edinburgh Festival is such a miracle.

But think about this festival in other terms, in the radical way in which a generosity of spirit emerged. It was necessary. Who would have thought that something as crazy as running an arts festival so soon after the Second World War was over was a good idea? There are many people who stand back now; main stream economists still scratch their heads thinking why this was so vitally important? Because there is only so much you can do with statistics. There is only so much you can tell a community about the death and destruction of it. But actually what we need to tell people, and what the Arts do supremely well, is give people hope and confidence – hope that there is a life worth living and confidence they can live with other people. That they can share their stories with others, so that in that very first Edinburgh Festival in 1947, the decision that was made, that was most brave and most radical, sounds very easy today, was to invite the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra to open the Festival. Think about it, two years early any member of that orchestra would have been jailed if they were found in the United Kingdom as an enemy alien, and yet, here they were two years later centre stage with Bruno Walter and then unknown legal secretary that comes onto that stage as a voice of great promise and leaves that stage as a resounding star and I am sure you know



who I am referring to.. .and there is a test after this....the great soprano...who can remember the name of a certain Kathleen who performs the *Song of the Earth* on that very first occasion with Bruno Walter, (Kathleen Ferrier). But think about it in terms of what the bringing together of the town and the artists from across Europe meant. Sir John Faulkner, The Lord Provost (meaning the Lord Mayor of the time) said at the time "*this should be a festival to embrace the world*". Now in 1947 those were no idle thoughts or idle threats because the last thing the world had done was embrace itself, and the last thing that anyone had done was embrace anyone else from any other culture from beyond their own circumstance. So it was very brave, it could have all gone terribly wrong, to paraphrase Percy Grainger "*but it was worth fighting for*". So if one thinks about what that means today in Edinburgh, it means that we preside over a festival that very regularly includes people coming from 85 different nations in the world. A million of them coming to Edinburgh, buying three or four tickets in one month. It means that there 27,000 artists performing in Edinburgh in all seven of the festivals that coincide. There are 15,000 athletes performing at an Olympic Games, and there are 27,000 artists performing at an Edinburgh Festival every year... and think about what the subsidy might have been to put on an Olympic Games, and what the subsidy might have been to put on an Edinburgh Festival and you will see where I am heading. Those 27,000 artists perform in 40,000 performances of 5,000 discreet and unrepeatable shows in 390 venues. And we also tell you there has not been a new venue in Edinburgh in seventy years. Not one! This is a city that does not believe in investing in infrastructure before investing in people. The Festival has always been the city as it was, and so let's acknowledge to ourselves, in this place here and now, that what will drive your future prosperity through culture is not going cap in hand to Government and waiting for a big shiny new building to happen, it will be the way in which you perform Hobart as it is now. And that is the secret I want to convey to you today. That Edinburgh didn't wait for a shiny new building to create this extraordinary festival...it started the festival. And only in two years' time will we have our first new building after 72-73 years. So what I am urging you to think about is you have had your luck here as well, you've had I think a very very important alignment of forces and circumstances, you



have had your equivalent to Harry Rosebery. He's not someone who necessarily breeds horses for which people take bets, but in David Walsh, someone who actually beats the system itself, and has made a total transformation, a complete total new conversation possible in Tasmania; you have Nicholas Heyward, and I can attest to this as I worked with him in Brisbane, we did things in Brisbane that Brisbane certainly wasn't ready for... and Brisbane still talks about in kind of hushed tones. Some of the crazy ideas that Nicholas allowed me to have, and some of the crazy ideas that he's had, but they were all an enlargement of the circumstances in which people imagined what was possible. So what I am saying to you, that if people at the end of the Second World War in parsimonious Edinburgh can create an event this enduring, and of such global terms, then so can you and you must! It's not that you should, or could, but you HAVE to! Because if you don't do that, then what else do you have? What are the circumstances in which you live your lives? What are the employment opportunities, the factories that no longer exist? I would suggest to you, as the really potent message to you, as the supporters of this very fine orchestra need to take away from this lunch today, is that it is far too important to be left to politicians alone, far too important to not do, and start as agents of change from now, and many of you are those agents for change, but more than that, that you are part of an alignment of circumstances with the ambitions of the TSO with the program that Geoff just read out would do any orchestra in Europe proud. To get Nina Stemme anywhere is a major achievement and you say "*oh it was an unusual alignment of circumstances that brought her to Tasmania*". NO. She was so lucky, she adored coming here, and she would not have had an experience like that elsewhere, and certainly not in New York, because in addition to the circumstances of creating great music in this city and this state, you have other things to offer. An alignment of ideas, an alignment of principals, and an alignment of a way of being that is sustainable in the world that is truly remarkable and unique. It takes a lot for Xi Jinping to take a side step from no doubt a very ordered itinerary, but it was clearly his interest in the state that led to him being here. It wouldn't have been anyone in Canberra suggesting that, let's be clear, he would have wanted to come here because he wanted to see what was going on in Hobart and what is going on in



Tasmania. This is all by way of saying that the only thing between this city, and this state, and truly a remarkable flowering of creativity is our ambition, and I hope that I encourage you to be bold and ambitious in everything you do. **To be bold and ambitious in what you hope for Tasmania**, bold and ambitious in what you insist on from your elected leaders, and bold and ambitious from enterprises, and organisation like the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and if that happens then I believe that the million and half tourists that the Tasmanian Government aims to build to will sound like quite a puny ambition.

We get a million visitors in Edinburgh every month, what would that look like and feel like in Tasmania, what that would do for a transformation. I think you could have it, I really do, I think that there is enough of an alignment of really unusual circumstances to be able to powerfully dream that that could be achieved. I have given you some small examples from experience I had very directly in Edinburgh, I have suggested to you that there are people here in this city, and in this country, and in this state, would want it to happen. I would like to announce, with Nicholas's permission, we have a very dear friend, Nicholas and I, who is an old school philanthropist, she is American she lives in Edinburgh, she is the largest single donor to the Edinburgh Festival, she is the largest single donor to many many arts organisations in the UK and in North America, and she has a reasonable number of Australian companies, some of which are based in Tasmania. It took me no time to convince her, because of Nicholas's presence and because of MONA, to actually agree that one of the things that ought to happen here is more opera. **Let's not stop with Nina Stemme singing *Tristan***, lets actually imagine that the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra is even busier because it is playing for an opera season, as well as a contemporary baroque chamber music, chamber operas and so forth and she has put her money where her mouth is and is funding the pilot of a collaboration between the orchestra and Victorian Opera, and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra to bring more regularly more opera to Tasmania. I very much encourage you to understand that somebody, that doesn't live here, understands profoundly what could happen here, and what must happen here, and I hope all



of you take some encouragement from the words that I have said and re-double your already generous efforts to making this a state for the Arts, we don't need an arts centre in Tasmania, we need Tasmania to be a centre for the arts. Thank you.