



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Australian Arts Community**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 21 February 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 21 February 2011  
**Page** 813  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Perrett, Graham, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (6.30 pm)—I move this motion with much glee. In 1992 the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy sang: ‘Television, the drug of the nation. Breeding ignorance and feeding radiation.’ I will give you the drum on this concept later in my speech. It is not news to people who know me—and my neighbours—but I am a strong supporter of the arts, especially writing and music. I am co-convenor, with Julie Owens, of the Labor Friends of the Arts. My bookshelves are packed to the rafters and my iPod has music from the four corners of the globe and includes all types except house. I say this to explain some of the history behind this motion.

For many years my good wife and I were addicted to a television police show from the United Kingdom, shown on ABC1 on Saturday nights. The show stretched right back to 1983. We have been clean for a while now. In fact, we went cold turkey on 16 October 2010. Our modern family is using my rehab journey to avoid all television and to rush out to engage with our local performers, our local artists and our local writers. Consequently, I encourage all Australians to turn off their TVs, to turn off *Iron Chef* or *The Simpsons* or *Spicks and Specks* or *RockWiz* or *MasterChef* or *Top Gear*—whatever you are watching—to get off the couch and get closer to your local live performers. Do it today, tonight, tomorrow.

**Mr Sidebottom**—Live theatre! Hear, hear!

**Mr PERRETT**—There will be singers in your local pub or actors in your local theatre. See a play. School ruined drama for many, but live theatre is well worth the effort, I am assured by the member for Braddon. So you think you can dance? Well, there is good live music just waiting for you to rage to right now at the end of your street. You will be the biggest loser if you do not act. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not just talking about your generation; I am also talking about all ages. We should all get immersed in the arts and tell our offspring, our brothers and our sisters that from sunrise to Sunday night there is something for everyone.

The Australia Council for the Arts published a report last year called *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*. This report gave a good insight into the level of our engagement with the arts. It found that in 2009 nine out of 10 Australians had participated in the arts—either by creating the arts, like the member for Braddon, or appreciating them. Literature is the most popular, with 84 per cent of Australians reading novels or poetry, but fewer Australians are familiar with the performance arts. About 16 per cent of Australians participate in creative writing, seven per cent in writing a novel or short story and five per cent in writing poetry. Thankfully, more than half of all Australians attend live music performances. About 22 per cent attend musical theatre. Thirteen per cent attend classical musical performances and eight per cent attend the opera. About one in four Australians attend theatre, with 19 per cent attending contemporary theatre and 10 per cent physical theatre or circus. Sixteen per cent attend ballet or classical dance.

Smart insiders know that we need to increase these percentages. This is not just about keeping up with the Kardashians. Rather, it is about valuing the contribution of the arts and how they help to shape our nation. Whatever our customs, the arts help us understand who we are, from creek to coast, and tell our Australian story through drama, dance, opera and music—whatever the medium. Make no bones about it, through the arts, and particularly the performance arts, we are challenged, entertained and inspired, and we value this gift to the nation.

British arts administrator Sir John Tusa said it best:

The arts matter because they embrace, express and define the soul of a civilisation. A nation without arts would be a nation that had stopped talking to itself, stopped dreaming, had lost interest in the past and lacked curiosity about the future.

Australia’s got talent out there. You only have to go down to your local pub or theatre and you will find people who have put in the hard yards and are able to make a contribution, and they need an audience. We should all get away and enjoy these people’s performances. Last week James Jeffrey, a writer from the *Australian*, poked fun at part of this motion in the *Australian* newspaper. Hopefully, if he now sees the full context of the motion, he will agree that it totally fits the bill.