

Occasional Address
Royal Exhibition Building, 15 December 2017, 11.00am

Ms Mary Jo Capps

CEO, Music Viva

Recipient, Doctor of Visual and Performing Arts (honoris causa)

Thank you for inviting me here to share this very special day.

I'd like to start with a lovely little story from Sir Ken Robinson, in one of his incredible TED Talks on the value of an arts-rich education, which goes to the heart of the power of the arts to help us imagine the unimaginable.

A teacher assigns their Year 1 class the task of drawing whatever they like for the next 15 minutes. One little girl industriously commences, scrunched over her chosen piece of paper. The teacher asks what she is drawing. "I'm drawing a picture of God."

The teacher is somewhat taken aback and gently comments: "But no one knows what God looks like."

To which the little girl responds: "They will in a minute!"

At its very best, the arts put us in touch with that little girl, encouraging us to see and feel the world around us differently. This is the power with which you leave this institution today.

It's been nearly 40 years since I graduated with my Masters in music – which is longer than most of you have been alive. I'd like to take a little of your time today to ponder what has changed, what hasn't changed and what still needs to change to unleash this power in yourselves and in others – to imagine the unimaginable.

One thing that hasn't changed in the entire generation since I graduated is the reaction from people – you know what I mean, the look they would give me when I said: "I studied music".

40% of their reaction was admiration or awe – often borne out of a misconception regarding the true ratio of inspiration to perspiration that goes into the arts.

The other 60% conveyed this concern: "Remind me why you didn't do law or medicine?" Or any of the other options available on entering university. I'm sure many of you here had plenty of options you could have chosen - fine arts and music students are often spoiled for choice as they leave secondary school.

The question lingering on their lips, if not verbalised:

How on earth do you plan to make a living?

Indeed, the recently released study by Professor David Throsby and his team in the Economics Department of Macquarie University reviewed the bank of data they now have since commencing this regular study in the early 1980s.

Their analysis revealed that

1. Australian artists now spend more time on their creative practice than in previous years but earn less from it; and
2. the income gap between men and women is wider in the arts than across all industries in Australia.

This is tangible evidence of the obstacle faced by professional artists throughout their career: having to explain why we should be paid for doing what others do for fun.

We all know the training is just as rigorous, if not more so, than other pursuits. In fact, the same study revealed that 90% of professional artists have post-school qualifications compared with only 53% for the general labour force.

As I am frequently heard to say about my own profession of music, as far as I can tell, the only other professions for which people actively start training at age four are dance and swimming. One could argue that visual arts, story-telling and acting really spring from the same development period in early childhood.

As far as I know, no merchant banker, no dentist, no neuroscientist starts to train at that early stage.

On every level, an economic argument for the arts has its limits and contradictions.

It's time to change the conversation.

Let's just consider for a moment the whole issue of the economic analysis of the arts.

What does that say about our society today? Has everything become so commoditised that we need to measure human endeavour in terms of its direct market value?

Even those in the arts have picked up the lingo:

- The Arts Council of England released a seminal report on “Measuring the economic benefits of the arts”.
- The Federal Government of Australia carefully crafts the language it uses for considering the arts, especially come budget time, to emphasise the role the arts play in the Australian economy.
- Do you know in which government department Creative Victoria sits? ...The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

We have all bought into the language.

I'm a firm believer in acknowledging loudly the huge economic impact the arts have. That is the main reason I became so active in the Business Chamber. The arts are a too often underrated essential element in creating the truly great cities of the world... but how has that become our first line of defence?

This economic rationale gets further played out in most education debates:

Time and time again, over the past 60 years, music and the arts have been proven to be valuable subjects for all children. The study of music and the arts builds a child's capacity in:

- pattern recognition,
- in team work,
- in listening and responding,
- in self-esteem,
- in articulating emotions...

The arts are often a way to reach children who have otherwise “checked out” of the educational system.

Indeed, the arts help a child achieve all these things

but

the arts are important because they are good in themselves, because they are inspiring, because they make us feel and think differently about ourselves and about the world around us. That is their greatest and unique value.

Michael Sandel, the political philosophy professor famous worldwide for his online Harvard Justice course, would be urging us now to “reclaim our collective moral compass” in the arts.

Each one of you today needs to be an inspirational advocate for the fact that the arts are essential because they are, not because of what they might be traded for in the marketplace.

Why is it important that we believe and act on that truth without delay?

The future of Australia will be shaped by the creativity and imagination of its people. Never has the need been greater for people of resilience, for people capable of creative problem solving, for people skilled at dealing in abstract concepts – in other words: for artists.

The job ahead of all of us in the arts is to be able to change that economic rationalist conversation into a conversation that talks about how you have been able to turn your love of the arts into a lifetime career that **changes lives**.

This is the power you take with you as you graduate from this amazing institution. You have the power, through your art in whatever ways you choose to use it, to change the way people think and feel.

I urge you to leave here today and start straight away to

1. BE AN ADVOCATE

Talk about the value of the arts to anyone, anywhere, without apology, without rationalizing. Who is better placed to encourage participation in the arts as audiences, patrons, or silent acceptors? And if we don't do this, who are we expecting will?

It is you and me: by our words and our actions, every day.

2. BE FEARLESS

Say yes to all good ideas AND don't be afraid to fail.... In failure, we learn our best lessons. Never stop asking to be involved. Never stop trying new things.

3. BE COLLABORATIVE

We who share the same language and love of the arts need to support one another in enabling this change... become a collective force of artists coming from different art forms, but always pushing the boundaries of what the arts are and how we can all engage, at every age and stage of our lives.

And what an ideal time to venture out into the arts. Society as a whole is searching for deeper meaning, a sense of purpose, something beyond pursuit of wealth and power. The arts offer a key component in that search.

You are there, at the front line of the newest frontiers.

And so, please

- be fearless;
- be collaborative; and
- be an inspirational advocate: for the power of the arts for themselves, as well as for what they can enable.

Use your art to rise above the depressing chatter.

Change the conversation about the arts from the economic rationalist one to a deep appreciation of art for art's sake.

Whatever path you choose: whether it's

- working directly in the arts
- teaching
- volunteering in the arts
- being an audience member, a consumer or a patron

My wish is for you to be the person standing here decades from now, and able to say

I took this gift of the arts to the world, the skills that I have honed here at the University of Melbourne, I have treasured this gift and used it to open up new opportunities for myself and for others. I have helped changed the way people talk about and relate to the arts.

And like the little girl in that story... you have helped all of us imagine the unimaginable.

Faculty Dean's Introduction

Chancellor,

Mary Jo Capps has worked in the Australian cultural industry for more than 30 years after graduating with an MA in Musicology from the University of Toronto in her country of origin, Canada.

She began her professional career in Perth WA working with symphony orchestras and ABC Radio production on both sides of the continent. In 1987 she established her own consultancy practice, focused on facilitating strategic planning, board development and fundraising plus overseas touring in several major Australian arts companies including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Company B Belvoir Theatre, Bangarra Dance Theatre, National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art. Subsequently she became Deputy Managing Director and Director of Development for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Ms Capps was appointed CEO of Musica Viva in 1999, where she has worked to broaden access to and understanding of music throughout Australia, supported by strong community partnerships. She is particularly concerned with arts education, both live and digital, and providing professional development for emerging musicians, composers, classroom music teachers and arts administrators. She works nationally as a professional mentor, with a particular focus on philanthropy, and is actively engaged in supporting emerging talent on both a formal and informal basis.

Beyond her role at Musica Viva, Mary Jo became the first female President of the Sydney Business Chamber since it was founded in 1825. She is currently Chair of the Advisory Board of the Faculty of the VCA and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne; Chair of the Peggy Glanville Hicks Composers Trust; a Board Director of the Community Council of Australia, of the Australian Major Performing Arts Group and of Green Music Australia; and a Council member of the Centre for Social Impact.

Mary Jo was the recipient of two separate scholarships to attend intensive courses at Harvard Business School in Executive Education. Her contribution to the sector was recognised with the awarding of the inaugural Arts Leadership Award by Creative Partnerships Australia in 2016. Chancellor I present to you Mary Jo Capps