

The Minister is listening, but not hard enough

Brett Dean, Artistic Director of the Australian Academy of Music, has responded to Minister Garrett's announcement of late Friday 28 November.

"Yesterday's hastily cobbled together statement by Minister Garret – the purpose of which seemed to be to clean up the mess created by previously hastily cobbled together statements - indicates nothing other than the fact that the Government seriously misjudged the community's understanding of the remarkable achievements of the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM).

"Having spent the past five weeks criticising the efficiency and effectiveness of ANAM's programs, the Minister has turned round and endorsed those very programs, so much so that he wishes now to steal the name of the Academy. This makes a complete mockery of his actions of the past five weeks. If the achievements of ANAM's students were so outstanding, warranting the badging of his new institution with ANAM's name, why close it down? This is the question that the Minister has not been able to answer for five weeks.

"If the Minister is still unable to answer this question, I now call on the Prime Minister to intervene

- Why was the Academy closed?
- On whose advice and to what end was the Minister acting?
- In light of the fact that a former ANAM board member has been appointed to the new Artistic Advisory committee, does he now also retract his criticisms of ANAM's governance?

"The transitional arrangements to which the Minister alludes comprise programs currently on offer by the University of Melbourne to its students, totally inappropriate to the specialist needs of the Academy's students.

"How dare the Government retain the name of ANAM – with its internationally recognised credibility - as a smoke screen to mask the inappropriateness of the proposed transitional arrangements.

"To boast about the need for "an international panel of experts" is the biggest insult of all: why do we need this? As 750 leading artists from around the world – including all the members and Chief Conductors of Australia's symphony orchestras - have attested, the Academy has been conducting a program that is the envy of these other institutions.

"The implication of there being new money for the training of elite musicians is another insult: the '08/'09 federal budget allocated \$2.5 million to ANAM. With its closure on 31 December, \$1.25 million was withdrawn from elite musician training. This announcement brings down \$500,000 of that already earmarked money, leaving \$750,000 still unaccounted for.

"I call on the Prime Minister to intervene in this appalling mess and take responsibility for the fate of each and every one of my students by imposing a 12-month moratorium on this decision."