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media release

RECORD \$5 MILLION DONATION TO PERFORMING ARTS

A Melbourne benefactor has become Victoria's biggest individual donor to the performing arts with a major endowment to the Arts Centre.

Miss Betty Amsden OAM has established the Betty Amsden Arts Education Endowment for Children with a gift of \$5 million, one of the largest gifts ever to the performing arts in Australia.

This gift follows the recent endowment donation of \$2 million from the Myer Foundation to support the Arts Centre's new Asian theatre series. Members of the Myer family have also pledged a further \$3 million to establish the \$5 million Kenneth Myer Asian Theatre Series Endowment Fund.

A self-made woman, Miss Amsden began work at 15. During her working life she built and managed aged care facilities, lived modestly and invested astutely in commercial properties, real estate and the share market.

Born just before the Great Depression, Miss Amsden said she'd lived her life according to two maxims learnt from her hard-working parents: "*The harder you work, the luckier you get*" and "*If you have two pennies, give one away*".

Always one to make bold choices and enjoy a little adventure, as a young woman Miss Amsden was a competitor in the Ladies' Scramble at the Eltham racetrack on her 500cc Norton motorbike.

She began her association with the Arts Centre soon after it opened in the 1980s, and since then has been a regular at the ballet in the State Theatre and concerts at Hamer Hall.

Over the past 12 years she's donated more than \$500,000 to the Arts Centre, mostly in support of the artists-in-schools program, expansion of a music therapy program for disabled children and the introduction of a staff development grant.

Miss Amsden said the Arts Centre had been an important part of her life for 25 years and her gift was her way of sharing the joy it had given her, especially with children.

"I did not have the opportunity to attend live performances until much later in life," Miss Amsden said. "I want to give children the chance to experience performances from an early age. I always get a thrill watching children experience their first live performance at the Arts Centre."

Last year 94,000 students visited the Arts Centre for education performances, performing arts excursions, music technology, new media workshops and special events for families.

Miss Amsden's gift will enable the Arts Centre to program the finest Australian and international performances for children and young adults and create new works for young audiences.

The Chief Executive of the Arts Centre, Mr Tim Jacobs, said Miss Amsden's record-breaking gift was a remarkable example of one person's sustained commitment to the success of the Arts Centre. "It means we can set our goals even higher, and offer richer and broader performing arts experiences," said Mr Jacobs. "This gift illustrates that donors are continuing their strong support for the Arts Centre, and our vision for its future."

Miss Amsden is a Governor of the Arts Centre Foundation and a former Chairman of the Philanthropists' Council. Her gift will be one of the pillars of the Arts Centre Endowment Fund.

Chairman of the Arts Centre Foundation, Mr Graham Smorgon, said he was honoured to be working with Miss Amsden to establish the Endowment Fund.

The soon-to-retire President of the Arts Centre, Mr Carrillo Gantner, said he could not think of a better way to conclude his nine years as President than to announce such a significant gift.

"I've known Betty for many years," said Mr Gantner, "and I've always admired her energy and her generosity. Her gift will benefit tens of thousands of Victorian school children for many decades to come. It is simply brilliant."

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