

Ms Robyn Archer AO

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Robyn Archer AO by the Chancellor the Hon Justice Kim Santow at the Faculty of Arts graduation ceremony held at 2.00pm on 6 May 2005.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Ms Robyn Archer, AO for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

Over the last thirty years, Robyn Archer had made an outstanding contribution to the artistic and cultural life of Australia in a career that has involved many firsts and many new directions and challenges. A career, too, that is still far from over, though what she has already achieved is more than most of us could manage in two life times.

Robyn Archer grew up in Adelaide, gaining a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in English from the University of Adelaide, followed by a Diploma in Education. Thus suitably equipped, she spent two years working as an English teacher before her other life as a performer took over completely. She had been singing folk songs and playing guitar since her school days; as a teenager she was under contract to the TV show *Bandstand*. At university she sang jazz, folk and rock and roll, performed in revue, music hall and children's theatre, and formed her first band (and still managed to gain First Class Honours). In 1974 she sang *Annie I* in the Brecht/Weill ballet *The Seven Deadly Sins*; the following year she performed in their *The Threepenny Opera*. Soon she had gained international recognition for her work as an interpreter of the music of Brecht/ Weill/ Eisler and Weimar Germany. Her landmark recordings with the London Sinfonietta were recently re-released on CD as *Songs for Bad Times*. Despite the many other directions her career has taken in recent years, she continues to perform internationally, appearing with Paul Grabowsky in 2001-2002 in New York, Zurich and Berlin, as well as Brisbane and Adelaide.

Given her love of literature, it is not surprising that Robyn Archer soon began writing her own theatrical pieces. The title of her first, *The Live-Could-Possibly-Be-True-One-Day Adventures of Superwoman*, written in 1975, signals the strongly satirical, political and feminist stance of most of her writing in the 1970s and 80s. Working in London and Australia, she wrote, directed and performed in many cabaret shows, including *Kold Komfort Kaffee* (1978), *A Star is Torn* (1979), *The Pack of Women* (1981) and *Scandals* (1985). Several of these played to packed houses in the University's own Seymour Centre; they were also published as books, recorded and televised.

In the 1990s, Robyn Archer took on further challenges as the Artistic Director of an ever widening range of festivals, beginning with her work as Artistic Director of the National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra from 1993-95. She moved on to the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, directing two memorable festivals in her home town in 1998 and 2000. Next she went to Melbourne as Artistic Director of their International Festival from 2002 to 2004. In 2001 she took over a whole state, as Director of the biennial *Ten Days on the Island*, a celebration of the arts for Tasmania, which has just been held for the third time with great success. And now she is about to spread her wings, and her talents, even further: she has been appointed Artistic Director of the Liverpool European Capital of Culture year of celebrations in 2008, and of that city's 200th birthday in 2007.

Needless to say, Robyn Archer has won many awards for her work; in 2000 she was appointed as an Officer in the Order of Australia and in 2001 was created a Chevalier du l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. She is currently a member of the councils of several arts and cultural bodies and is also Official Ambassador for the Adelaide Crows AFL team.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*), one of Australia's most talented and hard working artists, the singer, writer and director, Robyn Archer.