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Cinema Papers #116 May 1997

Scott Murray

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FOCUS

KISS OR KILL
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WHAT THEY SAID AS THEY PICKED UP THEIR OSCARS
(and CINEMA PAPERS heartily cheers them) . . .

... GEOFFREY RUSH
(Best Actor, SHINE)
I want to thank all the members of the Academy. I'd also like to thank every Australian actor and theatre colleague I've ever worked with.

There's a game you can play where you create a dinner party where you can invite guests from any time in history, real or fictional. The Academy has honoured me by choosing to seat me as David Helfgott, at a table with Larry Lynit, and Count Laszlo de Almasy and Carl Chivers and Jerry Maguire. I can't imagine where the conversation might head that night, but it has really enriched me as an actor to be seated at that table.

I want to thank Scott Hicks and all the Shine team for giving me the chance to have a glimpse of the bird of paradise. Scott, thank you.

My darling wife, Jane: I wouldn't be standing here without you. And to Merle and John, my mum and step-dad in Queensland.

And to the unstoppable David Helfgott. The front of my script said that this story was inspired by the events of your life. You truly are an inspiration.

And to those people who say it is a circus, then with your celebration of life you show me that the circus is a place of daring and risk-taking and working without a safety-net, and giving us your personal poetry. Thank you.

... JOHN SEALE
( Best Cinematography, THE ENGLISH PATIENT)
Thank you very much. My congratulations to the other nominees and to the Academy. This is for Louise, Darren and Brian, and Claire and Linden from Mona Vale.

Contrary to what you see, a cameraman or a cinematographer doesn't stand alone and there's a big international crew back there that helped us make the film.

On my side of it, it was headed by Tamamole and Mo Flam, second unit Remy Arderparson, who shot all the second unit; he shot all the beautiful camels.

To Michael Ondaatje, thank you very much for asking me to contribute to the film. And to one of the nicest producers, my congratulations for the Tankhead Awards, and I am one of the world's gentlemen, Mr Saul Zanetz. Thank you very much.

Gillian (Lyn Redgrave) and David Helfgott (Geoffrey Rush). Scott Hicks' Shine.

...
inbits

Eight Script Editing Fellowships worth $120,000 in total were awarded, enabling the recipients to work on attachment with an overseas production company, writer or script consultant to develop their skills. One such recipient was Sally Regan, who will work with Roger Corman.

Four Project Fellowships totalling $24,000 have been awarded. These allow writers to undertake a non-project specific professional initiative, such as an attachment to a studio or filmmaker, or a travel plan designed to establish or consolidate professional contacts overseas.

As well as this, The Australian Screen Directors Association, The Australian Writers Guild and The Screen Producers Association of Australia have all received Fellowships supporting script assessment and script workshop initiatives.

Cover: Al (Matt Day) and Nikki (Frances O'Connor) in Bill Bennett's Kiss or Kill.

Also featuring in this year's Festival will be four major focuses on film: "All That Jazz: Saxophones in Cinema from Fats Waller On"; "Made in Spain"; "Sergio Leone Spotlight"; "Studio Ghibli: Contemporary Japanese Animation".

PROVINCIAL FILM FESTIVAL RESULTS

The 3rd Annual Provincial Film Festival was almost washed out, but around 800 punters stuck it out to see all the films, and witness the presentation of awards to the winning films.

Awarded were:
- Alfred (Christopher Minosa): the Australian Film Institute Award, for distribution throughout Australia and New Zealand;
- Freak Magnet (Kellie McGregor): the Domaine Chandon Encouragement Award, $500 cash, and $1500 worth of Domaine Chandon champagne;
- What Comes First? (Alex Weld): the Media World Prize for Best Animation, $3,000 cash;
- Space Pizza (Paul Fenich): the Cafe Provincial Prize for Best Fiction Film, $4,000 cash.

NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE CONDITIONS

In a letter to the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Alston, renowned director Bruce Beresford has spoken out for improved conditions for staff and the Collection at the National Film & Sound Archive.

"Although they are housed in a rather colourful old building, it isn't ideal for the purpose of film presentation," he said.

While the government has acknowledged that working conditions are unsatisfactory, it has withdrawn funding for a purpose-built facility. No alternatives have been found, and staff have been asked to tolerate their conditions for an indefinite time, and with no guarantee of improvement.

PHILLIP NOYCE'S A LIFE IN MOVIES

CINEMA PAPERS asked Phillip Noyce, ex-patriate Australian director of Patriot Games (1992), Sliver (1993), Clear and Present Danger (1994) and most recently The Saint, about his favourite films.

APOCALYPSE NOW (Francis Ford Coppola, 1978): I must admit that the first time I saw it at Hoyts, I went to the 11am session and turned around at 2pm and turned around at 5pm. Not only was I swept away with the story itself, but just the texture of the film overwhelmed me, and so much of that had to do with Coppola and Walter Murch's use of sound. The soundtrack of Apocalypse Now, and by the soundtrack I mean the manipulation of the combination of dialogue, music, sound effects and atmospheres, was really revelatory to me and a great influence on me as a filmmaker.

THE GODFATHER (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972): Again, first of all because of the story and, secondly, because the photographic texture of the chiarascuro lighting was unlike anything that I'd seen in colour in the American cinema. The film was not made for a big budget, but the lighting transported me.

RAGING BULL (Martin Scorsese, 1980): Because of the performances, again because of the story... In all these films, the story took me up and never let hold of me. In Raging Bull, it seemed as though the acting style was so naturalistic that I believed I was watching a documentary, even though so much of it was stylized. But the fighting sequences - and I'll never forget the opening sequence - were so cinematic, so dramatic; the punches, the use of contrapuntal sound effects and the rhythm of Thelma Schoonmaker's editing. I was like a kid addicted to candy, who has suddenly inherited a candy shop. I couldn't get enough of that film, and I watch it frequently.

NATURAL BORN KILLERS (Oliver Stone, 1995): Disliked by many people all around the world because of its content, Oliver Stone put it together in a freeform way. From talking to him, there was no rhyme or reason behind it, no logic to when he used video, when he used 8mm, when he used black and white, when he used colour - or, at least, he hasn't been able to explain it to me. His cutting style, and his use of music and sound, are so propulsive that you come out of the film feeling you've had two days worth of cinematic experience, although you have only spent under two hours.

DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (David Lean, 1965): Maurice Jarre's theme is so well-used in that film, and I found myself just swept up in the love story. In addition, Lean works on such a grand scale. He never ever ignores the minute, the little details. He is able to tell us the story of the second-greatest, most impactful social and political experiment of the century after Nazism, and yet involve us in Lara and Zhivago's ongoing love story. I saw it again when it was revived, and it had the same emotional effect on me as it did the first time, and I've seen it probably twenty times throughout my life. He [Lean] is a master storyteller, but I must admit it is Lara's theme, which Maurice worked on for months and months and Lean kept rejecting, that contributes so much to the way the love story works.

IL CONFORMISTA (The Conformist, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970): You know, I often look at it again because of its design qualities, the way in which colour and composition are used - not only to tell a story but to affect you emotionally.

But I think of all those films, Doctor Zhivago is my favourite. Not as a filmmaker, but because the story gets to me every single time, and because Lean is so traditional and yet so perfect in a way that he uses classic construction - no tricks, just straight up and down and directly to the heart.
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BY CONVENIENCE, A NAME
In their article in the previous issue, "Taking the Credit: How Directors Contribute to the Big Lie of Filmmaking", Simon Lake and Ian David admonish Cinema Papers by stating:

Cinema Papers will refer to a film and then put the director's name in brackets as though that is all you need to know. [...] It's lazy and it's an inaccurate way to discuss film. Cinema Papers, like many serious film publications around the world, lists the director's name and date of release in parenthesis after first mention of a film title. This is done simply as a way of avoiding confusion.

In recent years, for example, two features were made in Australia titled Fortress; another two were called Traps. Statements such as "This is the best thriller since Fortress" or "The most politically-inciting since Traps" are meaningless without clarification. Equally, there are many foreign films with the same title as an Australian film: Next of Kin, Secrets, Fruds, Devil in the Flesh, etc. Dated by themselves are insufficient. One can't expect readers to remember which Next of Kin was released in 1989, or which Devil in the Flesh is being referred to, as both recent versions premiered in 1986.

Of course, one could replace the parenthesized director's name with that of some other member of the collaborative process, but it is a fair guess that the reader would be hopelessly confused. After all, for which Fortress did Frederic Talgorn do the score, or Phillip Warner the production design, or Jason King some sound editing?

Lake and David know full well that this desire to avoid confusion is the real reason such an editorial style exists worldwide, but they opt instead for the mischievous claim that it is "a lazy and inaccurate way to describe a film". Editorial clarification in no way sets out to "describe" a film, nor is there ever any suggestion that it is "all you need to know", as they also cheekily claim.

Every review in Cinema Papers lists all the major credits, something very few journals do. Cinema Papers also co-publishes the only books on Australian cinema which list all the major credits of a film, laboriously copied down by hand to ensure that no significant contribution is missed or misattributed. Lake and David's criticisms of Cinema Papers are misdirected.

EYEING POSSESSIVES
As a feature writer-director who refused to take a "A Film by..." credit, it is hard not to agree with Lake and David about the total inappropriateness of such a credit.

However, the fact remains that directors have been unfairly singled out. The most ego-driven grabs for possessory glory in Australian cinema have been by writers.

Taking a copy of Australian Film 1978-1994 in hand, look at all the theatrical film titles which include a person's name:

Patrick White's The Night The Prowler
David Williamson's The Club
Summer Locke Elliott's Careful He Might Hear You
Morris West's The Naked Country
Peter Kenna's The Umbrella Woman
Haydn Keenan's Pandemonium
David Williamson's Emerald City
David O'Brien's Shotgun Wedding.

In every case, the name is that of the scriptwriter, novelist or playwright. (Since 1994, of course, there has also been David Williamson's Brilliant Lies.)

As well as theatrical features, there are the television series and mini-series. Taking Australia on the Small Screen 1970-1995 in hand, there is not a director to be found with his/her name in the title, but possessory writers are prolific. To name but a few: Summer Locke Elliott's Water Under the Bridge Neill Shute's A Town Like Alice
Ruth Park's Poor Man's Orange
David Williamson's The Perfectionist
Ruth Park's The Harp in the South.

One could make a case for such a possessory writer when a film is based on a famous work, and the original writer's name is goood publicity (Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire or Ian Fleming's Dr. No), how can anyone seriously argue a case for Peter Kenna's The Umbrella Woman or David O'Brien's Shotgun Wedding, to name but two?

Of course, Australia is not alone in witnessing this desire by scriptwriters to have their names in a film's title. Overseas, it has been going on since cinema began. For instance (to cite but one film screened recently on SBS), it is Bud Schulberg's A Face in the Crowd. No mention of the director there; just the scriptwriter.

And that hit film of 1996-7 isn't Baz Luhrmann's Romeo & Juliet but William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet.

No, it is not directors who traditionally claim glory by having their name in a film's title, it is writers. That is something Writers' Guilds worldwide ought to bear in mind before solely criticizing directors. After all, a possessory film title is infinitely more open to accusations of egotism, and a blatant denial of the rights of collaborators, than the more minor (but still quite unjustifiable) "A Film by..." credit, which is in smaller print than, and never has the prominence of, a name in the opening title. Isn't there some biblical saying about denouncing the splinter in someone else's eye but...?

1 Cinema Papers, no. 115, April 1997, pp. 30-1, 44.
3 In the case of Haydn Keenan's Pandemonium, Keenan was also the director.
CENSORSHIP FOLLIES  DAVID A. HAINES EXAMINES SOME OMINOUS CHANGES TO AUSTRALIA’S CENSORSHIP RÉGIME

27 December 1996 saw the Federal Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, slip out a sneaky press release announcing the setting up of Community Assessment Panels to assist with the censorship process, seemingly to second-guess the decisions of the Classification Board (the Board).

Daryl Williams’ statement that the establishment of these panels was consistent with recommendations of the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilizing Electronic Technologies (the Committee) was certainly a worry. It should be remembered that the Committee recommended such a panel represent major interest groups. Given that the Committee might better be known as the “Morals Committee”, one need not look too far to guess the sort of interest groups that would have been jumping at the chance for a say in what the Australian community can see at the cinema or in the home.

Industry should have been pressing for greater detail of how such panels were to be constituted, who was to make the selections and how, and precisely what the panels’ role would be. One suspects, however, that as usual commercial interests took precedence and any flutters of anxiety felt by industry members were pushed aside.

The interests of film-lovers and film-goers are nevertheless being represented by the newly-formed “Watch on Censorship”, set up by a group of concerned individuals led by: Paul Byrnes, Director of the Sydney Film Festival; Jane Mills, Head of Film Studies at the AFTS; and David Marr, writer and journalist with The Sydney Morning Herald.

“Watch on Censorship” held a public forum at the Chauvel Cinema in Sydney on 20 March. Principal guest was the NSW Attorney-General, Jeffrey Shaw, who spoke about the decision the previous week by Censorship Ministers to establish the Community Assessment Panels.

He said that, while he thought the panels were unnecessary, the original recommendation of the Committee had been watered down considerably and the panels would have no legal powers to change Board decisions. As such, they would appear to be an extension of the “focus groups” research conducted for the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) between 1993 and 1996 which indicated that, if anything, Board decisions were slightly more conservative.

A close watch will need to be kept on the selection of panel members, and to ensure that their deliberations are not used to bring pressure to bear on the decisions of what is still nominally an independent statutory Board.

The announcement also presaged a review of the selection process for Board members. Any such review needs to take account of the fact that a truly “representative” board would require the appointment of dozens of persons representing our society’s multiplicity of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups. This would be totally impractical.

What is needed on both the Board and the Review Board are people imbued with basic common sense who are sensitive to, and can reflect and represent, the plurality of views in the community.

The possibility that terms of appointment are reduced to one year should also be of concern to an industry already bemused by inconsistencies in classification decisions. While it is necessary to have a steady infusion of “new blood” into the Boards, both industry and the public demand consistency in the classifications assigned to films over time.

One way of achieving this is to ensure that, despite fatuous arguments about desensitization, there are at least a couple of members with a longer term perspective on each of the Boards. While it is impossible to measure subjectively such qualities as sensitivity, my 13 years’ direct involvement with the censorship processes in Australia has indicated that, if anything, the reverse is true: that classifiers (read censors) generally become more sensitive to classification issues the longer they perform the task. In recent times that sensitivity has also extended to political pressures.

Neither should the political element be overlooked with the States and Territories increasingly involved in the selection of members of the Board. The clamour for State representation with its possibilities for patronage and political interference is also to be resisted.

Hopefully the new Director to be appointed nine months’ hence will bring stronger leadership in countering such pressures, and reassert the independence granted by the statutory nature of the Board.

While the appointments process is being looked at, it would be appropriate to look at the structure of the OFLC. In order to protect the integrity and independence of the Board, the business management of the OFLC, together with its policy and ministerial support functions, should be taken over by a suitably experienced senior Public Service officer. This would leave Board members to discharge their statutory responsibility of classifying films according to their interpretation of community standards free from political and commercial pressures.

It might also be a good time to consider the appointment of a part-time Director or figurehead for the Board who could speak out in defence of the principles that have applied to censorship in Australia until recent times without fear of treading on sensitive political toes – people such as David Stratton, the film writer and critic, Paul Byrnes, Director of the Sydney Film Festival, and Sue Milliken, Chairman of the Australian Film Commission, would make ideal choices.

By the time this is published, yet another development with serious ramifications for the film industry will be in the course of implementation. In early March, the OFLC held consultative meetings with industry to decide on the timetable for the application of increased classification fees. These second-stage consultations follow the preparation for the OFLC of a Pricing Policy Review by Pivotal Management Consultants. It is an impressive-looking document and has busy industry members scratching their heads about what it all means and consigning it to the “too hard” basket.

The new fee structure is complex and sets fees according to a sliding scale; however, as an example, the classification fee for a 95 minute feature, which was $280 in 1993, was increased to $500 on 1 January 1996 and will rise to $1,055 in 1998.

The cost of an appeal to the Review Board for a film of similar length has risen from $300 to $1,000 on 1 January 1996. This rise has already seen smaller distributors forego appeals on decisions they did not agree with simply because of cost. This “economic censorship” will be exacerbated with appeal fees set to rise to $2,645 in 1998.

Buried away at Recommendation 13 of the Review are the options that were to be decided on at the March meetings – whether the price increases:

1. Staggered by being introduced at 75 percent of the new fees on 1 July 1997, with 100 percent fees applicable from 1 July 1998;
2. Introduced at 100 percent of the new fees on 1 January 1998; or
3. Introduced at 100 percent of the new fees on 1 July 1997, the additional funds being used to promote community awareness and improved enforcement of the national classification scheme.

Looks a bit like Hobson’s choice, with an “enforcement” carrot thrown in for video operators worried about parallel imports!

There are fundamental flaws with the Pricing Review including the fact that the Pivotal Review does not report on OFLC work practices and how these impact on the pricing policy model. Neither does it report on past, present or projected performance indicators that would permit a proper consideration of the proposed pricing levels.

Additionally, there is no provision for the funding of enforcement activities from fees collected under Commonwealth laws, yet industry is expected to pay the $600,000 levy to the States and Territories each year, and subsidize a staff member, laughingly described as a “community liaison officer” based in Melbourne. The officer’s function is essentially to police video stores to ensure compliance with local enforcement legislation.

The introduction of new censorship legislation on 1 January 1996 coincided with the “commercialization” of the OFLC. As a government monopoly the discipline of “competition” should be replaced by the disciplines of economy and efficiency. These disciplines seem to be almost entirely lacking in the Pricing Review that industry were asked to agree to in March.

We have yet to learn what decisions, presumably to be supported by industry, will be made. Under pressure at one of the March meetings the Director did admit that, following representations from the Eros Foundation, the adult video industry peak body, legal advice was now being sought on whether enforcement costs can be charged to industry.

Implementation of the new fees should be delayed until such time as the proposed fees truly reflect the notion of a “fee for service” rather than merely covering the costs of the OFLC not funded by the Government.

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Other methods such as 24FPS telecine transfers and tape to tape syncing cannot guarantee frame accuracy. The method of 24FPS telecine transfer and syncing tape to tape can contribute to errors occurring in positive conforms, neg matching and sync in sound post production.

For further details, and a more complete explanation of the differences, please contact Stephen F. Smith at Frameworks.
HE INTERNATIONAL FILM Festival, Rotterdam, is a special event. In the range of festivals worldwide, it is lauded as one that seeks out and promotes feature films with an experimental and/or politically radical edge. It is also an event geared far more to the needs and interests of serious filmmakers, critics, curators and programmers than to those of sales agents, hucksters, hack journalists and deal-makers.

It was a very respectable year for Australian films at Rotterdam, with seven features - Children of the Revolution (Peter Duncan), Shine (Scott Hicks), Floating Life (Clara Law), Love and Other Catastrophes (Emma-Kate Croghan), To Have and to Hold (John Hillcoat), Fistful of Flies (Monica Pellizzari) and Love Serenade (Shirley Barrett) - and one short - Merilyn Fairskye's Plane Torque - on show. Clara Law was also a participant in the growing CineMart, which helps filmmakers to raise money for future projects. No Australian film, however, picked up a prize in eligible categories (such as the Fipresci Prize, which went to Kawase Naomi's delicate Suzaku); and there was nothing Australian shortlisted for the Tiger Awards (which honoured Amir Karakulov's Last Holiday, Hon Sang Soo's The Day a Pig Fell into the Well and Patrick Keiller's Robinson in Space). Shine, however, did pick up the official Citroën Audience Award.

Rotterdam is a concentrated but large event. With the addition this year of the vast Pathé complex as a central venue, there were never less than half-a-dozen films at once from which to choose. One can easily spend twelve days and nights blearily stumbling from session to session, and still feel at the end that one has only seen a fraction of what was on offer. The experience is frustrating, but it is also a cinephile's heaven.

La Promesse (The Promise), the first fiction film from the documentary team of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, is one of the great films of the 1990s (it screened at the 1996 Melbourne International Film Festival). Reminiscent of the fine American film Fresh (Boaz Yakin, 1995) in its evocation of a teenage boy (Jérémie Renier) calmly negotiating his way through the mean streets of an amoral, criminal milieu, La Promesse ends up evoking the cinema's most telling, compassionate and morally complex portraits of childhood and adolescence, specifically Rossellini's war-time classics. Caught between two promises—the promise to a dying African immigrant to look after his wife and child, and the promise to his father to keep this man's death a secret—the boy's painful journey to the toughest of resolutions is a remarkable parable of human 'bondedness', responsibility and community in our multi-racial, multi-cultural time.

Werner Schroeter approves of the German title of his new film (Abfallprodukte der Liebe) and the French title (Poussières d'amour), but considers an adequate English title an impossibility. Nonetheless, his subtitlers have come up with Love's Debris. Under any title, this film - by a living, avant garde legend whose 30-year career is virtually unknown in Australia—is superb. Schroeter's earliest Super 8 works revolved around his passionate obsession with opera, and his subsequent artistic path has led him to direct many operas on stage. Here, he sets up a 'between documentary and fiction' situation, inviting various renowned opera singers to work with him, for a couple of days each, on the staging of an aria for the camera. He also takes the opportunity to quiz each participant intimately on the topics of love, art and death. A beautifully-edited mosaic of glimpses and fragments, Love's Debris is a precious document of the collaborative creative process at its richest.

Irma Vep is a fast, bold, euphoric movie from Olivier Assayas, a rising star of contemporary French cinema. Reportedly written and shot very quickly, it has a spontaneous, comic feel that removes Assayas from the slightly precious, solemn, academic manner of his previous features (such as Cold Water, 1994). Described by the director as a "cubist mosaic", Irma Vep is indeed a whirlpool of scenes, tones and textures. This 'film within a film' plonks Hong Kong superstar Maggie Cheung (playing herself) smack in the middle of an obviously doomed pro-
One can easily spend twelve days and nights blearily stumbling from session to session, and still feel at the end that one has only seen a fraction of what was on offer. The experience is frustrating, but it is also a cinephile’s heaven.

Benito Jacques’ La Fille Seule.

Jacquot’s La Fille Seule (The Only Daughter) is a sad affair coming from the maker of La Désenchantée (The Disenchanted, 1990). It is a laborious exercise in ‘real time’ cinema – following a young woman (Virginie Ledoyen) working in a hotel – but since it uses conventional cutting rather than the long-take simulations of Hitchcock’s Rope (1948) or Rouch’s Gare du Nord (1964), this parti pris hardly seems to matter. Lastly in this category of woe, Claire Denis’ Nénette et Boni is an oddly unfocused, baldly repetitive piece alternating between the masturbatory fantasies of a teenager (Grégoire Colin) and the hard-luck travails of his pregnant sister (Alice Houri). All of Denis’ films (such as the unforgettable U.S. Go Home, 1994) play on understatement, allusion and things unspoken, but the explicit, surface level here is so thin it virtually disappears into the ether long before the dreamy ending.

Jean-Luc Godard’s For Ever Mozart is also a sad case, and one that has essentially tasteless project with any social seriousness or human insight whatsoever.

Completely opposite in effect was Charles Burnett’s stirring Nightjohn. This historical drama about black slavery, a tele-feature made for Disney, has all the conventional stateliness and restraint of a William Wyler film. But how utterly compelling it is: subtle, complexly shaded and novelistic in the best sense of the term. A central scene, in which the young heroine (Allison Johns) sheds a private, secret tear in close-up as she gazes at the words in a hymnbook and understands them for the first time (“I be reading!”), seemed like the most powerful argument for classical narrative – and a radically humanist politics – offered by a modern filmmaker. Rather less classical in its structure, but similarly intense in its focus on character interaction within a vividly-defined social milieu, André Téchiné’s Les Voleurs (Thieves) is a quiet, oblique, singularly haunting study from a filmmaker who grows in mastery and expressivity with each new film.

Outright stinkers are rare in Rotterdam. But let me state for the record that I walked out of Lone Star – as always with John Sayles, a lazy, blantly edit of poorly-directed footage from the pages of a possibly interesting but insufferably PC script – and that I gaped in disbelief at Aurelio Grimaldi’s grubby biopic Nerolio, a film that reduces Pier Pasolini’s entire life to a potent charm – and who can forget the sight of a sooky young male crying non-stop for about the last quarter of the film, solely because he finally relented and let a woman kiss him on the lips?

Graced with a boundlessly inven-
KISS OR KILL
Producers: Bill Bennett & Jennifer Bennett
Writer/Director: Bill Bennett
Cast: Frances O'Connor, Matt Day

A LITTLE BIT OF SOUL
Producers: Peter Duncan, Simon Martin
Martin McGrath & Peter (P.J.) Voeten
Writer/Director: Peter Duncan
Cast: Geoffrey Rush, Frances O'Connor

BLACKROCK
Producer: David Elfick
Director: Steve Vidler
Writer: Nick Enright
Cast: Laurence Breuls, Linda Cropper
Simon Lyndon

HEAVEN'S BURNING
Producers: Al Clark & Helen Leake
Director: Craig Lahiff
Writer: Louis Nowra
Cast: Russell Crowe, Youki Kudoh

THE LAST BUS HOME
Producer: Paul Donovan
Writer/Director: Johnny Gogan
Cast: Annie Ryan, Brian O'Byrne

TRUE LOVE AND CHAOS
Producers: Ann Darrouzet
Writer/Director: Stavros Andonis Efthymiou
Cast: Naveen Andrews, Miranda Otto
Noah Taylor, Hugo Weaving
UNDER THE LIGHTHOUSE DANCING
Producer: David Giles
Director: Graeme Rattigan
Writers: David Giles & Graeme Rattigan
Cast: Jack Thompson, Jacqueline McKenzie, Naomi Watts

THANK GOD HE MET LIZZIE
Producer: Jonathan Shteinman
Director: Cherie Nowlan
Writer: Alexandra Long
Cast: Cate Blanchett, Richard Roxburgh, Frances O’Connor

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Seventh National Screenwriters' Conference

by Diane Cook

Frank Moorhouse issued a different but somewhat inextricably-linked challenge, in an equally-interesting address. Peppering it with wry anecdotes and quoting luminaries from Dad and Dave to Milton, he admonished Australian writers for what he identifies as an adversarial approach to the industry – an "ideological habit" – and for their failure by and large to take seriously the "the suits" (bureaucrats, financiers) they so despise, but from whom they expect financial support. He spoke of an "imaginative deficit" among Australian writers when dealing with the world of commerce, politics and bureaucracy, of their reluc-

crance to delve into power elites other than via caricature (NB all those who would follow Milne; this is precisely the world with which she deals in very serious detail). As a long-time film bureaucrat, I couldn't help smiling as Moorhouse pointed out (a) "it's their money", and (b) some highly admirable work has come from "the system".

Moorhouse went on to talk more generally of screenwriting craft, and of storytelling as antidote to "the malaise of the real". He described his personal creative quest as "the perfection of imperfection", and spoke of the screenplay as a series of tableaux, of the fragments which constitute perfection within the film, of the screenwriter's responsibility for these, for "the moment". His erudition was as absorbing as his anecdotes were illuminating and funny.

Jan Sardi talked about the frustrations of taking Shine through years of development, about the writing process and his creative partnership with director Scott Hicks. He said that they endured the long development haul because of their unflagging belief that the script worked; this carried them past numerous obstacles, including negative assessments and the sudden closure of apparently-open financial doors. He stressed the importance of good creative relationships, and encouraged writers to avoid "possession" of their work, saying that they should find good collaborators and then abandon themselves to the process of development and production ... and perhaps stick to novels if they're not prepared to do so.

Craig Pearce told another story of nerve-racking development re William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet, and again the precariousness of financing was central. The session was almost as pacy as the film itself, a whirlwind of a tale of brainstorming, writing, auditioning, pitching, budgeting, casting. Pearce had hilarious anecdotes about meetings with studio executives (aimed at convincing Fox, with whom co-writer-director Baz Luhrmann has a first-look deal, to invest in the project), and his and Luhrmann's collaboration. And he gave the audience considerable insight into the process behind the film's tone, language and aesthetic, discussing his and Luhrmann's reasons for maintaining an Elizabethan idiom, and for using American accents and a contemporary setting. Comparing Elizabethan English with rap, he said it was not unlike contemporary American English, and that he and Luhrmann therefore felt there was strong currency in the idiom. They wrestled with the context of the story many times before they settled on the setting, returning time and again to the play to identify where they might find a latter-day Romeo and Juliet, what Verona might have meant to Shake-

speare's audiences, and decided it was hot, violent, sexy – something like Miami, only shooting there was out of the question so the fictitious metropolis was rendered via Mexico City. Pearce was much more than just entertaining, however; what emerged from this session was another portrait of a partnership founded on incredible creative energy and tenacity, and successful ego-wrangling.

Other craft sessions included John Hughes and John A. Scott discussing their collaboration on Have Written, and Jan Sardi talked about the frustrations of taking Shine through years of development, about the writing process and his creative partnership with director Scott Hicks. He said that they endured the long development haul because of their unflagging belief that the script worked; this carried them past numerous obstacles, including negative assessments and the sudden closure of apparently-open financial doors. He stressed the importance of good creative relationships, and encouraged writers to avoid "possession" of their work, saying that they should find good collaborators and then abandon themselves to the process of development and production ... and perhaps stick to novels if they're not prepared to do so.

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Other craft sessions included John Hughes and John A. Scott discussing their collaboration on What I Have Written, Lawrence Johnston and John Brumpton on Life, and the Blue Heelers team on their high-ratin-

series.

Issue-based sessions included children's drama, writing indigenous characters and themes, interactive writing, action cinema, animation, sex on screen, and screen violence. They were supplemented by the customary marketplace sessions for funding bodies and distributors. 

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The latest in serious Indian cinema
by John W. Hood

THE INDIAN PANORAMA section of the International Film Festival of India, held recently in Trivandrum, might well be remembered not so much for the quality of its films as for the controversy provoked by its selection panel. Intended to showcase the best of the Indian art cinema of the previous twelve months, the Panorama may show anything up to 21 films. This year, the selection panel chose a mere 14. Bearing in mind a committee’s usual propensity to produce camels when designing horses, this one came up with an interesting beast, noble in some respects, a lame hack in others, with half the hump and maybe a leg or two altogether missing.

Several films by noted filmmakers, including Govind Nihalani, Aparna Sen, Basu Bhattacharya and Amol Palekar, were rejected by the selection panel whose decisions were made, according to the chairman, Manipuri filmmaker Aribam Syam Sarma, on artistic merit alone. Presumably, the films of the reputable rejects lacked artistic merit and here was the basis of the controversy that waxed more than a little bitter at times during the Festival. The films were not actually rejected in favour of films that were claimed to be better; they might, in fact, have been included, bringing the total to eighteen, still three short of the prescribed maximum, and the controversy would very simply have been avoided.

There were, in fact, films selected in the Panorama that were clearly inferior works. One wonders how Santosh Sivan’s Halo made it into the Panorama, being a film for children, yet that aside it has little to recommend it other than its technical slickness. It is full of hackneyed sentiment buoyed by all the clichés of commercial cinema and popular television. Arun Khopkar’s film, Katha Don Gampatroachi (Its English title is not much easier: The Tale of Two Gampatros), was another undeserving entrant, a factually-based film based on Gogol’s short story of the two quarrelling Ivans. While Khopkar has taken a good story as a basis for his film, his treatment of it is marked by ham-fisted acting, contrived and clichéd comedy, and a very flabby script in which too much importance is given to narrative elements that are not followed through. The John Cleese imitations of one of the two leading characters is irritatingly amateur.

Amol Palekar’s rejected film, Daayra (The Square Circle), is clearly a better film than either of these, though it is, nevertheless, a crass attempt to treat a serious and sensitive theme in a way that might make it as acceptable more realistic example of political correctness is decided upon: the deviant must be killed, and by the thugs who had earlier raped his female companion. While it is, ultimately, cheap and populist, Daayra had no less an entitlement to inclusion than some of the selected films.

Another reject was Govind Nihalani’s Sanshodhan (Correction), a very well-made film about the legislation for empowerment of women in village administration and the conservative reaction against it. Sanshodhan is a good story as a basis for his film, his treatment of it is marked by ham-fisted acting, contrived and clichéd comedy, and a very flabby script in which too much importance is given to narrative at the popular box-office as at the art-house. The subject is very interesting and, for Indian cinema, quite adventurous, dealing with a chance relationship between a girl who has been raped and a male transvestite who feels more comfortable as a woman. The rape is made a feature, as it would have been in a Hindi commercial film, along with woman-bashing, songs for the sake of them and a highly improbable though well-choreographed fight scene. The ending is goozy as well as politically correct, advancing the naïve notion that the deviant might become normal thanks to the love of a good woman, but then the director’s intelligence overcomes this whim and a

notably successful in its visual recreation of the heat and languor of village life and of the obvious distinctions between privilege and labour, power and subservience. The story is highly plausible, but just as highly predictable and, as its subject might suggest, the film – over-long at two and a half hours – succumbs more than once to the temptation to be didactic and polemical. Needless to say, it is definitely a better film than Daayra and as good as half those selected in the Panorama.

Also taking up women’s issues were two films, Nairashya, by the Kannada director, Rahat Yusufi, and Adajya (The Flight) by the Assamese, Santwana Bardoloi. Nairashya deals with the obsessive preference for male children that still prevails in many Hindu families, where girls are regarded even by their mothers and grandmothers as a curse. In this case, the father, an unabashed misogynist, is a teacher of physics, a man one would have thought educated enough to know the biological facts of gender determination. Nairashya’s subject is extremely important and its treatment is intelligent, despite occasionally bordering on melodrama. However, it is

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Indrani Haldar and Asad in Buddhadeb Dasgupta’s Lal Darja.
the developing relationship of a third with an English research scholar, a relationship that inevitably destroys her. While her aim to portray rather than examine the plight of widows is artistically respectable, Bardoloi's lightly shot of unheard conversation do little to advance the film's ideas. Moreover, the work is slow but without the compensation of any basis for reflection or meaningful contemplation; indeed, its overall substance is too meagre to allow for that. The occasional exaggeratedly long takes also suffer from want of apparent purpose. Although the contrived pace is stylistically inappropriate to its minimal substance, the film does offer a very good visual experience and its audiography is a strength.

Another Assamese film was Bidyut Chakravarty's Ragi Bhag, given the English title Vacation for a Sannyasi. The sannyasi or Hindu ascetic who takes a holiday is the uncle of a boy who also wants to renounce the world and enter the monastery. (His older brother has also renounced the world in a more active way, having gone underground and become a terrorist leader.) The uncle is enjoined to persuade the boy to reconsider his decision. In talking with the boy, the monk becomes involved again in the life of his family and, through his nephew's rejected girlfriend, realizes that female company still has the power to excite him. The film has little dramatic interest, its characters are flat and its dialogue is excessive and, at times, tediously homiletic. Ragi Bhag is often very beautiful to look at, but this is less an integral quality of the film than an incidental advantage of its being shot in Assam.

Arguably the best film of the Panorama was Buddhadeb Dasgupta's Lal Darja (The Red Doors), the life of a Calcutta stage actress and her young adult son trying to find a purpose in his life. The film promises much interest in the theatrical life of the city, but relationships are sketchily-drawn and the quotations from performances are too lengthy. Like Kraurya, it is an enjoyable film but one in which too many narrative elements are introduced and not followed through to any conclusion. It is, however, notable for a memorable performance by Mamata Shankar in the title role.

Also from Bengal, and one of the better films of the Panorama, was Malay Bhattacharya's Kahini (Fiction), described by the director as "an exercise in introspection". On the surface, the film presents a story in which a lawyer offers a man some old photographs, so prompting him to undertake a journey with a taxi driver and a poster painter, during which they kidnap a small boy, who later dies. Actually, the film makes little sense as conventional narrative, for this is not its purpose; rather, it offers an impression of narrative merely as a basis for the man's journey in search of his imaginary self or 'other' of himself. Kahini proceeds, with minimal dialogue — some of it voice-over — through a structure of loosely-associated episodes out of which a thread gradually emerges as a kind of self-realization is attained by the central character. Bhattacharya effectively exploits temporal and spatial discontinuity to merge and sometimes confuse dream and reality, a blurring that is enhanced by the soundtrack and its occasional 'inappropriateness'. Kahini offers some real hope that there are directors in India willing to dare to be different.

Not so willing to be different, but always to be relied on for technical and artistic polish, is the eminent Keralan director Adoor Gopalakrishnan. His latest film, Kathapurushan (The Man of the Story), is a well-constructed, carefully-paced work aiming to reflect in the life of its central character the momentous changes that have occurred in the history of the state of Kerala since the early 1940s. The story has a strong moral dimension, celebrating the quest for truth at all costs, and, while the central character is intended to be no more than a man, he certainly emerges from his trials in a heroic light.
After the Hollywood experience of TWO IF BY SEA, Bill Bennett came home to get excited about filmmaking again. He talks to ANDREW L. URBAN about the genesis and making of KISS OR KILL, his thriller set on the Nullarbor, starring Matt Day and Frances O'Connor.

The idea for KISS OR KILL was born in a barn, wasn’t it? Yes. I was at Broken Hill in a shearing shed during the making of Backlash in 1986 and there had been a camera malfunction. It was in a remote location about 80 km out of town. For some reason I can’t recall, the rest of the crew had gone back to town and I was in this woolshed with another crew member. We’d worked on A Street to Die [1985] together and I’d known this fellow, I guess, quite a long time. We’d become friends. Anyway, all morning he had been playing with this big-bladed Rambo knife which he had bought. I remember it was blistering hot, there was a slight wind outside and it was rattling the galvanized iron roofing. He was sitting in one corner and I was sitting in the other. It was so hot we could barely move; and he was hypnotically sharpening this blade on the sharpening stone and he was just sitting there, going, joop ... joop ..., and it was becoming really quite eerie.

Then he stopped and he looked up at me with this very clear gaze and he said, “Bill, I could cut your throat. I could put your body underneath these floorboards here and, when the rest of the crew came back, I could tell them that you’d gone for a walk down by the creek. No one would ever know.” He held that gaze and in that moment I discovered that in fact I really didn’t know this man. I didn’t know whether or not he was serious or whether he was joking. So much went through my mind just at that instant.

Anyway, he burst out laughing. The moment was forgotten for him, but it stayed with me. That really was the genesis of KISS OR KILL; that somebody I thought I knew, somebody I was good friends with, could have a side of his personality that I just could not fathom.

But that insightful moment in the woolshed was tougher to nurture to film than you had anticipated.

I wrote over a long time. This was a story that I couldn’t get off my back. I must have done about 18 or 20 screenplays over those 10 years or so. It always had inherent story problems that I couldn’t crack. In fact, on a number of occasions I could have actually financed the film and gone into production, but I pulled back because I didn’t feel the story was right.

If you don’t get the story right, it could just end up being a B-grade video exploitation film, which is not what I wanted. I was more interested in the psychological underpinning of the characters and I just couldn’t get all the elements in place so that I felt comfortable.

In 1993, I finally just threw it against the wall and I said, “I can’t do it. It’s taken too much out of my life.” I was at the point where I would say to Jennifer [Cluff, Bennett’s wife], “I’m going to do another draft of KISS OR KILL”, and she would scream at me. She would say, “No, don’t!” So I dropped it and I started work on Spider & Rose [1994]. I really didn’t think that I would ever come back to KISS OR KILL. But you did.

Well, yes. Pierre Rissient [cinema advocate and...
At Matt Day and Nikki (Frances O'Connor). Bill Bennett's Kiss or Kill. There so far, the romantic core more warmly.

Kiss or Kill is a Cannes Film Festival consultant had been following the thing for some time, and in early 1996, when he was here, took me out to dinner urging me to go back to it. He in fact had been a very strong supporter of Two If By Sea and had been surprised at the negative critical response to that. He'd wanted Two If By Sea for Compétition screening and his words rang in my ear. He said a couple of really interesting things. I had always been concerned about the morality of Kiss or Kill and that was the one thing that was holding me back. I don't have any problems making an immoral film, but I do have problems making an amoral film, and I couldn't get the morality right within myself. Pierre said, "Bill, in this one you must not think. You must simply write: action, action, action", and something that Picasso once said, "If you are an artist and you work, then what you produce will be art."

So, I sat down and realized that what in fact had been shackling me on Kiss or Kill is that I'd been intellectualizing too much. So, I just threw everything away. I sat down one day and just wrote the script in three weeks, not referring to anything that I'd written prior.

**The script is well thought out and even contains some specific dialogue, but there is a lot of improvisation required by the actors. In Kiss or Kill, is that any more or less than with your other films?**

Backlash was improvised. There were bits of A Street to Die that were improvised. Obviously, Mortgage [tele-feature, 1989] and Malpractice [tele-feature, 1989], the two drama-documentaries I did for Film Australia, were improvised. This is actually a very controlled film. I mean, it's a bit of a misnomer really, or it's probably a little bit misleading, when people talk about an improvised film. They probably regard it as being a very undisciplined thing where you simply turn a camera on and the actors get out there and start talking.

In fact, you know that to shoot a picture in the number of days that we have scheduled, and the value that we're striving for, you need to be extraordinarily disciplined. Very rarely do we actually get to a scene where the actors have to talk about what's to be said. All of that has been discussed beforehand during the rehearsal period.

Also, I have very specific dialogue in the script. It may not be, you know, word for word, but I've written a 60-page scene breakdown, and each scene has a very clear notion of where that dialogue needs to travel. So, it's actually a very controlled and disciplined process. I'd be crazy to go into something that was otherwise.

Kiss or Kill is also a good film for improvisation in that a lot of it is very reactive stuff, unlike, say, the social-realist drama documentaries I did, which were heavily dialogue-dependent. This isn't.

**Bill Bennett**

After a highly successful career in television documentary *(Big Country)*, Bill Bennett made the feature *A Street to Die* (1985), about a Vietnam vet's coming to terms with the carcinogenic effects of Agent Orange. His second feature, *Backlash*, about two police officers escorting an Aboriginal prisoner across the outback, successfully premiered in *Un Certain Regard* at Cannes in 1986. However, Bennett's next two features, *Jilted and Dead Cardholder*, were unable to secure theatrical releases in Australia, and appeared first on video (1988). Bennett then returned to television to make two highly acclaimed drama-documentaries, *Mortgage* and *Malpractice* (both 1989), with largely non-professional casts, setting out real-life situations. It was a clever career move, which he topped off with an odd couple road movie, *Spider & Rose* (1994), which had Hollywood calling. However, Bennett's one film there so far, the romantic comedy *Two If By Sea*, opened to a critical drubbing, though it now seems to be being viewed far more warmly. *Kiss or Kill* is a return to Australia and a return to *Un Certain Regard.*
that's not to say there aren't some cracker dialogue scenes in it.

**HOW WOULD YOU PITCH THE FILM IN A FEW WORDS?**

Two young hustlers, they’re lovers, on the run from the cops, going across the Nullarbor. In each town in which they spend the night, there is a murder, and each begins to think the other is the killer. That was my basic premise for the film. It's funny, you know: the one theme that kind of inspired me through the 10 years has been the Bruce Springsteen song, “Born to Run”. What are the words: “People like us, maybe we were born to run?” You know, the whole notion of this theme: working-class kids who you know are criminals but they do have a line beyond which they don't cross, and for them to find themselves in circumstances where suddenly everything starts to spin out of control. Where do the characters come from? Gee, I don't know exactly.

**WE DO SEE GLIMPSES INTO THEIR PAST WHICH ROUTES THEM OUT AS CHARACTERS. WE DO UNDERSTAND THEM AND WE EVEN LIKE THEM AS PEOPLE.**

Jennifer and I cast Matt [Day] and Frances [O’Connor] for that very reason, because we knew that on paper they’re pretty unlikeable people really. They do pretty dastardly things, but what Matt and Fran have brought to it is certainly what I require as a director: a wonderful humanity and empathy for them [their characters].

**SIT DOWN TO WRITE THIS FINAL, NEW AND TOTALLY DIFFERENT VERSION?**

After all, you have an emotional investment in the story. I'm not saying that we were actually there; that this is real and happening. After all, you have a huge emotional investment and it seemed that this was the appropriate style for this story.

Instead of doing conventional coverage, we'd shoot from slightly different angles and change focal lengths marginally. You know, throw continuity out the window and just do this very fractured, jumpy kind of thing. I do refer to it as a heartbeat, because at times in the movie we do cover it more conventionally, at the time when the heartbeat is slow, and there are other times when the adrenalin is pumping, and the film jump-cuts all over the place. It just seems appropriate for the film.
The Australian Film Commission invests in the development and production of Australian programs, assists the cultivation of new audiences, undertakes research and provides advice on policy issues.

Internationally, the AFC promotes Australian programs through festivals and special events; facilitates co-productions; provides an information service to major film and television buyers; attends film and television markets; and advises Australian filmmakers on markets for their projects.
FRANCES O’CONNOR

Film audiences were not familiar with seeing Frances O’Connor on the big screen until last year when Love and Other Catastrophes (Emma-Kate Croghan) was released. O’Connor played Mia, a young university student trying to get some order into her life and into Adrian Martin’s cinema-studies class.

O’Connor was nominated for Best Actress at last year’s AFI Awards, and since then she has worked in three films: Cherie Nolan’s Thank God He Met Lizzie, Bill Bennett’s Kiss or Kill, and Peter Duncan’s provisionally-titled A Little Bit of Soul.

O’Connor started acting in the usual ways: in school plays, and at Curtin University, where she completed her Bachelor of Arts in literature. After a year’s trip to Japan, she studied acting at WAAPA (Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts) from 1990 to 1992. “After I finished uni, I knew I wanted to be an actor,” says O’Connor, “but I knew I had to get out and have a bit of a real life for a while.”

In her first year out, O’Connor worked with the Melbourne Theatre Company, and in the first season of television’s Law of the Land: “It was a really good way into the industry, because the only way to get grounding is on the job, and that was three months of moulding the character, and me bumping into cameras, and making an idiot of myself.”

From there, O’Connor moved in to other television work, such as GP, The Damnation of Harvey McHugh, and Halifax f.p., which was where Emma-Kate Croghan noticed her, and was further encouraged by Greg Apps to cast her for Love and Other Catastrophes.

Having just completed three features, O’Connor is interested in remaining versatile, but finds film work very satisfying: “Film’s such an attractive medium to work in. It’s a very creative medium, and the more I get experience in it and feel comfortable in it, the more I want to do it, because I’ve done quite a lot of theatre, and I feel like I know that, but film is something I’m still exploring and learning about. It’s such a delicate kind of medium in terms of acting that I feel there’s much more for me to explore.”

PHOTO: TAMARA HARRISON
AMANTHA LANG, director of two short films, *Out* and *Audacious*, has chosen as her first feature an adaptation of *The Well*, by the acclaimed Australian novelist Elizabeth Jolley. It is a fine example of contemporary Australian literature, encompassing many themes and atmospheres common to other Australian writers, such as Tim Winton.

Scripted by Laura Jones (*The Portrait of a Lady*), it is a psychological thriller about two mutually-dependent and manipulative women, Hester (Pamela Rabe) and Katherine (Miranda Otto), who find their fragile world threatened when they accidentally run over a stranger near their isolated farm.

**WHAT IS YOUR FILM PERSPECTIVE ON THE WELL?**

It is not really a myth, because it doesn’t quite have mythic proportions, but a world presented in a way through Katherine and Hester’s eyes.

The landscape is supposed to reflect, to provide, a metaphor for Hester’s inner world. It is quite isolating and arid, rugged, with those strange boulders, and should really underscore Hester’s character, rather than being a real place in northern New South Wales.

So you’re using landscape in a similar way to *Love Serenade* [Shirley Barrett, 1996]? *The Well* has a darker side of the female psyche, though maybe *Love Serenade* does, too, in a different way.

When I was making *The Well*, and I hadn’t seen *Love Serenade*, I was quite concerned about it being similar, but actually it’s not. There are similarities, though, in the sense that there are two female protagonists ...
One in each film played by Miranda Otto...

Yes. But hopefully the similarities stop there.

They have also a man in the middle.

**What makes one think of Love Serenade is your comment that The Well has a heightened reality.** Love Serenade does, too. It's where you allow things in the film to take on symbolic value. A cupboard, for example, can mean something more than just a cupboard. The things within the frame are significant; they are not arbitrarily there.

**How did you become involved with The Well?**

For me it has a very short history. For Laura Jones [scriptwriter] and Sandra Levy [producer], it has a much longer one, in that Sandra optioned the book when it came out. She had already worked with Laura on Hightide [Gillian Armstrong, 1987] and they wanted to do another project together.

Originally, it had another director attached to...
It's very complex psychologically, and the great challenge for me was to learn something about the country and have a feel for it, an understanding of it, and to acquire that in a short period of time.

I don't think of it as a country drama, because I'm not particularly fond of them. In a way, I was trying to get as far away from that as possible, whilst still being situated on a homestead with a farmer.

I wanted to try and work out what that meant psychologically, rather than practically. I went to the Country Women's Association, and met farmers and people like that. I was interested in what effect the country would have on someone's psyche and what kind of woman would exist in that environment.

I see both Out and Audacious as being very different. I don't see myself as someone who is stuck in a particular style. I'm a director, or hope to be one, who will develop a style according to what the story demands. It could be a comedy, a thriller, an action movie, whatever. For me, part of the excitement is discovering a style for a story. Obviously there are particular themes

The Well is very different to your two short films, Out and Audacious. What direction had you seen for yourself in film?

I'd been developing a project which was another adaptation based on The Monkey's Mask, a crime fiction novella written in verse by the Australian poet Dorothy Houghton. I always thought that would be the first thing I'd do.

I've never lived in the country - most of the stories that I had told have been urban - but when I read The Well I thought I'd love to direct this film.
Cate Blanchett has played some fairly powerful roles in her relatively short career, and seems set to continue, having just worked on Bruce Beresford's *Paradise Road*, Gillian Armstrong's *Oscar and Lucinda*, and Cherie Nolan's *Thank God He Met Lizzie*.

Blanchett grew up in Melbourne, graduated from NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Arts) in 1992, and stayed in Sydney, where she has been very active in live theatre. She starred in the ABC television series *Heartland* in 1993, and has guest starred in episodes of both *G.P.* and *Police Rescue*, as well as starring in *Bordertown*.

Film work to date includes *Police Rescue* (Michael Carson, 1994) and *Parklands* (Kathryn Millard, 1996), a 50-minute featurette filmed in Adelaide, as well as the features mentioned before, now in post-production. Says Blanchett: "I've been lucky because each project has been so completely different that it's really kept me stimulated. I have a very insistent need to be constantly stimulated by things. That's why it's been great: I've been thrust into these all-consuming projects."

It was Bruce Beresford's confidence in Blanchett that got her a part in *Paradise Road* with Glenn Close, Wendy Hughes and Pamela Rabe, and similarly Gillian Armstrong's belief that she, and not Sharon Stone, was right for Lucinda in *Oscar and Lucinda*, with Ralph Fiennes and Ciaran Hinds. Blanchett: "It's a testament to the power of Australian directors who will not compromise their artistic integrity. I am filled with admiration, and gratitude, that they didn't compromise on that."

While Blanchett is currently working on stage in *The Seagull*, and having a rest from film, her agents all over the world are fielding scripts and looking for the right ones for her to work on next. But, at the moment, she has a blank page. And that, she says, is quite exciting.

*Photo: Marco del Grande*
**Flying the Flag**

1996 was a great year for Australia at Cannes.

The following is a summary of the features most likely to be seeking critical and sales glory at Cannes in 1997, in either an official event or in the Marché.

### The Big Red

**Production company:** Scala Productions, Unthank Films

**Production:** 16/9-9/11/96

**International sales agent:** The Samuel Goldwyn Company

- Stephen Elliott
- Finola Dwyer
  - Co-P: Antonia Barnard
  - EP: Nik Powell, Stephen Woolley
  - SM: Michael Thomas

**Synopsis:** Based on the novel, "The Dead Heart," by Douglas Kennedy.

**DOP:** Mike Molloy

**PD:** Owen Patterson & Martin Walsh

**Synopsis:** The story of Teddy, a streetwise New Yorker, who finds himself out of his depth Down Under, entrapped by a sulkiness Outback Valkyrie.

- The third feature of Stephen Elliott, and his first since the worldwide hit, "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert."

### Love in Ambush

**Production company:** Pro Films

**Budget:** $4.9 million

**Production:** June 1996

**Australian distributor:** REP

- Carl Schultz
- Jean Pierre Ramsay EP: Richard Becker
- SW: Louise Durand, David Ambrose, Christine Miller, John Howlett, Tom Hegarty

**Synopsis:** A little bit of soul is the second feature of writer-director Peter Duncan. (Children of the Revolution.)

### Blackrock

**Production company:** Palm Beach Pictures (Blackrock)

**Production:** 26/8-4/10/96

**International sales agent:** Beyond Films

- Steve Vidler
- P: David Effick
- AP: Catherine Knopman

**Synopsis:** When a 15-year-old girl is raped and murdered at a teenage surf club party, Blackrock turns into a town of hatred, shame and distrust. For 17-year-old Jared, the event tears him between loyalty and truth. When one is 17, scared and alone, how does one choose?

[See review this issue, p. 45.]

### River Street

**Production company:** House & Moorhouse Production

**Production:** September-October 1995

- Tony Mahood
- PD: Lynda House

**Synopsis:** Set in World War 2 Sumatra, European women imprisoned by the Japanese seek solace from the horror of their imprisonment by forming a vocal orchestra.

[See interview with DOP Peter James next issue.]

### Paws

**Production company:** Working Dog

**International sales agent:** Village Roadshow

- Dr. Rob Stich
- P: Debra Christa EP: Michael Hirsch

**Synopsis:** A streetwise New Yorker, who finds himself out of his depth Down Under, entrapped by a sulkiness Outback Valkyrie.

- The third feature of Stephen Elliott, and his first since the worldwide hit, "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert."

### Kiss or Kill

**International sales agent:** Beyond

- Dr. Bill Bennett
- P: Bill Bennett
- Co-P: Corrie Soeterboek

**Synopsis:** A thriller set on the flat, treeless plain of the Nullarbor, Al and Nikki are lovers on the run from the cops. Heading across the Nullarbor, they stop for the night at a small motel. The following morning the motel owner is found dead. Second night out, two more people are killed in their sleep. Al begins to think Nikki is the killer. Nikki thinks it's Al. They have known each other for years, but do they really know each other?

[See article in this issue, pp. 20-2.]
**Diana & Me**

**Production Company:** Matt Carroll Films

**Production Dates:** 3/16-11/96

**International Sales Agent:** Village Roadshow Pictures

D: David Parker P: Matt Carroll LP: Greg Ricketson EP: Greg Coote, Alan Finney SW: Matt Ford (Based on a screenplay by Elizabeth Coleman)

DOP: Keith Wragstaff PD: Jon Dowding CD: Tess Schofield E: Bill Murphy

**Synopsis:** A romantic comedy about a young Australian woman who shares the same name and birthday as the Princess of Wales. Obsessed with her royal namesake, she wins a trip to London and comes close to shaking her hand, but is elbowed out of the way by a pushy paparazzo photographer.

The second feature of David Parker, who not only shoots and co-produces Nadia Tass’ films, but directed Hercules Returns.

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**Doing Time for Patsy Cline**

**Production Company:** Oil Rig Films

**Production Dates:** 20/9-11/96

**International Sales Agent:** Southern Star Sales

P: Chris Kennedy P: John Winter Co-P: Chris Kennedy P: Chris Kennedy DOP: Andrew Lesnie PD: Roger Ford LS: Louise Wakefield E: Ken Sallows C: Peter Best SD: John Dennison, Tony Vacche, Chris Alderton SR: Chris Alderton

**Synopsis:** A wry tale about a reluctant hero who sacrifices his dreams for love and desire.

**Doing Time for Patsy Cline** is writer-director Chris Kennedy’s third feature, after Glass and This Won’t Hurt a Bit.

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**Dust Off the Wings**

**Production Company:** Southern Star Films

**Production Dates:** 30/9-12/95

**International Sales Agent:** Southern Star Films


**Synopsis:** A romantic comedy about a man who shares the same name and birthday as the Princess of Wales. Obsessed with her royal namesake, he wins a trip to London and comes close to shaking her hand, but is elbowed out of the way by a pushy paparazzo photographer.

The second feature of David Parker, who not only shoots and co-produces Nadia Tass’ films, but directed Hercules Returns.

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**Fistful of Flies**

**Production Company:** Long Black Productions

**Production Dates:** 30/9-22/11/96

**International Sales Agent:** Beyond Films


**Synopsis:** A thriller.

[See article, issue no. 112, pp. 16-19.]

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**Heaven’s Burning**

**Production Company:** DusArt Productions

**Production Dates:** 30/9-22/11/96

**International Sales Agent:** Beyond


**Synopsis:** A thriller.

[See article, issue no. 112, pp. 16-19.]

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**Joey**

**Production Company:** Village Roadshow Pictures

**Production Dates:** 4/9-16/10/96


**Synopsis:** When a young Australian boy trains a bird to Sydney to reunite a baby kangaroo with its abducted parents, a hilarious adventure begins through the city’s mean streets and to the halls of government, finding a new best friend and justice along the way.


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**Road to Nilh**

**Production Company:** Gecko Films

**Production Budget:** $1.85 million

**Production Dates:** 27/10-15/12/95

D: Sue Brooks P: Sue Maslin SW: Alison Tilson DOP: Nicolette Freeman PD: Georgina Campbell CD: Louise DOP: McCarthy E: Tony Stevens C: Elizabeth Drake SR: Mark Tarpey

**Synopsis:** A comedy about a fictitious small country town on the day of a car accident which ends up involving the whole town. Bowling ladies, husbands and fire engines go in all directions, and everyone has a different version of events.

The first feature of director Sue Brooks and DOP Nicolette Freeman.

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**Sound of One Hand Clapping**

**Production Company:** Artist Services

**Production Dates:** 7/10-22/7/96

P: Richard Flanagan P: Rolf de Heer SW: Richard Flanagan

**Synopsis:** A comedy about a fictitious small country town on the day of a car accident which ends up involving the whole town. Bowling ladies, husbands and fire engines go in all directions, and everyone has a different version of events.

The first feature of director Sue Brooks and DOP Nicolette Freeman.

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**Thank God He Met Lizzie**

**Production Company:** Stamen

**Production Budget:** $2.5 million

**Production Dates:** 25/7-12/95

**International Sales Agent:** Beyond Films

**Synopsis:** A comedy about a fictitious small country town on the day of a car accident which ends up involving the whole town. Bowling ladies, husbands and fire engines go in all directions, and everyone has a different version of events.

The first feature of director Sue Brooks and DOP Nicolette Freeman.

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**True Love and Chaos**

**Production Company:** Westside Films

**Production Dates:** 15/7-30/6/95

**Australian Distributor:** REP

**International Sales Agent:** Beyond Films

**Synopsis:** A comedy about a fictitious small country town on the day of a car accident which ends up involving the whole town. Bowling ladies, husbands and fire engines go in all directions, and everyone has a different version of events.

The first feature of director Sue Brooks and DOP Nicolette Freeman.
Short films with long impact

Jonathan Ogilvie

interviewed by Margaret Smith
Jonathan Ogilvie shares his Redfern house with his canine, the star of his third film, This Is a Dog, and another filmmaker. His third film, This Film is a Dog, has been recommended by Pierre Rissient for screening at Cannes, and he's waiting to hear if it has been selected.

Ogilvie's three short films are completely different. The first, Despondent Divorcee, focuses on a photograph Ogilvie found in Life magazine which shows a man sitting in the window of an American bar in the 1920s. Ogilvie wrote an internal monologue for this man, which told us he was a salesman who had left his girlfriend behind on the coast for another woman. As he talks, we see different segments of the grainy black-and-white print, and then gradually the whole photograph is revealed with its shock ending.

Ogilvie financed the film himself and was elated when it was accepted for Cannes. And we all know what happened then. He took a Super 8 camera to Cannes to film the stars, but the madness and mayhem turned his eye to the stars' outrageous dogs. Ogilvie came home to Australia with lots of dogs in his camera, and filmed his own dog, Quinn, as the star guest of the Festival in a shoot in Melbourne. Now with the linking footage, he had a whole film, and again it was selected for Cannes as a very irreverent satire on the whole damn world!

Jokingly, Ogilvie regrets that, even though Quinn became famous world wide, there's been no television ad man knocking on their door offering them a lucrative contract.

And now Ogilvie's third film, Trunk, is something very different again. It's a spoof on movies and cars, concentrating on yes, you've guessed it, the trunk!

Actor Leverne McDonnell (Naked, Simone de Beauvoir's Babies) plays a car dealer with an eccentric eye for oddball clients. She even introduces herself at the beginning of the film with absurd grabs such as, "We can talk primary purchase motivation", and "The colour brought good luck, and your first finger fuck."

The camera tracks with Leverne as she measures various boots for size. There's the Jaguar trunk of Down By Law (Jim Jarmusch, 1986), the Cadillac trunk of Reservoir Dogs (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), the Pontiac trunk of Goodfellas (Martin Scorsese, 1990), the Oldsmobile trunk of White Heat (Raoul Walsh, 1949) and more.

Ogilvie doesn't confess that he conceived the film in a car. He says he wrote Trunk with Leverne McDonnell in mind because he's attracted to the idea of using a subjective and objective camera in the one film. Ogilvie explains, "When Leverne talks to the camera, it only works if it's contrasted with something else. To maintain the impact, we used a crane and other objective shots."

Pierre Rissient has said that it's Ogilvie's best film yet. It appeals to his film-buff self, especially as Rissient has a reverential admiration for Raoul Walsh's White Heat.

Ogilvie's passion for films started when he was at university in New Zealand, where he made Super 8 films with a friend: "We edited in the camera, and made it up as we went along. Now I see it as a chunky, moving scrapbook of my youth."

In Sydney, Ogilvie did a year's television course at the Australian Film Television & Radio School, but he wasn't accepted into the directing course. He went on to shooting, directing and editing music videos, and his favourite is for the Headless Chickens.

Recently, he's realized that he can have a career in film: "When I was a teenager, that thought was absurd. It's only now that it's become a viable option for kids in school."

Ogilvie is very interested in the language of film, and is happy to acknowledge his influences. When asked if he consciously chose to become a post-modern filmmaker, he says that just evolved because "I'm not comfortable with autobiographical filmmaking and with staged dramas. I'm interested in showing different perspectives, round the corners of the stage."

Passion for his craft is something he cares about, and one of his great memories was going to see Samuel Beckett's Crap's Last Tape in London, which really pushed the boundaries of storytelling.

Quentin Tarantino is not an influence, although Ogilvie acknowledges that "violence on stage and screen is a great outlet. But I'm not really comfortable with that violence. It's not something I've experienced in my own life - it's not part of my Australian psyche."

Then again, Ogilvie admits quickly that he does have shrapnel in both legs due to a grisly accident in China in the mid-'80s.

It is the films of Stanley Kubrick that still affect him: "I worked on his Full Metal Jacket as a special-effects assistant in 1985, and I was fascinated by his approach. Every film Kubrick makes has its own form defined by its content. He's an ultimate auteur."

Ogilvie's own bent toward rock video clips has fuelled his interest in soundtracks and sampling. He has a close partnership with Chris Abrahams, who composed the soundtracks for This Film is a Dog and Trunk. On Dog, Abrahams had Ogilvie together with Peter Johnson and Grant Horsnell actually playing the music on guitars, bass and mandolin: "The use of samples has opened up notions of hybridity. It adds another level to the piece."

Modern art is another influence on Ogilvie's work: "Abstract expressionism is in a sense what post-modern film is. You're using the film as part of the subject."

Right now, Ogilvie is developing his first feature-film script. When asked how hard it is to be original for 90 minutes, he says, "You can get away with murder in a short film, but at some point you have to rely on a craftsman approach. In a feature film, it's naive to ignore that the audience is going to want to get involved with the story - you have to follow that through."

Ogilvie's script is called "Kinghit" and it plays with the genre of boxing films. He says that it's an American genre but he's going to dress it up "and glad it in the folklore of Australian legends". He's been hanging out at Tony Mundine's gym in Redfern, and "Kinghit" will focus on both white and Koori boxers of the 1920s.

Ogilvie says he's interested in irony "as the tool of the underdog". He remembers going to see King Hearts and Coronets (Robert Hamer, 1949), with Alec Guinness, when he was a kid: "The producer of that film told the director, 'You're trying to do the impossible in trying to sell irony to the British public.' Americans have a similar problem. Now that they're top-dog in the world, they can't see the irony of their actions."

Ogilvie agrees Bruce Springsteen is a typical example: "His 'Born in the U.S.A.' was taken up by President Reagan for some sort of jingoism. But perhaps Bruce sang it in a way that allowed that to happen."

Lastly, Ogilvie is asked if there are any recent American films that he admires. He says Lone Star, because John Sayles isn't 'over picking his story. It's an intelligent script, though perhaps still a little too didactic."

Afterwards, he takes his dog for a walk in Redfern park. No one stops him to ask for Quinn's autograph, but perhaps he has a better deal just the same.
After several notable films in Australia, including the iconic *Newfront* (1978) and *Dead Calm* (1989), director Phillip Noyce went to America. There he has had great box-office success with films such as *Patriot Games* (1992), *Sliver* (1993) and *Clear and Present Danger* (1994), even if not always critical success.

But Noyce’s American career has a solidity and strength that has eluded many, and Noyce may yet prove to be one of Australia’s best Hollywood directors. Certainly his filmic interpretation of Leslie Charteris’ The Saint character has been much anticipated, as is his planned adaptation of Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*.

**Having now worked here in Australia, in Hollywood and in England, which is the most satisfying place for you to work?**

In Australia, when I was working, you were making films in a little bit of a vacuum; that is, as opposed to now when so many films are being made with foreign involvement and partial pre-distribution deals.

When I was making them in Australia, we were making them with 90 percent government money, or, under the 10BA era, it was 100 percent private money. It was a very benign private investment, because it was usually spread over 300 small investors, whose only contact with the film was an invitation to the premiere and a yearly profit-and-loss statement.

Obviously, there was a greater freedom in that first wave of films than anything you would probably find anywhere in the world. The big difference in Hollywood is there is a ‘filter’ prior to shooting which supposedly filters, with varied degrees of accuracy, the non-commercial films out of the Hollywood studio system.

There are many tiers of filmmaking within America, and in the tier that I’ve been working in, which is the big-budget studio tier, there is a fair amount of pre-judgement on behalf of the studio in terms of what films they put into production. Once you start production, there is very little involvement in the filmmaking process, but once you finish the film and screen it in the preview system, which is part of Hollywood filmmaking, and has been since the ‘30s, then the studio comes back into play.

The preview system can be one that can work to your disadvantage or your advantage. I remember on *Clear and Present Danger*, after I sent an early cut of the film to Harrison Ford, he was demanding that he have his own editor and re-cut the film himself. The only way to quell that was to advance the first public preview a month and then the problem went away. In other words, once we had demonstrated to the studio that the audience loved the film, there was no further question about changing it, re-editing it or doing anything to it.

And there is a third possibility, which is not that the preview system has a negative impact, but that you can use it positively. That is, just like any artistic endeavour, but particularly one that is made obviously on a large budget to appeal to a mass audience, you really cover the chance to screen the picture to an audience. I usually screen it within a week of finishing shooting. For example, on *The Saint* we did that at Pinewood studios within ten days of shooting. We recruited our own audience privately, away from the studio system, so we could get an idea of how it was playing. That screening was really related to pacing and story intelligibility, although I also use the preview system to assess music; sometimes I’ll try a different approach to music and have a screening just to try things.

Each system has its benefits; the benefit I
suppose, if you can look on the positive side of the Hollywood system, is the very fact that Hollywood has been so successful and that it is locked into the audience. Its hegemony over the world’s cinema screens is based on a number of factors, not least of which is the aggressiveness with which films are marketed worldwide, including lately in the expansion of Hollywood-owned or partially-owned cinemas all over the world. Even before that happened, the aggressive marketing was in place, but, even beyond that, you have to have a product to market, and the pacing, the story values generally, appeal to the widest – not necessarily the lowest, although it can be the lowest as well – common denominator, with devastating results all around the world. That is an advantage or a disadvantage depending on your point of view.
It means that it is harder to make films of true artistic distinction, although it’s arguable that America makes as many of those as any other country, as well as more of no artistic distinction. But looking at the Australian films that have emerged even within the new era, where so many of them have been picked up prior to, or during production, I would still have to say from a distance, looking at the product that has emerged, that there is more freedom in Australia, because the development process at least is done outside the studio system and do it independently.

Do you find it ironic that Newsfront sympathizes with Len Maguire [Bill Hunter], who stays in Australia, and that his brother Frank [Geordie Kennedy], who goes to America, is treated disparagingly, now that you are an Australian expatriate living and working in Los Angeles?

I guess there is an irony, although, at the time, the Australian film industry in those years between 1970 and 1990 was always what could be described as a feast-or-famine cycle. There were times when it was very easy, and too easy, such as the 10BA years, which have been documented by David Stratton in his book, but there were times when it was too hard.

After making Newsfront in 1978, it took me four years to get another film going and then another four years to get another film going. So, in the late ’80s, after the demise of 10BA — in fact, Dead Calm was one of the last of the 10BA films — I didn’t really see much future in Australia at that time. I was lucky enough — or unlucky, depending on your point of view — to stumble into the Harrison Ford-Jack Ryan project, Patriot Games, which was a huge-budget boys’ own adventure, and it was quite successful.

I guess I like working on that level of film inasmuch as it was a case of if you died tomorrow at least you could say you’d been there rather than pining about the fact that you never have. It wasn’t a direction in filmmaking that I coveted, but, like so much that has happened to so many Australian filmmakers, it was a blissful gift, and I continued making films like that. Maybe The Saint will be the last one, although the chance to work on that level is something that will certainly be denied to you and you’ll never be able to return to it after a certain point in your filmmaking career. That is a given. It is sort of something that you can’t go back to, so you may as well do it while you’ve got the opportunity.

The Quiet American has a budget of $33 million. Obviously it is on a different scale, and so is the content very different to The Saint. Hopefully, that is a move in a different direction, or the direction perhaps that I might have liked to have stayed on when I first came here.

William McDonald bought all the rights to The Saint and then took them to Robert Evans who, at the time back in the early ’90s, was sort of on the outer in Hollywood. The Saint was one of the projects Evans used to make his re-entry back into Hollywood.

Evans then hired Terry Hayes to write a screenplay. That was the story of Simon Templar, a polo-playing playboy in Miami, who somehow became involved with some Russian jewel thieves. The trail led him to his estranged father, who was to be played by Roger Moore, who was the most famous recent Saint in the British television series which started in 1961.

To cut a long story short, the trail led to the grave of the Romanovs, the last Czars of Russia, and there Roger Moore’s character was killed, leaving young Simon to become the new Saint. I worked on it with Terry for a couple of months after I did Patriot Games in 1992 and went off to do Silver, followed very closely by Clear and Present Danger.

When I was a kid growing up, I used to love the Leslie Charteris stories of The Saint, although he was very different to Roger Moore’s interpretation. In fact, The Saint has not exclusively been an Englishman even. During World War II, Charteris had him working as a government agent and he became an American, and, of course, Vincent Price played him on American radio on NBC from 1947 for three years.

The most famous of the people who have previously played him in the cinema was George Sanders in the late ’30s, early ’40s. They were feature films adapted from Leslie Charteris’ books.

The first one was called The Saint in New York [Ben Holmes, 1938], and that was light years away from the Roger Moore interpretation. The Saint had quite a dark side, full of angst and self-doubts, and was quite a ruthless character, although he did have the veneer — the debonair veneer and charm — that Roger Moore brought so well to the part in the ’60s.

Anyway, I’d loved the stories as a kid. I’d always imagined a different Saint to the one that appeared when I was a teenager in the form of Roger Moore. So, when I was offered it again after Clear and Present Danger, it really was an opportunity, not only to bring to the screen one of my childhood favourites but also to interpret him in the way that I’d seen him in my mind’s eye, as opposed to doing an adaptation of a TV series.

The reason I always loved The Saint was because of his duality. He was able to be on the side of right, but also with one foot on the wrong side. He was light and dark at the same time.
As one would expect, things go wrong, very wrong, in the film noir-inspired Heaven's Burning. And there's no shortage of working-parts ready to be broken: a Japanese woman who plans to run off with her former lover during her honeymoon in Australia; her revengeful, cuckolded husband; gun-brandishing robbers hitting a crowded city bank; double-crossed hit-men; a desperate escape to the outback where, ironically, strangers are notable for their presence.

In Heaven's Burning, Tristan and Isolde collides with the fatalistic visions of Don Siegel, the road movie hitchs onto the multi-cultural train, and redemption is found in a conspiracy of misadventures.

Heaven's Burning's director, Craig Lahiff, has led an unusual career, even by the curious paths most Australian feature film directors endure. After a career in the computing industry, he enrolled in a Master of Arts in Film at Flinders University. He learned the tools of the trade watching and working (as an assistant in the editing department) on the sets of 'Breaker Morant' (Bruce Beresford, 1980), 'The Plumber' (tele-feature, 1979), and several locally-made documentaries, before directing and producing a couple of short films.

Having figured out the workings of 10BA, he made his first tele-feature, Coda, in 1987. "In order to direct my own films," he recalls, "I had to become a producer and raise the money myself. My background as a computer consultant, working with people like BHP, gave me a confidence to deal in finance."

After Coda came Fever (1987), with Bill Hunter and Gary Sweet, Strangers (1990) and another tele-feature, Ebbtide (1993), a project with which Lahiff is far from satisfied: I had to go at different elements of style, trying, even if I was not happy with the script, to make the most of it and learning about working with actors and developing a style.

Morant (Bruce Beresford, 1980), The Plumber (tele-feature, 1979), and several locally-made documentaries, before directing and producing a couple of short films.

Making Heaven's Burning was an opportunity for Lahiff to collaborate with screenwriter and playwright Louis Nowra, to work on a scale—not to mention budget—in excess of his previous films and to exercise a greater degree of control over the entire project.

A novel, which Lahiff describes as "very Polanski, sort of The Tenant", was sent to Nowra. That project didn't eventuate, but through their discussions a mutual interest in films noir and specific directors—particularly Don Siegel and Orson Welles—got Nowra thinking about a number of ideas.

One followed the story of Midori, a Japanese woman who is caught up in a bank robbery and pursued by her husband. Another centred on two people from different cultures whose ill-fated love ends on a paradise beach somewhere on the Andalusian coastline in Spain. Scenes from one worked their way into the other, and from that a first draft,
By Paul Kalina

Which Lahiff hails as being "all there ... the first script I've had that you could pick up, go out and shoot".

Unlike many Australian stage-and-screen writers, Nowra's screenplays are not simple adaptations of his stage work, nor do they clumsily metamorphose conventions that work in one onto the other. For Lahiff, Nowra has a great eye for the poetic visuals as well. He is very mindful that it is cinema, and not just words and characterizations. He spends a lot of time thinking the project through; the structure, the dramatics.

I've found with some writers they get started and say, "We'll see how it goes." They don't go through to the end, and there generally comes a crunch somewhere later on. It is very hard to go back and restructure things because characters have already developed in a certain way.

Part 'lovers on the lam' romance, part-road movie, part-thriller, Heaven's Burning is infused with the dark poetry of film noir.

On the first night of her honeymoon in Sydney, Midori (Youki Kudoh) fakes her own kidnapping, having previously planned a rendezvous with a former lover. The following day she is taken hostage during a failed bank robbery, and saved from certain death at the hands of her thug captors by the conscionable driver Colin (Russell Crowe). Together, they flee the vengeful Boorjan (Petru Gheorghiu), whose son was the price of Midori's freedom, and Midori's outraged husband, Yukio (Kenji Isomura). They wind up at Colin's outback home, where his philosophical father, Cam (Ray Barrett), tends to a once-thriving, now barren and drought-stricken property. (The events surrounding Midori's kidnapping and Yukio's elevation to the stature of world's most famous cuckold are based on actual events several years ago in Japan.)

A contemporary Tristan and Isolde is one way of looking at it, says the quiet-spoken Lahiff, while Don Siegel provided a perfect model for the characterizations that drive the film:

Charley Varrick [1973] is one of my favourites, and of course there is Dirty Harry [1971], Coogan's Bluff [1969], Escape From Alcatraz [1979] and Invasion of the Body Snatchers [1956] going back to that genre. Quite often his films tend to be about a main character who comes into contact with his darker side. Like in Dirty Harry, one of the characters tends to be very controlled and then he is pitted against somebody who has lost control. There is a final confrontation.
Generally, he makes a statement at this stage: whether it is beneficial for society to be more controlled and emotions contained, or whether there is something more spontaneous about people who express their emotions more. There’s a duality between those two different sides of human nature. I suppose the archetypical film is *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where you get the total pod people. *Heaven’s Burning* doesn’t settle on just one ‘dual’ protagonist upon which to pivot its unpredictable flights of suspense and action. Nowra and Lahiff bring to their film noir typology a skewed take on ethnicity and Australian multi-culturalism. It doesn’t amount to the message about multi-cultural harmony our political pundits would prefer to hear.

I wouldn’t like to make any implications about that mix of different cultures coming into collision. The important thing is Midori’s point of view, being a Japanese woman who comes out here into a different society. She steps outside of her own culture and only finds herself by breaking the rules. In the end, it costs her her life, but in the end love is more important... which again ties back into *Tristan and Isolde*.

Part-‘lovers on the lam’ romance, part-road movie, part-thriller, *Heaven’s Burning* is infused with the dark poetry of film noir and a free-wheeling approach toward myriad film genres it systematically subverts, with a healthy amount of knowing humour.

There have been few Australian films as dark as this. This was an issue for one Australian distributor the producers approached, says Lahiff (and with whom, needless to say, they did not go): It was difficult to cast, and difficult to shoot as well. The script moves between suspense and mystery at the beginning to straight action sequences and black humour. But the central element is the love story.

Some people who originally read the script tended to sympathize with Yukio, the husband. Midori needed to be somebody who was sympathetic, who had only been married for a week or so and was leaving her husband, who appeared to have done nothing wrong.

For the rôle of Midori, producer Helen Leake and I wanted Youki Kudoh, whom we’d seen in *Mystery Train*. We sent the script to her and then went over to meet her. She has such an innocence, a naïve quality, which is very endearing. We thought we could get the audience to still empathize with this character despite what she does. She makes mistakes; there is a touching scene where she and Colin are in the motel room, in separate beds, and she is saying how she is bad luck for the men in her life.

For the rôle of Colin, producer Helen Leake and I wanted Russell Crowe, and this meant delaying the project to fit in with Crowe’s commitments in America: the film in *Super 35*, which will end up as anamorphic in the final print.

We met with him when he was down in Adelaide with his band, and then he suggested I come up and watch the cricket with him. So we spent the day in the box watching the cricket to see if we could get on with each and last a day, which was a good way of doing it. The other casting issue, says Lahiff, was the range of ethnic characters. As well as the lead characters, Japanese and Anglo-Saxon, are Afghans and indigenous Australians.

Lahiff and DOP Brian Breheny opted to shoot spend about five or six weeks with the DOP and go over all the locations, think about different styles of doing the film, and come up with a consistent approach which will fit the budget. I storyboard all the shots.

But with this film you can pick up the script and have a look at the storyboards on the side of the pages and it is pretty well the same as what we shot. Lahiff welcomes the breadth of styles, subject matters and audiences – from niche arthouse films to market-driven genres – with which Australian filmmakers are currently engaged.

However, he laments the slickness of many American films and the absence of “stylist” filmmakers:

I do get a bit disappointed that there are not too many stylists left; filmmakers who have their own distinct visual style. Particularly American films tend to have a certain look and that is it. I miss the Hitchcockian set-pieces, the Welles visual style.

Boorjan (Petru Gheorghiu) and Colin. *Heaven’s Burning*
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BOYS NOT TO ADMIRE • LIZARD AS PET AND PARTNER IN THE HEARTY ARTISTS

Film

THE QUIET ROOM


The Quiet Room


Australian distributor: Twentieth Century Fox. Super 16 (blown up to 35mm). 92 mins.

It's impossible to predict how The Quiet Room will do at the Australian box-office. The film screened in Competition at the Cannes Film Festival last year. It is a minimalist film with a seven-year-old protagonist, and she doesn't speak for most of its duration. The film is mostly set in the child's deep cool-blue bedroom, where she keeps her fish and her toys. We never see her in the kitchen, the family room or watching television because Rolf de Heer purposely set out to make a film that isn't distracted by ordinary domestic tasks and 'kitchen-sink drama'. We see the parents' bedroom and the spare bedroom, but nearly always from the child's point of view. The child's name is Kate (Chloe Ferguson) and, at the beginning of the film, she is creating a drawing of her mother and father: they stand separately, the mother under the sun and the father under a black cloud. Kate has done twenty or so similar drawings which are all stuck neatly on the wall of her room, too neatly for a young girl.

When the mother (Celine O'Leary) comes into the room and sees the drawings, she's shocked and she recognizes their symbolic nature. But when the father (Paul Blackwell) is given a drawing by Kate, he looks at it quickly and looks away, too busy to see its significance. The parents are obsessed with getting Kate to talk, which is putting their marriage even more on the edge. She hears her father say roughly, "No point in taking her to counselling, she just says nothing!" Her mother angrily asks him to give their daughter time — time to recover. But, by now, we the audience sense through Kate's perspective that it's the parents who need counselling. Kate has told us in her internal monologue that she "Makes her own peace" and "You know what you have to do to make me talk again!"

Kate also has flashbacks to an earlier time when she was three years-old (Phoebe Ferguson), when there was love and fun in the house. These scenes are shot hand-held for energy and movement, and tinted with golden tones to accentuate warmth and affection. We see the three-year-old in bed with her parents, and in the country with them, in a series of romantic images. The older child wants to return to this time, and her muteness is her way of trying to tell her parents. She wants them to hear her inner voice, but they aren't able.

In contrast to these earlier warm images, the world of seven-year-old Kate is shot cold and still-framed. The camera never follows the parents; instead, they even argue in her room, and run about in and out of her bedroom door in the film's most

Grim Secrets

Jared [...] has witnessed a rape which has ended in murder [...] and is torn between telling the police the truth and the hoary old Aussie bromide of never dobbing on your mates [...] Blackrock), while sparing its rapist pigs nothing, also makes clear that sexuality is a matter that interests women as well as men. p45

Where's Carrie?

Debbie Reynolds wasn't always Carrie's favourite mum, neither is she Albert Brooks' in Mother Zone, that rarest of the rare, a serious Australian sci-fi film, makes its long-awaited debut.

A Short Walk to an Airport

The Frontline team has created a low-budget comic gem with The Castle.

CINEMA PAPERS • MAY 1997
Films continued

unconvincing scenes. Even if we’re realistically, the parents’ arguments seem false and hyped up rather than real points of conflict.

But when the older schoolgirl comes to babysit, the film returns to its own inner strength. The girl sits down on the floor and really tries to talk to Kate and tells her kindly, “Some of the kids at school think you’ve gone mad. Everyone talks, they don’t deserve it yet.”

When Kate succeeds in getting them to hug one another, and she climbs in between them as she once did as a younger child, they all stay as separate as before. Finally, there is some sort of resolution for this family, but it’s not what any of them really wants, except for Kate, who does score a hit on at least one of her wish lists.

THE CASTLE


The Castle was destined to create a lot of interest in film circles. It is the first feature produced by the creative team behind the highly-praised Frontline television series, and it seems that the interest is well-deserved. They have succeeded in producing a low-budget film that has no pretensions about what it is, or the story it has to tell.

Dale Kerrigan (Stephen Curry), the 16-year-old narrator, begins by telling us his story, the story of his family, the Kerrigans. They live in a dump house adjacent to the airport and frayed by power lines and cyclone fencing. His father, Darryl (Michael Caton), is a loving man committed to his family and his greyhounds, and is constantly thinking up plans to improve the house for his family - patios, mezzanine levels, extensions - and never finishing them.

Dale’s mother, Sal (Anne Tenney), is just as devoted to her family, and is loved for her cooking, and her handicraft skills evident around the house. Dale’s brother, Steve, is what his dad calls an “ideas man”, and has something of an eye for a bargain in The Trading Post; his other brother, Wayne (Wayne Hope), is in gaol for armed robbery, but misses his family terribly and longs to get out; while sister Tracey (Sophie Lee) is the family’s pride and joy. Not only did she get her hairdressing certificate at Sunshine College of TAFE, but she was called down on The Price is Right, and almost won the whole showcase, and has just married Con (Eric Bana), a man the family have grown to love as one of their own.

The Kerrigans are a happy, content and comfortable family until a real-estate assessor turns up on their doorstep to do a valuation on the house. Soon afterwards, they receive a letter saying their house has been compulsorily acquired so the airport can build a storage facility. Darryl is not at all happy about this; his house is his home - his castle - and he is not prepared to give up without a fight. With the unwilling help of Dennis Denuto (Tiriel Mora), the solicitor who represented Wayne, Darryl takes it to the Federal Court with an hilariously underprepared case and, not surprisingly, loses. But during a court recess, Darryl meets Lawrence Hammill (Charles "Bud" Tingwell), a retired QC specializing in constitutional law, who offers to represent the Kerrigans’ case in the High Court in Canberra.

The impressive thing about The Castle is not the story or the situation - they’re fairly standard as far as storytelling goes - but the quality of the script itself. While it is a simple film, its humour, and the skill with which that humour is presented, is sophisticated and effective. Where it would have been easy to depict the Kerrigans as a family of losers living in a particularly unattractive neighbourhood, and really robbing them of any integrity and reality by turning them into gross caricatures, the creative team has shown instead a family that has foibles and faults - some of which are very amusing - as well as pride and dignity, and a right to live the way that they enjoy.

There is also an element of familiarity with the Kerrigans, as if they were our own family, or our neighbours or friends. Their life is full of the strange domestic trappings that we tend to take for granted - The Trading Post, the unfinished extension, the cubby-house converted into a kennel (it would have been a granny flat, but the council wouldn’t approve it), television game shows - things that are identifiable, and immediately endearing. And even though they are distinctly Australian, there’s a notion that they’re universal as well, and the Kerrigans take on the role of the ‘Everyfamily’ battling against the faceless corporate enemy.

Produced independently with no government funding, and only a financial kick-in from Roadshow during post-production, The Castle was shot on Super 16 during an 11-day shoot, edited in a similar time, and then transferred to 35mm. With the success the team has had with their rather unique production methods on Frontline (where they are not just writers and directors, but producers, camera operators, editors, casting and music supervisors and actors), it is pleasing to see
Blackrock


"It's nearly a grown man", says Len (John Howard), whose divorced wife, Diane (Linda Cropper), asks him to help their son. "Yes, but what kind of man is he gonna be?" is her reply. This exchange sums up a good deal about this new Australian drama of urban youth in an industrial seaside town. Jared (Laurence Breuls), their son, has witnessed a rape which has ended in murder. He has thrown a party to welcome back his older surfie mate, Ricks (Simon Lydon), and is torn between telling the police the truth and the hoary old Aussie bromide of never doubting your mates.

This is a film about kids unsupervised before they're ready to look after themselves and certainly before they're ready to take responsibility for the results of their stupid and dangerous lifestyles. Not that the film takes a censorious approach to its youthful characters and it is ready to see parental neglect, incompetence and ineffectualty as having a good deal to answer for. However, it very intelligently sees the possibilities open to kids in a threadsbare culture of surfing, screwing, boozing and hoovering around Jared's arm, but can find no time or way to tell him until she has had the operation. When he visits her in hospital, he tells her he won't be round when she gets home, and the rest of the film must work towards a closure which will satisfy narrative expectations about the way this relationship has been working. The early scenes between them, getting in each other's way in the bathroom in the morning, have a very convincing sense of people long used to living together.

Diane, in Linda Cropper's outstandingly good, detailed performance, is crisply likable, capable of nagging, generally allowing Jared what turns out to be more independence than he can handle. The relationship deteriorates until a final truth-baring scene when he leaves her in a stretch of urban wasteland in the shadow of a vast bridge. Breuls is not really up to this exchange, but Cropper makes her side of it eloquent and just about carries him through.

It's not just Breuls' fault. The character of Jared is too clearly signposted as the sensitive one, the one with aspirations (to be a photographer), and too often the camera dwells soulfully and unwarrantedly on his conventional good looks. There's not enough sense of activity behind the eyes to make one feel that this character can work as the film's pivot.

In terms of community, though, the film is remarkably astute in its intimation that political and social generations and sexuality stake their claims for attention. Class, in particular, is very sharply signified in a couple of brief scenes at the high school: this is no clichéd working-class blackboard jungle institution, just a dreary cross-class place where kids are bored but put up with it most of the time, saving their energies for more dangerous games. Similarly, the film, while sparing its pretty pigs nothing, also makes clear that sexuality is a matter that interests women as well as men. Diane and her friend Glenys, rightly unable to bear watching a video of Terms of Endearment (James L. Brooks, 1983), go to a pub where Diane meets an amiable but unknown bloke, Geoff, and later spends the night with him.

The film finishes on a sobering long shot of the cemetery where Jared has wordlessly joined his mother and five other kids dying before their time, and this maudlin gesture, when the parent? of the dead girl berate Jared, whom they judgmental about the surfie murderer.

In some ways, it works better than any of these: it zips along with enough energy and drive to deflect attention from awkward moments and an inadequate central performance. Its dramatic texture is denser than that of any of the earlier films. There are two interweaving narrative strands, both dependent on "secrets". Jared can't bring himself to tell the police investigating the death of Tracy that he has seen the rape from his position on the cliff above the beach. A generalized sense of loyalty to his friends becomes focused on one who later confesses to Jared that he killed the girl because she "led him on" and then bit him ("like a fuckin' dog") when she tried to repel him. This is the least well-managed scene in the film: the confession is awkwardly written and its immediate cliff-top aftermath belongs to a different sort of melodrama. The surfie funeral rites (the board floated out to see bearing his wetsuit and other relics) are rightly placed in a subsequent scene as a maudlin gesture, when the parents of Tracy that he has seen the rape...
MOTHER


John Henderson (Albert Brooks) has a plan: he's going to move back in with his mother in a little experiment that should solve his problems with his self-esteem and his relationship with women. John's been suffering a mid-life crisis: he's seen as a kind of goy Woody Allen, but not as lauded. Personally, I like a description I read which described him as a mix of Woody Allen and Ivan Reitman: he has great ideas, but he seems to be pitching them to executives in suits who can't see beyond the straight-jacket of the family home. There is potential not only for good comedy, but good drama. Unfortunately, the idea gets muddled in a deceptive simplicity and a stickiness that this perception is not without merits. In fact, she's so good that much has been made of the fact that Albert Brooks' comedies are often overlooked and underrated; he's seen as a kind of goy Woody Allen, but not as lauded. Personally, I like a description I read which described him as a mix of Woody Allen and Ivan Reitman: he has great ideas, but he seems to be pitching them to executives in suits who can't see beyond the straight angle.

Mother is an excellent example. The idea itself is not bad: to examine the relationship between son and mother, put together under the microscope of the family home. There is potential not only for good comedy, but good drama. Fortunately, the idea gets muddled in a weird West Coast male psycho-babble. While the comedy is of the gentle observational variety, you sometimes get the uncomfortable feeling that you are laughing at the expense of characters, and not with them - Brooks' character an exception. The same uncomfortableness carries through to the observations, which often are either banal or wrong.

Debbie Reynolds plays Beatrice, in her first leading role for 27 years. And she's good. Her performance is able to defy the reveal layers in Beatrice, while at the same time appearing very 'surface' - a good interpretation of a middle-class veneer. In fact, she's so good that it's probably the main reason why I had troubles with the concept. That John Henderson is a man so embittered with the legacy of self-doubt and lack of confidence that his mother left with him does not sit with Reynolds' portrayal of an essentially-confident, caring mother. So she doesn't show his glory across the suburbs, or constantring him to praise and admire. The assumption that she is maddening and that he is charming and in need of more positive reinforcement is a problem, when confronted with a self-absorbed son who forces his need on his mother, who has chosen a lifestyle that suits her.

The dénouement itself is a sticking point: he has an epiphany by realizing that her lack of belief in him comes from her own stunted lifestyle. He can pity her and gain self-worth in knowing that her main source of emotion for him was one of jealousy. It feels a bit like an outcrop of a perceived 'feminist backlash', where men who have problems relating to women trace it back to a crippling mother. That is not to say that this perception is not without validity, but in this case it comes across as a bit of a cop-out.

There are moments when the film rises above this narrow vantage, and they have great intrinsic comedic elements. One is the scene where John, in order to totally incense his jealous brother, yells out "Yes, we are making love" in front of his horriised mother and her doodering old neighbour. And there are nice observational moments: Beatrice's freezing everything, including a weeks worth of salad, and a jumbo-sized cheese block; the trip to the supermarket which turns into an extended exchange of banalities with the elderly neighbours.

There are other films which explore this son-mother dynamic a little more adventurously: Flirting with Disaster (David O. Russell, 1995) and Spanking the Monkey (Russell, 1994) come to mind. Also "Mrs Robinson", which Mother refers directly to by remaking Simon and Garfunkel's signature tune ("Here's to you, Mrs Henderson"). Unfortunately, the trission of these films is undermined by John's essential infantilism. He's unlike Allen in that he doesn't seem to realize his own character's essential weakness, and that this weakness needs to be plumbed to gain humour.
ZONE 39


In the year of the 20th anniversary of Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977), there's something refreshingly about Zone 39 (finally) hitting Australian cinema screens. A modestly-budgeted science-fiction film by anyone's reckoning, Zone 39 is also a universally-downbeat experience - sometimes for the audience, sometimes for the creators.

While the distributors obviously hope for an X-Files-size demographic with the snappy ad line “The truth is a lie” (which, for some, is immediately nullified with the follow-up, "Enter the terrorist zone" - Terrorzone being a mid-'80s sci-fi comedy), the title, Zone 39, more than nearly references the work of Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. Not only does Zone 39 frequently adopt the pace of a Tarkovsky film, but it actually takes one of his better-known works, Stalker (1979), and attempts a thematic advance. By arming lead character Lieutenant Leo Megaw (Peter Phelps) with a means to live his dreams before his journey of self-discovery, he puts the singular objective of Staller's characters - the ability to harness dreams - in his own pocket, or ear as it is, and then ably demonstrates what several doses of Novan can do to your grip on reality.

Novan is apparently a government-produced pharmaceutical that can induce full digital virtual reality. Megaw ingests the drug by means of a plastic tab attached to his left ear lobe and principally uses it to keep in touch with his deceased wife, Anne (Carolyn Bock).

Before the credits proper, a chunk of text states that two corporate and former "enemy nations" have linked up to replace government as we know it. Overnight, social order reigns, a 40-year war has been put on pause, and a few joint ventures have been announced - all this and more, only in exchange for total media control.

After this opening scroll, Zone 39 tries to focus on a military training session involving land mines. A trainer fails to disarm the mine he's standing on and the bomb detonates. As thelayouts of the road’s paved with a bit of irony. Despite the inclusion of violent death, a limb lopping, two sex scenes (one of which earned it an MA) and several visions of rampant drug abuse, this is no exploitation checklist. Zone 39 has much larger considerations that extend way beyond the eco-warrior-come-grief-striken character of Leo Megaw. Phelps remains enigmatic as Megaw throughout, and makes you wonder why he usually has to do so many horror movie gags to get lead roles. For a digital appearance, Novan Anne is played confidently by newcomer Carolyn Bock. Photography is supplied by Peter Zakharov, here on his first outing as the sole DOP. Zakharov has definitely captured some rich textures. Music and effects are full and effective, with Burkhard Dallwitz using drones and percussion to set the tone.

Zone 39 could easily be a quick burn down Route 666 to the post-holocaust bottom-of-the-quarry fast-car fun factory. Instead, it's an elegiac and darkly-contemplative drive on a road of the near future. That the road's paved with a humanity being rapidly absorbed by corporatization and modern technology, to say nothing of real living environment damage, is a prime concern of Zone 39. Concern yourself with the fact that you don't have to wear 'sat-cam' shades to view it. Who knows? Bofto box-office might dislodge its distribution labelmate Lpsilon from distribution limbo.

MICHAIL HELMIS
(See article about the making of Zone 39 in Cinema Papers, no. 114, February 1997.)
The harsher laughing at stupidity is reserved for minor characters who are written in a more one-dimensional style, but no less telling for that. It is the gallery-and-arts establishment who appear briefly in gallery tours or at money-raising socials; it is the pompous critics; it is the seedy legal advisers; and the crass company board members who receive the sharpest barbs. They are all the more effective because of the skills of Pamela Rabe (who shows how one can be memorable even with a minute or two of screen time and only half-a-dozen lines), Max Gillies (pontificating, "I'm an Art Critic"!), John Hargreaves in a final memento cameo and a humorously-disguised Wendy Hughes.

The setting is Adelaide (since Film Victoria did not contribute financially, but the South Australian Film Corporation did) and the subject is the visual arts world, but it can be taken as Melbourne and the film world.

While a genuine artist is commissioned to sculpt a piece as a memorial donation for the entrance to a gallery, the money comes from the owner of a pharmaceutical corporation (with ultra-diligent memorial donation for the entrance to a gallery, the money comes from the owner of a pharmaceutical corporation (with ultra-diligent investigations for the maximum tax breaks), is approved by a self-besotted and alcoholic critic, and is manipulated by the owner's spoiltd daughter. But the heiress, Georgina Oliphant (Claudia Karvan) gives a smart interpretation of chic bordering on breakdown), has her own problems, cajoling her wily philistine executive father, George (Chris Haywood, as a paragon of double standards), outwitting her psychiatrist (Robert Menzies) and seducing Karl-Heinz (Nicholas Hope), the sculpture model. There are plenty of targets here as well, not the least the poking fun at pop psychology and greedy quackery with drugs and therapy. Karl-Heinz is the naïve hero, easily seduced by the prospect of money and lust. Nicholas Hope makes him decent, often bemused and struggling with his earnest wife, Cecilia (Gosia Dobrowolska). She, meanwhile, has wafted off to the New Age, prefers purity to sex, doing good for the customers at the Centre for Synchronous Awareness (including Cox himself in a cameo role to show he is really enjoying the movie, as well as the revenge) and sitting at the feet of the ex-Rabbi, ex-Jesuit missionary guru, Baba Charles (a smartly Norman Kaye), whose words are those of uncrous spirituality but whose mind is on dollars and power. So, there are enough characters and enough plot to keep us attentive and entertained. The production design, photography and lighting give each location a specific tone and atmosphere: suburban homes, spirituality centre, board room, gallery, mansion and artist's studio. Paul Grabowsky's score has eastern beats and instruments (recorded in Sri Lanka), which nicely counterpoint the visuals.

Lust & Revenge is very funny. The situations are set up, often belying our expectations, and the editing cuts mean the sequences do not outlast their welcome and we are swiftly on the next. One presumes that John Clarke's major contributions is the dialogue. Much of it is slyly wicked, a judicious blend of the obvious and the subtle — and it is delivered with verve and point.

The humour also works because of the contrasting personas of the four main characters. Chris Haywood's bumptious worldly-wise donor is balanced by Nicholas Hope's nice and somewhat naïve model. Claudia Karvan's sophisticated poses are balanced by Gosia Dobrowolska's suburban wife, with combination of innocence, puritanism and shrewd determination. Her performance gives the film a humanity without which Lust & Revenge might merely have been vindictive.

While there is an abundance of questions, this is not a film of answers. Relationships get no further than frequently comic last. Audiences will respond to the comic depictions of issues of art, art and commerce, art and patronage, art and pretensions, to issues of authenticity and phoniness in society, religion, business and relationships. It is just as well that the film itself works and exhibits Paul Cox's talent for filmmaking. At the end, the Art Critic, plied with alcohol, fails to see that he is being set up as a pseudo-expert. He delivers himself of authoritative opinions on the commissioned statue, praising with tropes and style of the lines and curves of the sculpture. While the couple in the statue are wearing no clothes, Cox finally leaves us with the image of the Art (Film) Critic, who is wearing "emperor's clothes" and whose opinions are threadbare. © Peter Malone

**inreview**

**Films continued**

**LUST & REVENGE**

Books

I FELLINI

Charlotte Chandler, Bloomsbury, London, 1996, 407 pp., illus, index, rrp $49.95.

Federico Fellini was honoured with an Academy Award in 1992 for his lifetime achievement, and in 1993 he died in Rome. Before he died, he entered into a series of taped conversations with the journalist Charlotte Chandler, which are full of wit and irony, and her interviews are a pleasure to read. They are frank and disarming. Not surprisingly, he’s full of contradictions, especially as his genius is there on celluloid forever.

For instance, Fellini thought television seduced us because we watch it when we’re half undressed, and you come away feeling that you actually know this man just a bit better. © Margaret Smith

Books Received

THE EVENING STAR
First printed in 1992; reprinted as movie tie-in, 1997

EXTREME MEASURES
First printed in 1991; reprinted as movie tie-in, 1997

FIerce Creatures

LETHAL KISSES
19 STORIES OF SEX, HORROR AND REVENGE
Ellen Datlow (editor), Orion, London, 1996, 370pp., rrp $19.95

PARALLEL TRACKS
THE RAILROAD AND THE SILENT CINEMA

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY SCREENPLAY

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Access Agreements
by Lloyd Hart

Suppose you hit on a likely film subject, a true story. There is someone in the story, or who has a particular interest in the story, and whose co-operation is valuable. You know it is a good idea to contract this desirable person to give you exclusive access to the information, contacts and documents in their possession.

In this article, I will discuss some of the issues that can arise as you set about obtaining this exclusive access.

Books and Access
Where there is a real story of real events, or a person’s life begs for cinematic treatment, some enterprising author may have seen fit to put pen to paper about it. Maybe there is a cornucopia of books. A producer might well say, “In strict legal terms, I don’t need to get an option on these works. I can do my own research.” Yet there are reasons to take up an option on the rights. Research can be time-consuming and costly. You stake out your territory as far as the other aspect, the stuff of legends perhaps, spawning books, researchers who have devoted a lot of time to the topic, or there is a key relative, associate or busybody who has gathered critical information or harbours a unique theory, giving colour to the story. They may have numerous bits of memorabilia or know a lot about the various places where the information is in this mini–industry. If you can obtain an exclusive agreement with one or more of those persons, as well as an option on the existing books, you have the means to get the best story you can and the inside running to boot.

Don’t Miss Out
Your accessor may be pretty old and information lost to posterity if you do not ask now. They may also be able to authenticate and put in context photographs and documents. Their presence may influence others to co-operate with you.

Do You Need Permission?
What if there is no book? Generally, if you want to make a film about someone’s life or an aspect of it, they cannot stop you, short of putting your horse’s head or other parts in your bed, unless you have defamed someone big-time or done some of the things below. Even then, speaking generally again, you won’t be injunctioned where damages are a sufficient remedy. But what will your backers say?

In some American jurisdictions, the celebrity and the notorious have a loose kind of proprietorship in their own fame. Not here. We Australians cannot suggest that someone endorses a commercial product when they don’t, that someone endorses your script, your film or your series when they don’t, or that you are associated with someone else’s well-known work when you aren’t (passing off). You cannot use a specific idea you know has been given to you in confidence. There are also limits under the Copyright Act on how you use a performer’s performance when you pay for it. You can’t use it for something other than the purposes you have agreed to.

So, if you want someone who is the focus of the script to co-operate, they have no copyright in themselves as it were – artistic work though they may be. You may choose to enter an Access Agreement with them. There may be some mileage in having the unauthorised version – most likely on the road to court.

Issues In Access Agreement

Exclusivity: To work, your agreement must be sole and exclusive. You need to fix the period – at least five years – to give time to develop the script and have the film out sans competition.

Script Approval: You don’t have the luxury of giving script approval to the accessor, for your script development backers won’t risk money now to have later returns jeopardized by a third party they may see as being as co-operative as the captured alien in Independence Day.

You need to clarify that you can freely change the story. Perhaps you will change it so much that you are no longer able to claim in the credits that the film is based on a true story. Major wins election.

Introduction To Third Parties: The accessor may agree to introduce other people integral to the story, libraries and other sources.

Documents: The accessor may have copyright in letters and other documents they have written. They can give you permission to reproduce these. They may possess other documents. It may be a breach of copyright to copy these. An agreement can cover this, so that the accessor does not give you more than they have, but you can define exactly what you’re allowed to do with the information.

Defamation: Unless you are paying a fee that would make the Sultan of Brunei blink, you cannot expect the accessor to consent to your defaming them, when they have no earthly notion of what you might say. Someone who is a little insane may agree to give you immunity from a defamation suit if what you say is true, regardless of whether it is for the public benefit. Most people, when it is put to them fairly and squarely, are like religions and the truth: fairly reluctant to embrace it. A lot of access agreements deal with this issue in the way of some religious orders – silence. A prudent producer – alliteration certainly, but is it tautology or oxymoron? – gets pre-emptive guidance from defamation counsel before each draft of a script on sensitive subjects.

Fees: Fees can obviously vary a great deal according to the importance of the accessor’s contribution to the story, the size of the film or the amount of work the accessor will have to do. If you ask them to meet you a goodly distance from where they live, you will pay for their reasonable travel and accommodation expenses, assuming there is such a thing today.
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The A to Z of Producing
by Hal McElroy

A is for AFC, AFFC, ABC. They’re all good, but A is also for Arrogance – a bad thing. Are you with me?

A is for Art. Many people think what we do is Art. True! But some people are outraged if I talk about what I do in such terms. How can commercial television be Art? So maybe I should file what I do under P for Popular Art.

A is also for Attitude – be positive – if you’re not, don’t expect anyone else to be! A is for Aim High – don’t settle for second best.

A is for Actors – who you must learn to love and understand.

A is also for Apathy – things won’t happen unless you get off your arse and do something. Then there’s that other A.

A for Arse – as in tin arse luck. But I’ll get to that later.

B is for Brand – branding is important these days. Your name is your brand – protect it, promote it, enhance it – it has value.

B is for Be Strong – you’re the leader, so lead!

B is for Bullshit! – avoid it at all costs, particularly if it emanates from your own mouth.

B is also for Beastie Boys – their songs and videos are wonderful.

C is for Clarity of Vision – communicate your vision to everyone in your cast and crew continuously.

C is also for Collaboration, for Cost-Control and Creative – all good.

But C is also for Cold – as in impersonal or aloof. If that’s how you’re perceived to be, then you can’t use all the other good C letters – like Communicating, a Clear Creative Course.

C is for Groundbreaking – try to be – and Generosity – learn to be, particularly with praise because it helps speed the creative process.

But G is also for Gangrene – a life-threatening disease that arises when a wound or problem is neglected. So if you figure out there’s a problem, for god’s sake do something about it straight away. Unless attended to, neglected problems can be life threatening.

D is for Delegate – learn to do it if possible.

D is for Diplomatic – essential in dealing with the creative community.

D is for Decisive, imperative, and Distribution, necessary, and Directors – your most essential collaborators.

D is for bad qualities like Dogmatic – try not to be!

D is for Don’t Repeat Yourself, or De La Soul – who’ve taken hip hop rap, scratching and sampling to amazing heights, and Di, my wife, who is amazing.

E is for Enthusiasm and Efficiency – they’re terrific – but it’s also for Ego – keep it under control. Sublimate it to your star’s or the director’s, all for the project’s sake.

F is for Fighter (you need to be), for Friendship (you’ll need them, don’t forget them) and for the Future – something you should always be watching.

F is also for Fear of Failure. In my 23-year career, I’ve wanted to make (and have developed) nearly 350 projects, concepts, books or scripts. But I’ve only made 17 and only had 7 or 8 successes. So there’s a lot of failure implicit in those numbers. In fact, for the mathematicians, it’s a 5 percent success rate, isn’t it? Don’t be fearful of Failure, it comes automatically with the game.

F is also for Freak Out/Panic Attacks – try and control them, particularly in public.

G is for Groundbreaking – try to be – and Generosity – learn to be, particularly with praise because it helps speed the creative process.

But G is also for Gangrene – a life-threatening disease that arises when a wound or problem is neglected. So if you figure out there’s a problem, for god’s sake do something about it straight away. Unless attended to, neglected problems can be life threatening.
**H** is for Honesty and Hard Work – they’re two qualities I like to think I’ve built my reputation on.

**H** is for Hysteric – given the incredible stress of what we’re doing, perhaps understandable in others like actors or directors, but unforgivable in a producer.

**I** is for Integrity and Innovation – both fundamental.

**I** is for Information. I read 20 newspapers and five women’s magazines every week. Plus I read at least 5 monthly magazines, and switch continuously over the 12 different radio stations programmed into my car, plus watch a slew of television. Why? Because it keeps me up to speed with everything people are reading, watching, thinking and talking about.

**I** is also for Isolation. I know producing is hard and lonely, but no one promised you a rose garden. Come to terms with it and get out and meet and talk and share and then you won’t finish up in that other I – the I that is for Ivory Tower.

**J** is for Journalist – make them your friends, they’re just men and women with a job, don’t turn them into the enemy!

**J** is for Jealousy – there’s lots of it – some of it in the most surprising of places, like your friends. It comes with the territory, so get used to it, too.

**K** is for Know Your Markets – if you don’t know them then you’re dead. K is for Kryptonite, but you’re not Superman, so don’t worry about it.

**L** is for Listening – learn and listen and watch carefully and deeply – listen to and watch your audience, your crew, your director.

**L** is also for Learn From Your Mistakes – they’ll prove to be your most powerful lessons.

**L** is for Luck – which is best described as when preparation meets opportunity.

**L** is for Little Minds – wherein success is not possible.

**M** is for Movies as opposed to Television – learn the difference. Different needs, demands and audience expectations. For example, I don’t believe that the same low-budget movie script could also make a good television movie. So understand the difference.

**N** is for New Technology – learn about it, adopt it if you can, as quickly as you can. N is for No – most things I want to do are greeted with a No. Virtually always, at first, my ideas are rejected. That’s okay. Don’t necessarily stop – learn from the No what problems you may face. The negatives may have come from the way you presented your idea.

So, try incorporating the negative into your sell thereby, hopefully, neutralizing it by dealing with it. You can learn a lot from a negative by turning it into a positive.

**N** is also for Nasty – my attitude to violence.

**O** is for Optimism and Originality – enough said.

**O** is also for Opportunistic – enough said. But O is for an Open Mind, too. Keep your mind and your heart open; that way instinct can flourish, then creativity will follow.

**P** is for very important things like Perseverance and Patience – you’ll need heaps of both.

**P** is for Publicity and Promotion – you’ll want heaps of that, so think about it all the time.

**P** is for Popular Culture (or is that art?). Immerse yourself in it because, like it or not, as far as your audience is concerned, that’s the industry we’re all part of – popular culture.

**P** is for Street Poetry or rap – which is just young people expressing their fears and prejudices.

**P** is for Problems – but that’s your job isn’t it? Solving them.

**P** is for one of the most important qualities of all, Passion, for without it no success is ever possible. If you don’t have a passion, then don’t do it – it’s too hard and probably doomed to failure. And failure will make you P for Pissed Off.

**Q** is for Questions – ask them all the time. Why does it work? Why did it fail? Why does it cost so much? Why can’t I do it quicker, cheaper, better? Q is for Quixotic – try and avoid.

**R** is for Research, Reading and Radical – which are good.

**R** is also for Rewarding Originality, which is essential, and the Republic, which is inevitable, and Rolling Stone, which is a terrific magazine, and Rhythm in Storytelling – which is fundamental to good drama.
unbroken succession of inserts – images that patiently and hypnotically detail practices of secrecy (how a group of oppressed captives hide and pass messages inside clothes, books, furniture) and, eventually, violation (when the oppressors move in and methodically destroy these same objects). Cavalier’s style openly resembles Robert Bresson – especially the Bresson of Un Condamné à Mort s’est Échappé, ou le Vent Souffle où il Vient (A Mon Escaped, 1956) – but this amazing film is more Bressonian than Bresson, with its astonishing portrait shots of each character, its microscopic attention to gesture, detail and texture, and its accumulation of fierce, pained emotional traces. If ever there was a film that deserved a cult – a serious, reverential, avant garde kind of cult – that film is Libera Me. And I had to travel to Rotterdam to be able to see it, which unfortunately says a lot about the current state of Australian film culture, with or without the recommendations of the Goski Review.

The Cavalier series seemed to find little favour among critics at Rotterdam. But I was intrigued by his latest work, Le Rencontre (The Encounter), which is in many respects the ultimate exercise in personal cinema attempted to date – filmed entirely by the director with a small Hi-8 video camera, narrated by him and his lover, and documenting the internal intimacies of their relationship. Nonetheless, the film is rigorously, often lyrically stylized – comprised almost entirely of close-up inserts of various, talkative objects collected by the lovers, with many a glimpse of a face, and few views of any bodily parts beyond hands and an occasional foot. The narration is pitched at a level of gush that undoubtedly makes the film painfully embarrassing for some – just about everything that Cavalier films leads him to whisper frantically, “It’s so marvelous, so beautiful, it filled me with such tender emotion!” – but this is a special and unique experiment.

Even more remarkable was Cavalier’s previous work, Libera Me (1993). A film with no dialogue (but an exquisitely-rendered soundscape), the barest possible sets (but a remarkable feeling for space and objects), and a plot abstracted from all historical specificity, Libera Me is an intense distillation of personal experiences related to imprisonment and resistance. It is, once again, a virtually

**13 festivals** - Rotterdam

focusing on three directors (Jang Sun-Woo, Oleg Kovalov and Alain Cavalier), the burgeoning mockumentary genre – defined extensively enough to include Orson Welles’ F For Fake (1973), Wim Wenders’ childlike The Brothers Sklodowsky and Mohsen Makhmal­bai’s latest, A Moment of Innocence – and a tribute to the production company Golden Harvest.

I sampled two films by Kovalov, The Island of the Dead (1992) and his latest, Sergei Eisenstein – Autobiography. Both are compilation or found footage feature films in a fairly avant garde mode – no narration, no identification of any clips until the final credits. His montage effects veer from the ridicu­lously obvious – for instance, intercutting Eisenstein’s more romantic Soviet visions with documentary footage of hideous historical atrocities – to the archly cryptic. The films work best when they conjure Rui-style ‘impossible scenes’ and fanciful fic­tions from the assembled fragments but, in the long run, they become tired­some and unengaging.

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**19 festivals** - India

Kathapunishan is a very warm, humane film, well acted and beauti­fully photographed. The meticulous care given to characterization is one of its great strengths. Yet one cannot help wondering how long the man who made a masterpiece like Ellippathamayam is going to keep turning out conven­tional narrative cinema, albeit of a very high quality.

The prolific Mumbai-based director Shyam Benegal had two films included in this year’s Panorama. The lesser of the two, Sardari Begum, tells the story of a woman who achieved considerable fame as a classical singer while she strove, often without success, to achieve happiness in her personal life. The film takes a hackneyed approach of structuring the narrative in the form of a journalist’s investigation, and to some extent several of the characters are mere sources of information rather than people interesting in themselves. Those with a taste for fine Indian music will find the film an aural delight, while some may be critical of the filmed concert that it often appears to be.

Shyam’s other offering was the highly-acclaimed The Making of the Mahatma, an excellent film dealing with the South African period in Gandhi’s life during which he developed his philosophy of non-violence and carried out what he called his “experiments with truth”. So many popular represen­tations of Gandhi depict him as a pre-packaged mahatma or ‘great soul’, ignoring the perplexities and pain he brought to his family in the develop­ment of his lofty moral rigour. Benegal’s warts-and-all Gandhi, played superbly by Rajit Kapoor, is by no means entirely admirable, and, considering all that she had to put up with, one might sometimes wonder why the title mahatma was not bestowed on his long-suffering wife, Kasturbai. Those who remember Attenborough’s epic will immediately appreciate the rela­tion­ally minimal budget of Shyam’s film, but they will be no less impressed by the film’s attention to historical detail, its keen perception of character and, above all, its sincerity.

Arguably the best film of the Panorama was Buddhadeb Dasgupta’s Lal Darja (The Red Doors). Given its thematic, structural and stylistic origi­nality, as well as its impeccable craftsmanship, this film clearly stood out against the rest. Basically, the film represents a man’s endeavour to regain the innocence lost in the suffocation of urban bourgeois life, and to this end traces the slender though adequate story of a dentist, fearful of becoming a robot and trying to cope with the break-up of his mar­riage. Alongside his unhappy domestic life, we see the exceptionally success­ful love-life of his driver, a simple, good-natured rogue, who has two wives and a third on the way. There is another strand of narrative in which Dasgupta presents glimpses of an ide­alized world of lost innocence and flashes of an all-too-real and absurd world of present experience. The direc­tor, also an eminent poet, weaves the three strands together with remark­able artistry, giving his highly poetic film meaning and intelligence without being abstruse, and thoughtfulness without detracting from its proper measure of enduring unanness. Lal Darja is a delightful film.

It is a pity that the Indian Panorama was marked by controversy. Given the uneven quality of the package and the relative merits of some of the rejects, questions might perhaps be asked, or at least wondered, about the many rejects by not so well-known film­makers whose names did not even make it into the controversy. In its aim to show the world the best of the country’s art cinema, this year’s Panorama, contro­versy notwithstanding, was saved by the reliable Gopalakrishnan and given sparkle by the promising Jayaraj and Bhattacharya, the veteran Benegal and the immensely-talented Dasgupta.

**50 legal ease**

**TIME AND PLACE:** You need to decide how accessible the accessor is, and just how often and where they can make themselves available. You may choose to employ them as a consultant on the film itself. You may have to allow for old age. They may set conditions. You can negotiate.

**RIGHT TO USE ACCESSOR IN PUBLIC­ITY:** The accessor may be seen to be a great authority on the story; they may be a person of public interest. You may have to insist that they appear at vari­ous times and places for publicity and allow themselves to be photographed.

**EXTENT OF RIGHTS TO USE INFOR­MATION:** The accessor may want to restrict the use of information to particular media. Of course, you will want to use the information for all purposes. This may affect the fee. You may also agree that the accessor is not obliged to talk on certain subjects (bed wetting, perhaps).

The accessor may be a copyright holder of the material they say and you record. Better to get an assign­ment of the rights in it.

**ASSOCIE IN UNDER Eighteen:** Even though a parent or guardian signs the agreement, it may not bind the accessor. It may be impractical to enforce any access agreement where the accessor goes silent, particularly on a sensitive subject, hard as it is to think of one today.

**WHAT IF YOU DISCOVER SOMETHING DREADFUL?** What happens if during the course of your research you find out something really quite disgusting about the person who is giving you the access? Assuming you intend to base your film on a true story and want to say so, integrity can be an issue if you do not depict the dreadful truth you have uncovered. Maybe the disgusting thing isn’t relevant to the drama. Maybe it is. You could withdraw. Facing backer after that might compare with meeting your maker – best delayed as long as possible.

**Personal**

It usually makes sense not to bind the accessor’s successors to act – the agree­ment is clearly personal – though access to material should survive the accessor.

**Conclusion**

Access Agreements can sew up the story; not so much find the core themes. That’s already been done. So, it’s better not to put the cart before the horse that bolted off before the stable door was closed! Wasn’t that the one taken to water?
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but I'm not precious about the form that I'm consistently interested in, there we did tweaks. We wrote a couple of different endings, tried a thing in the script that I wasn't happy about directing; that I had to like each scene and think it was relevant; that if I didn't believe in a scene, then it shouldn't be there.

Because the screenplay had gone through several drafts, I went back to the first draft and worked out its evolution. I found things in some of the original drafts that I really liked, and put those back in.

I guess every director tells a story in a different way.

Do the fact that The Well has been considered unfilmmable put you off? I read the screenplay first, so I always approached it as a film rather than an adaptation. I read the book a couple of times, and stuff like that, but I always treated it as a film and as a story that I was telling on film. Laura had already done that in a sense, so whilst she was actually true to the essence of the novel, I didn't feel compelled to use story elements in the film just because they were in the novel. My task was to make it work as a film. Maybe some viewers will have read the book, but I'm catering for a movie audience, not for a literary audience. So, I never thought about it.

I don't know what you mean in terms of "unfilmmable". It's quite a strange story and it asks you to suspend disbelief on a number of different levels. It's hard trying to make something that can sustain that suspension of disbelief. Once the man is thrown down the well, Katherine's saying he is alive is a very odd thing to happen. That's why I wanted to approach it from the point of view of a fable, because in fables, or in fairy tales, there are lots of things that happen that aren't real or couldn't possibly exist, but they help in the telling of the story. I looked at it like that.

Was it your decision to bring Mandy Walker on as DOP? Yes. Sandra was very generous and very supportive in the sense that she allowed me to go out and bring in people who I was interested in working with. Of course, she had to meet them and feel good about them, too. But Mandy was someone who I wanted to work with. Sandra met her, really liked her, and we went from there. It was the same with the first AD and the production designer.

Walker has a very poetic visual style.

What is fantastic about Mandy is that she is a great communicator, a great collaborator. She is an artist, but she is very practical and great fun.

Mandy is a very unique combination because what she does is visually very poetic. She has a great understanding of that without being a tosser. She talks about things in very tangible terms: "This is the emotion of this scene. This is what we want to feel. How can we find an image that is going to make us feel like this? Is this the moment when we want to see Hester really clearly, or is this the moment when we want her in the dark?"

None of her images, or her lighting, is arbitrary. It has meaning, but it also has a kind of visual flair.

Mandy and I did a lot of research in the beginning to try and come to a style. When she first read the script, she felt it would be really good to do it in black and white. I said, "I really think it would be good to have a bit of colour in it." So we then tried to develop a technique that had the feelings that we were both going for. We did a bleached bypass process which strips everything of its colour but certain colours still resonate in the frame. We did weeks of testing to try to come to the right filtrations and the right look.

The other thing that we discussed was how Australian light is very hard, very contrasty. I wanted the film to have a painterly look. When light is soft and slightly abstracted, you don't feel like it is really real.

We tried a couple of things and ended up putting Softex filters in front and not bouncing into daylight, trying to give it a softer floating-down feel.

We also decided that we wanted to try and make the images like still photographs. An image wasn't arbitrary: if you freeze-framed it, it would have a meaning on its own.

There is a great feeling of composition through the whole film. Some people might find it a bit slow, or a bit too considered or deliberate, but the lighting, being slightly bleached and a little washed out, is very evocative.

I thought at the time, "Oh, this is too self-conscious", but hopefully once you see it up on the screen, and it has its sound properly done, it will all blend into one thing. There is nothing worse than watching a movie that is so self-conscious that you can't get into the story.

As a first-time director, you want to make an impression; you want to come up with something that is exciting. It's hard to find the balance between that and going too far.

That's something that I've realized retrospectively. It is part of the process of making films and of learning what your parameters are and how far you can push one element, and how little you need to do in order to achieve something.

Miranda Otto and Pamela Rabe play the two main characters, Katherine and Hester. Was there any casting in place before you joined? No. I was lucky again; I did all the casting.

At first, we looked at much younger girls for the part of Katherine, because she was written as 15. But I didn't have much success finding a younger girl who could achieve the complexity of a character like Katherine. She is such a chameleon: suddenly manipulative and seductive, but naïve at the same time.

Sandra, Laura and I talked about Miranda, but I thought she wasn't quite right. When she came in, she did one take and I thought, "This girl is Katherine!" She is really amazing.

As far as Pamela goes, it was very hard to find someone to play Hester, because she is a very peculiar character who is out of her time. If you read the book, Hester is like a character from the '30s and Katherine from the '80s, yet they are both living in this same time. I found that quite hard to grapple with at first. Certainly in the casting it was hard to find someone who could bring a reality to such an "out of time" character. Pamela is perfect. I can't imagine anyone else playing Hester.

If it were 30 years ago, Ruth Cracknell, probably. But that would be completely different again.

Yes, that's right.

Pamela isn't iconically Australian, if you know what I mean, whereas Ruth Cracknell may be seen like that. Pamela doesn't come with that baggage attached – not that that was why I cast her.

She is fresh, a very brave, very intelligent, very clever storyteller who was willing to allow Hester her oddities and her peculiarities. Because of that, she could also find an emotional truth to the woman which was the most important thing, certainly for a film like this.

Did you use music to highlight this difference between characters, and how involved were you in the choice of music? Completely and absolutely. One of the first things I realized was that music would play a really important part in showing the balance, or imbalance, in Hester and Katherine's relationship.

I started work with the composer, Stephen Rea, very early on. We played each other bits of music and basically came to a few choices. We showed them to Sandra, which was a very amusing exercise! She loved the classical music, but then I played her Fur, the band in the pub, who were not musical geniuses. Her face fell.

"What?", she said. "Are we going to have that noise in the film?"

For me, it wasn't important that I had music that was going to make a great CD; what was important was having music that describes both characters and has great contrast.

Hester's music is supposed to represent the only beautiful thing that she had contact with in her life, whereas Katherine's music is about being physical and thrashing around, about something that was scary, kind of instant and not sweet or beautiful, but sensual or primal. In a way, it's those elements, or those characteristics, in Katherine that Hester is attracted to; but also they are foreign to her because she has very little understanding of her own physicality or sensuality.

That [early selecting of music] was also great because it helped me to start seeing Hester and Katherine's relationship. Before I'd even cast, I had this music which was describing their characters to me. It also helped when we finished shooting the picture and started working with the composer again.

Hopefully, it means that all the music is part of the film, rather than something that happens later.

It's terrifying, really. I'm not musical and I've never been to the country, and here I am making a film with lots of music set in the country. But I think it is about more than that.
**36 Phillip Noyce**

—a Robin Hood character, except not like Robin Hood because he didn’t just steal from those who deserve stealing from and give it to those who needed it. He did that and something else, which was that he kept some of the booty for himself.

In that sense, I suppose that’s been his appeal ever since he appeared in 1929 with Leslie Charteris’ short crime stories, as a minor character in a British crime magazine, and why he has endured all those decades.

When I came back to it, Terry was working on *The Planet of the Apes* [remake] script for Fox, so he couldn’t work on it again. So, I hired Jonathan Hensleigh, who had written *Jurassic Park* and *Die Hard with a Vengeance*. We thought about it for a while. There was one problem with this present screenplay, the one that Terry had written. It assumed something that may or may not be true: that there is a huge audience out there who are familiar with *The Saint*, and who are waiting with bated breath for his reappearance on the silver screen. It seemed to me, particularly from Los Angeles, where I was sitting at the time, that the opposite was true: that there was very little knowledge, particularly amongst the prime movie-going audience. Yet, I was also aware that amongst my own age group, and amongst opinion-makers — that is, writers and people in the media — that there was an awareness and a loyalty, even if we don’t really go to the movies.

So, we thought what we’ve got to do here is to try and come up with a story that reintroduces The Saint to an audience who are familiar with the character, but also introduces The Saint without alienating the first group. We investigated Leslie Charteris’ life. He grew up in Singapore, so we thought, “Okay, so The Saint is going to grow up in the Far East somewhere.”

We also decided that, although he was principally a Brit, we couldn’t be sure that he would be played by a Brit, because it would depend on who we could get to play him, who wanted to play him — not that we were seeking an American, although that is the way it turned out.

Although Roger Moore played him as the quintessential ’60s Britisher, the character for me when I was growing up was not necessarily that personality. So, we decided that we would make him an orphan and tell the story right from childhood.

In our story, which is the story that will appear on screen, he is an orphan who doesn’t know who his parents are or their nationality. It could be English, could be Australian, could be a combination of anything, certainly Caucasian. He is growing up in a Catholic orphanage somewhere in the Far East, presumably Hong Kong or Singapore, where he has been given the name of one of the patron saints of the orphanage, a name which he denies because he knows it is not his real name: and he invents his own name. Simon from the super-heroes tree, it doesn’t matter because Bond, although we thought he was dead, has been resurrected with a vengeance, and we didn’t want him to become confused with James Bond.

We decided that, rather than try to get bigger and distinguish ourselves by being a bigger action-adventure movie, we should distinguish ourselves by being a smaller one; that the film should try and concentrate on the psychology of the character, and the central relationship he has with the woman he is hired to steal from. And so the film took, under Wesley Strick’s writing, a major turn to become a film that we hoped would be true to the spirit of the action-adventure genre — that is, basically exciting escapist entertainment — but at the same time would startle the audience by the turns that it takes into character and relationship.

Essentially, the film is a romance — for better or for worse.

**How close to the original concept of Charteris’ The Saint is your film?**

That is an impossible question to answer. First of all, there is not one Charteris’ Saint. There is Charteris’ Saint of the early ’30s, late ’30s, the war years. After the war, the ’50s, he changed. Our Saint is closer to the first Saint movie starring George Sanders. But our film is not about The Saint; it is about a man who becomes a Saint, and how he becomes known as The Saint.

**Is this something that The Saint purists are going to throw their hands up in the air and say, “No, this is not what it should be”?**

Hopefully not, and certainly not till now. I showed it to Roger Moore about a week ago and he seemed delighted, and the producer of the original Saint TV series, Robin Baker, had a similar reaction.

**Is The Saint the kind of character that evolves and develops depending on the era the movie or the television series is made in?**

Yes, obviously he did, and also according to the medium, as Roger and Robin commented after the screening: “You know, our Saint was deliberately softened and given a somewhat more debonair light-touch because he was made for television.”

I don’t think in the ’90s a recreation of the Roger Moore character would really work — as good as he was in that time and that medium.

The same seemed to be the reaction last week when we screened the film to about a thousand Englishmen, in a provincial town, just to see what the reaction would be. Where they did make comparisons, they seemed to appreciate the fact that this Saint was more complex than The Saint they remembered from the TV series which is now re-screening on BBC 2 weekly.

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2. Australian scriptwriter who wrote *Dead Calm* and several Kennedy Miller mini-series.

3. The second (*The Saint Strikes Back, 1939*) was directed by Australian John Farrow.
Get out more often!
Currently, the big productions that require Hollywood-scale studio space head to the Warner MovieWorld stages at Coomera on Queensland’s Gold Coast. Many in the industry have long thought the northern state’s venture into film real estate an odd one, considering the traditional production centres have always been in Sydney and Melbourne. Talent reservoirs, producers’ enclaves, laboratories, sound studios and escalating tiers of specialized and arcane services, such as animal handlers, antique car hire, etc., are visible in abundance in the southern states, mainly due to the high activity of television commercial producers.

But a change is due as, from early 1998, the scales may begin to tip the other way when Fox Studios Australia begins operations with serious resolve and a huge investment in its Sydney Showground production site, just four kilometres from the Sydney CBD and no more than eight kilometres from the city’s airport.

As you stroll around the spacious site, with last year’s Ferris wheel and a sprinkling of today’s trade shows filling temporary exhibition halls, it’s hard to visualize the magnitude of what will actually be running in 1998. No more funfairs, fairy floss, cattle droppings, woodchopping tussles...

To soak up the story, I spoke to Rod Allen of Fox Australia.

Asbestos

Rod Allen:

In taking over the area, we adopted a philosophy that we would respect the heritage of the site — and not only with buildings. It applies to streets and open spaces. Wherever possible, if a building could be adapted for our use, we did so. Two big pavilions are being retained because they lend themselves for shooting and big exhibition spaces. The Government and the Commemorative Pavilions date from April 1938 and, whilst considered to be structurally very sound, contained large amounts of asbestos in their roof areas. This was a major task to remove. But the reward of this costly effort was the salvation of, in the case of the former, a huge stage area of 3,800 square metres. This structure has a very high arched roof and it will receive sound insulation treatment to improve its acoustic performance.

On the site of five proposed sound stages, the present animal-judging sheds had low ceilings and little else to recommend themselves production-wise, so were not serious prospects for studio conversion. These studios will be new, purpose-built structures: three stages (2, 3, 8) will be primarily intended for film, while the other two (4, 5) are aimed at television production and will accommodate live studio audiences.

All the sound stages will be able to switch to the other medium. All stages will have the ability for acoustically-secure cable ports to allow for OB vans to park outside and pass their cables inside.

The philosophy behind the whole site is that the studios will be a shell and production units will need to bring in their own gear and people.

"It’s not our intention to end up with a big workforce of our own. Fox Studios will be the supplier of facilities", says Allen. In the area of post-production, Fox is adopting a selective approach when it comes to sub-letting space to interested companies.

Allen:

Our approach has been to talk widely. We’ve had a lot of interest and applications from a whole range of businesses, not only in post-production, but from businesses that provide services, like equipment hire, props, wardrobe, casting agencies — all those types of production support. In the case of post-production, there has also been a lot of interest.

At the present time, we’ve not made any final decisions at all about any businesses that will be relocating to this site. But our approach is to encourage existing businesses to move to the site and set up those facilities, rather than for Fox to establish a post-production service itself — apart from a picture-cutting service or a sound-mixing service.

Allen is of the opinion that this approach reflects the way the Australian industry works at the present time: In most cases, we’ll certainly not want to set ourselves up in competition with existing businesses. It’s a small industry and it wouldn’t be in our interest. It is better to attract the established businesses and those with best reputations to locate here.
Communication
Fox Studios will have a fibre-optic ring around the site to enable buildings to exchange information or data. There will also be a network of conduits laid to allow for future communication standards that may arise. Inbuilt will be the ability to transfer data and image and sound internationally, although there's no intention of on-siting a dish at the present time.

Power
Film and television production demand relatively large amounts of clean, reliable and economic electrical power. The power supply to the Showground site will be upgraded.

Based on research the company has done, each of the stages will be equipped with adequate power; as an example, the Government Pavilion will be able to tap into 750 amps on each of two phases.

On the day of the Australian Cinematographers' Society visit, there was a buzz of discussion coming from some of the cinematographers about the decision to take mains power. One, an Australian expatriate DOP and a veteran of high-level Hollywood productions, felt it was unwise to rely on mains power, citing his own experience of working in many parts of the world with truck-mounted generator current. Yet another argued that, in his experience, the Fox way was the best way to source the necessary amounts of power.

In its favour, reliability would seem to be assured by the fact that there are several major hospitals in the area. Company research indicates that the power is stable in the adjacent areas. Allen is confident that the studio complex will have flexibility on site as far as power is concerned and certainly we're confident from the research that we've done that the power will be adequate to service the stages.

Road Access
The principal access to the working studio areas is off Driver Avenue, which passes the Sydney Football Stadium and the Sydney Cricket Ground. This has sufficient room to take two traffic lanes into the site, while around the site itself a road system will be marked one- or two-way traffic as necessary.

There will be a 'professional' entrance, with the public entry separated. Additionally, the public will not be able to go into the working studio area - the two areas will be separated by barriers.

Response
Allen:
I think the industry is getting behind what's happening, once they realize what we're doing here. We've been very active in having industry groups and associations visit and, as more people have the opportunity to see first-hand, we're getting a very positive response. We have visitors from overseas all the time who have heard about what we're doing. We expect that interest will start to increase now.

Obviously, productions have a long gestation period, but, when it comes to the decision to go into production, that's when a producer starts to look for facilities. We're still a year away, but we expect that as this year goes and construction starts we'll get a lot more interest. And a lot more interest from Aus-

The Story So Far
The Sydney Showground development is Fox's first production complex to be built outside North America, and sets out to offer world-class facilities for both film and television production, as well as providing some degree of public access in the nature of a multi-screen cinema, specialist retailing and restaurants.

The heart of the site, the parade ring, will be left as open public recreational space - surrounded by new and renovated stages. There will, of course, be a public studio tour to entertain and educate the public about the filmmaking process.

In 1995, as the news hit the fan, so to speak, perimeter political interests tried to fracture the NSW Government's resolve by claiming sleazy deals and hidden agendas supported the deal. But to no avail.

In the days after the announcement, however, call-back radio and newspaper correspondence columns displayed majority public support - especially from film techies and, naturally, the echelons of the producers and directors around town.

The early team running the project, under the helm of Fox Australia's CEO Kim Williams, has taken great pains to invite interested industry groups to the site and gauge their feelings. This writer was fortunate enough to string along with the ACS one afternoon - then returned a month or so later to explore the story further.

Fox Australia claims that, once fully operational in 1998, the development will create 1,600 direct and indirect jobs annually, and generate production with an $85 million value annually.

HISTORY: The Sydney Showground at Moore Park has been occupied by the Royal Agricultural Society since 1882 and was proposed as the site for the development of a major film and television production studio by the State Liberal Treasurer and Minister for the Arts, Peter Collins, in late 1994.

The Fox project breaks down into three zones: largest and most important is the production areas; the other two are those allocated to the studio tour and the cinema/shops complex.

The portion of the site leased by Fox occupies 24 hectares, leased for 40 years with a ten-year option. The company intends to spend in excess of $120 million over the next decade.

Eventually, there will be eight stages, ranging from 800-4,000 square metres. Stage 1, the so-called Government Pavilion, is a renovation project, while five others are new structures to be built over the next twelve months to replace a maze of cattle and animal judging sheds. A further two are 'planned' to proceed at a later date.

Not a working studio as such, but calling for renovation is the huge Commemorative Pavilion - intended to act as the public's eye into production technology.

The stages are of varying sizes, and will be augmented by other buildings intended to house allied post-production facilities, audio activities, digital image manipulation and special effects.

A major feature of the planning is the inter-structure communications links and facilities to permit image and sound transfers domestically and internationally. Backlot areas have been allotted for external shooting.

Construction workshops, wardrobe and prop storage are planned, while parking for 672 cars is provided. Studio and allied areas constitute 45 percent of the site, whilst public access venues soak up around 50 percent.
Australian producers as well. Bookings should start to flow later this year.

Start

construction of the working studio area was scheduled to commence just two weeks after the final RAS show takes place — meaning ‘first sod’ broken in late April.

Fox Australia’s intention is to have the working studio up and running by the first quarter of 1998 – meaning all studios will be renovated or built by that date.

The project managers are confident they can keep to this commitment. The public area will take a little longer to complete (by late 1998) but, according to Allen, the beauty of having brand new sound stages is that we’ll be able to operate in this area without any concern from noise generated by the construction on the rest of the site. And we’re very excited at the prospect of opening in early 1998.

Comparison

There’s nothing like a positive approach – and every ounce the Fox team can muster will go towards making the venture a success.

There’s nothing like this in Australia. The Gold Coast has stages, but it doesn’t have Sydney. It’s not the same volume as the highest production schedule.

In terms of floor area, we have more. Our largest stages are bigger than the Gold Coast’s largest. Our largest, the Government Pavilion, has an arched roof which is higher (at its peak) than the highest at the Gold Coast.

Sound stage 2, however, is almost the same volume as the highest stage in the Gold Coast, but has a larger floor area.

Come 1998, there will be a lot of interest in this old/new production facility.

MovieWorld Studios, Queensland

by Scott Murray

The Warner Roadshow MovieWorld Studios on the Gold Coast have been for several years Australia’s major film studios, attracting a significant number of large-budget off-shore productions, as well as lower-budget television work. In this wide-ranging interview about the future of the Studios (and some associated Village Roadshow operations), Managing Director Michael Lake begins by explaining his modus operandi:

I arrived here with a very clear way of making this work, which was to attract off-shore production. The Studios had been here [under different ownership] for a while. They were not working based on Australian production, and we really went out there with a clear goal of attracting off-shore production. That certainly has made it work for us. 75-85 percent of the work that we are getting through is from off-shore and I think that trend will continue.

In the nine years the Studios have been operational, probably only two or three projects here have had FFC money. I think it will always attract projects which are outside the smaller-budget Australian film area, unless of course they are Village projects that are driven by Village. We are tending to finance projects by pre-sales and other methods our own. So, it is a different sort of operation that we are running.

And the majority of the off-shore productions are American? Yes, though we recently finished a big Japanese picture called Acri, which filmed here and did all the visual effects in conjunction with Dale Duguid’s company, Photon Stockman. There was about $2 million worth of visual effects done on that.

I’ve been to Japan many times. I see Flipper is a big Japan tend to be not dissimilar to the $3-4 million area.

It is probably at the lower end, as is Japan. Independent pictures out of Japan tend to be not dissimilar to Australian productions, and around the $3-4 million area.

The rest of Asia is a much longer-
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term situation. In my mind, the next possibility of doing business with is Korea.

One of the things that would help the whole Australian-Japanese situation would be the signing of a co-production treaty between the two countries.

Do you see the connection between Village Roadshow and Golden Harvest bringing more Asian films here?

There may be, although, interestingly enough, there has been a couple of Golden Harvest pictures shot down here in the past two years, with Jackie Chan. But they were more location-based type pictures.

There is a possibility, I guess, but there isn’t a lot of studio-based production out of Golden Harvest. It tends to be more location-based, but who knows what the future will hold.

What is the principal ways of marketing the Studios internationally?

It is probably twofold. We are lucky in this state that we also have the Queensland government’s Pacific Film and Television Commission [PFTC], which was formed about the same time as I came up here to work with Studios. In fact, I was on the board of the PFTC before I actually came to work at the Studios. It is more along the lines of an American film office, in that its major function is to market the state and attract production to the state. It is a little different to Film Queensland, which has a more state film office traditional role of investment and film development and so on.¹

The PFTC has done a lot of joint-marketing of the state. Initially, it held seminars in Los Angeles for heads of production, studio heads and producers.

I go there six times a year. Now with Export Film Services Australia, we do a lot of in-and-bound missions, which I believe are the best way of promoting what we have down here. You can give people brochures, you can show them videotapes, but there is no substitute for having them come down here and actually seeing what we have to offer and talk with people about it.

If somebody has a project they think would work in Australia, we ask them to send the script down. We’ll read it and, first, tell them if we believe it is do-able here. Second, we will bid it for them and tell them what it will cost them here. Third, the film office will do a location presentation for them. It is a free service and they get a very good package before they come down here. We’ve done that for most of the major studios now.

The big thing now for us, of course, is that we have such good word of mouth, and that is helping us. We have done so much production, and have worked with all the major television producing studios, the networks, the major independents, people like Warners, people like Disney, all that sort of thing. We have a pretty good track record now, and it is spread by word of mouth.

The plus for us is that the heads of production in a lot of those places tend to be more location-based, but who knows what the future will hold.

What do the off-shore productions see as the major advantages of filming here?

Over all, it is economics. Everyone is trying to get more bang for their buck wherever they are filming.

With television production, we are saving some money, especially with movies of the week. What we are trying to be able to give them is more production value for their money, or there have been projects that they haven’t been able to do in the U.S. for their finite budget. The normal MOW is now around the $3 million U.S. mark and a lot of projects they can’t afford to do in the around $200,000 rebated to them, which is a tidy piece of money. On a typical MOW, it can be anywhere between $50,000-70,000 in rebate, which makes it a little more attractive to them.

What that helps to do, of course, is make it a more level playing field, because that more than pays for the cost of bringing people down here, although that is changing as well, especially in the television arena. They are tending to bring less people down now. Often with these productions they will send a director and a producer. Sometimes I’ll work as a producer on the show for them, and they will just send a director down.

Because the quality of the people working here has strengthened, or because the off-shorers have more faith?

I think it is quality and confidence.
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into Australia, I think this is a category that doesn't fit in any of the current guidelines. We are talking about pictures that are absolutely 100 percent financed from off-shore. They are pictures or television series that are usually set in America, and I believe there should be a category with different guidelines associated with those shows.

Having said that, producers also don't want to bring all their cast from America, otherwise it becomes counter-productive and uneconomical. The norm tends to be around about six people on a MOB.

I was doing some figures recently and I think we've brought in something like 175 actors over the past five years into projects we have produced through the studios or through VRP Production Services. And in that time there has been something like $2 million spent on fees for Australian actors.

So, there has also been quite an amount of work for Australian actors which would normally not have been there. And the amount of work given to Australian crews in that time is probably something like $10-12 million.

What we have developed, I believe, is a new strand of production in Australia, which has been beneficial to both the acting community, certainly for the technical crew side of it, and also for Australian directors as well, because there are a lot of directors working. All Flipper was directed by Australia directors. Most of Time Trax was directed by Australian directors. A CBS MOB we recently did was directed by John Power. 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea was directed by Rod Hardy. Kevin Dobson directed Thornbirds.

Another interesting aspect about this off-shore production path is the benefit to the Australian government in terms of export dollars, and building a service industry. Austrade was sufficiently interested to set up Export Film Services Australia, because they saw what was happening. Through the Studios alone over the past five years, we've gone close to bringing in something like $200 million in export earnings to Australia, and more specifically Queensland. It has been, from that point of view, a very interesting exercise and it is one that perhaps gets lost in the debate about this. It is a very different industry. It is bringing those dollars in to be spent here, instead of Australian pictures being exported initially, then the dollars flowing back in.

It has made it a much easier way to finance these pictures, and I guess it means there has been a whole strand of production that has not had either state film body financial support, AFC support, FFC support, or tax support at all. It has just been purely investment money coming into the country.

Many Australian directors have gone off to Hollywood. Do you have which has been very hard in Australia since the demise of Crawfords. Because it has become much more independent production, once the production is done everybody goes. If we can overlap and keep running a production like this, then the training opportunities become stronger for people.

So you have tried to bring the best of Crawfords here?

Yes. Nick McMahon, who is executive vice-president of Village Roadshow Pictures Television, and I both were directors of Crawfords. We were there for a long time and saw the advantages of that system, and I think there is an advantage in that system.

We also do a lot of training and people come in on the attachment side. I sit on the course advisory committee both at QUT and Bond University in their television schools. With Bond, we have an internship programme and we take three students in their last semester of their television course there and they spend at least a day a week at the Studios involved in work here, involved in work on productions. That is a great training ground for them. It gives them the opportunity to be exposed to what they are about to go into, and some of those people have got jobs with us here once they graduated.

You mentioned several times VRP Production Services. What was the rationale behind setting it up?

What I found is a lot of productions coming down here were not necessarily keen on setting up a production company here in Australia. They wanted to do it as simply as possible. I suggested to Village that we set up a production services company that became the producer in Australia and the employer of the Australian crews and cast, etc., on these American productions. All they need to do is pay us a fee for the service and we would take over the production in Australia. I either act as producer for them, or line producer or as production consultant.

What we tend to do is expand that. The majority of the productions that have come through the studios now utilize that service. And, indeed, we have expanded that. Most of Village's own production goes through that company, but also we will use it anywhere in Australia, or even in South East Asia.

I tell producers, "Don't think just of Queensland. We are better positioned to service your production anywhere in South East Asia, and probably do it much more economically by using Australian technicians, Australia equipment and such. It is much simpler to ship it from here than from the States and you then take advantage of the savings that you may get in Australia."

It has worked very well for us. With The Phantom, we were the production services company in Thailand, as well as in Australia. Because we have such a mass of production, we've been able to negotiate the best deals with the services outside the Studios, like the laboratories.

It has also meant that the off-shore productions have got around having to deal with the unions. We will do all the union negotiations with them, and indeed VRP Production Services has for the past three years. We are just in the process of finalizing an agreement with Media Arts Alliance in relation to off-shore production with actors in television, and we are indeed expanding that to cover feature films for the next three years as well.

Does Alan Finney's move to Village Roadshow Productions represent a different direction?

Alan was already doing a lot with Australian production. What we've decided to do is focus Alan more in that area. It has meant that Alan is probably working closer with the
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NOTE NEW CLOSING DATE - 31 JULY

Talent and ideas development is a cornerstone of the role of the NSW Film & TV Office. The FTO recognises the valuable relationship between a healthy film culture and the film and television production industry.

In August 1997 the FTO will allocate funds for the support of events, publications and organisations that contribute to film culture in NSW. Funds, as usual, are tight but the FTO would welcome approaches from individuals or organisations with an initiative that might warrant support. There is no formal application form. Proposals, which should include information and a budget, should reach the Film Culture & Policy Officer by 31 JULY at the latest.

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production division now than we have in the past.
The production division within Village has grown substantially over the past few years, and we want to develop that. We want to be sure that not only what we are developing in-house, but projects outside of it. Maybe we are better served to act as producer for some of these projects with some new people coming through.

For instance, last year we finished Hotel De Love, which I produced with David Parker in Melbourne, where we had a first time director-writer. Village was able to package the deal around him.

We are always looking outside of what we are developing for I guess the next Muriel's Wedding, the next Priscilla. We are the ones that are doing that as much as I guess the other people in the game outside of Village.

We are very well situated with a very strong production division and a very strong distribution/exhibition arm to do that – and an exhibition arm that I guess is growing through Asia and into Europe. We want to be sure that we are the ones that are getting the pictures that are coming out of new Australian talent.

**Do you see the Sydney Fox Studios having any effect on your Studios?**

It will be competition, but from an overall situation competition is a good thing. Also, if there are more facilities available, then they are going to attract more production to the country.

We both offer things that are slightly different. Where we are set up here, we have a great range of locations that are a very short distance from here, whereas in Sydney it becomes much more urban. If you drive half an hour from the Studios in Sydney, you are still in a suburban area, whereas half an hour from here you have absolutely pristine rainforest. From that point of view, we have an advantage.

I'm not sure how they are going to deal with Australian production, you know. My feeling is that most low-budget Australian production will not use studios. It hasn't to date and I don't believe it will; the finances don't make that work. So, they would need to fall back on what we are doing and that is attract off-shore production and also use, in the case they don't have a partner, their owner to utilize it as well.

What I do find interesting is that Sydney eventually got its studios, but only because it was heavily subsidized by the governments, both state and federal, whereas the studios here were much more economically driven. Certainly, there was state government support of them, but that support was by way of low-interest loans, which have been repaid to the government.

Running studios is not a way to get rich and I just wonder if the economics in Sydney would have been such that somebody could have made it happen there.

**Presumably there are advantages in having studios side-by-side with a theme park, as well?**

Very much so. Universal have shown that, and we've shown it here. In our early days of setting up, having the theme park being part of the overall thing is very good for it, but with this theme park, of course, a lot of the credibility is attached to having busy studios. The studios are to MovieWorld what the dolphins are to SeaWorld.

**You don't want to have every studio door closed as they drive around**

Exactly. Having Ray Liotta or Billy Zane at the Studios helps in making MovieWorld more attractive. But certainly in an economic sense it is a plus in having that park there. Also, the Sydney studios will be slightly different. We are a four-wall operation. We don't own anything but the studios on this complex, apart from our wardrobe department.

Any other facility here, and there are about nine or ten other companies working, are companies that pay a rent to us, like Videolab, Show Travel, Photon Stockman, Samuelsons. We always push them as the preferred facility supplier to people coming in here, but they don't have to use them, whereas in Sydney, from what I've read, they will be a little bit more like the Hollywood studios. They will have some infrastructure that they will own as well.

Other Key Studios

The following list makes no attempt to be exhaustive about major feature-film studios, but merely to give an indication of other studios available.

**New South Wales**

**Film Australia:** 101 Eton Road, Lindfield, NSW 2070.
Tel: (02) 9413 8691, Fax: (02) 9416 5672
Set on two hectares of bushland close to Chatswood and fifteen minutes from Sydney's CBD, Film Australia has quite a large range of facilities available, including:

- two Lightworks editing suites with Pro Sound and Turbo options, and 1:5:6 removable optical rewritable disk drives and tielines to DAT syncing facilities
- three SP Betacam offline editing suites fitted with two Sony SP Betacam machines, Sony RM450 controller, Digikeyes' fRED auto edit controller, and Shotlister
- tape to tape colour correction
- tape to tapecolour correction through the Corporate Communications 'Sunburst' Colour Correction System and Accom grade reducer
- 10 film editing suites for 16mm, 35mm and 16mm with Steenbecks, picture synchronizers and trim bins.
- Syncing and numbering facilities are also available
- a fully soundproof soundstage 20m x 10m x 3.5m with two moveable overhead gantries, an infinity cycorama, magnesite floor and three phase power
- wardrobe and make-up rooms, a production office and a green room
- a separate, non-soundproof studio for packshots and model work
- the Roxy Presentation Theatre which seats 200 people and has a large foyer and bar area
- Film Australia offers full support for 26mm and 35mm, optical effects, film laboratory, negative matching, stock shot library, audio post-production and video graphics.

**South Australia**

**South Australian Film Commission Studios:** 3 Butler Drive, Hendon Common, Adelaide, SA 5014.
Tel: (08) 8348 3900, Fax: (08) 8347 0385
Located in Hendon, 15 minutes from Adelaide's International Airport and 20 minutes from the city centre, the SAFC studios have hosted films such as Rolf de Heer's Bad Boy Bubby and The Quiet Room, Scott Hicks' Shine, and the sound recording studios have been used for films such as What I Have Written and Zone 39.

There are two sound stages, one 30m x 16.5m x 5.25m, and the other 24.5m x 16.5m x 5.25m. They are soundproofed and have widedoors opening onto a large carpark with plenty of room for trucks and crew vehicles.

Interior doors lead to various large production suites, smaller offices, and complete Art Department facilities.

The Art Department includes a large workshop with a separate office, stand-by props store and a Wardrobe Department comprising two costume workshops with fitting rooms, a laundry, drying room and two makeup rooms.

There is also a cafe available for cast and crew catering that seats 100.

Editing Rooms are equipped with Steenbeck and Moviola 35 and 16mm machines.

Non-linear and sound editing facilities are also on site. Rushes screening in 35mm anamorphic, Super 35 and 35mm wide screen, 16mm and Super 16mm double-head.

The Sound Department is equipped with a digital Foley/post sync dialog theatre, a television mixing theatre and a Dolby SR40 stereo mixing theatre for theatrical product. Equipment includes Studer 24 track ATR, 12MTE dubbings including 66x track, coupled to one 6 track recorder and one 4 track recorder. A Fairlight mx3 is wired to all theatres.

High-speed rock and roll MTE projector for 35mm anamorphic, 16mm and Super 16mm image. Other services include: continuous double-head 35mm and 16mm screenings, sound transfers to and from all formats, and non-linear and sound editing services are also available on site.

**Victoria**

**Melbourne Film Studios:** 117 Rouse Street, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207.
Tel: (03) 9646 4022, Fax: (03) 9646 6336
The Melbourne Film Studios in Port Melbourne, 7km from the CBD and close to the many post-production facilities in South Melbourne, have been utilized by films such as George Miller's Gross Misconduct and The Man from Snowy River, and John Ruane's Death in Brunswick.

Owned by filmmaking partners Nadia Tass and David Parker, the Studios consist of a soundproof soundstage 31.4m x 19.5m x 11.6m, lighting grid, make-up room, green room, wardrobe rooms and a canteen.

Also available at the studios is a range of adaptable office spaces for permanent, semi-permanent or temporary productions.
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The Australian Screenplays collection, published by Currency Press, the performing arts publisher, highlights the diverse, highly individual and vigorous state of contemporary Australian films.

These screenplays explore a variety of issues including: race relations (Dead Heart), small town yearnings (Love Serenade), teenage violence (Blackrock), schizophrenia (Angel Baby) and ideology (Children of the Revolution).

Other titles include Muriel’s Wedding, Bad Boy Bubby, The Sum of Us and The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert. All titles are priced at $17.95 (RRP) and include B/W and colour stills from the film as well as introductions from the films’ writers/directors/producers and film commentators.
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pale and disability, and he has a remarkable strength of spirit. Jonathan believes a wisdom beyond his years in his understanding of love, friendship, beauty and suffering. Through the eyes of personal friends, including environmentalist Dr David Suzuki, the film will also look at Jonathan’s impact on others.

THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY
(55 mins ACCORD DOCUMENTARY)
FILM ART DIRECTOR
D. Darryn Deluca
P. Sue Maglin
W. Darryn Deluca
Pre-sale: ABC

Most people know about the Mabo and Wik decisions, but few know much about the decision makers: the High Court of Australia. The Highest Authority will show first hand the characters and drama of the High Court of Australia, the pinnacle of legal and constitutional processes in Australia. The role of the Court will be explored as the film follows constitutional, criminal and civil appeals where much is at stake and the decision of the Justices is final.

MOHAMMED ALI’S HAPPY FEAST DAY
(55 mins ACCORD DOCUMENTARY)
LITTLE UNIVERSITY FILMS
D. Nicola Tindale-Bridge
P. Catherine Deson
W. Nicola Tindale-Bridge
Pre-sale: SBS

The “Happy Day” feast is a Somali ritual of celebration. Traditionally, everything from the first rain after the drought to the purchase of a good camel is acknowledged with a feast, and this spirit lives on every Saturday night in a small café in the Melbourne working-class suburb of Flemington. It is celebrated by another week of survival and progress for a new refugee community. Through the voices of Mohammed and Helma – the hosts of the Djadoon Cafe – and the stories of their patrons, a portrait emerges of the collective loss suffered by more than five thousand Somalians, most of whom have arrived in Melbourne since 1991. That portrait becomes more complex and poignant as we experience the intimacy of the friendships, supports networks and the optimism characterized by the Happy Day feast.

OUR PARK
(55 mins ACCORD DOCUMENTARY)
BLACK DOG PICTURES
D. Gillian Leaky
P. Gillian Leaky
W. Sophie Jackson
W. Gillian Leaky
Pre-sale: SBS

Our Park covers a year in the life of White’s Creek Valley Park in Leichhardt, Sydney. The pensioners, the migrants, Housing Commission tenants, yuppies and old working-class Australians who live around the park all have conflicting ideas of how the park should be developed. How does a community negotiate such diverse ideas? In our big city environment, the park is a battleground between the wild and the tame, and a place where we think through our relationship to the natural world. In a time when “wildness” gets further and further from our reach, this is a crucial activity.

RITe OF PASSAGE
(55 mins ACCORD DOCUMENTARY)
APOLLO FILMS
D. Richard Kiddie
P. Andrew Wiseman

The Truth About Taru
76
The Well
78
Dr Amoeba Does Sex!
78
Nine Caudrons
78

Secret Fear focuses on the experiences of several people who suffer from or have recovered from an anxiety disorder. Psychiatrists are beginning to realize that sufferers of anxiety disorders frequently play down the severity of their condition and will sometimes suicide without warning. That anxiety disorders have occurred throughout history and across cultures is beyond dispute, but the way we respond to excessive anxiety depends on our cultural references. This programme touches on these explanations and attempts to offer hope for those afflicted through the experiences of others who have found their own solutions.

Justice
Production company: WEST COAST PICTURES
Executive producer: Larry Hechan
Producer: Bob Rogers
Line producer: DIY Bebb
Associate producer: Ryan Hodgson
Kelvin Munro, Stuart McCracken
Based on the original screenplay titled:

Secret Fear

K E Y
EP Executive Producer
P Producer
Co-P Co-Producer
Associate Producer
L P Line Producer
D Director
SW Scriptwriter
C Cost
PC Principal Cast
SE Story Editor
WD Weiner-director
DIST Distributor
NOTE: Production Survey forms are available in a revised format. Cinema Papers regrets it cannot accept information received in a different format.

Cinema Papers does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of any information supplied by production companies. This is particularly the case when information changes but the production company makes no attempt to correct what has already been supplied.

P. Eva Dinner
W. Sarah Stephens
Pre-sale: SBS
CINEMA PAPERS • MAY 1997

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...
athan Vaughn, an enigmatic man, handed out his own form of rough justice. Recruited by Detective Andy Riddle to

THE ALIVE Tribe is a wild bunch of hipped-out students radical who fight for anything, from ecological Armageddon to the ozone layer and animal liberation. Set around the final days of the Fitzroy Football Club merger, the film explores the theme: evolve or die.

THE BIG RED [working title] [See previous issue for details.]

BLACK ICE Production company: WEDSTAIR FILM MANAGEMENT Ltd Budget: $1.5 million
Principal Credits: Director: James Richards Executive producer: Bill Mutter, Ron Williams Associate producer: Ron Veenek Scriptwriters: James Richards, Rob Greenough Director of photography: Kevin "Lucky" Lind Production Crew: Post-production supervisor: Karl Brakston Chaperones: Ron Veenek, James Williams Assistant editor: Adam Weiss Cast: John O’Call, Troy Bonner, Ron Veenek,Tina Law

Nathan Vaughn, an enigmatic man, a coiled spring ready to explode, is recruited by Detective Andy Riddle to hand out his own form of rough justice. Vaughn begins working for criminal Curtis Starr which is his final journey to self-destruction.

FOUR JACKS Production company: PIPELINE FILMS Production: 20/1-21/2/97
Principal Credits: Director: Mathew George Production: Rob Good, Stephen Elsom Line producer: Gene Geoffrey Scriptwriter: Mathew George Director of photography: Justin Burock Sound recording: Martin Kev Editor: Mark Ellis Production designer: Ralph Mose Production Crew: Planning and Development: Casting: CHAILEMONE CASTING Shooting schedule by: Monique Giric

CAST: Peter Phelps, Rachel Blakeney, Chris Haywood

THE story of a female prison officer: married, reliable, trusted. Yet she planned the most spectacular get-rich quick scheme in Australia’s criminal history – for the love of a convicted murderer.

Principal Credits: Director: Vincenzo Gallo Production: Lavina Rampadd, Robin Jolly Scriptwriter: Vincenzo Gallo Production designer: Brendan O’Connor Other Credits: Length: 90 mins Genre: Digital Betacam

CAST: Kate Fischer, Sammy Hillberg, Anthony Arndt, Tony Nardella.

THE story of a man undergoing a strange breakdown who wants to become a pigeon and the journalist sent to cover the story.

SCREAM Production company: THE FILM FACTORY Production: 1996
Principal Credits: Director: Gary Young Production: T. C. Fields Executive producer: Gary Young Scriptwriter: Gary Young


A young man is arrested after the hold-up of a liquor store. During psychiatric examination, the young man regresses to Egypt 4,000 years ago as a mummified hero. The psychiatrist learns that there has been a trail of killings of anyone who disturbs the mummy.

SIAM SIEN Production company: ARTIST SERVICES Production: 11/11-13/12/96 Scriptwriters: Max Dann, Andrew Knight


CAST: Kerril Fox

WANTED Production company: ONE 2000 Production office: Sydney Production: 28/1-10/2/97
Principal Credits: Director: Hung-Sook "Howard" Chung Production: Steve Rigg Line producer: Glen Campbell Executive producer: In-Tak Yoo Assistants: Jo-Ji Ha Park, Juvenile Pain Scriptwriters: Hung-Sook "Howard" Chung, Tony Egan, Arthur Tanaka Director of photography: Geoff Burton Editor: Jane Masisc Producer: Sean Callinan Costume supervisor: Tanti Kßerdem

Production manager: Glenn Campbell Location manager: Tom Binns Unit manager: Edward Donivan

CAST: Michael, Fabiana Continuity: Royce Dunn Starts co-ordinator: Grant Page

ART DEPARTMENT Art director: John Bowling Special fx co-ordinator: John Boning

POST-PRODUCTION Length: 100 mins Genre: 35mm

JOE by Pete Scott, Rebecca Lam A young Korean actor is convinced by police to impersonate a gangster on a television show. What begins as an acting job becomes dangerous yet hilarious as both the police and the gangster have him continue the impersonation for their own ends.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TARO Production company: THACKRAY PRODUCTIONS Production: 2/10-23/10/96 Post-production: 24/10-16/June 97
Principal Credits: Director: Mark Thackray Executive producer: Howard Thackray

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production survey
continued
Documentaries

THE GOLDEN MILE
Production company: SALOMON SISTERS Productions
Production date: 29-11-97

Synopsis

Nine Cauldrons (a dance video directed and choreographed as a trio for camera, sound and dancer. It is about one figure’s journey through nine pools of light, nine sequences of movement and nine physical transformations.

THE NOMADS
Production company: SIMION PRODUCTIONS
Pre-production: FEBRUARY 1997
Production: March-June 1997
Post-production: JULY-AUGUST 1997

Synopsis

The journey of two children from Ethiopia as they are adopted into an Australian family.

THE GALLERY
Production company: BORNTOSTAY PRODUCTIONS
Pre-production: September 1996
Production: 2 weeks
Post-production: October 1996

Synopsis

A woman has lost her memory. She is adopted by a Melbourne family and her lost memories begin to return.

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<table>
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<th>Film</th>
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<td>Gilles Mimouni</td>
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<td>Basquiat</td>
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<td>Le Bonheur est dans le Pré (Happiness is in the Field)</td>
<td>Étienne Chatiliez</td>
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<td>The Castle (Rob Sitch)</td>
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<td>Chacun Cherche son Chat (When the Cat’s Away)</td>
<td>Cédric Klapisch</td>
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<td>Chain Reaction</td>
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<td>The Crucible</td>
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<td>Dante’s Peak</td>
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<td>Kolya</td>
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<td>Lost Highway</td>
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<td>Star Wars (George Lucas)</td>
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**Eidetic**

Impossible to believe, but some people didn’t give Welles a 10.

**Average**

A panel of eight film reviewers has rated a selection of the latest releases on a scale of 0 to 10, the latter being the optimum rating (a dash means not seen). The critics are: Bill Collings (FX on Foxtel); Barbara Creed (The Age); Paul Harris ("The Green Guide", The Age); Stan James (The Adelaide Advertiser); Scott Marriage; Tom Ryan (The Sunday Age); David Stratton (Variety, SBS) and Evan Williams (The Australian). Sandra Hall was unavailable.
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