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Cinema Papers #134 August - September 2000

Michaela Boland

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How they shot The Perfect Storm

Byrne baby Byrne

Rose Byrne in a galaxy far far away.
"I want the audience to feel the sun warming the bricks. To smell the bread baking down the street. And to see the hope that reaches beyond the alleyway."

"I need their heads to pound from the car screeching into the station. Their noses to wrinkle from the fumes. Their hands to dig into the armrests as the car speeds off."

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Welcome to Woop Woop

Yep, it’s August 2000 and Olympics hoopla abounds. Not to be left out of the main game, the film industry has leap t into the ring(s) by organising Sunscreen Sydney. A component of the Olympic Arts Festival, Sunscreen will showcase classic Australian films free of charge at outdoor venues. A great gift to the Olympic city and its visitors during the games lead-up - August 31 through September 10. After a sluggish couple of years for local releases we’re starting to witness a domestic box office resurgence lead by The Wog Bay early this year and followed by the heavily advertised Looking for Alibrandi, which just might creep over $9 million. Initial word on the heavily-guarded Roadshow release The Dish is positive and Palace has backed a winner with Chopper. A free publicity-fest, Chopper is also proving a critical success and has come in at number one in The Sum of Us [p.58]. Congratulations to producer Michele Bennett, lead Eric Bana and director Andrew Dominik. It has also been interesting to note the number of ex-cops, law reporters and assorted riff raff who have been called on to review the film for the daily press. A fresh approach seen first in Cinema Papers 133. Issue 133, incidently received a very positive review in The Sydney Age on July 9. While we were chuffed to receive the praise we were disappointed our specially-commissioned feature by US movie writer Joe Queenan on blockbusters was judged to be a buy-in. After generating the original idea, we had worked closely with Mr Joe to tailor the story for our audience. Must we stamp ‘Exclusive’ all over our stories to prove they’re unique? We hope not.

We’re very pleased cinematographer John Seale had the chance to write about tensing for the film page. In previous issues writers have been asked to tackle completed works but the lateral thinking Safran dived in from the side and examined a partially completed film instead. Michael Ward is a freelance comedy writer who has written for the Micallef program and Backkerner on ABC television. He once fell asleep during awakenings and woke up in the middle of sleepers. Megan Sloley, coming of age in the era of Valley Girl, you can’t stop the music and Sanadu inspired her to wear white plastic earrings, leg warmers, Indian headress and write stuff about cinema. Shane Danielson is a feature writer for the Australian. Michael Bodey, showbiz editor for The Daily Telegraph, is a film journalism rarity.

MICHAEL WARD IS A FREELANCE COMEDY WRITER WHO HAS WRITTEN FOR THE MICALEFF PROGRAM AND BACKKERNER ON ABC TELEVISION. HE ONCE FELL ASLEEP DURING AWAKENINGS AND WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF SLEEPERS. MEGAN SLOLEY, COMING OF AGE IN THE ERA OF VALLEY GIRL, YOU CAN’T STOP THE MUSIC AND SANADU INSPIRED HER TO WEAR WHITE PLASTIC EARRINGS, LEG WARMERS, INDIAN HEADRESS AND WRITE STUFF ABOUT CINEMA. SHANE DANIELSON IS A FEATURE WRITER FOR THE AUSTRALIAN. MICHAEL BODEY, SHOWBIZ EDITOR FOR THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, IS A FILM JOURNALISM RARITY.

DEB VERHEEVEN IS FILM CRITIC FOR THE MELBOURNE TIMES AND LECTURES IN CINEMA STUDIES AT RMIT UNIVERSITY. SHE RECENTLY EDITED TWIN PEKOS, AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZELAND FEATURE FILMS.

JOHN SAFRAN CO-HISTS THE BREAKFASTER ON MELBOURNE’S 3RRR FM, WRITES FOR TV AND IS SOON HEADED OVERSEAS ON HIS OWN FILMING PROJECT.

COVER ROSE BYRNE PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANSON SMART FOR HARPER’S BAZAAR.

MICHAELA BOLAND
Australian Imax will screen locally

An Australian produced IMAX film called Solarmax premiered in London on June 27 as part of the opening of the new wing of that city’s Science Museum. Chronicling the solar max - the peak period of solar spots and flares, the film uses footage from both satellite and earth based telescopes, with additional computer generated animation.

A collaboration between director/producer John Weiley, physicist Robert Eather - who hand built an IMAX format camera - and the Sydney post production company Lux Monkey, the producers were concerned that Solarmax may never screen in Australia.

Following screenings at Washington’s Smithsonian Institute and New York’s Museum of Natural History, the film is receiving a wide roll out across Europe and the US.

An Australian release date for Solarmax has not been set but the future of IMAX cinemas in Australia is confirmed despite administrators being appointed.

Confirming the continued existence of IMAX Cinemas in Australia (so long as senior employees take ‘considerable’ pay cuts), one of the administrators said the IMAX sites must continue operating because the structures could be used for little else than indoor rock climbing.

Let the Games Begin

For two weeks in September Sydney is hosting the greatest sporting event in the world. Yadda yadda. To get everyone in the Olympic mood, Dendy distributors has decided to launch on August 24 the documentary One Day in September. Winner of the 2000 Academy Award for best documentary, One Day in September explores the events surrounding eleven Israeli athletes being held hostage by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. The film contains music from the period, eye witness accounts and what is billed as ‘dramatic’ archival footage.

Exhibition cooperation

The twin powers of the Australian exhibition industry, Hoyts and Village have joined forces to open a multiplex in Sydney’s George St. Megan Sloley reports Village chief executive Graham Burke said the deal was the result of two years of negotiations but the dual occupation of the site is not a joint venture.

Burke likened the arrangement to “an airport terminal where two retailers sell the same product but operate and pay rental separately, competing for customers”. He said both companies agreed on “the efficiency of creating more circuits together to save costs.” The companies additionally share a stake in Adelaide’s Palace Nova Eastend in conjunction with three independent shareholders. Hoyts had a share in the Nova Rundle Street when Palace/Village opened a four-screen cinema in the same street. All owners decided to join forces after both businesses suffered and the collusion has resulted in a financial turnaround for both cinemas.

A Hoyts/Village/Force joint venture also owns and operates eight cinemas in New Zealand, currently in litigation through the NZ Commerce Commission, the NZ equivalent of the ACCC. The NZCC believes the joint venture is “anti competitive” says Andrew Bowden, Village Roadshow group manager, investor relations “and will probably close it down”.

No such threat hangs over the Adelaide or Sydney sites.

A festival conundrum

The closing night of the Sydney Film Festival threw up an interesting dilemma. A capacity audience bedded down at the State Theatre for a screening of Mark Lamprell’s debut feature My Mother Frank and, after a short intermission High Fidelity, the new film based on Nick Hornby’s popular novel of the same name.

Problem being, after the second film, dialogue from the fast talking American actors, lead by John Cusack, was difficult to understand for a large section of the audience (seated at the rear of the balcony). Some frustrated audience members could be heard querying each other about missed dialogue, others left or moved to find vacant seats downstairs where the audio was clearer.

While the general manager of BV, [distributors of High Fidelity] Alan Finney, denied a film’s release could be seriously damaged by a poor preview exhibition, he said “we assume exhibitors, because they’re the people on the spot, (see to it that) sound and image presentation is 100 percent”.

Dendy will release One Day in September in August.
Mail→

→ Enjoyed the ‘first’ issue of Cinema Papers. More Alan Finney please. Why do magazines on film never (rarely) have the regular perspective of the exhibitor? Production people and distributors always cast assumptions on what Village/ Hoyts/GU say and think about films playing in cinemas. Believe me, it was much worse for local films before the advent of multi-screen theatres. If you had a local film booked to play and it was on a single 1900-seat screen it would be off in a week if the first week average was below that of the previous films that year.

Kind Regards,
David Kilderry

Mail→To Cinema Papers

I have just received another copy (#133) of Cinema Papers, and would just like to tell you that I think the relaunched magazine looks fantastic. While I know the size of the magazine has (thankfully) not changed, the redesign and the issues covered certainly have generated debate in my circles. For the first time people I know are actually talking about stuff in your magazine. The most enjoyable aspect of the magazine is the variation in topics and writers. Many magazines I have read suffer from an over exposure of either certain topics or certain writers, or both. It makes for a boring read. Cinema Papers has adopted an approach which allows a number of both high profile and relatively unknown writers to present material side by side, and thereby cover a broad range of topical issues. Unlike many other magazines, I find this style in Cinema Papers draws people in (myself included). Once in, the reader can not miss being really impressed by the incredible range and size of the pics, and their reproduction. Keep up the good work, and I look forward to resuming my collection of the magazine.

Mark Jones

Let the AFI fever begin

A record number of 25 films are vying for publicity through this year’s AFI Awards to be held at Sydney’s Fox Studios on November 18. Nominations for the film and television categories will be announced on October 18, after the completion of a national tour commencing August 1st. The awards will be broadcast live on SBS TV. A full list of films in contention will be listed below. The only feature film releasing locally prior to the awards yet not in competition is Working Dog’s follow up to The Castle – The Dish (Roadshow October 21).

15 Amore
Prod: Maurice Murphy, Margaret Murphy, Brooke Wilson
Dir & screenplay: Maurice Murphy
A Wrack A Tangle
Prod: Nick Rutter
Dir: Scott Patterson
Screenplay: John O’Brien
Angeles (IUP)
Prod: Jonathan Green
Dir: Daniel Nethem
Screenplay: Anthony O’Connor
Better Than Sex (Newstv)
Prod: Bruna Papandrea & Frank Cox
Dir & Screen: Jonathan Teplitzky
Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts (Palace)
Prod: John Taulis, Colin South, Dionyssis Samios, Anastasios Vasistou
Dir: John Taulis
Screenplay: Tom Galbraith
Breakmen (20th Century Fox)
Prod: Hilary Lindlead
Dir: Dein Perry
Screenplay: Steve Worton
Closing Parked Cars
Prod: Vicky Fisher, Holly Fisher
Dir: Holly Fisher, Fish Entertainment
Screenplay: Vicky Fisher
Chopper (Palace Films)
Prod: Michele Bennett
Exec Prod: Al Clark, Martin Fabiny
Co Prod: Michael Gudinski
Dir & Screen: Andrew Dominik
Door Log
Prod: Bruce Redman, Red Mover
Dir: Belinda Chayko
Screenplay: Stephen Davis
Cur (Beyond Films)
Prod: Martin Fabiny, Jennifer Bennett, Bill Bennett
Dir: Kimble Rendall
Screenplay: Dave Warner
Innocence (Sharmill Films)
Prod: Paul Cox & Mark Patterson
Dir: Paul Cox
Screenplay: Paul Cox
Kick (Beyond Films)
Prod: Marnie Beres, Sharon Kruger, Ross Matthews
Dir: Lynda Hoy
Screenplay: Stuart Beattie
Looking for Alibrandi (Roadshow)
Prod: Robyn Kershaw
Dir: Kate Woods
Screenplay: Melissa Marchetta
Magic Paddington 20th Century Fox
Prod: Gerry Travers
Assn Prod: Ed Truss
Dir: Karl Zicky
Animation Dir: Robert Smi
Screenplay: Harry Crippen, Greg Hadlock, Simon Hopkinson
Mali Bay/Buena Vista International
Prod: Fiona Egger
Dir & Screen: Vincent Giarrusso
Me Myself I Buena Vista International
Prod: Fabien Liron, Andrea Finlay
Dir & Screen: Pip Karrer
My Mother, Frank (Beyond Films)
Prod: Phaedon Vass, Susan Vass, John Winter
Dir: Mark Lamprell
Russian Doll (Beyond Films)
Prod: Allanah Zitserman
Dir: Stavros Rassamantis
Sample People (IFP)
Distribution: Barton Smith, Emile Sherman
Dir: Clinton Smith
Screenplay: Clinton Smith & Peter Buckmaster

Selkie (IUP)
Prod: Jane Balintyne, Rob George
Dir: Donald Crombie
Screenplay: Rob George
The Day Neil Armstrong Walked on the Moon
Prod: Michael J. Rivette
Dir: Michael J. Rivette
Screenplay: Michael J. Rivette
Sensible New Age Killer
Prod: John Broucek, Mark Savage
Dir: Mark Savage
Screenplay: Mark Savage & David Richardson
Staring Damean Wile
Prod: Julian Saggars, Jason Gooden
Dir: Denis Whitburn
Screenplay: Denis Whitburn & Darryl Mason

Walk the Walk (20th Century Fox)
Prod: Jan Chapman
Dir & Screen: Shirley Barrett
The Way We (20th Century Fox)
Prod: Nick Giannopoulos, John Broucek
Dir: Alexis Vellis
Screenplay: Nick Giannopoulos, Chris Anastasiadis
Reviewers cannot appraise actors
And they’re not the only ones

Julia Roberts’ breasts - or ‘boobs’ as her character Erin Brockovich calls them in the film of the same name - have recently proved a convenient handle (excuse the pun) for film reviewers. Collectively reviewers have chewed up valuable column inches expressing surprise at the size of them while marvelling at the cleverness of the costumes that give them that extra oomph. They have philosophised on the way they have been portrayed as ‘weapons, not victims’ and, ironically, bemoaned the fact that too much focus on you-know-what is upstaging the excellence of Roberts’ performance.

To be fair on reviewers, it has to be said that this breast obsession began with the makers and promoters of the film spinning the angle for all it’s worth. And if they can get so much mileage out of a cleavage, why shouldn’t the media hop on board? No reason at all, except that in your average sized newspaper review it leaves little room to talk about any other aspect of the performance, which, come to think of it, may be the point entirely.

Performance is difficult to discuss and any angle that can provide an ‘in’ is welcome. Out-of-date devices, include physical description (see above), speculations about the stars’ salaries and the relationship between co-stars (particularly if they’re romantically linked and without question if they’re married), Oscar prophesising and the flitching of choice bits, ie clichés, from the media releases that drum to the beat of: ‘role of a lifetime’, ‘born to play this role’ and ‘as you have never seen her before’.

If we are talking a quick grab containing a directive to ‘go see’ or ‘avoid like the plague’, there’s not much wrong with gossip or PR recycling. But when a review starts to get into the 800-word territory, throwing in a few lines at the end on how the actors measured up could be construed as avoidance. And although things have improved quite a lot on this front over the years as film reviewing has become a more specialised occupation (as opposed to something that someone from the sports desk can knock up if there’s nothing else on), old templates survive. Just ask the actors who automatically flick to the last few paragraphs of the review because that’s where they know they’ll find the verdict.

Performance is the most ephemeral part of a film. Occasionally the direction, or editing, or screenplay or camera work is so good that it transcends easy dissection, but there’s always a technical element there for discussion if the art of the work proves too elusive. Acting has its technical aspects too, but reviewers often don’t know a) what they are and b) how to separate them from the person of the actor.

The failure to recognise the work in a performance and the tendency to attribute its effect (often negatively) to some innate quality in the actor (a gift from the gods as opposed to something designed and crafted [is common among reviewers who, paradoxically, are determined not to be impressed by movie stars. Why look in depth at the work of someone like Harrison Ford when you know that he was only cast because market research said he should be, and when he’s only doing what he always does? An example of this is A.O. Scott writing in the New York Times on Erin Brockovich, who complains that ‘Ms Roberts spends the next 90 [minutes] content to be a movie star. As the movie drags on her performance swells to bursting with moral vanity and phoney populism. What’s missed here is the fact that Julia Roberts’ career is all about phoney populism: her extraordinary ability to be boringly ordinary and dazzling star-like simultaneously, and her skill in exploiting the combination to maximum effect. Embarrassment and an over-developed sense of politeness are

other factors that may contribute to a general reticence to review performance. I suspect this is particularly so in a place like Australia, where the paths of those involved in the smallish film communities cross frequently.) Actors are their work [among other things] and performance is by its very nature self-exposing. Bagging a performance publicly is not a comfortable thing to do. The rule for the sensitive reviewer who doesn’t like a performance is not to touch it. Yak on about everything, and if you can’t avoid it, a quick line buried somewhere towards the end should do it. The New Yorker review of Eyes Wide Shut, which mentions the fact that Nicole Kidman has a small mouth before moving, with pointed swiftness, onto another matter entirely. In Australia, the master of this technique is the perennially polite David Stratton [a reviewer, I must say, I rarely disagree with].

An actor is, more often than not, the hook for the audience. Film producers recognise this and pay actors very well within their performance. Pinpointing what this quality is, and how it feeds a film is not easy. Getting to the essence of character is something that literature has struggled with for years, and in the end it may well be that the level of insight and attention required for the job is more within the realm of poets and novelists than the time-restricted, ideas-wary world of journalism.

Ingrid Ohlsson is a former actor and theatre reviewer, and now works as a writer across a number of areas.
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As the Working Dog production company prepares to release its second feature The Dish, expat Aussie Tearlach Hutcheson examines The Castle’s much-delayed US release.
When it was released in Australia in 1997, The Castle became one of the most profitable Australian films on record. Shot for next to nothing and relying on cast and crew pay deferrals, it ended up grossing $10.5 million. What made its success particularly notable was that the film was so avowedly Australian - proudly parochial, even - in its idiom.

But while that proved a strength at home, what would it mean for the film's chances overseas? Well, in mid-May 1999, The Castle finally opened in the US, after a protracted word-of-mouth campaign. Let me begin by unclawing myself. I'm an Australian who runs an arthouse theatre in Dallas, Texas. Don't ask me how I ended up in Texas from Sydney, because I don't really know.

You could put it down to my fervent nationalistic pride, but I really wanted to screen The Castle. I should point out at this stage that I am deeply cynical of the Australian media, which frequently over-hypes the reception Australian films receive in the US. So exaggerated are the tales of audiences wildly throwing their clothes to the rafters in joyous response to the latest export from home that I can only wonder where they're reporting from. It certainly isn't this town.

Sure, some Australian films do well, but the ones that create a huge impact on US audiences are few and far between, and far less common than independent American product, or even British period pieces. But the reason I'm here is not to berate the Australian media, but rather to offer a fly-on-the-wall account (at least/as they see it) of the US reaction to The Castle.

The film opened in the US on May 14. That date might mean little to an Australian audience, but to the US film exhibitor it was hugely significant. For months, every studio in the country had been juggling its release schedule around another May day: the 19th, the day The Phantom Menace was set for release. It became impossible to read a newspaper, turn on the TV or listen to the radio without hearing some reference to the long-awaited Star Wars movie about to erupt everywhere. How could the Force do battle with the Force? In the case of Miramax the answer was to go small, and release perhaps the tiniest film in its slate and play a David versus Goliath game.

Could there have been something deliberate about the timing? The Castle opened in Australia in 1997 just as the Star Wars trilogy was being re-released. Of course, it did well, though after the run director Rob Sitch remembers telling himself: "At least we won't have to go through that again." Little did he suspect.

So how do you show an American audience a film considered so quintessentially Australian? Well, the first thing is you have to get somebody to buy it. The Sponsors' Night people heard about it and decided to show our film instead [of the one booked], and it took off.

Working Big people - creative talents Santo Cilauro, Tom Gleghorn, Jane Kennedy and Rob Sitch, with Michael Hirsh providing the management muscle - had given up on distributing The Castle outside Australia. They moved instead on other projects including A River Somewhere (an ABC TV fishing series) and The Panel (a weekly TV chat show). They also set about producing the now much-awaited The Dish (releasing through Roadshow on October 19), when "a smart woman in the office" (as Sitch puts it) sent a copy of the film to Sundance.

"That was the turning point," says Sitch. "The Sponsors' Night people heard about it and decided to show our film instead [of the one booked], and it took off."

Rumours abound about The Castle among US exhibitors. It is said that Miramax had been offered the film prior to Sundance for US$1 million. The company turned it down. But the 1998 festival screening generated such intense interest that a frenzy of bidding pushed its price up to somewhere about US$6 million.

Whether or not that figure is in any way accurate, one thing is certain: Miramax bought the film in January 1998. So why did it take 16 months for it to be released in the US?

The film is the latest in a series of Australian films to break into the US market, including The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and Muriel's Wedding. These films have all been successful, with grosses of around $20 million each. However, they are not considered to be "blockbusters" by Hollywood standards. The success of The Castle is significant because it is the first Australian film to reach a wide audience in the US.

So exaggerated are the tales of audiences wildly throwing their clothes to the rafters in joyous response to the latest export from home that I can only wonder where they're reporting from. It certainly isn't this town.
Executive producer of *The Castle*, Michael Hirsh believes vehemently "everything written about The Castle’s US release has been wrong". The amount of changes made to the film, the price paid and audience reactions have all been mis-reported.

He says a music track and a skerrick of dialogue were the only changes made between *The Castle’s* Australian release and its US release several years later. Was a reference to ‘pool’ table in the trailer dubbed to become ‘billiard’ table in the feature? Hirsh cannot recall.

While refusing to verify production company Working Dog earned US$6 million from the film’s sale to arthouse distributors Miramax at Sundance 1998 (a sum widely reported in the trade press) Hirsh believes the US release was an overall success. Stressing the sale figure was for world rights (excluding the UK and South Africa), he says what started out as a very small Australian film received sound critical reviews in the US media, played to appreciative audiences and earned box office of almost A$2 million, despite being released on the same day as *Star Wars Episode 1*. But why did Miramax sit on *The Castle* for 18 months before releasing it on the same day as the most anticipated film of 1999?

They were waiting for the right moment and then... “their argument was counter-programming, in hindsight it didn’t work,” Hirsh says.

During the waiting period he felt anxious and nervous but lacked the power to tell Miramax when to release the film. Would he work with Miramax again? “Sure, if it was appropriate” but he notes the likelihood of this happening following the company’s switch, in recent years, towards producing its own product rather than buying finished films for release, is very small.

“One of the things that we know (through the US experience) the film plays exactly the same every time”. Between them, Hirsh and director Rob Sitch witnessed at least 20 screenings.

The poor box office was due to a lack of the all-important marketability – the big stars and big release budget so necessary for the US market, according to Hirsh.

Marketing which could have benefited from a concerted campaign. But increasingly, the big international distributors are cautioning local filmmakers from seeking high market prices. The argument runs that a high sale price will limit the marketing spend and prejudice the film’s chances at the box office.

“I didn’t get that sense,” Hirsh says.

Miramax was very easy to work with. Hirsh, Sitch and lead actor Michael Caton travelled to the US for the film’s release and Miramax encouraged the production company’s input along the way. Unfortunately however, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Life is Beautiful* were being released about the same time so, “the Miramax marketing machine was going to those two films”.

Defending the Castle

Mum; Dad and the gang outside their castle.

Michael Caton enjoys the serenity.
concern that it had paid too much for it. Time and special consideration were needed to devise a strategy to ensure the distributor had the best chance of recovering its expenses. Of course, in film more than most other industries, you’ve got to spend money to make money. So how could Miramax possibly make back its investment without spending perhaps half as much again in marketing? The answer: the almost-mystical Word of Mouth.

Miramax hoped the strategy that had reaped Fox Searchlight such dividends with *The Full Monty* could work just as well with *The Castle*. The company held numerous free screenings of the film in major cities around the United States; in Dallas alone there were eight free screenings. Each screening targeted a different demographic, whether it was people who live close to airports, Australian expat groups or Middle Americans in general. But here’s the thing with free screenings in the US. Everybody, including the major studios, is doing them, with the upshot that they have become virtually ineffective as a marketing tool. With at least three free movies a week, the discerning public can pick and choose between films. *The Castle*, with its unknown cast and dodgy picture quality, was pitched against the likes of Brendan Fraser in *The Mummy*. Predictably, it struggled to draw a crowd, rarely pulling in more than 150 people per screening. The movie was usually shown in auditoriums with a capacity of 300-500. With such a sparsely populated theatre, generating the empathy needed to make the film a success was extremely difficult (this phenomenon was seen with *Muriel’s Wedding*, too). Nonetheless, the word of mouth was generally positive. So too were the audience survey responses. But here’s the problem with surveys: you only get extreme response, either very positive or very negative (those who don’t feel particularly strongly tend not to fill out the survey, dumping them instead on the theatre floor). Out of the 400 surveys collected at my theatre we received only two negative responses.

Good word of mouth, good survey results. The film should be selling itself, right? But asking the 1000 or so people who had seen it over its eight Dallas screenings to spread the good word in a city of three million people is... well, you do the maths...

The critical response to *The Castle* was mixed. Andy Klein, writing out of Los Angeles for a Dallas publication, finished his review with these words: “This sort of comedy is dependent on a genuinely generous attitude towards it characters. If the makers of *The Castle* have such an attitude, it doesn’t come through very clearly.” Klein was pointing towards an ambivalence that was also noted by some Australian critics of the movie, a suspicion that the filmmakers may have harboured a sense of superiority to their characters. That’s a dangerous perception in the US, because of that American thing about never making fun of yourself. Americans also have difficulty in relating to characters like the Kerrigans. They really have no reference point for such people. The closest thing might be the American ‘redneck’, but the redneck of American popular culture is either an unsympathetic savage, as per *Deliverance*, or a noble fool, as in *The Beverly Hillbillies*, neither of which really approximates the Kerrigan tribe.

Other critics were kinder – or, at any rate, could be made to appear so. In its press campaign for *The Castle*, Miramax extracted a quote from Roger Ebert, one of America’s most widely read [and watched] film critics. Ebert had proclaimed the movie “This year’s *Full Monty*”. But using this quote may prove to be a double-edged sword, leading audiences to expect something quite different than the film they are actually about to see. There were also other critics who, while enjoying the film, struggled with reference points. Jane Sumner of the *Dallas Morning News* referred to the moral majority when she wrote: “*The Castle* may not be about what the religious right means by family values, but that’s the underlying theme of this modest, sunny satire that has you grinning all the way to the car.”

*The Castle* also suffers from the same problem that afflicted director Emma Kate Crogan’s *Love and Other Catastrophes*. It’s easy enough to talk about how much the film cost and how much it was sold to North America for. But there’s no getting around the fact that in almost all cases, the lower the cost of the film the more technical faults it has.

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It’s easy enough to talk about how much the film cost and how much it was sold to North America for. But there’s no getting around the fact that in almost all cases, the lower the cost of the film the more technical faults it has. *The Castle* was shot on 16mm film and transferred to 35mm, and it looks like a 16mm film transferred to 35mm. Audiences do notice, and are often unforgiving, of such things, especially American audiences used to watching films that have been touched up by Industrial Light and Magic. Yet for all that, American audiences seem to enjoy the film. Released on the arthouse circuit, which normally attracts audiences willing to be more forgiving of the technical problems of a small-budget film, *The Castle* received enthusiastic responses. In my theatre, people have been known to break into applause at the end of the film, though they seem to struggle, particularly in the beginning.
What the American critics said

The Castle, directed by Rob Sitch, is one of those comic treasures like The Full Monty and Waking Ned Devine that shows its characters in the full bloom of glorious eccentricity.

Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times
A feel-good comic fairy tale that flashes its family values like an oversize rhinestone bracelet... Essentially a one-joke movie... But The Castle moves along nimbly enough to keep from settling into a pudding that even Darryl, in all his gastronomic innocence, couldn't stomach.

Stephen Holden, New York Times

What makes The Castle so startlingly good is that about midway through the picture, we realise the joke is on us.

Gary Thompson, Philadelphia Daily News

The Castle has the ultra-slow pace, ultra-thick characters and ultra-slim plot of a PBS sitcom pilot. Hardly worth a night at the movies. And yet... The Castle is charming and, yes, uplifting.

Bob Heisler, LA Times

This domestic comedy from Down Under is... more thoughtful, noticing and inventive than nine out of 10 big-budget comedies out of Hollywood. For all the fun it has with the family’s individual and collective lack of taste, the script clearly takes these people to heart - and so will you.

Susan Stark, Detroit News

An agreeably flaky Aussie comedy that taps that it’s-always-the-’50s comfort zone.

Owen Gleiberman, Entertainment Weekly

Written and directed by a clutch of Australian comics who are their country’s equivalent of Second City, The Castle is refreshingly, affectionately, exuberantly unironic. So unironic, in fact, as to be radical.

Carrie Rickey, Philadelphia Inquirer

The satire and inventive wit of Working Dog, the Australian comedy team behind this (led by Rob Sitch), are right on the money. If you’re looking for straight-ahead belly laughs... I advise you pay the Kerrigans a visit.

Desson Howe, Washington Post

with the dialect. I sometimes wondered if they didn’t get the jokes, or is it just that they’re not as funny as I remembered? There are, of course, some jokes that are simply so culturally specific that Americans were never going to get them. Like the “can you move the Corolla so I can move the Torana to get to the Commodore?” exchange.

Despite the cultural differences there were some fundamental truths that Americans could relate to well. You don’t buy houses next to airports, power-lines, or landfills, for instance. The first major audience response in the film always occurs when Darryl [Michael Caton] asks the building inspector if he knows anything about lead.

US audiences seemed to appreciate the dry understatement underpinning much of the comedy. References to the daughter’s hairdressing diploma as a college degree, the walk home from the airport, the nearly dry lake, the lawyer who dictates a letter then types it up himself. These are all moments that know no cultural boundaries. There were moments which took on added significance in a foreign land: when Farouk [Costas Kilies] says he doesn’t mind living next to a runway because at least these planes don’t drop bombs, it is especially relevant to an audience whose country is currently bombing Serbia.

It’s difficult to know if changes were made in the script to satisfy American sensibilities. To know for sure, one would need to see the films side by side. The trailer for the film did, however, refer to a pool table, while the movie refers to a billiard table. The trailer also had Tracey Kerrigan [Sophie Lee] telling her mother Sal [Anne Tenney], “I’m not going to have children till I’m at least 23,” a scene that was cut from the film. What’s more, Miramax issued a last-minute request to switch some reels because of “technical problems” - and yet we had already played the film with the suspect reels and found no such problems. Changes may have been made in the substituted reels.

Was Miramax right to be so fearful about the fate of The Castle? At the end of the day, this is a film with the near-universal premise of the underdog overcoming apparently insurmountable odds. It’s a theme that has proven a winner with audiences from Rocky (and before) to Strictly Ballroom (and beyond), and one with enormous appeal to what we might call the American mentality.

Surveys held after the film’s release revealed a positive reaction. Audiences on the way out were heard telling incoming patrons that they were in for a treat (of course, there was also the occasional audience survey response calling the film “numbingly boring” and “definitely unfunny”).

But the central question remains both for exhibitors and for Miramax. For exhibitors, the choice is between allowing the film the time it needs to build gradual growth to turn word of mouth into decent box office.

Life is Beautiful was eventually an Oscar winner for Roberto Benigni and Miramax, but it took 20 weeks of gradual growth to turn word of mouth into decent box office.
Like bees to a honey pot
The Australian arts grant culture needs a shake up

The Australian film and television industry is in crisis. Or so writers, directors, producers and actors of Anglo-celtic origin would have us believe. More funding is the catch-cry under the auspices of the need to protect our Australian culture. But what is Australian culture and why should it need protecting?

For jobs?
With the building of film and television studios in both Queensland and New South Wales, the on-again off-again proposed studio for Victoria and the resultant growth in overseas productions coming to Australia, job growth has never been more healthy. Add to this that US productions pay considerably higher rates than local productions and one may begin to smell a vested interest in the clamour for protection of our Australian values.

For over a hundred years the prevailing depiction of a true blue dinky-di Aussie bloke has been the laconic, hard-working, hard-drinking, working class stoic possessor of true wisdom and high moral fibre under pressure. Supported by the equally stoic tough-as-guts Aussie sheila who in recent times has begun to out-tough the blokes - who are now far more concerned with the Australian male pastime of dressing up as women. Afterall, someone has to do it.

This one-eyed view of Australian societal make-up has of course always ignored or marginalised slightly over fifty percent of the population. Not until the show Heartbreak High did we see on Australian television anything that remotely represented a true depiction of the demographic mix in the population.

It is no surprise then the main source of demonstration comes from the Anglo-Saxon community within the film and television industry, though only those of course whose jobs are genuinely threatened by the emergent globalised market. That is, actors, producers, directors and writers, of Anglo-celtic extraction who write and depict this myopic view of Australian culture. Ironic also that this is the same insidious bunch who created and now perpetuates the cultural cringe phenomenon which is used to advantage when being applied to home audiences who “just don’t get it” when failing to support homemade crap. Used self-detrimentally when this same group cry foul of anything that is “un-Australian” being given the least drop from the gravy-train that is arts funding in this nation.

The dispossessed and the totally ignored have little to complain about since they have nothing to lose and everything to gain in the changing environment.

Perhaps the Australian arts industry is a microcosm, of sorts, of the worldwide reaction to the global market place. Naturally those who have their monopoly removed are going to fight. However, it might be wise to check with others before the call “national identity under threat” is utilised for self-interest and economic greed.

Hypocrisy aside, what is the need, if any, for a society to have a depiction of itself? With the successful bourgeoisification of all but the lumpenproletariat, the pursuit of mammon has become all. It is ironic that in the past actors were thought of as society’s fringe-dwellers and writers the source of intellect for revolutionary change.

Yet here we have a society undergoing great change and at the forefront of protest are the members who fought so hard to get the world the way they want it. Revolution and reaction? “Let them eat cake” or “We want to preserve our Australian culture”, the sentiment remains the same. At the next glamorous, glitzy gala evening of wondrous awards for all the beautiful people who so selflessly gave of their time to troop up the red carpet, one may see the facade crack. The dispossessed who are being fed this crap and told constantly how much it is in their interest to preserve the status quo may perhaps smell a rat. They may begin to correlate government funding and untruthful depictions of the world as a plot to keep them right where they are: spending what’s left of the pauper sums they garner from the sale of their labour on movie tickets, and the products advertised on television and at the movies. If not they can always go to the casino for a bet and watch the awards ceremonies live.

They might cry: “Cut all government funding of the arts now!”

The very concept of state-sponsored arts is truly beyond nelly. How many people go to the opera, ballet and modern dance? Theatre, films? Lots, lots and lots. But what would happen if there was no government funding? The world as we lazy fat bastard artists know it would end. No more deeply concerned ponderous articles on “blondie, the anorexic latest hot young thing who cares so deeply for the world she’s waiting in line for her chance to hold a black baby up and shame you into salving your guilt with a credit card”. All of which can only happen if we have enough starving black babies so let’s keep them coming.

Idea: Arrest all poets. Arrest all artists of every hue for that matter, and put them in a chain gang and make them passes so tastefully damned round their insincere necks like so many ribbons of concern.

One eats, shits and or dies. All the rest is propaganda. To claim otherwise is to be disingenuous to say the least.

Colin Moody is an actor of Anglo-celtic origin currently portraying the character of radio broadcaster Tom Dooley in the ABC drama Something in the Air.
One of Australia's most established distributors of arthouse films.
Currently distributing The Dinner Game (Le Diner De Cons), Comedian Harmonists, Love Etc, Love Is The Devil, The Assistant, Would I Lie To You and Wallace & Gromit.
New titles for late 2000 include Innocence (Paul Cox), No Ball Players Here (Monique Schwarz) and Train de Vie (Radu Mihaileanu).

For all bookings contact Jeremy Weinstein
Phone (03) 9826 9077 Fax (03) 9826 1935

Jacques Villeneuve (The Dinner Game)
Where is the audience?
It's time to share responsibility of finding out

Where is the audience?
It's time to share responsibility of finding out and are therefore being swamped in Australian films or because the print advertising budgets of American films are so much smaller than the advertising budgets for local films and the support of Glebe's Valhalla two screens. Due largely to the efforts and tenacity of the lead actors and the support of Glebe's Valhalla cinema it enjoyed a limited season in Sydney in June 2000. Elise is currently writing her second feature and will appear in Clara Law's The Goddess Of 1967.

Australians don't want to see. It is imperative not to equate poor box office returns with an industry in crisis. Our industry will be in crisis if filmmakers are forced to replace the creative process of filmmaking with a cynical attempt to second guess the market.

Were Fellini, Godard and Campion thinking of market forces and the demographic when they were making what are now seen as masterpieces? As filmmakers and screenwriters we should be diving headfirst into worlds of vision and imagination where anything can and will happen. Our need to tell a particular story must outweigh marketplace concerns. We are putting the cart before the horse by demanding of our new writers at every public seminar - who is your audience? Just write, be inspired, create worlds and emotions that excite and confront. Dive in, succeed

We should be acknowledging scripts which don't rely on formulas, films which tell important and powerful intimate stories

Australians don't want to see. It is imperative not to equate poor box office returns with an industry in crisis. Our industry will be in crisis if filmmakers are forced to replace the creative process of filmmaking with a cynical attempt to second guess the market.
Winter 2000 is proving a very good season for Rose Byrne. But at 9.30am, perched in a favourite Balmain café, her big sleepy eyes reveal plainly the demands of the past few weeks.

Each evening she has been performing on stage with the Sydney Theatre Company production of La Dispute, Pierre Marivaux’s play about four kids raised in isolation then released into society, while during the days Byrne has been part of the Star Wars set.

From local theatre production to international blockbuster and back again. Despite working around the clock, with a bit of sleep thrown in, she is remarkably unfazed. On her busiest day last week Byrne left home at 4.45am to be on set at Fox Studios at 5am. Many costumes and layer upon layer of make-up later, she wrapped at 6.30pm and had 30 minutes to remove costumes and make-up before leaving Moore Park for the Sydney Theatre Company in Walsh Bay. She was due on stage, made up and in costume, at 8.15pm.

An industry veteran at 21, Byrne’s been acting professionally for nine years after securing her first professional role in the local feature Dalias Doll opposite the wise talkin’ New York comedian Sandra Bernhard.

Directed by Ann Turner, the 1994 film about a US golf pro visiting Australia was never released theatrically.

Byrne went on to appear in episodes of television dramas, including Wildside, before she rocketed to fame in 1999 opposite Australia’s hottest recent export Heath Ledger, in the crime comedy Two Hands.

Her latest feature, My Mother Frank, where, opposite Matthew Newton she portrays a uni student, Jenny, releases August.

Byrne is pretty chuffed with her performance (wearing a long brunette wig] and she especially values the friendships she made on set.

"I’d never really kept a friend from a film ever. Matty (Newton) was the first one. So it was really interesting for me to learn you can have friends from the industry too,” she says.

For the last few years Byrne has been seeing Two Hands’ director Gregor Jordan. The relationship has now ended, she says, due to the demands and geographical distances imposed by their careers - Jordan is currently shooting the feature Buffalo Soldiers in Munich. Despite her relationship with Jordan, Byrne says she has never really hung out with the ‘industry’ crowd.

Now she finds herself in the middle of a group of predominantly Sydney-based twenty-something actors including Pia Miranda, Kick Gurry and

Last year she featured in Two Hands, this year she got a role in the coveted Star Wars and next year her first lead film will be released. Michaela Boland writes Rose Byrne is on the up and up.
Leeanna Walsman (Looking for Alibrandi). Walsman also starred in La Dispute and subsequently picked up a bounty hunter role in Star Wars after the film's casting agent, Robyn Gurland, went to observe Byrne on stage. Byrne had met Gurland during a recent holiday in New York. "She was trying to meet people from Australia who were interesting." During the meeting she invited her to La Dispute. "Apparently she'd watched every Australian film from 1979 or whatever to get a bit of an idea about the talent out here."

Gurland met Rose after the show. Luckily the actor didn't know she was in the audience during the performance "otherwise I would have been really scared", she confesses. Byrne can discuss her couple of weeks work on Star Wars but she's banned from disclosing any plot details. Which could be a difficult task anyway given very few people on set are privy to the full script. Security is tight - but the myriad of online gossip sites carry full reports daily (of varying accuracy) for full fan enjoyment.

Walsman has even received a digital makeover on one site to show what her character may look like. In Star Wars Episode Two Byrne plays a handmaiden to Natalie Portman’s Padme. "I'm like the person behind the person behind her, like a glorified extra really," she laughs.

Playing a handmaiden in corsets, big collars and fluted sleeves, Byrne says she's been blown away by the fabrics and detailing of her six costumes. "One's like paper with dots on it and there's an Armani one that's a blue and purple velvet one..." Australian actors are fond of going on (and on) about the how ace the food is on Hollywood film sets. They are familiar anecdotes - there must be other differences between local film sets and the big ones?

Nope, says Byrne. "I fully agree. That is how you can tell, the food and the freebies. You get free Snickers on this set. Big ones. Free chewing gum, free Coke, free juice," Byrne confides enthusiastically. Plus there's the full range of biscuit shapes... Byrne runs through the list..., "pizza, savoury, chicken crumpy, barbecue, cheese..." "Who gets free Snickers? What is that? On a usual (Australian) set there’s a couple of crusty Arnotts and stale Lan Choo Tea."

Additionally, Byrne says the sheer scale of everything and the money behind it is somewhat daunting. Each meal time there are two sittings, for the off-set and on-set crews. Byrne recently ate with the off-set crew. "And there's like 600 blokes who are working making buildings." She describes the scene as, "like being in jail because there's this huge tent and all these blokes in their jeans and..." at which point Byrne the actor takes over performing a type of convict farce hunched over the table in an endearing caricature....

Though some parts of the local industry are struggling for survival alongside the big US productions occupying Sydney’s Fox Studios, the films have been good for a handful of local actors. In M:i-2 John Polson received the break he would otherwise have struggled to get. Likewise Belinda McClory and Hugo Weaving in The Matrix and Richard Roxburgh in M:i-2. Now Byrne is part of a younger group fielding opportunities. Byrne is eager to kick-start a Hollywood career but she's caught in a tricky in-between space. Yes, she was in the biggest film of 1999, but she's only just completed filming her first lead role - playing a blind girl opposite Japanese Prada model Rakiya Kurokawain in Clara Law’s The Goddess of 1967. (The industry 'buzz' on Goddess? A visual feast but is otherwise quite weird).

She's visited LA and screen tested for a few parts - some after being recommended by Heath Ledger. After the craziness of La Dispute and Star Wars, she has nothing scheduled for spring. "I’d like to go back but my agent always says, 'You’ve gotta wait for your vehicle here. You’ve gotta wait for your vehicle here'."

The common wisdom would have Rose continue developing her acting and profile in Australia until such time as she is cast as a lead in a quality Australian film with legs that take it overseas.

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The common wisdom would have Rose continue developing her acting and profile in Australia until such time as she is cast as a lead in a quality Australian film with legs that take it overseas. However, the poor international sales of local films in recent years could mean she is waiting a long time for her Oscar and Lucinda or her Muriel’s Wedding to show up.

Sure, Cate Blanchett and Toni Collette sailed more smoothly overseas than Byrne may sail if she were to leave tomorrow - but then there's nothing quite like the impatience of youth... Especially when she can so easily cast a sideways glance at her Two Hands’ buddy Heath Ledger.
Selling Australian films internationally

Local box office success is not enough

The first screening of Strictly Ballroom at Cannes in 1992 went off.

There is a common misperception that an Australian film with respectable local box office performance is a success. However, with the exception of a few micro-budget aberrations an Australian film must sell overseas in order to recoup its full budget for the investors. The key markets are the US, UK, Spain, Germany, France and Japan, and along with the key international market places where the buying and selling takes places, the markets are continually changing and evolving.

For Australian films, over the past 18 months prospects for success have proven difficult. This is most likely due to the plethora of English language films flooding the marketplace from the UK (lottery driven) and the US. The disappointing foreign box-office performance is a success. However, and along with the key international market places where the buying and selling takes place, the markets are continually changing and evolving.

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Oh Harvey where art thou?

2000. digital video. 17 min.

WRITER: JEREMY WEINSTEIN
DIRECTOR: JEREMY WEINSTEIN
CAMERA: NAOR BAR-ZEEV
PRODUCER: IMI WEINSTEIN

As mentioned, Jeremy has hours of footage he captured at this year’s Cannes Film Festival, chasing Harvey and trying to discover if blood, even tenuous blood, is thicker than water. He knew Cannes was the only chance to jump Harvey. As Jeremy sees it, unlike Hollywood, this is the town where nobody knows you’re a nobody. His first foot-in-door stop, with his cameraman Naor Bar-Zeev, is the Miramax office in the festival city. He tries to sweet talk the first gatekeeper in the labyrinth - the receptionist. As often happens in these inter-cultural exchanges, the Yank has no idea what the Aussie is talking about. He big notes himself as being somebody down Under, but just as he suckers her in, he chickens out and owns up to not being a rich and powerful media mogul. He hits the brick wall.

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Next thing, Harvey’s at the buffet with his white plate, plucking hors d’oeuvres from the smorgasbord. Jeremy realises he better seize the moment or else he’s going back to Melbourne without a Harvey scene in the can.

But in a case of nepotistic life, Jeremy’s son Jeremy Jr. has become one of the organisers of Celluloid Soup Film Festival. Climbing the micro-mogul ladder Jeremy has become one of the organisers of Celluloid Soup 2000. He’s pushed the project to this stage, self-funded and self-produced. But in a case of nepotistic life imitating nepotistic art, Jeremy’s father, Imi Weinstein - the blind and curtain maker - wants to step in as producer. Jeremy's unsure, as more established producers are also handing him business cards. In Imi’s favour, he could help raise finances for the online edit and make sure the curtains at the premier look top notch. Listen, Jeremy, if Harvey owes it to you, you owe it to Imi.

Oh Harvey Where Art Thou? up at one of the big festivals, even Sundance.

Jeremy has previously shot two short comedies: “Have A Break”, a finalist in the 1998 Metropolis Super 8 film competition, and “The Goldcoinsteins” which ran during 1998 Celluloid Soup Film Festival. Climbing the micro-mogul ladder Jeremy has become one of the organisers of Celluloid Soup 2000. He’s pushed the project to this stage, self-funded and self-produced. But in a case of nepotistic life imitating nepotistic art, Jeremy’s father, Imi Weinstein - the blind and curtain maker - wants to step in as producer. Jeremy’s unsure, as more established producers are also handing him business cards. In Imi’s favour, he could help raise finances for the online edit and make sure the curtains at the premier look top notch.

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Because film people like films about film people, Jeremy hopes he can get Oh Harvey Where Art Thou? up at one of the big festivals, even Sundance.

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Listen, Jeremy, if Harvey owes it to you, you owe it to Imi.

Jeremy realises he better seize the moment, although the covert-camera work means the conversation is not captured on microphone. From what we see, the Weinsteins are getting on famously. Then Harvey spots the camera. He’s not impressed. The anxious cameraman pulls away. From what we see, the Weinsteins are getting on famously. Then Harvey spots the camera. He’s not impressed. The anxious cameraman pulls away. From what we see, the Weinsteins are getting on famously. Then Harvey spots the camera. He’s not impressed. The anxious cameraman pulls away. From what we see, the Weinsteins are getting on famously. Then Harvey spots the camera. He’s not impressed. The anxious cameraman pulls away. From what we see, the Weinsteins are getting on famously. Then Harvey spots the camera. He’s not impressed. The anxious cameraman pulls away.

Jeremy w ill also have to weave around the mic and camera, while Harvey strolls around in the background looking for a table. Next thing, Harvey’s at the buffet with his white plate, plucking hors d’oeuvres from the smorgasbord. Jeremy realises he better seize the moment or else he’s going back to Melbourne without a Harvey scene in the can.

Footage reminiscent of JFK's book depository scene, Jeremy traps Harvey in the crosshairs of the DV lens. This is getting him nowhere so he calls it a night. He hears that Harvey is staying at the Hotel Du Cap, so he starts loitering around there to increase the serendipity-potential. It pays off. One morning Jeremy is busy eating the cheapest thing on the menu at the hotel’s café when the fat tycoon himself comes down for a bite. Jeremy vocalises his nervousness to the camera, while Harvey strolls around in the background looking for a table. Next thing, Harvey’s at the buffet with his white plate, plucking hors d’oeuvres from the smorgasbord. Jeremy realises he better seize the moment or else he’s going back to Melbourne without a Harvey scene in the can.

Because film people like films about film people, Jeremy hopes he can get Oh Harvey Where Art Thou? up at one of the big festivals, even Sundance.
>For the first time in years, the actual business of films seemed to take a back seat at this year’s Cannes Film Festival. All the regular players were in attendance. The restaurants were crowded and the parties seemed both plentiful and well-attended. Yet comparatively few deals of note were struck, and the buzz on individual films, that perennial index of interest and worth, seemed practically non-existent. Part of it might have had something to do with the movies on offer, a dignified but hardly commercially lucrative bunch, this year, even the billboards along the Croisette - normally reserved for upcoming blockbusters like Harry Potter or The Mummy - or garish oddities like Bar's Wire - seemed lacklustre and impoverished.

But in fact, it ran much deeper than that, as most observers agreed, the past 12 months has seen a general shift in the discourse, a change in the way the industry is configured and understood. The names on the ads taken out in Variety and The Hollywood Reporter - unfamiliar, vaguely tech-sounding - said it all. On the Carlton Terrace, or late at night outside the Petit Majestic bar, all anyone seemed to be talking about were the dot-coms - two syllables that, depending where you stood in the matter, signified either the death of the film industry, or its resurrection.

What prompted this debate? Call it synergy: a coming-together of disparate elements, a not-altogether seamless confluence of technology, resources and old-fashioned entrepreneurial instincts. As the means of production, at the lower end of the filmmaking scale, have become cheaper, and therefore more readily available - as movements such as Dogma and releases like Blair Witch have legitimised a rough-hewn, video-driven aesthetic, aligning it with both the arthouse and commercial mainstays - a new sense of possibility and entitlement has sprung into being. As one independent British producer remarked recently, “These days, every man and his dog’s a bloody filmmaker.”

In such a climate, actually making a film is only half the battle: given the increasingly crowded (and globally diverse) nature of the marketplace, the real challenge lies in getting it noticed. And in this respect, the internet has proved a rather dubious blessing: at once a godsend to aspiring filmmakers, and a fast-track for those looking to break into the business end of the film industry.

Very occasionally, amid the crowded precincts of the web, one happens upon a minor break-out hit, some home-made effort that has, for whatever reason, struck a chord with consumers - like George Lucas’s American History X or Lars von Trier’s The Kingdom, or Harvey Weinstein’s image-soaked, wildly successful The Sopranos. But in the end, the real shoal of filmmaking activity almost as widespread and industrious as the home- Porn industry. Most of these take the form of witless parodies of some A-list blockbuster or success d’estime - Computer-Generated Matrix spoofs, complete with chase sequence involving a Wilder Society koala; Mission: Impossible with Austin Powers in the Tom Cruise role; Die Hard: Shut, Being Osbourne et al. Alternatively, there’s the kind of chuckle-inducing exploitation flicks (Bikini Bandits and the Magic Lamp, Cannibalism and Your Teeth) that make Tom Clancy look like Merchant Ivory.

Hardly the sort of stuff to make Harvey Weinstein reach for his appointment’s book. Nevertheless, for many would-be Tarantinos, the fantasy of what the internet represents, remains curiously nebulous: the promise of a free, readily-accessible forum enabling a means of distribution which transcends international boundaries and individual markets.
Instant attention, and instant (albeit limited) acclaim. In this respect, probably the biggest news in recent months has been the establishment of POP.com - an online venture founded by two of Hollywood's biggest guns, directors Steven Spielberg and Ron Howard (and their respective production houses, DreamWorks and Imagine Entertainment), in conjunction with former Microsoft CEO Paul Allen. Rachel Weaver visited Melbourne recently to attend the St Kilda Film Festival, and her role within the new organisation - comparable to that of a vice-president of acquisitions (as with many of the new digital entertainment companies - POP.com has dispensed with job-titles per se) - granted her an unusually clear perspective on some of the changes overtaking the industry.

Neither a online studio, nor a distributor in the traditional sense, POP.com is instead "a digital entertainment company, focusing on short-form entertainment on the web." Their programming is two-fold: "We're playing short films in an ongoing festival that we call POPFest," Weaver explains, "and we're also creating original productions, live-action and animated, and serialised shorts, between three to five minutes in length, with continuous storylines and characters. We're working with celebrities, yes, but we're also working with emerging talent."

Little wonder, therefore, that the fledgling outlet has been bombarded with submissions from all over the world. To date, one Australian short film (Samuel MacGeorge's B&W Freezer) has been selected for inclusion in POPFest - and more than its novelty, or even the famous names behind it, this slightly old-fashioned process of viewing and inviting films is a large part of what sets POP.com apart, betraying as it does a qualitative, curatorial impulse that's unusual in the radically democratised realm of the web.

Much the same message is echoed by Jannat Gargi, Director of Acquisition & Development at Atomfilms.com. "We're currently receiving hundreds of submissions a week," she confirms, adding that "we go out and attend all the major international festivals in search of product." She's quick, however, to emphasise the rarified nature of their search, however: "We're extremely selective: maybe three- to five-percent of what's submitted to us, actually ends up making it onto our site. Right now, our catalogue lists between 1200 and 1300 titles - though not necessarily every film we license goes up on our web site."

Among their more market-driven peers, however, both Atomfilms and POP.com count as minor anomalies, in that they view online consumption, via the web, as an end unto itself - though Weaver admits, this doesn't entirely preclude the possibility of further development: "Well, there are certainly opportunities for spin-offs," says Weaver. "Obviously it would be terrific for both us and the filmmaker if a buzz built up around our short films and original productions which we couldn't ignore, and which lent to them being spun off into a television series or a feature film. But at the same time, it's not our number-one goal."

"We're not simply a farming tool for DreamWorks or Imagine content, by any means," she adds. "It would have to be one of those rare cases where something garners a lot of attention, and really cries out to be taken offline and put into a wider distribution system, such as television or the cinema. But we'd certainly never ignore that opportunity, should it present itself."

Atomfilms' site, Gargi explains, is refreshed every day: as well as its turnover of fresh material, new categories and areas are regularly introduced, partly in order to reflect its changing content, and partly to sustain the interest of regular visitors. And for the moment, at least, the strategy seems to be working: the Atom Films web site tabulated 1.4 million unique users in March 2000 - with 25 percent of that figure "visiting" from outside the US - and its program of free-to-view films and animations were watched 2.7 million times during that month. These figures are impressive, certainly - yet one important question remains unanswered: who's actually watching this stuff? Key executives from Miramax and DreamWorks - or your average teenage slacker from Ohio? If we allow that, in most cases, the purpose of a filmmaker posting their work goes beyond simple ego-gratification - that it's done, much of the time, with the specific aim of attracting serious studio attention and, by extension, with the hope of launching a professional career - then one must consider it, for the most part, a dismal failure.

Lyn McCarthy, former head of Dendy Films, now chief of Maverick Films - and a distributor with almost two decades' experience in the Australian film industry - admits to being faintly sceptical of the current dot.com mania: "I find myself wondering, what's the real audience for all this?" she says. "I mean, you put your film up online; it gets seen by a bunch of 12-year-old geeks all over the world... Big deal. "It's being intended as a sales tool, as people claim, you have to wonder whether the people who need to see it, are actually accessing it. Maybe they are. Maybe right now, LA is full of development executives going online every day to check out some hot new talent. But I doubt it, somehow. "There's also the thorny issue of broadcast rights and royalties. As a "stateless" medium, the internet defies most of the existing contractual provisions attaching to studios, filmmakers and their work. It remains a largely uncharted frontier, and a general uncertainty as to terms, has led to some byzantine, not to say opportunistic contractual provisions."

"Getting exposure is great," says McCarthy. "That's what short films have always been about. But there's a lot of legalities to contend with, in terms of rights. Internet rights are still largely undefined, and the terms are incredibly vague: I know of filmmakers who've given their work to one of these dot.com companies - who've cheerfully taken all world rights - and then, a few months later, had to go crawling to them cap-in-hand to get it back, in order to show in it their home territory."
“...different needs,” says Rachael Shapiro, the London Screenings and MIFED. “We have several locations, or portals, to suit many different needs,” says Rachael Shapiro, the company’s vice-president of marketing and creative affairs. “Ultimately, we want to reach a stage where, in the same way that people reach for their daily copy of Variety, they log-on to Reelplay to see what’s out there.”

The example of the latter is especially applicable to internet-only television pioneer DEN. The future of the latter is especially applicable here. DEN spent up big (upwards of US$60m, by all accounts) and enjoyed strong word-of-mouth, at least in its pre-launch phase, but like many of the online film studios, was handicapped by lousy content. Shows like Fear Of A Punk Planet (described by one American critic as “Andy Hardy-meets-Johnny Rotten”) and Redemption High (“an Aaron Spelling-style drama about Christian teenagers who asked, in each episode, ‘What would Jesus do?’”) conspicuously failed to attract an audience. With no viewers, and virtually no revenue, the site had no option but to cut its losses and shut down.

Similarly, the future for the current crop of dot.com film companies is far from certain; all that is guaranteed, is a turbulent ride. Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodget was recently quoted as saying that three-quarters of current “E-tailers” will eventually disappear, either through collapse or consolidation. Meanwhile, almost everyone within the film industry, whether online or off, insists that the marketplace is unable to support more than a handful of distribution/original content sites - perhaps two or three in America, and two in Europe. Of the rest, the overwhelming majority will either be assimilated, or go under. Mergers and alliances will be the watchwords of the 12 months to come, as companies struggle to capture viable market shares. By the end, the landscape will be almost unrecognisable - though a whole lot less crowded.

“I think there’ll probably be a real shakeout in the next year to 18 months,” says Weaver. “By then the real players will start to emerge, and the little guys will either get bought up, or fall by the wayside. It’s inevitable.”

Says McCarthy: “A lot of people right now are thinking they’re in on the ground floor of something that’s going to make them rich. And I think, for a lot of them, there’s going to be a very rude awakening before too long.”
The Australian Film Institute is synonymous with Australian film. Just ask Academy Award winning actor Geoffrey Rush, or director Baz Luhrmann, two high profile film makers and AFI Award recipients who recently spoke in support of the embattled film culture body.

Or ask the producers behind the record number of 25 Australian feature films vying for publicity through this year’s AFI Awards on November 18. They will all state publicly the Australian Film Institute is doing a grand job promoting Australian film and servicing the industry’s cultural side. But peak funding body, the Australian Film Commission, has told the AFI it will no longer fund some of its activities.

Meanwhile, during this uncertain period, a lobby group for a recently emboldened player in the screen culture arena, ScreenSound Australia, is quietly issuing a challenge to the glamorous event. ScreenSound, the National Film and Sound Archive has undergone some changes in recent years. The Sydney office has relocated to Fox Studios, the ‘Archive’ banner has been superseded by the catchy name, ScreenSound, and the branch of the government’s arts department finds itself flush with resources following a funding increase and move by the Canberra head office into a more efficient premises.

Now the “Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive”, represented by respected industry figures, film producer Glens Rowe and distributor and cinema operator Andrew Pike, is circulating an 11-point discussion paper advocating new roles which should be undertaken by the new, invigorated ScreenSound.

Among the proposals, the Friends advocate for ScreenSound to lead national debate on topical issues such as the recent censorship debate on Catherine Breilat’s film Romance. It should publish a serious film magazine, host premieres of new works, host ‘meet the filmmaker’ events, and present film retrospectives. ScreenSound should be the industry focal point for fostering new talent, exchanging ideas and, “Friends believes that the Archive is the most appropriate and most logical place to organise and host the national film awards”.

Canberra-based Andrew Pike co-authored the discussion paper but when pressed, he says this blatant bid for the awards, the AFI’s strongest arm, was misjudged. He is considering requesting that point be removed from the paper and explains, “it is a draft discussion paper, it is not policy.”

“The AFI does have meagre resources but it’s doing a lot with them. ScreenSound has significant resources that it should be doing more with.”

The paper proposes ScreenSound pursue many identical objectives to those currently undertaken by the funding-threatened AFI but Pike is not advocating a cannibalisation of the Institute’s territory. “I want more money coming into film culture, not less,” he says.

The director of ScreenSound, Ron Brent says he is, “in general very supportive of what [Friends] is proposing” but he will not publicly support the group’s bid to host the film awards. “We’re very keen to see the maintenance of those (threatened) services but the AFI has been constrained by limited resources and one of the things we’d like to do is help the AFI exploit those services better,” he says.

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“We didn’t say these services shouldn’t exist. We thought the client base and the eventual outcomes were not appropriate for the AFI to be funding.”

Kim Dalton AFC chief executive

Australian Film Commission is reviewing funding to two of the AFI’s five core activities: a research and information service and video sales.

It will continue funding the AFI Awards and the institute’s exhibition sector, which facilitates forums for the discussion and appreciation of local and international films. The executive division, which oversees these functions may exist in a reduced capacity in the future, because, quite simply, there may be less to administrate.

As part of the AFI’s funding review a working party of representatives from associated organisations has been established. Chaired by a member from the department of the arts, key AFI representatives were joined by a representative from Victoria’s peak film body, Cinemedia, from ScreenSound, the AFC, the Australian Film Television and Radio School and Film Australia.

The AFC wants some of these organisations to assist the AFI’s transition into a leaner future.

The group met for the last time on July 3. Its recommendations should assist the AFI in its funding application for 2001, which was due by the end of July.

In general terms the AFC acknowledges the value of the research and information service, and video sales,
Australian cinematographer John Seale prefers shooting intimate dramas but somehow he found himself behind the lens on this year’s big budget SFX extravaganza The Perfect Storm. He writes exclusively for Cinema Papers about how he spent more than US$100 million.

I think most people would agree the new blue/green screen technology where backgrounds are put in after filming is not as nearly appealing to work with as the old systems of front or rear projection. Or better, shooting everything ‘live’. When shooting live the whole frame is recorded instantly and the background light can and does influence the foreground considerably. The camera-operators can actually ‘operate’. They can cut the average, or balance artificial light, or shoot using available light if they desire - whatever is the best solution at that moment.

Live shooting also keeps the cinematographer slightly out of control, which can be advantageous in some ways because a ‘lucky mistake’ can happen. Natural light has its own tricks. It can suddenly do something you may never have anticipated, with stunning results.

When filming with front or rear projection, the ‘lucky mistakes’ would seldom occur, if ever. Nevertheless, by having the background plates there to shoot, light on the foreground actors can still be manipulated and synchronised to that plate and therefore have a reasonably realistic look to the frame. You still get to ‘operate’.

Bluescreen, however, has none of that. Unless you have seen the plates that are going to be composited to the foreground action, you don’t have a clue as to the way those plates will, or should, affect the foreground.

And even if you do see the plates, movements and density of that light will be very difficult to synchronise. And don’t even ask about an actor’s reaction to bluescreen. In some scenes, the actor may have to talk to the end of a broom, held in front of the screen, or a laser beam dot and listen and react to lines ‘off camera’ ie, act by yourself to an inanimate object with its lines coming from another direction altogether.

Julia Roberts was very vocal about this after doing Steven Spielberg’s Hook. When she played Tinkerbell, it seemed she spent weeks talking to the other actors off camera, actors who were never actually there. She vowed never to act in that kind of movie again. On some film sets, actors watch monitors, placed on the proper eyeline, to see the other actors. Oh joy.

In The Perfect Storm our bluescreen work was quite extensive, but for the actors the bluescreen was always in the background, lurking behind them like a monster. Therefore, the actors could play off themselves at all times, knowing that wherever the awful constant blue glow was, a major apocalyptic storm was brewing.

This was particularly interesting when we would strike lighting. The digital artists would have to synchronise the background to match the foreground lightning, so it was imperative the vfx (video effects) house always followed, or slaved, the foreground fx. This became Perfect Storm’s rule of thumb - we will wag your tail. It held for the duration of the film.

There were times in the pursuit of reality when the lighting in the rushes or dailies would not look too good because the bluescreen was not giving us the image of the background.

Imagine relying on the b/g effects making a lightning flash silhouette an actor against the wave. We had to wait weeks, almost months, for postproduction to give us the result. In all cases, the result was stunning.

It must be remembered that there is no other way we could have made the film, considering the awesome magnitude of that night’s storm, without this amazing help from the vfx team. For the actors in the foreground, it was more than just a case of “off to work we go into a storm on a sound stage”. That storm was as close to reality as we could make it.

Consider this. Four 100mph wind machines, two 2000 gallon dump tanks [which dropped water 50 feet onto the baffles that directed the water onto the actors] and three water cannons were all pointed directly at the actors all day AND they kept coming up laughing. Then there were the three wave makers creating 4ft high waves on the surface of the tank. No wonder the humour wore a trifle thin at times. And we were controlling the cameras by remote upstairs in the video box with coffee and donuts!

But led by George Clooney, the actors would always attack the next day with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Even the bruises and sprains, cuts and twisted joints seemed to heal overnight even though the next day was like the first.

The long and intensive pre-production allowed us to organise and run the show on schedule. I had three and a half months and used every single second of it.
On some film sets, actors watch monitors, placed on the proper eyeline, to see the other actors. Oh joy.

Bros lot was rigged to shoot full sun at midday, dusk and dawn, overcast rain to full apocalyptic storm to night. All with full lightning fx! It went way over budget and there was no real way to reduce it. The constant need to learn about and understand the new technology can be gained reasonably easily, because someone out there knows it and has used it. They'll readily pass this on to the ignorant because, in the end, we're all making the same film, and the gathered knowledge will culminate in a better film. Most people in the film industry now specialise in a particular field. From dealing with these problem solvers you can quickly assess the mechanical or creative limits that may apply on your set, and can change or adapt aspects to suit your particular needs. This may require bending a few rules here and there, but it mostly gets down to "pushing the technical envelope" and requiring these technical handshakes to go faster, further, lower etc. Compromises can always be reached and, most times exceeded, sometimes to our great surprise. As the new technology advances, so shall we, because the effects that can be digitally created are awesome. There is no way that "TPS" could have been made with the same visual impact unless we walked hand in hand with this new technology. VFX companies such as Industrial Light & Magic, who mastered the effects, will go on developing software, as they did for "TPS", allowing filmmakers to contemplate VFX that were yesterday's dreams. Today, they're reality. The technology is changing so rapidly that what was cutting edge yesterday, is reality today and obsolete tomorrow. That's why the visual recording process and its use by the tomorrow's filmmakers is so exciting. It can work.
The release of Yahoo Serious’ latest film prompts Deb Verhoeven to cast an eye over an Australian cinematic past steeped in quirky comedies.

You can always tell when the Australian film industry’s number crunchers are nervous. Their audible jitters over low ticket sales are invariably followed by the whooshing and slapping sounds of comedies slamming onto cinema screens across the country.

For the past few years there’s been quite a bit of concern about the unpopularity of Australian films. From the highs of the mid-90s when local films took around nine percent of the national box-office (think Muriel’s Wedding and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert), the local box office sank last year to an unflattering three percent.

A report commissioned by the Australian Film Commission quickly identified the problem. Australian films, it announced, were tackling ‘difficult subject matter’ and this was simply no good. Tom Jeffrey, President of SPAA (Screen Producers Association of Australia) concurred: “Last year our films didn’t work at the box office. Why? In my personal view ... I reckon they were too dark.” He’s not talking f-stops.

The answer? More comedies - preferably as over-exposed as possible. According to the AFC report, exhibitors in particular yearn for the halcyon days of the gaudy, quirky comedy - bring back Muriel’s satirical nuptials or Priscilla’s farcical adventures. Craic us up one more time. And filmmakers have heeded their call with alarming alacrity. So far this year we’ve seen Nick Giannopoulos’ self-deprecating The Wog Boy, and now there’s Yahoo and his high-haired Mr Accident. Both films are a monument to the pervading resonance of ‘quirk’ in the Australian cinema.

There is a longstanding theory that all successful national cinemas arise from, and are defined by, two genres - comedies and soft-porn - and in Australia’s case perhaps a combination of both (think of films like Alvin Purple and The Adventures of Barry McKenzie). According to theorists the yokel is always local. Humorous films are the frontline vanguard of certain national or native traditions in the struggle against the suffocating tentacles of Hollywood.

And so whenever the Australian film industry has emerged from a crisis it has been with a comedy tucked firmly under its arm. Way back in the 1930s Ken Hall revived the national industry with his Dad and Dave comedies, many of which were actual revivals (On Our Selection being a good example). Hall’s films were, for the most part, an uneven mix of bubolic farce, smutty puns and laboured moral postures. And he set the tone for most of the successful Australian comedies that have followed.

Hall’s legacy can be equally seen in a suburban satire like The Castle and the capital capers of Mr Accident. In The Castle, the Kerrigans, a thinly disguised update of Ken Hall’s country bumpkins, the Rudds, have shifted inland to occupy the metropolitan fringe. But the same rustic ingredients are there - the upstanding Dad on a journey to national righteousness, his loyal wife (known only as Mum, Mother or Ma) and their bevy of half-witted children (portrayed in The Castle by Steven Curry, Sophie Lee and co.).

The Kerrigans, not unlike the Rudds, are a family that simply want to be... a family. Theirs is a dorky rather than quirky comedy. A humour celebrating the sentimental pursuit of domesticity. Dad’s
Exhibitors in particular yearn for the halcyon days of the gaudy, quirky comedy - bring back Muriel's satirical nuptials or Priscilla's farcical adventures. Craic us up one more time.

reluctance to take centre stage, his defence of ordinariness, his sure knowledge of his own inadvertence flies in the face of the quirky comedy's lust for flamboyance. It's the difference between the self-deprecating Col'n Carpenter and the celebrity seeking Norman Gunston.

Like The Castle, Mr Accident also owes an inheritance to Dad & Dave - only this time there's no Dad. The film's writer-producer-director-star, Yahoo Serious - whose very name will always be remembered by future generations of film buffs as being synonymous with the quirky comedy - plays Roger Crumpkin like a latter-day version of the incorrigibly naive Dave. There's even a direct connection. David Field who appears as the sexually unresolved Lynden in Mr Accident played Dan in the most recent revival of On Our Selection [Dad & Dave: On Our Selection, 1995].

Film writer Lynden Barber once described the quirky comedy as, 'the cinematic equivalent of being turned into a koala' - all cute and emblematic. If I had to describe the genre in terms of Australian fauna, I'd be more inclined to see the quirky comedy in the image of a frill-neck lizard in full fright. There's a fear-inspired flagrancy at the heart of the quirky comedy which makes it the exception rather than the rule in Australian feature films. The cultural reflex inspiring anxious laughter is the fear of being sprung for pretentiousness, an accusation the quirky comedy simultaneously invites with its 'look at me' clamour for recognition.

A quirk is a characteristic flourish, a tic alluding to a larger difference. To 'quirk' is to strive to stand out from the flock. To 'dork', on the other hand, is to settle for one's own lot. The avian metaphor of the flock seems particularly apt since, according to my dictionary at least, a 'dorking' is a large white fowl. In the pecking order of the Australian film industry the difference between the dorky and the quirky comedy can be summarised in the (farmyard-sized) world of difference that separates the scrawny chook from the strutting rooster.

Judith Brett, musing on the chook in the Australian unconscious, once summed up the chicken's purchase on vulnerability and ordinariness by drawing on the familiar figure of the straggly Australian chook scratching out its meagre existence in a dusty, undernourished landscape. This, she felt, was an image that set the chook apart from the plump and contented English hen or the crowing Asian cock, an image that goes on to speak about white Australia's own precarious, superficial relationship to the landscape.

There is Brett believes, 'a secret identification' in most Australian hearts between themselves and the...
Yahoo Serious takes the title role as Roger, the Opera House shells into something.

Crumpkin, a maladroit man who must overcome the.

You only have to look at the AFC’s latest policy objectives for the industry to see just how potent the idea of being permanently ‘in development’ can be. Brett is not the only commentator to expend her thoughts and words on the cultural consequences of chicken identification. Cluck! The True Story of Chickens in the Cinema is an unprecedented and comprehensive homage to fowl films. In this book, Jon-Stephen Fink combs the film archives for evidence of chicken suppression and sublimation in the cinema. According to Fink, ‘We must not shrink from recognising that our redemption - from pain, from tyranny, from disaffection, from shrugged and fretting and pecking over the same old ground. Brett describes the chicken’s frustrated flappings as, ‘more aspiration than achievement’. It’s a sentiment often applied to an Australian cinema that sets its limits on similarly frustrated flights (of fancy), a cinema which thrives on the apologetic encouragements of the ‘nice try’, and which seems to have embraced the perpetual state of being almost - but not quite - good enough.

Brett is not the only commentator to expend her thoughts and words on the cultural consequences of chicken identification. Cluck! The True Story of Chickens in the Cinema is an unprecedented and comprehensive homage to fowl films. In this book, Jon-Stephen Fink combs the film archives for evidence of chicken suppression and sublimation in the cinema. According to Fink, ‘We must not shrink from recognising that our redemption - from pain, from tyranny, from disaffection, from

meaninglessness and chaos - resides in universal awareness of the interwoven fates of chickenkind and humankind. That awareness in modern times is enshrined in motion pictures, the ultimate refuge of ultimate truth.’

By Fink’s reckoning, Hollywood itself is an elaborate mechanism purposefully designed to connect humans with their chicken-ish ancestry. He uncovers the existence of a secret council that meets twice yearly in Petaluma, California, to decide where, when and what kind of chicken scene will be included in any film. Completion funding quite often rests on the decisions of the clandestine chicken council.

Fink’s Hollywood chicken conspiracy seems as likely an explanation as any for Mr Accident, the story of a good guy (in desperate need of a comb and a girlfriend) who pits himself against an evil egg empire and their fowl deeds (like refashioning the Opera House shells into something more marketable).

Yahoo Serious takes the title role as Roger Crumpkin, a maladroit man who must overcome the privations of his childhood. Roger you see, is the unhappy child of a pair of post-structuralists: ‘We’re parts people, we don’t make things up we take

things apart’. Its not until he meets the girl of his dreams (a prize winning chicken-sexer), that Roger has a larger, philosophical revelation: ‘You made me realise. Parts are like people - they belong together.’ Unfortunately, and as many an Australian actor can testify - good parts don’t come along everyday and Mr Accident is no exception.

Roger’s faith in the power of parts might in some way account for the appealing cameos that dot the film. Yahoo Serious has possibly exceeded even his own past practices (remember Max Walker in Reckless Kelly?). Elle McFeast occasions the screen as a spurned sex kitten. Flacco appears as himself in an inexplicable gesture to an alien spaceship subplot. Surely not even the forgettable Dallas Doll (1993) stooped this low when it summarily introduced an otherworldly plot-device (althought you could be excused for thinking that Sandra Bernhardt’s role was something of an extended cameo)?

These celebrity cameos recall another, much earlier Sydney comedy of quirks and eccentricities. In Michael Powell’s They’re a Weird Mob (1966),

Graham Kennedy, in clear exploitation his media profile, makes a brief but notable appearance and in a sense anticipates the defining characteristics of the cameo in Australian films. More recent local films have dealt with their cameos in less relaxed ways. Like the uncomfortable appearance of film critics Adrian Martin and Paul Harris in Love and Other Catastrophes (1996) - which despite their evident awkwardness did kind of work in context. Or Alan Finney in Welcome to Woop Woop (1998) - which didn’t. Kylie Minogue’s short-lived but much publicised showing in Cut (2000) was just about outclassed by the haunting presence of Alexander Downer’s childhood cubby house in the same. (True!)

The point of the cameo is to nod to the film’s specificity, to celebrate its ‘recognisability’. A cameo appearance is supposed to let us in on the film’s locale, to reveal to us just how far down into the loop a film (and its viewers) can reach. Its about value-adding for a knowing (nudge nudge) audience. If you don’t recognise Flacco then nothing is lost. But if you do, then the film ‘means’ more. Or so the

Hall’s films were, for the most part, an uneven mix of bucolic farce, smutty puns and laboured moral postures. And he set the tone for most of the successful Australian comedies that have followed.
The filmmakers hope. It's a particularly economic method of layering the plot. Instead of relying on the script to create recognisable characters, the cameo gestures at prior representations, at already givens. The same sort of economic thinking has given rise to another recent industry phenomenon, the rise of the instant auteur (of which Yahoo Serious was an early example). In Australia nowadays you can be an auteur after only one film - and if you're keen enough to believe the Tropfest hype, before you've made a feature.

This newfound form of immediate authorship, is made up of a checklist of effects - like people who 'do' method acting - you can now 'do' Auteurism. A few angled, arty close-ups in the style of Jane Campion and hey presto! you too can claim a signature style. Its all a matter of arranging a few requisite 'on screen indicators' with the right amount of frequency. These 'indicators' [the phrase comes from a particular policy framework ordinarily used to discuss Australian content] are meant to be seen so it is also important to labour them. In Mr Accident you should be thinking about Jim Carrey only without the facial facility and self-mockery. Add a few drops of Jackie Chan complete with an outtake credit sequence (only minus any actual bloopers and the unfettered physical humour) and you have Yahoo (take me Seriously).

Authorship in the Australian film industry is no longer measured from the idea of personal expressiveness but is proved instead by the amount of distance a filmmaker can generate from their work. Nor is the point to develop a set of serial relationships between any given auteur's films - what we're looking for is the capacity for professional distance, or better still, ironic distance - the space of the quirky ha ha. And don't be fooled into believing that the industry’s sudden taste for 'practitioner development' might extend to an interest in the evolution of an individual filmmaker’s oeuvre. Instead expect to see inner-city filmmakers blithely encouraged to make humorous films about the suburban fringe, straight filmmakers to keep optioning queer content. Just so long as no one cares too much about the subject at hand.

One Australian film which particularly demonstrates the perils of caring too much and having an ongoing commitment to the cause and it just happens to be about chooks. *Me and Daphne* (1976), an unassuming docudrama set in a chicken factory in Western Sydney remains one of Australia's most controversial films. When the owners of the chicken processing in which the film was shot expressed their discomfort with it’s less than favourable documentation of factory conditions, the films executive producer, the AFTRS, opted to withdraw the film from circulation. The Sydney Filmmakers Co-op (that’s co-op not coop) 're-acquired' a print of the film which was distributed for many years by one of the producers from the backroom of her house. While the Film School busied itself by taking the Co-op to court, the film’s original prints were lost.

On viewing the film you wonder what all the fuss was about. *Me and Daphne* is likeable enough, an awkward progenitor of the type of documentary filmmaking that became an industry staple for a while in the early 80s. Uncomfortably scripted dialogue is edited between the disembodied voices of migrant workers and rallying theme songs ('50,000 chooks a day, They won't raise my take home pay'). The film seems especially torn between graphically exposing the onerous working conditions of the factory and a transparent fascination with the graphic geometry of the production line. The same divided purpose occurs in Brian McKenzie’s extraordinary documentary (also about meat processing) *A Winter’s Harvest* (1979). Both *Me and Daphne* and *A Winter’s Harvest* are deeply concerned with what happens next - with the processes that occur after the fact (of death, of production, of censorship). In a sense *Daphne* and *Me* got bitten on the bum by its own interest in the afterlife. When Daphne’s mum despairs, 'If they can put a man on the moon you'd think they could organise a chook factory better' you have cause to wonder about the film factory in the same despondent terms. Film policymakers in Australia are explicitly narrowing their ambit to the chicken and egg arena of production only. The real question is, does anyone care anymore about what happens to films afterwards...
My Mother Frank

Writer and Director
Mark Lamprell

Key Cast
Sinead Cusack, Matthew Newton, Sam Neill, Rose Byrne, Sacha Horler

Producers
Phaedon Vass, Susan Vass, John Winter

Distributor
Beyond Films

Country of Origin
Australia

Duration
94 minutes

"Get a life," David screamed at his mother. And so she did. The only problem was that she got his life. She is 'Frank' - Frances Regina Aileen Nano Kennedy, a devout Catholic who immediately endeared herself to audiences with her collection of eccentricities, her devotion to her dead husband and her tendency towards over-protecting her son. But her life - full of one-dimensional characters - is boring her senseless. Literally. So Frank decides to broaden her horizons by enrolling in a university. The only problem was that she got his life. But her life - full of one-dimensional characters - is boring her senseless. Literally. So Frank decides to broaden her horizons by enrolling in a university course - at her son's university. What follows is a simple and heartfelt work from first-time feature director Mark Lamprell, who has also written this story. It is a quaintly original but ultimately insignificant piece of film which is saved only by two fine performances on the part of Irish talent Sinead Cusack as Frank and Australia's boy-of-the-moment, Matthew Newton as her son. Their roles are well-constructed and refreshingly original (how rare it is to discover such a meaty female role on Australian screens) but surrounding these two are myriad insipid roles which serve only as obstructions to what this film should - and could - be. Sam Neill's role as Frank's university professor is appallingly written and directed, as is Sacha Horler's turn as the daughter Margaret. But My Mother Frank's greatest problem lies not in its characters but its effort to find itself. The film twists and turns impatiently throughout the 90 minutes as it tries to decide what it is really about. Is it a boy's quest to win the heart of the girl of his wet dreams (played with superior sweetness by a dark-haired Rose Byrne)? Is it a woman's battle to free herself of the chains which her family and society bind her with? Is it the growth of a quirky nuns - one of whom enjoys her own personal journey to mirror Frank's. Then there is a curious obsession with exploding cans and a devastatingly romantic gesture from Frank's dead husband which brings about parallels in David's love life. If one can ignore the distractions, the underlying story of My Mother Frank morphs into a pleasantly enjoyable film, easily forgiven for its sentimentality and its hit-and-miss script. It is beautifully shot, making the most of the imposing Sydney University and the ramshackle mansion which serves as the Kennedy home. Newton and Cusack are a perfect coupling and, for an attempt at a first feature, My Mother Frank is indeed impressive. We wait with hopeful anticipation for Lamprell's next offering. ● Sarah Thomas

Jesus' Son

Director
Alison Maclean

Cast
Billy Crudup, Samantha Morton, Dennis Hopper, Debra Lawry, Jack Black, Will Patton, Greg Germann, Holly Hunter

Producers
Morgan Bridger, Elizabeth Cuthrell, Lydie Deen-Pitcher

Distributor
NewVision

Country of Origin
USA

Rating
R

Duration
103 minutes

Drug-fuelled road movies have had a chequered career of late. Although this reviewer is probably one of the very few around to admit to a sneaking enjoyment of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas it's clear that the indies do it better. Gritty and grimly realistic in production design (check out Crudup's fascinatingly filthy fingernails), Jesus' Son recalls other 'Sundance' type films like Another Day in Paradise and Drugstore Cowboy. The qualities it shares with them are its strong (and sometimes wildly funny) streak of humour and a range of quality performances. And there's a great soundtrack. Any 70s film featuring 'Hang On Sloopy' has to score a few points in anybody's book. Such welcome levity underlines how Jesus' Son is from Alison Maclean's latest cinematic offering, Crush (1992), a moody and unsettling piece set in New Zealand,
Billy Crudup plays an amiable loser - labelled Fuck Head

where the director lived for much of her life. Now she’s back working in the US - directing such things as TV’s Sex in the City - and it shows. Crudup plays an amiable loser - labelled Fuck Head by an early love rival and living up to his sobriquet with increasing appropriateness as the film progresses. Very much a drifter, FH gets carried away by the wind or a whim, which leads him into the company of heroin addict and all round partner-in-crime, Michelle (Morton, diving headlong into the role as she is wont to do, and sporting an astonishing American accent). Using flashback and playful cutting techniques (including the neatest use of a split screen since Pillow Talk), Maclean has FH stumblingly narrate his own history with charm and a touch of post drug-fucked hindsight. But what are we to make of all the Jesus allusions? Apart from the title, Christian iconography abounds, from FH’s crown of thorns, to the graffiti on the train, to the surreal imagery with Jesus’ Son recalling other ‘Sundance’ type films like Another Day In Paradise.

And any miracle healing is left to one of the many laugh-out-loud scenes in the film. Said scene involves a hunting knife, a drug-addled orderly and a man’s brain. And that’s all you need to know at present. In the end the episodic nature of the tale - based on a collection of short stories by Denis Johnson - makes for a meandering and vaguely familiar experience, but one which nonetheless gently charts FH’s gradual awakening; not with any bells and whistles mind: the character is never going to be queuing up to join Mensa.

The cameos are all neatly delivered... although don’t you hate it when you know someone huge is due to appear anytime and you spend the entire movie thinking “I wonder when Holly Hunter’s going to show up” as you do here?

But the movie stands or falls on the central performance of Crudup and he is superb. Whether stoned or sober, he ambles along with such appealing candour, geniality and downright good naturedness, it’s hard not to wish him well.

• Madeleine Swain

Rules of Engagement

Some would argue Guy Pearce didn’t capitalise on his breakthrough American performance in L.A. Confidential? Good on him, I’d say, if it means he doesn’t attain Gwyneth-like omnipresence. And if his performance in William Friedkin’s latest elementary drama, Rules of Engagement, is typical of such careful selection, he made the right choice. It would have been too easy for Pearce to waltz into a swag of mediocre Hollywood films and fizzle. To pick a meaty supporting role like this, in what was always going to be a middling American success, shows a rare wisdom. How can you not look good next to a couple of hams like Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson? The Rules of Engagement are the rules US military forces must adhere to when engaging with combative enemy forces. On screen, Rules of Engagement is a trumped up courtroom drama with all the finesse of Friedkin’s paltry 1990s directorial offerings, Blue Chips and Jade. His classics, The French Connection and The Exorcist are, sadly, but a memory. Rules Of Engagement opens in 1968, in a not very Vietnamese jungle, where Col. Terry Childers (Jackson), while under siege, saves the life of a fellow marine, Col. Hays Hodges (Jones). Cut to 28 years later and Hodges is retiring (you could never say that about Jones’ acting) as a Marine. Childers still ploughs on in a world without an enemy, wallowing in that frightful military melancholy that craves the action of yesterday, not today’s relative peace. That desire for action seemingly initiates a frightful international incident that brings Childers to court-martial. He calls on his old buddy Hodges to represent him against a government that requires a scapegoat. No matter that Hodges is now a poorly regarded drunk (as Jones seems to be in all his films now), Enter Major Mark Biggs (Pearce), the imperious, upset lawyer representing the Government. Thankfully, director Friedkin does Pearce’s first scene justice, giving him an arresting hallway entrance. And Pearce plays it just right. The look he has going is perfect, all harsh shadows consumed in his chiselled jaw and cheekbones. Very sharp and warlike, he evokes a young Pacino, without needing to wear an ethnicity on his sleeve as the young Pacino did. He is the major delight in a film that we’ve seen many times before. Technically, it has that Hollywood competence and the story has a well-buffed smoothness. But it remains a story laden with the very predictable turncoats, surprise witnesses and moral quandaries inherent in such wan courtroom drama.

• Michael Bodey

The imperious upstart lawyer Major Mark Biggs (Guy Pearce)
Bootmen

From the first rattle of the Fox Searchlight drumroll, it’s clear there is overseas money riding on Bootmen, the film adaptation of Dein Perry’s global theatrical success, Tap Dogs, and its offshoot, Steel City. And while first-time director, Perry has set up Top Dogs to achieve commercial success here and overseas, his narrative and style choices niggle at the essence of his stage creation, to the film’s detriment. Entertaining though it may be, Bootmen is not the joyous, unrestrained hoot Steel City and Tap Dogs were on stage. Though easy to watch, the film is self-conscious when it should be over the top. Where’s the skin, sweat and energy that made Tap Dogs such a beaut entertainment?

Instead, the latent self-consciousness results in the film rushing though its limited characterisations, simple motivations and an elementary plot - ie, a boy denied things he loves strives to prove others wrong.

"ball and chain". Of course, I’m not a dancer/gay/emotional but some of my best friends are. Sure, the stage show’s appeal rested on the flannel and muscle attitude of boys doing tap but this verges on the ridiculous. It means Porter’s and Lee’s roles, in particular, are woefully disrespectful (and Lee needs a new agent, someone who can get her something more substantial than a hairdresser role).

Lee is Linda, the object of the affection of two brothers, Mitchell (Sam Worthington) and Sean (Adam Garcia). The Newcastle brothers have another thing in common - they’ve been tap dancing since they were kids, although Mitchell long abandoned any aspiration to continue as Adam chased his dream of becoming a professional tap dancer. The film skips through the boys’ struggles and misadventures, all the while dropping emotional pointers at just the right moments before the expected, but too short, finale.

One could argue many of the actors, some of whom are from Perry’s stage troupe, are ill-equipped to deal with anything more than their elementary characterisations. So a pro such as William Zappa stands out like a giant sequin.

The very central lead, Adam Garcia, does have a bit of early John Travolta about him but it’s that bit including looks, smooth dancing feet and basic acting skill. No wonder Worthington, playing his brother, charms him off the screen in a dominant and very likeable performance.

Indeed, Worthington’s presence encapsulates the enjoyable, and best, aspects of the film - he’s ruggedly handsome, roughly hewn and deals a perfectly dressed in fruity dialogue.

Only then, when Bootmen drops its posturing, is it terrific. It shows glimpses of being an Australian film that sounds and feels as an Australian film should precisely when it doesn’t try too hard. It’s a shame that very same Australianess means overt machismo overwhelms the theatricality that underpinned the project. This is particularly galling when Bootmen’s technical aspects are so strong and the dancing set pieces so effectively (if unrealistically) staged. But Bootmen deviates and chases that prized “wide audience”. It drops most of what made Tap Dogs great. Bootmen has the soul of a strong, popular film. Pity it lost its heart.

Mr Accident

Physical humour - it’s the great universal leveller in the world of comedy. Without words Rowan Atkinson slays them in Somalia, Jacques Tati has them rolling in the aisles in Alice Springs and Buster Keaton busts guts around the globe. But when the slapstick fails and the pratfalls fall flat on their face, what’s left? If you’re smart: a good story and hopefully some witty repartee. That’s why even those who have trouble swallowing Jerry Lewis’ shenanigans can enjoy The Nutty Professor. And if the well of comic inventiveness has all but dried up you’ll just have to fall back on an appealing central character. People will forgive a lot if your protagonist has something different to offer. Whether it be Mr Bean’s misanthropic mean streak or Laurel and Hardy’s wonderfully mismatched yet symbiotic relationship. Which brings us to the geek with the carrot-top...
Yahoo Serious clearly believes in the ongoing appeal of his gormless twit in the red fright wig, for this is the third time he’s moved heaven and earth to get the character onto the big screen. Following the successful Young Einstein (1988), he conjured up the not so-earth-shattering Reckless Kelly (1993) and now he’s back as accident-prone Roger Crumpkin, a hapless and hopeless handyman with all the worldly wisdom of Bad Boy Bubby (before he leaves the basement). Why Roger is such a babe in the woods is never explained, but his ineptitude only just loses out in the extraordinarily irritating stakes to the baby doll voice required of his female lead and counterpart, Sunday Valentine (Dallimore). Dallimore has a hopeless handyman with all the serious words with her agent. But if this is her idea of a move into the big time, well, she should have some serious words with her agent. And fast.

As we all know by now, Serious also seems to believe in the old maxim: if you want something doing, do it yourself - he’s credited in the producing, writing, acting and editing departments on all three of his films. Of course the upshot of this is that when the film is a lame duck, only one pair of shoulders can really bear the blame.

And Mr Accident is a duck with both wings and legs in splints. The plot - some silly yarn about a wicked factory boss lacing eggs with nicotine - is feeble and unengaging; the characterisations are two-dimensional and grating. Featuring David Field as yet another cartoon gangster - it is almost Sample People all over again - and only one gag raises even half a smile (a visual jest about red wine and sauté). Oh and spare a thought for poor Libby Gore - sidelined in a rather tasteless minor cameo here, you can’t help but feel sorry for her.

And if the movie hadn’t dug itself in deeply enough already, Serious decides to use the delicate strains of ‘Moon River’ to remind the waiting world of a movie they could be sitting and watching... Bad move, Yahoo.

Eye of the Beholder

Director Stephan Elliott
Cast Ewan McGregor, Ashley Judd, Jason Priestly, k. d. lang, Genevieve Bujold, Patrick Bergin
Producers Al Clark, Nicholas Clermont
Writers Mark Behm (novel), Stephan Elliott
Distributor Roadshow
Country of Origin UK / Canada
Rating MA
Duration 109 minutes

Director Stephan Elliott has departed from his penchant for broad comedy - some would say thank heavens - and turned his hand to a psychological thriller. The resulting Eye of the Beholder is a distinct improvement on his last effort, the grotesque Welcome To Woop Woop, but well, that’s not saying much.

A sub-Hitchcockian study of identity and obsession, this film most obviously recalls Vertigo in its lead character’s tormented attempts to reclaim a woman that has died or in this case, simply walked away. In case there’s any doubt that we’re in homage territory, Elliott even has his protagonist, the eponymous Eye, shack up in a church bell tower in San Francisco. But reverence of course, does not necessarily equate with style, and while elements of the suspense genre surface now and again, they rarely congeal to form a coherent, suspenseful narrative.

There are no screws tightening in Elliott’s script (adapted from Marc Behm’s 1980 novel), no sudden plot twists of note, no headlong acceleration to a climax anywhere near as devastating as that of Hitchcock’s 1958 thriller. In fact, it’s difficult to feel any kind of frisson at all when the film’s main characters remain simply the watcher and the watched for far too much of the film’s running time.

Eye (Ewan McGregor, miscast) is a cold, detached surveillance expert for the British government. His preoccupation with his job has led to a breakdown in his personal life, with his wife and daughter leaving him years ago. His current assignment is quickly ditched when he fleetingly photographs mysterious Joanna (Ashley Judd), a woman who reminds him of his lost daughter. From here an obsession forms that leads him in on a pan-American stalking mission. A number of implausibilities annoy. Chief among them is Elliott’s obvious intent to fetishise the hi-tech, state-of-the-art technology employed by Eye, yet at the same time he would have us believe that police all over the United States are too ill-equipped to nab a killer with no qualms about leaving clues all over the place.

The director’s predilection for wide-open spaces and the road movie harks back to another of Elliott’s four features, The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert. In Eye of the Beholder we tramp all over the States (mosty a morphed Montreal, actually) taking in a variant of the Aussie outback, Death Valley, and end up in the icy expanses of Alaska. Here at last McGregor’s character moves beyond mere voyeurism and actually interacts with his quarry. By this time however, a lukewarm thriller has cooled irrevocably.

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Perhaps director Peter Farrelly saw the tepid response to his latest film, Me, Myself & Irene coming. Why else would he bother trying to write low brow literature?

His publishing company sure as hell knew they'd sell a copy or three of a novel called The Comedy Writer ($22.95) by the co-writer of There's Something About Mary. Might even sell some copies to people who think it's a manual, not a novel.

What a pitch, particularly when those who read his first novel, Off-loaded his overly sentimental personal memoirs in that one. Pity the narrator, Henry O'Halloran, is an aspiring comic writer in 1990 Los Angeles. Quelle surprise! Henry's a feckless, frustrating soul occasionally capable of scriptwriting. Blessed with a quirky, distinctive voice and written with an eye over the top sales pitches for these epic films. But that's not the point. Why would you want to compete against a tag line such as Paths Of Glory's - "Never has the screen thrust so deeply into the guts of war!" Indeed. No creature has penetrated so deeply into the cinema psyche as Bruce, the shark used in Jaws. The mechanical killer, named after Steven Spielberg's lawyer, is just one of the many stars in the Bloomsbury Movie Guide No.5, Jaws ($29.95).

The Bloomsbury Guides deserved a revisit after the woeful sixth instalment (Mick Brown's Performance). Thankfully, Nigel Andrews' dissection of Jaws is a cracker. Apparently, Andrews was told to write whatever he wanted, however he wanted, on the classic thriller. And he did. While full of the usual useless trivia, anecdotes, buffery and the occasional insight, found throughout the Bloomsbury series, this book also adds storyboards from the climactic scene and eight pages of colour stills. They're welcome bonuses among the silliness.

Who knew Robert Duvall was Spielberg's choice for Brody (eventually played by Roy Scheider) or a chocolate shark that oozed jelly blood was rejected as a confectionery tie-in? Despite its lack of sources and referencing, you have to love a book that lists the film's five major sound effects. As Bruce would say: Wahhh HWOOOHGGHH-HWOOOH!

The Cambridge Film Handbook for Jane Campion's The Piano (Cambridge University Press, $34.95pb/$99hb) is, necessarily, more serious. The six specially-commissioned essays on the film are more direct than most film analysis. Despite the immense New Zealand pride in the film, essays such as Leonie Pihama's on its Maori representation cast an objective, and intriguing, eye over The Piano. If you can conquer the occasional over-analysis and sometimes impenetrable language, this is a thoughtful book to understand the film. And it shows in his breezy style. 

Adrian Danks' summary of Melbourne on screen and Verhoeven's bold revisiting of Ken O. Hall's work are particularly readable. There's no trouble reading William Goldman's Which Lie Did I Tell? ($29.95). He's frank, he's fun and he reads like he's delivering an alcohol-fuelled, off-the-record after dinner speech. Which Lie Did I Tell? is a juicy rollick through Hollywood and its foibles by the famed screenwriter who first said "nobody knows anything" about the town. He's achieved enough not to care anymore and it shows in his breezy style. It isn't as pithy as his original, Adventures In The Screen Trade, but sequels rarely are.

Michael Bodey
Intelligent and fun, *Run Lola Run* is an energetic film set around the premise of small, seemingly inconsequential moments. Divided into three separate segments which start with the same premise, Lola (played by Franka Potente) has twenty minutes to save her boyfriend Manni (played by Moritz Bleibtreu) from the mob whose money he has misplaced. Each segment is based around the small incidences that affect Lola as she desperately runs across town to her boyfriend. Different circumstances slightly alter her path and thus the outcome.

The intelligence does not limit itself to the film but extends to the DVD presentation of *Run Lola Run*. There is an extremely interesting and thought provoking commentary by director Tom Tykwer and star Franka Potente. The two discuss the entire film from beginning to end giving a detailed explanation of the objectives of each scene, evaluating their effectiveness and highlighting the in-jokes that non-German members of the audience may not have understood: these tasks are performed objectively which is refreshing.

Although at times it appears less like a film and more like a play, the special features section includes the option of commentary by the director and actors over the film but *Run Lola Run* is informative and interesting. The special features also includes a featurette of the film, an over zealous appraisal of Mamet’s direction and the performance of the cast.

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Another Day in Paradise

Director Larry Clark
Cast James Woods, Melanie Griffith, Vincent Kartheiser, Natasha Gregson Wagner
Producers Stephen Chin, Larry Clark, James Woods
Distributor Eagle Entertainment
Country of origin US
Duration 97 mins

Whatever you think of Larry Clark, at least he lets you know what you’re in for right from the start. His blazing directorial debut, Kids, opened creepily with a too-young teen Lothario working a syrupy seduction on an equally young girl. His follow-up, Another Day in Paradise, opens again with teen lovers but within five minutes, the lad is involved in some incredibly lurid violence. Consider yourself warned.

Mel (James Woods) and Sid (Melanie Griffith) are junkies, thieves, and 40ish. When they take young Bobbie (Vincent Kartheiser) and Rosie (Natasha Gregson Wagner) under their wing, a cozy but delinquent family unit is formed. Continuing his interest in the course of young lives going off the rails, Clark is now asking, how do they grow old? In Mel and Sid, the answer seems to be that if you survive, you can stay young-at-heart forever. Woods makes the part his own - equally scared and scary - and even the often-irritating Griffith rings true. Gregson Wagner brings a tired, waifish charm not unlike Chloe Sevigny’s performance in Kids, while Kartheiser presents a far more sympathetic figure than that film’s preening baby sociopaths.

Clark’s background as a photographer is apparent in his use of Eric Edwards’ cinematography, which is lush enough to distract from the fact that this is a pretty seedy story. But despite a few questionable elements, this is ultimately a thoughtful, provocative movie.

Me and Will

Directors Melissa Behr and Sherrie Rose
Cast Melissa Behr, Sherrie Rose, Patrick Dempsey, Seymouir Cassel
Producers Melissa Behr, Sherrie Rose, Pierre David
Distributor 21st Century Pictures
Country of origin US
Rating 18
Duration 89 mins

Jane and Will, a pair of LA biker babes, are on the brink of being swallowed up by the vices of the big city. They meet in rehab, and before you can say “kindred spirits”, they’re on a thousand-mile quest to retrieve a holy biker relic - Peter Fonda’s ‘chopper’ from Easy Rider. Thus begins a long, blonde journey of the soul as they encounter all the perils of the road trip - bad cops, bitchy waitresses and, of course, their own inner demons.

Lead performers Behr and Rose also take writing, production and direction credits in their behind-the-camera debut. The screenplay is unremarkable but their obvious personal investment in the story does help bring it to life. However, Rose, the more experienced actor of the two, tends to overshadow Behr with her greater charm and range. Cameo roles include a demented turn by Lynch and Van Sant regular Grace Zabriskie, as Will’s obsessive-compulsive mum, and M. Emmet Walsh as a gold-hearted hayseed. See if you can spot Once Were Warriors director Lee Tamahori, who is also named as “Mentor” in the closing credits.

Road movies always lose something on the small screen, but this is no great tale to begin with. If a grittier, more experienced actor of the two, tends to overshadow Behr with her greater charm and range. Cameo roles include a demented turn by Lynch and Van Sant regular Grace Zabriskie, as Will’s obsessive-compulsive mum, and M. Emmet Walsh as a gold-hearted hayseed. See if you can spot Once Were Warriors director Lee Tamahori, who is also named as “Mentor” in the closing credits.

Rumpelstiltskin

Director Mark Jones
Cast Kim Johnston Ulrich, Tommy Blaze, Max Grodenchik, Allyce Beasley
Producer Michael Prescott
Distributor 21st Century Pictures
Country of origin US
Rating MA
Duration 88 mins

From the creators of Leprechaun (no, seriously), comes another splattered-up, schloked-down version of a folk tale about little people. “Somewhere in Europe” in the 1400s, Rumpelstiltskin’s attempt to steal a baby is thwarted by a witch who imprisons him in a stone figure. In an exposition more Scooby Doo than Brothers Grimm, the entombed dwarf turns up in modern LA, on the shelves of a “weird antique store”. New mother Shelley (Kim Johnston Ulrich) finds him pretty fascinating and takes him home. Big mistake.

Max Grodenchik seems to be having fun in the title role, which seems conceived as a sawn-off version of Freddy Krueger, but fails to reproduce the Elm Street killer’s evil allure. The script doesn’t help - this guy’s wisecracks make Freddy sound like Dorothy Parker. Production values are cheap, cheap, cheap, and there’s plenty that just doesn’t make sense. If he wants a baby, LA’s full of them - why is he so fixated on Baby Johnny? There’s also a nasty misogynistic tone, which only adds insult to injury, and the filmmaker has apparently gone out of his way to kill off as many police as possible. I smell an angry young man with an agenda. This is pure Z-grade genre guff, custom-made for the video market, but with barely a redeeming feature.

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1999 was an extraordinary year for most Australian exhibitors and distributors, especially those releasing and/or exhibiting US made blockbusters. Total box office for the year was $704 million - 11.7 percent up on the $603 million of 1998.

Exhibitors added 170 screens bringing the national total to 1746 by the end of the year. According to the Motion Picture Distributors' Association of Australia (MPDAA), which has been gathering box office data from Australian distributors since 1926, 1999 was the 11th consecutive year of record box office growth and screen expansion in this market. Due to lack of adequate data, the MPDAA no longer calculates annual figures for admissions, but a very rough estimate of 78 million admissions comes from dividing total box office by an average ticket price of $9 - "which hasn’t varied by more than $1 for about eight years," according to the MPDAA.

An Australian Film Commission Report released on January 21, 2000, shows 84 percent of the 1999 box office came from US films (mainly studio made), 9.5 percent from UK films, 3.5 percent from Europe/other and three percent from local product which means that multiplexes gained a lion’s share of the year’s total box office.

The top five films of 1999, (all US studio based), individually grossed more than $20 million compared to 1998 when only Titanic took over $20 million. Interestingly, the total number of films released nationally in 1999 was 258 - down from 271 in 1998 and 282 in 1997.

One likely explanation for this apparent contradiction is a rise in the number of prints per film - or for certain films.

Natalie Miller of specialist distributor Sharmill Films suggests "there may be too many prints generated for smaller films to try and fill screens". Conversely Alan Finney of Buena Vista International (Australia) says that "there are never too many prints - just sometimes too many expectations of a particular film".

Box office and industry data for the first half of 2000 confirms the extraordinary status of 1999 in retrospect. Based on its figures to June 30, the MPDAA reports while the industry is on track for a total box office of $709 million by the end of this year, this equates to a significant drop in growth compared with 11.7 percent for 1999 and 10 percent for 1998. Similarly, although exhibitors have added another 31 screens over the past six months bringing the national total to 1777, growth has slowed in comparison with the two years prior.

Major exhibitor Village Roadshow also scaled down its profit projections by $6 to $8 million for the last financial year due to slower than expected box office from January to April 2000.

Box office and screen level data alone does not provide a detailed picture of the market and is obviously not the only gauge of success for individual businesses. According to the Australasian Film Commission films with big budgets, high production values and well resourced marketing campaigns currently generate the biggest box office locally. It’s report also shows “Australian films compare favourably with other low budget, independently produced films”.

Happily, 2000 has already provided some surprises in this respect, with the popular success of Australian features The Wogboy (Twentieth Century Fox) $11 million and Looking For Alibrandi (Roadshow Film Distributors) $7.6 million (as of June 30, 2000). Yet while Roadshow is aggressively acquiring and distributing Australian films, other distributors and exhibitors generally believe Australian product still presents too much of a challenge for too little return. • Megan Sloley
Distribution

UNITED INTERNATIONAL PICTURES (AUSTRALIA)

Owner: United International Pictures
US Studio Partners: Paramount, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Universal
Managing Director: Michael Selwyn
Film product category: Mainstream & specialist
No of releases in 2000: 45
Australian Releases in 2000: My Mother Frank, Kick (jointly with Beyond Films) Angst

UIP Australia distributes films locally on behalf of its three major studio owners plus Dreamworks SKG through Universal. It also distributes in Australia for Beyond Films as well as acquiring local films in its own right. Biggest recent releases are Gladiator ($30 million box office to end June 2000), MI-2 ($25 million to June 2000) and American Beauty ($18.9 million). Recent successes in specialised area are Snow Falling On Cedars ($4 million), Tea With Mussolini ($4.3 million) and Being John Malkovich ($3.1 million).

Managing director Michael Selwyn said, “While the level of attendance is still very healthy, costs associated with releases continue to escalate at an alarming rate.” He added that Australian product is proving particularly challenging right now, “audiences seem to be wary of them”.

Local releases over past 12 months include Cut and Strange Fits of Passion (with Beyond), Selkie and Siam Sunset. “We had great hopes for Siam Sunset” says Selwyn, “and were very pleased with the campaign - just not the result”. He concludes “not much is new and changing except an increasing understanding of the importance of the internet in film marketing”.

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Owner: Twentieth Century Fox
Managing Director: Robert Slaviero
Managing Director Robert Slaviero was not available for interview but according to its Australian web site, Twentieth Century Fox has 15 films slated for release between July 2000 and April 2001 including Australian releases. Bootmen and Baz Luhrman’s Moulin Rouge.

BUENA VISTA INTERNATIONAL

Owner: The Walt Disney Company
US Studio Partners: Touchstone, Hollywood Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures
Managing Director: Alan Finney
Film product category: Blockbuster & arthouse
No of releases in 2000: Approx 30
Australian Releases in 2000: Mallboy

Buena Vista International (Australia), a wholly-owned division of The Walt Disney Company, releases films produced by its studios plus films acquired from other sources. Australian managing director Alan Finney believes “each individual film determines the release strategy rather than the financial resources of the distributor.” He sees “risk-taking as part of the territory”.

Finney views the local market for specialist films as very healthy, “with most of these titles performing better per head of population than in the US”. BWI Australia recently acquired its first Australian title, Mallboy will be released later this year.

With 30 years industry experience, Finney said, “an Australian film hits the mark, the Australian audience forms a much closer and intimate relationship with the film than with other movies”.

COLUMBIA TRISTAR INTERNATIONAL

Owner: SONY Pictures Entertainment
US Studio Partners: SONY Pictures, SONY Classics, Screen gems
Managing Director: Stephen Basil-Jones
Film product category: Blockbuster & arthouse
No of releases in 2000: 40
Australian Releases in 2000: D

Columbia Tristar Australia has been distributing locally since 1996, releasing titles directly for Sony Pictures, Sony owned Screen gems and Sony Pictures Classics.

Columbia is one of the “big four” distributors of blockbusters, with Twentieth Century Fox, BFI and UIP.

Stephen Basil-Jones said, “CTA is the biggest distributor of arthouse product in Australia based on its annual release schedule” (15 this calendar year). Most successful recent arthouse releases are The Opposite of Sex ($1.6 million box office), Run Lola Run ($1.8 million), and The Winslow Boy ($1.4 million). Basil-Jones confirms that 99 was “a quiet year” for Columbia, but claims the business has turned around in 2000 with 40 titles on the release slate.

Columbia “is not the most aggressive distributor of Australian film” said Basil-Jones. “Our focus is currently on Asian film as the logical addition to the strong local trend in Asian food, fashion and spirit”. Parent company Columbia Tristar International recently established a Hong Kong production office to acquire and produce Asian films to feed its markets. See the Silk screen sidebar.

ROADSHOW FILM DISTRIBUTORS

Owner: Village Roadshow - 50%, The Greater Union Organisation - 50%
US Studio Partners: Warner Brothers
Chairman: Ian Sands
Managing Director: Joel Pearlman
Film product category: Blockbuster & arthouse
No of releases in 2000: 30
Australian Releases in 2000: The Dish, Risk

Founded in 1968, Roadshow Film Distributors has been the exclusive distributor for Warner Brothers since 1971 and also distributes for Newline owned by Time Warner.

Managing director Joel Pearlman says, “Roadshow handles the largest blockbuster to the smallest arthouse film and believes “the biggest story in local distribution so far is the increased success of Australian films”. He cites box office figures for Two Hands (REP 1999 release) at $5.6 million, The Craic (Roadshow 1999) at $5.2 million, The Wogboy (Fox 2000) at $11 million and Looking For Alibrandi (Roadshow 2000) $7.6 million to June 2000.

Roadshow has a strong commitment to local product “and is the most aggressive distributor in this area” Pearlman claimed. The company
Australian films cater to an international audience and don't seek films with commercial potential at script stage and targets local producers. He attributes recently successful Australian product to the filmmakers' understanding of the audience for the films and hopes this leads to a continuous supply of commercial Australian product.

"The local industry is a mature market" he concludes, "in that all major studios are represented, there is a large number of multiplexes, our market is driven by big releases from the US and is very competitive... with high cost media". As a result, Roadshow has evolved its marketing strategies into web sites.

DENDY FILMS

Owner: The Becker Group
Head of film division - Dendy & REP: Mark Gooder
Head of Dendy distribution: Troy Lum
No of releases in 2000: 12
Australian Releases in 2000: 0

Fully owned by Becker Entertainment since '98, Dendy Films specialises in "the best of arthouse and foreign language film product" according to head of distribution Troy Lum. Dendy and REP do not conflict by allocating specialist product over 30 print capacity to REP and anything below that to Dendy. Due to a two year run of successful releases including Waking Ned Devine ($5 million box office), All About My Mother ($1.2 million), The Blair Witch Project ($10.6 million), Buena Vista Social Club ($1.5 million) and The Cup ($500,000) Lum claims that this is "the most successful time in Dendy's history with $15 million revenue coming from the last 12 months". He agrees that box office is not the only criteria for success especially in relation to specialist product, adding that "overheads were kept low because some films were very cheap... others didn't see the value in them". Dendy will release up to 12 titles in 2000 but there is no local content. "We never got offered any Australian films" says Lum, who believes that "big Australian films cater to an international audience and don't reflect our cultural reality".

PALACE FILMS

Owner: Antonio Zeccola
General Manager: Tait Brady
Film product category: Blockbuster & arthouse
No of releases in late 2000/early 2001: 12

Australian Releases in 2000:
- Palace has been involved in the distribution of specialist film product since 1965 and under the Palace name since 1976. Antonio Zeccola and Tait Brady handle acquisitions, purchasing international product from sales agents and festivals. Brady said "Local product is mostly acquired at script stage as films need a distributor to get financing from the FCC (Film Finance Corporation). one of the few funding options along with the AFC (Australian Film Commission), Showtime and private sources". Palace sells through to video, pay television, free to air, airlines and hotels.
- Major issues for Palace currently are increased competition in the specialist area bringing with it increasing film purchase, promotion and advertising costs. Brady also perceives "a deep rooted audience conservatism" favouring mainstream fare and requiring endorsements and awards attached to a film". Palace has shifted its focus away from small, foreign features with "something new to say" and towards Australian films in its next slate of films.

NEWVISION FILM DISTRIBUTORS

Owner: Frank Cox
Film product category: Specialist
No of releases in 2000: 9
Australian Releases in 2000: Better Than Sex

Distributing locally for 20 years, Newvision is what Frank Cox calls "a specialist operation, marrying commerce and art anywhere possible to push art to a commercial audience". Biggest successes in Australia have been Kundun, Chasing Amy, Kiss or Kill, Love & Other Catastrophes and My Name Is Joe but Ulee's Gold disappointed despite a local tour by star Peter Fonda. This year's releases include Ghost Dog, Pornographic Liaison and Jesus' Son. Newvision has scaled down its annual volume of releases from 15 to nine in the last couple of years to concentrate on local production. First Newvision production effort, Better Than Sex, will be released in October this year. Cox also owns fifty percent of Melbourne's Kino cinema with the Becker Group. Cox says "the Kino business has grown by about twenty percent over the past year, but only twenty percent of Kino product comes from Newvision". Cox believes bringing foreign investment into Australia is essential to the growth of our industry.

REP FILM DISTRIBUTION

Owner: The Becker Group Limited
Head of Becker Film Divisions: Mark Gooder
Head of distribution: Mark Gooder
Film product category: Blockbuster & arthouse
No of releases in late 2000: 11
Australian Releases in 2000: 0

Part of the Becker Group Limited, REP has distributed film locally for 15 years with current product focus on "200 print mainstream commercial product and 30 print 'crossover titles'.
- Company head Mark Gooder said REP "aims for 'break-out' product that can compete with studio product" and will increase releases from nine in 1999 to 11 by end of 2000. Two biggest REP grossers of the past 12 months are The Blair Witch Project ($10.5 million) co-distributed with Dendy Films, and Two Hands ($5.6 million). Up-coming releases include Saving Grace, as a joint venture with Pinel Film Entertainment, Girlfight, Cherry Hills and Subterrano produced by Becker Feature Films - production arm of Becker based in the US.

Beyond Marketing Manager John Thornhill
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"rising costs of promotion and advertising".

BEYOND DISTRIBUTION LIMITED

Owner: Public Company
Managing Director: Mikael Borglund
Marketing Manager: John Thornhill
Film Product Category: Arthouse
No of releases in 2000: 10
Australian releases in 2000: My Mother Frank, Kick [with UIP]

Beyond has distributed locally for 18 months, setting up theatrical releases via UIP and managing marketing and publicity in-house. Marketing manager John Thornhill estimates current release rate is 10 per year "though we are mainly an international sales agent". Around fifty percent of the company's theatrical release schedule is Australian including My Mother Frank and Kick due out later this year. Thornhill says that the local market is "pretty tough...you need to be highly selective and control the size of your print and advertising budget."

SHARMILL FILMS

Owner: Natalie Miller
No of releases in 2000: 5
Australian releases in 2000: Innocence (Paul Cox) Nijinsky (Paul Cox documentary)
No Bail Players Here (documentary)

Sharmill has been distributing locally for 30 years, specialising in smaller foreign arthouse product. Owner Natalie Miller's first film was The Exterminating Angel and most successful title was An Angel at My Table ($1.7 million box office). Miller cautions good box does not always equate to profit.

"Once you take out film hire, advance, prints, advertising, etc and send fifty percent to the producer there isn't a lot left over. A much smaller film like The Comedian Harmonists, [which has earned] $150k to date and still in cinemas can provide a better margin". Miller, who also owns the Longford Cinema in South Yarra and part owns the Nova Carlton and Nova Adelaide, says the concept and consumption of arthouse, has changed dramatically over the years.

"Twelve years ago (as an exhibitor), I was able to get Mona Lisa exclusively for The Longford plus My Left Foot and Truly Madly Deeply today those films would play in multiplexes".

THE GLOBE FILM CO.

Owner/Directors: Andrew Mackie/Richard Peyton
Film Product Category: Australian
No of releases in 2000: 23
Australian releases in 2000: Mullet, Till Human Voices Wake Us

Globe has distributed film locally for over six years releasing around 40 titles in total including Secrets and Lies and Praise. Owner Andrew Mackie says distribution has been scaled down since March '99 "because a major backer left to set up his own company". The focus is now on provision of marketing and publicity services although Globe will still release two or three Australian films per year using its own resources.

PINEFILM ENTERTAINMENT [PINEFILM GROUP OF COMPANIES]

Owner: Pinefilm Group of Companies
Managing Director: Sean Rothsey
Film Product Category: Commercial
No of releases in 2000: 8
Australian releases in 2000: 0

Pinefilm has an ongoing focus on direct to video sales. "The comedies Still Life and The Road Home are on 12-month licence with Firstline Home Video; The Road Home (Zhang Yimou), Shower (Zhang Yang), The Emperor and The Assassin (Chen Kaige), Kikujiro (Takeshi Kitano), Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee) were produced by Columbia Tristar Productions Asia. Columbia Australia packaged up and branded the program before presenting it to every independent and arthouse cinema in Australia. Managing director Stephen Basi-Jones explains the cinemas then made submission outlining how they would support the program. "We then chose the best."

Columbia Tristar launches Silkscreen

Local distributor Columbia Tristar's Asian film package Silkscreen opened nationally across 11 cinemas on July 6. The titles are, The Road Home (Zhang Yimou), Shower (Zhang Yang), The Emperor and The Assassin (Chen Kaige), Kikujiro (Takeshi Kitano), Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee). Sony Picture Classics acquired three of the titles, while the other two were produced by Columbia Tristar Productions Asia. Columbia Australia packaged up and branded the program before presenting it to every independent and arthouse cinema in Australia. Managing director Stephen Basi-Jones said the cinemas then made submission outlining how they would support the program. "We then chose the best."

The cinemas selected were Melbourne's Nova, Palace Como and Village Rivoli; Dendy Opera Quays, Palace Verona and Roseville Cinemas in Sydney; Electric Shadows in the ACT; Palace Nova Eastend in Adelaide; Luna and Windsor in Perth and the Hoyts Regent in Brisbane.

One surprising omission was Melbourne's Kino Cinema. Part-owner, Frank Cox said he was not surprised by the selection of Cinema Nova, due to its eight-screen capacity, but "had been under the impression that only one cinema would be chosen per state". 
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EXHIBITION AND DISTRIBUTION

Owner: Reading Entertainment Inc. (US)

Cinema Division:

Chief Operating Officer: Neil Pentecost

Total national sites: 10

Total national screens: 71

Reading is fully owned by Reading Entertainment Inc in the United States, a property developer and motion picture exhibitor in all its markets encompassing the US, Australia, Puerto Rico and New Zealand. The dual business focus enables Reading to own much of the property on which it builds its cinemas in contrast with most major competitors in Australia. Global strategy to build bigger screens and stadium capacity than competitors', is also being followed through in Australia with a 600-seat, 20m screen cinema at Reading Geelong.

Reading entered the local market in 1996 with its first six-screen multiplex at Townsville, QLD. To date Reading has invested $160 million dollars in the development of its cinema chain in Australia which now incorporates Townsville, Redbank, QLD (eight screens); Harbortown, QLD (14 screens); Bundaberg, QLD (four screens); Mandurah, WA (six screens); Belmont, WA (10 screens); Market City, NSW (five screens); Dubbo, NSW (five screens); Elsternwick, VIC (five screens); and, Geelong, VIC (eight screens). This totals 10 locations and 71 screens. Two more sites are under construction in Auburn, NSW, and Chirnside Park, VIC, with sites planned for Tumbi Umbi, QLD, Newmarket, NSW, Burwood, VIC and Frankston, VIC.

Neil Pentecost is Chief Operating Officer at Reading Entertainment. He came to the position in September 1999 from Hoyts where he was operations manager for NSW and QLD.

Pentecost said, “Reading committed to the Australian market in the early 90s when it was under-screened by US standards, but expansion accelerated in the late 90s creating greater competition”. He acknowledges that major commercial interests “being the ‘duopoly of Village and Hoyts’ – the ACCC’s description not mine – have made it difficult for Reading to expand its cinema sites as per the original schedule”. Reading had aimed for a 10 percent share of the market, but Pentecost estimates it is currently around six percent. Graham Burke, Chief Executive of Village Roadshow, recently estimated the Reading market share lower at around three percent.

Pentecost is hopeful that the change of government in Victoria may eventually reverse current planning laws that enabled “major commercial interests” to block the development of a Reading multiplex in Burwood because it was outside a major shopping area. He says that the legislation is “a warm topic”, but as the Reading-owned property in Burwood is “now valued at double what we paid for it”, the company has not lost out.

Pentecost believes that lengthy legal proceedings instigated by “shopping centre developers and other cinemas” to prevent the building of a multiplex on the Reading owned Moonee Ponds Market site are “drawing to a close”. He predicts that Reading will commence building in about 12 months’ time. Despite competitive and legislative disincentives, Pentecost is optimistic about the future for Reading in Australia. He says, “Townsville and Geelong have been particularly successful... with Geelong growing the market there by 40 percent and now maintaining a 50 percent market share in competition with the established Village multiplex”. He believes that “Sydney is still underscreened and Melbourne offers scope for screen growth” especially since Landlease relinquished its $76 million share of Hoyts to the Kerry Packer owned Consolidated Press Holdings in March 1999. “But although this is a facilities driven business,” concludes Pentecost, “the product still has to be there, and no exhibitor can control product.”

Megan Sloley
Exhibition

THE GREATER UNION ORGANISATION

Owner: Amalgamated Holdings Limited
Cinema Division: Greater Union
General Manager: Richard Parton
Total national sites: 54
Total national screens: 400
International: Cinemas in Middle East, Poland, Netherlands and Germany

Founded in 1910, Greater Union is Australia’s oldest film exhibitor which now owns 100 percent of Birch Carroll and Coyle giving it a total of 54 Greater Union managed sites and 400 screens nationally. Greater Union also has a 33.3 percent share (with Village and Warner Brothers) in around 37 multiplexes (making up some of the 54) plus 50 percent of Roadshow Film Distributors.

The company has sites planned for Chermside in Brisbane and Burwood, Hornsby and Bondi in Sydney though screen expansion will slow this year in favour of refurbishment. Most successful sites are the Megaplex Marion, SA (30 screens); Macquarie, NSW (16 screens); Castle Hill, NSW (16 screens); Indooroopilly, QLD (16 screens); Garden City, QLD (16 screens); and, Liverpool, NSW (12 screens). Programming is mostly mainstream product but sites in Cairns, Manuka ACT and megaplexes screen alternative and limited release films.

Greater Union believes Australian films require specialised attention and particular effort in marketing and promotion. Supporting The Wogboy and Looking For Alibrandi with star tours, gala premiers and focus on school bookings has paid dividends.

VILLAGE

Owner: Village Roadshow Limited
Directors: John Kirby/Robert Kirby
Chief Executive: Graham Burke
Total national sites: 75
Total national screens: 532
International: 124 sites/1013 screens

Major profit driver in the Village Roadshow cinema division locally is a three way joint venture with The Greater Union Organisation and Warner Brothers (US), giving each corporation a 33.3 percent share in around 37 new generation multiplexes nationally. These are branded Village Cinemas in Victoria, Greater Union in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia and Birch Carroll & Coyle in Queensland. Village owns 9 multiplexes and cinemas outright has a 50 to 75 percent share in another 21 cinema joint ventures including the arthouse Europa chain. Village also owns a 50 percent share of Palace Cinemas as a “silent partner” in the words of Graham Burke.

Best performing Village sites “seesaw between the Jam Factory, Melbourne, the Marion in Adelaide, Crown Casino in Melbourne, and Macquarie and Castle Hill in New South Wales” says Burke with location and good product the key success factors.

Though Village had to reduce its profit expectations for the June 30 year end due to poor product, “momentum has been regained in the last two months” according to Burke with the release of Gladiator and MI2 and “this will be maintained with new releases A Perfect Storm and Me, Myself, Irene.” Burke believes that the cinema division is set for a “great next quarter” and that the industry generally “is in the best shape of any country in the world due to the high standard and quality of our theatres... and aggressive marketing”. Per capita visits to cinemas is at five per year according to Burke, in contrast with 2.5 per year in the United Kingdom and three per year in Europe.

AUSTRALIAN MULTIPLEX CINEMAS

Owner: Australian Multiplex Cinemas
Chief Executive Officer: Michael Hawkins
Total national sites: 5 (QLD only)
Total national screens: 37

Australian Multiplex Cinemas is fully Australian owned, with cinemas in Queensland since 1921. The company opened its first multiplex at Sunnybank (eight screens) in 1995 and has since added sites at Stafford (10 screens), Redcliffe (eight screens), Tweed Heads (six screens) and Noosa (five screens). Sydney is now the focus for expansion with three sites currently at various stages of development and approval.

CEO Michael Hawkins believes the marketplace is extremely competitive but not oversupplied. “Overscreening is the mantra of the majors” he says, “but there are still desirable markets with pockets of opportunity. Like Sydney with only three megaplexes for its four million population when Brisbane has three for its one million”.

AMC programming is mainstream and Hawkins suggests that any competitive megaplex screening smaller, arthouse product “shouldn’t be mistaken for anything other than a cinema which needs to fill its screens”.

HOYTS

Owner: Consolidated Press Holdings
Cinema Division: Hoyts
Chief Executive Officer: Paul Johnson
Total national sites: 40
Total national screens: 338
International: Cinemas in Argentina, Chile, United Kingdom, Europe, New Zealand, Mexico and the United States

PALACE

Owners: Tony Zeccola - 50%; Village Roadshow - 50%
National Programming Manager: Kim Petalas
Cinema Division: Palace Cinemas/Europa
Total national sites: 21
Total national screens: 56

Village Roadshow bought a 50 percent share of Palace from Tony Zeccola in 1994 who retains a 50 percent share. With 56 screens across 21 cinemas nationally the Palace/Village joint venture is the largest arthouse circuit in Australia. Zeccola concurs with Graham Burke that Village is a “silent partner” in the joint venture, with Zeccola managing all aspects of the business. Exceptions are Palace NOVA Eastend in Adelaide and the NOVA in Melbourne where Palace/Village is one of a number of owner/managers.

Most profitable sites are Norton St, Leichhardt, The Verona, Paddington in Sydney, and Palace Balwyn, Dendy Brighton and The George, St Kilda in Melbourne. Zeccola maintains that most cinemas have experienced between “15 and 20 percent increase in revenue over the past 12 months”.

DENDY CINEMAS

Owner: The Becker Group Limited
Head of Becker Film Divisions: Mark Gooder
Head of exhibition: Mark Sarfaty
Total national sites: 5
Total national screens: 11

Becker purchased Dendy Cinemas in 1998, which included Dendy Brisbane, Dendy Newtown, Dendy Martin Place and a 50% share in the Kino Cinema in Melbourne. An existing Dendy distribution division (now Dendy Films) came with the purchase, which Becker still runs in addition to its own distribution arm, REP Film Distribution - a 10 year old business.

Becker opened another site at Ocean Quays in Christmas 1999, which has generated “fantastic box office from day one” says Mark Gooder, who also oversees distribution at Dendy Films and REP. Gooder says the Dendy chain specialises in arthouse product, “both the kind that can only be seen at 3 places and ‘mainstream arthouse’ which can be seen in multiplexes” and likes to support Australian product. Turnover has increased and cinemas are more profitable since the Becker acquisition “partly as a result of more open programming sourcing from many distributors rather than just Dendy” says Gooder.

Megan Sloley
Feature Films

In pre-production

TEMPE TIP
GV Productions
Distribution company: Becker & Co.
Principal Credits
Director: Michael Ralph
Producer: David Rowe
Line producer: David Lightfoot
Executive producers: Richard Brezzo, Phil Davey, Johnathan Shiehman
Scriptwriter: Michael Ralph
Director of photography: David Foreman

SYNOPSIS
Every man dreams of finding a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. But you don't expect to find it in Tempe. For Max Franklin the search started in a hole in ground in his own backyard.

In production
NIJINSKI
Illumination Films and MusicArts Dance Films
Distribution company: Sharmill Films and WTV (US)
Budget: 1.2 million
Principal Credits
Director: Paul Cox
Producer: Paul Cox, Aanya Whitehead
Executive producer: Kevin Lucas, William Wiiburd
Scriptwriter: Paul Cox
Based on the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky
Composer: Paul Grabowsky

Planning and Development
Researchers: Leonie Verheugen, Margot Wiburd
Dance Consultant: Alida Lavelle

Principal Credits
Producer: David Rowe
Line producer: David Lavelle
Scriptwriter: Michael Ralph
Director of photography: David Foreman

SPUDMONKEY
Spudmonkey Films Pty Ltd
Principal Credits
Director: Stuart McFate
Producer: Jon Silver, Michel Bouquet, Stuart McFate
Scriptwriter: Stuart McFate

SYNOPSIS
A young man casts aside the shackles of his middle-class society to become a writer and join the ranks of the free-living artistic underworld of Paris.

In post-production
MOULIN ROUGE
Production company: Bazmark Productions
Director: Baz Luhrmann
Writer: John Cameron
Composer: John Klondike

SYNOPSIS
Menace, Dath Sidious, takes over the Republic, turns it into an empire and controls everything. The Clone Wars reach their pinnacle as the Jedi attempt to defend the galaxy from the forces of evil. Meanwhile, Anakin Skywalker falls in love with Queen Amidala but begins to succumb to the Dark Side of the Force.

Art Department
Art director: Suzie Blackshaw
Assistant art director: Tim Allan
Set dresser: Peter Wright
Costume designer: Christine Manton
Unit makeup: Vicki Geast

Post-production
La SPAGNOLA
Production company: Wild Dog Pictures Pty Ltd
Post Production: Untill November 2000
Principal Credits
Director: Alex Dimitriades
Producer: Anna-Maria Monticelli
Co-producer: Philip Hearnden
Scriptwriter: Anna-Maria Monticelli

SYNOPSIS
Contemporary comedy about a pizza delivery boy who achieves his dream of drumming in a successful rock band, only to be replaced by computerised drums.

WillFULL
Latent Image
Principal Credits
Director: Rebel Penfold-Russell
Executive producer: Sheridan Johns
Scriptwriter: Harry Cripps
Director of photography: Steve Arnold

Make-up assistant: Emma-Lee Leonard, Cherie Southern
Hairdresser: Tiffany Beckwith
Safety officer: Christy Beard
Unit nurse: Vicki Geast

Copyright © 2000 CINEMA PAPERS. AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2000
Production designer: George Liddle
Editor: Nicholas Beaman
Composer: Antony Partos
Sound recordist: Andrew Bellette
Planning and development casting: Alison Barrett

**Casting**

Extras casting: Mieke Ryan

**Production Crew**

Production manager: Dennis Kiely
Production co-ordinator: Cassandra Simpson
Producer's assistants: Michele Ryan
Location manager: Robin Clifton
Unit manager: Simon Lucas
Unit assistant: Mardi Thompson
Production assistant: Katie Gordon
Production runner: Kane Sarich
Production assistant: Lyn Johnson
Accounts assistant: Tracey McKewen
Insurance: HW Wood Australia P/L
Legal services: Nina Stevenson & Associates

**Camera Crew**

Camera operator: Richard Hobbs
Focus puller: Jeremy Chiffin
Camera assistant: Brett Tracey
Key grip: Greg Molineaux
Assistant grip: Andy Rennie
Gaffer: Miles Jones
Best boys: Mark Newnham, Mark Watson

**On-set Crew**

First assistant director: Jamie Crooks
Second assistant director: Tom Red
Third assistant director: Annabel Osborne
Continuity: Karen Mansfield
Boom operator: Nicole Lodge
Make-up/hair makeup: Trish Glover
Make-up/hair artist: Sherry Hubbard
Special effects: Paradox FX
Stunts co-ordinator: Reel Sun
Unit nurse: Patby Buchan

Catering: Mighty Bite
Unit publicist: Catherine LaVelle, CLPR

**Animals**

Animal handler: Djimi Bjork
Horse wrangler: Ware's Livery Stables

**Construction**

Construction department: John Rann
Heading lead: Marcus Smith
Carpenter: Phils: Chuck Morgan, Rick Locke, Ross Cairnes, Kelvin John Henwood, Ian Grant, Robert Arthur

**Studios**

Max Studios

**Post-production**

Post-production supervisor: Simon Klaeble
Shooting stock: Kodak Cast

**Animals**

Anna Llge Phillips, Anne Moser

**THE ENCHANTED BILLABONG**

TEB P/L - Imagine if Productions - D & R Productions
Distribution: Columbia Tristar Budget: 103.0 million
Animated CGI feature film and 3D IMAX film

**Production Credits**

Director: David Waddington
Producers: Rob McKenzie, David Waddington
Executive producer: Jack Wegman

**Screenplay**

Michael Ludwig based on the original screenplay titled: The Enchanted Billabong
By: Michael Wagner, David Waddington
Production designer: Wayne Bryant
Composer: Craig Bryant
Sound designer: Christen Hill

**Planning and Development**

Casting: Bedford & Pearce Video Master by: FMTV East

**Synopsis**

Dusk Productions
Budget: 500,000
Duration: 90 mins

**Principal Credits**

Director: Rob McKenzie
Line producer: Desmond Hurley
Scriptwriter: David Phillips
Producer's assistant: Tony Parker

**Synopsis**

On the outskirts of the small outback town of Imphy, lies a tightly secured military compound. Twenty years prior a meteor crashed into the compound site unleashing an alien chemical with the ability to clone living beings. The clones are being sent back to the town while their original selves are kept comatose at the compound. Nobody suspects a thing. When security is broken at the compound the original townsfolk escape and head back to town where they confront themselves and where no one knows who is the original and who is the clone.

**TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE**

Based on an original concept by: Michael Wagn'er, David Moser, Strakosch, Denn McCoy.

**Synopsis**

“maybe” for an answer.

**THE MERCHANT OF FAIRNESS**

Clandestine Pictures Pty Ltd - Production
Duration: 95 mins

**Synopsis**

Dusk is an Aussie yarn about a group of losers who have embraced the tagline: "back to town where they are innocent."

**TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE**

Onset Crew

First assistant director: John Titley

**Government Agency**

Investment: Australian Film Commission
Production: Showtime
Australia: SSi and NSFW Office.

**Marketing**

International sales agent: Andrew Films [UK]

**Production Crew**

Writer/Director: Michael Petroni
Producer: Shana Levine, Dean Murphy, Nigel Odell, David Redman, Thomas Augsburger, Matthias Encke
Executive producer: Andrew Deane, Bea Flynn, Yoram Pelman, Stefan Simchowitz, Garth Wiley

**Synopsis**

A film about fishing, football and family.

**TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE**

Dusk Productions
Production company: DND Productions/ Key Entertainment Investments: AFFC, Key Entertainment, Film Victoria International sales: Key Entertainment Tomorrow Films

**Synopsis**

Australia/NZ Distribution: Globe Film Co

**Production Crew**

Writer/Director: Michael Petroni
Producer: Shana Levine, Dean Murphy, Nigel Odell, David Redman, Thomas Augsburger, Matthias Encke
Executive producer: Andrew Deane, Bea Flynn, Yoram Pelman, Stefan Simchowitz, Garth Wiley

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Executive producer: Andrew Deane, Bea Flynn, Yoram Pelman, Stefan Simchowitz, Garth Wiley

**Synopsis**

A film about fishing, football and family.
B FOCUS puller: Jem Rayner
B Clapper loader: Simon Williams
Addtional Focus: Dave Dunlop
Camera loader: Matthew Windsor
Key grip: Warren Grieve
Dolly grip: Terry Churchill Brown
Assistant grips: Adam Kuiper, Craig Job, Jason Trews, Jason Weeks
Gaffer: Reg Garside
Best boy: Alan Dunstan
Electrician: Colin Wyatt, Mark Jeffries, Travis Magges, Mark Watson
Overload Crew
1st assistant director: Mark Turnbull
2nd assistant director: Jane Griffin
second 2nd assistant director: Noni Roy
3rd assistant director: Greg Cobain
4th assistant director: Eddie Thorn
On Set PA: Marcus Levy
Continuity: Pam Willis
Playback operator: Stuart Weller
Book supervisor: David Pearson
Make-up supervisor: Deborah Jansen
Hair supervisor: Martial Corneville
Key make-up artist: Nicole Spinn
Make-up artist: Kylee T'Otto
Key hairdresser: Kerry-Lee Jun
Hairdresser: Tina Gordon
Special fx supervisor: Brian Cox
Special fx: Dave Haddie, Walter Van Veenendaal, Angela Sahin, Pauline Gerbert, David Goldie, Special assistants: Patrick Carmiggelt, Aaron Cox
Choreographer: Vincent Paternoster
Assistant Choreographer: Tracie Morley
Stunts co-coordinator: Lawrence Bowdward
Unit nurse: Ron Houghton
Still photographer: Carolyn Jones
Catering: Mighty Bites
Catering: Crema Mo'khtar
Art Department
Art director: Nick McCauley
Assistant art director: Emma Lawes
Art department co-coordinator: Jen O'Connell
PA to Designer: Sally-Anne Louisson
Art director runner: Kent Sherlock
Set designer: Suza Maybury
Set dresser: Screen Saver
Draftsman: Tim Hobin
Drafting/Models: Jodie Fried
Graphics: Ingrid Weir
Architectural co-ordinator: Ralph Simpson
Props person: Lisa Brennan
Props buyer: Mark Brimms
Props assistant: Jo Beckett, Walls
Beattie, James Horn, Andrew Short
Standby props: Murray Gosson
Museum
Assistant stand by: Adrienne Ogle, Fiona Walker
Armourmist: Keskeres
Action vehicle co-ordinator: Paul Naylor
Assist vehicle: Geoff Naylor
Wardrobe
Wardrobe supervisor: Kerry Thompson
Wardrobe buyer: Natalie Gardiner
Standby wardrobe: Helen Magges, Anne Keelin
Wardrobe assistant: John Power
Costumer: Julie Frankham
Costume Department
Construction supervisor: Geoff Howe
Scene artist: Steve Salby
Sailbanks
Construction manager: Eugene Land
Leading Actors: Edward Warbeck, Miller, Steve Kezic, Michael Routh
Stunts: Frank Han, Richard Baldwin
Groomsman: Gregg Tomas
Post production
Assistant editor: John Lee
Editing assistant: David Birrell
Music supervisor: Paul Bogey
Music engineer: Joel Moss
Recording studio: Studio 301
Cast
Glenn Close, Michael Gere, Jack Nicholson, Leon Siga, John Travolta, Jack Black
Synopsis
Remake of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, 'South Pacific'.

MY HUSBAND, MY KILLER
Director: Brad Silberling
Producer: Steve Windon
Wasting: Christine King, Jodd
Wning: n r  desJJhamp^p
In production
SANCTUARY
Principal Credits
Director: Dick Pearce
Producer: Chris Scaicas
Aprodu (Aust): Sue Miliken
Executive producer: Michael Jaffe, Howard Braustein, Glenn Close, Michael Gore
Screenwriter: Lawrence Cohen
Based on the novel titled: 'Tales of the South Pacific' by: James A Michener
Director of photography: Steve Windon
Production designer: Patricia Von Brandenstein
Composer: Rodgers and Hammerstein
Sound: Gjenn Close, Rade
Scherbiedza, Harry Connick Jr., Robert Pastorelli, Lori Tan Chong
Synopsis
Remake of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, 'South Pacific'.

WEDDING BELL BLUES
Director: Steve Weitz
Producer: Lawrence Cohen
Glenn Close, Michael Gere
Synopsis
A streetwise Maori cop and a sophisticated Sydney cop team up to solve a three-year-old murder mystery.

ARIA & PATA
Passionfruit Productions
Budget: $12 Million
Principal Credits
Director: Bruce Berendsen
Lead line producer: John Izzard
Producers: Philip Gerlich, Bruce Berendsen
Associate producer: Augustus Durland
Synopsis
A documentary about the life and work of Australian anthropologist and filmmaker, Michael Eady.

SYNOPSIS
A documentary about the life and work of Australian anthropologist, Arnold Halter.

In production
A FOX WITH TWELVE CHICKENS
Director/Producer: Alan Carter
Director of photography: Ian Puglesy
Editor: Peter Pritchard
Production Company: Alley Kat Productions
Synopsis
The story of a young family and their struggle to raise the sixteen chickens.

MYSUB HUSBAND, MY KILLER
Director: Brian A. Miller
Produced by: Jessica Douglas-Parry
Synopsis
A man who has been wrongly named as a suspect in a murder trial defends himself in an attempt to preserve his professional and personal future.

MY SISTER'S WEDDING
Director: Peter Andrikis
Produced by: David Gould
Synopsis
A wedding goes wrong when an unexpected guest attends.

MUSICALS
In production
ANIMAL X - SERIES 2
Series Consultant: Peter Andrikis
Executive producer: Mike Stover
Producer: Mike Searle, Nigel Swetnam, Jennifer Wilson, Melanie Ambrose, Linda Searle, Andrea Pandoros, Renata Scotti, Marilyn Horne, Cecilia Bartoli, Bryn Terfel
Synopsis
A series of musical events that explore the preparation of the stars and their favorite dishes.

DOCUMENTARIES
In production
ANIMA L X - SERIES 2
Series Consultans: Peter Andrikis
Executive producer: Mike Searle
Producer: Mike Slow, Nigel Swetnam, Jennifer Wilson, Melanie Ambrose, Linda Searle, Andrea Pandoros, Renata Scotti, Marilyn Horne, Cecilia Bartoli, Bryn Terfel
Synopsis
A series of musical events that explore the preparation of the stars and their favorite dishes.

MY SISTER'S WEDDING
Director: Peter Andrikis
Produced by: Jessica Douglas-Parry
Synopsis
A man who has been wrongly named as a suspect in a murder trial defends himself in an attempt to preserve his professional and personal future.

MY SISTER'S WEDDING
Director: Peter Andrikis
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MY SISTER'S WEDDING
Director: Peter Andrikis
Produced by: Jessica Douglas-Parry
Synopsis
A man who has been wrongly named as a suspect in a murder trial defends himself in an attempt to preserve his professional and personal future.
COMMUNICATION has defied children who are attending years that alternative favoured cure.

**Synopsis**


**Synopsis**

AUSTRALIANS AT WAR examines the efforts of the 600,000 Australians and how this nation has been shaped by these losses. 8 x 55 minutes

**STRESS**


**Synopsis**

This is a story of a final journey through stunningly beautiful Chinese landscapes on a small, cantankerous train called Bundy. It is also a story of fulfilling the personal dreams of a dedicated band of drivers, who dream of dying and nobody knows. Though Bundy has changed, it is the same story of a man who has come to terms with his past and is determined to find and rebuild the friendships and a professional challenge he hasn’t expected.

**THE ROAD FROM COORAIN**

(112 x 24 minute children’s series) Chapman Pictures Pty Ltd Producers: Penny Chapman Writer: Sue Hosking

**Synopsis**

Based on Jill Ker Conway’s celebrated autobiography, this is the story of a childhood. Set mainly in of the western plains of Qld, The Road From Coorain is a witness to the relationship between two extraordinary women over a lifetime of adversity.

**FOR ITS TOO LATE 10: THE FORGOTTEN SPECIES**

(26 x 24 minute children’s series) Storytellers Production Executive producers: Mike Searle, Jonathan M Shiff Producers: Mike Searle, Bill Gough, Sam McLaughlin, Mark de la Mare, Mark de la Mare Executive producer: Mike Searle Writer: Mike Searle

**Synopsis**

Episode ten in the Before its too late series looks at the forgotten species, India’s large mammals, elephants, crocodiles and other creatures that are critically endangered and utterly阴影ed by their African cousins. 64 minutes

**Recent funding decisions**

**Feature Films**

**LET’S GET SKASE**

MediaWorks Entertainment Pty Ltd Producers: John Tatoulis, Colin South Directors: Matthew George, Lachry Hulme

**Synopsis**

A bastardised Village Roadshow, Trident Releasing Anti-heros, DeLorenzo, and his posses of boys become men in the process of bringing skase back to the Majoretta. The forces of good overcome all obstacles to triumph over the bad guys, and a lot of laughs are had on the way.

**DAUGHTER**

Stella Productions Pty Ltd Producers: Andrew Andrzeja, Georgie Campana Director/Writer: Mario Andreacchio Writer: John Goldsmyth Presale: Studio Canal Plus Distribution: Beyond

**Synopsis**

Set in Paris and Tahiti in the late 19th century, Gauguin examines a slice in the life of French painter, Paul Gauguin, in his attempt to create a revolution in painting and thinking, and his obsession with the freedom and creativity. Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

**ADULT TELEVISION DRAMA HOPE FLIES**

(100 x minute telemovie) Liberty and Beyond Pty Ltd Producers: Simon North, Tony Cavanagh Director: Geoff Nottage Presale: Ten Network Distribution: Beyond

**Synopsis**

Hope returns to her hometown in response to her father’s cry for help. Her dreams are dying and nobody knows why. Box Tree hasn’t changed much...the people have. Her arrival brings about an extraordinary story of rekindled friendships and a professional challenge she hadn’t expected.

**THE TEA THIEF**

(90 & 52 x minute documentary) Campbell Peletz & Company Pty Ltd in co-production with Les Films De La Memoire and La Huit Productions Producers: Diane Pelletz, Willy Lefebvre, Gilles Le Mao Director: Diane Pelletz Written and directed by Willy Lefebvre, Willy Pelletz, Joelle Kimmink

**Synopsis**

In 1940, Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, was commissioned by the Tea Committee of the British East India Company, to travel to China to unravel the mystery of tea cultivation and manufacture. Masquerading as a Mongol Mandarin, Fortune wandered through tea gardens and processing plants in China. He stole the secret of tea cultivation and processing from the Chinese. With the help of present day tea experts, tea tasters and connoisseurs, the film will follow Fortune’s enigmatic and audacious journey to rediscover the originality and significance of his achievements.

**LOOSING LAYLA**

(55 x minute Accordion documentary) Hatchang Productions Producers: Cathy Henkel Director: Jessica Gorman

**Synopsis**

Losing Layla became an international bestseller, and the book was made into a movie called Layla. Layla was the story of a woman who wanted to lose her partner by her choice to become a mother. Instead, it became the story of losing their daughter.

**EQUUS - THE STORY OF A HORSE**

(Large Format documentary) Mullion Creek Productions Pty Ltd Producers: John Tresidder, Michael Caufield

**Synopsis**

This film is a docu-drama about the true story of a horse that thrives through the brumbies of the Snowy Mountain high country.
The sum of us
The gurus rate recent releases.

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Erratum issue 133
- Stephan Elliott, Al Clark, Richard Wolstencroft and Paul Cauter's names were spelt incorrectly.
- Sharmill Films purchased Paul Cox's Innocence at Cannes (not Serenades as reported).
- In The Sum of Us Adrian Martin's and Megan Spencer's scores were severely infected. Madeleine Swain somehow inherited David Stratton's scores in toto - Cinema Papers apologizes to all concerned parties. Measures have been taken to ensure the problem does not recur.

Our review gurus have rated a selection of the latest releases on a scale of 0 to 10, the latter being the optimum rating - a dot means not seen.
Cinemedia is an Australian cultural organisation which encourages and assists the development, production, exhibition and knowledge of film, television and new media.

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Markets the Victorian film and television industry nationally and internationally - including locations, facilities and services.

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Supports major festivals including the Melbourne International Film Festival and industry conferences.

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