Cinema Papers #135 October - November 2000

Michaela Boland

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Cinema Papers #135 October - November 2000

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NZ $8.00 inc GST
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Welcome to Woop Woop

→ Welcome to the Bring It On issue, which despite the identical title, is not named in honour of the upcoming Roadshow release (though some members of the Cinema Papers office are partial to the occasional cheerleader). Rather, through October and November we’re saying ‘bring it on’ in celebration of so many Australian films, and OS films featuring the work of Australians, sizzling onto cinema screens.

→ It was difficult selecting a cover from eight strong films but the very sexy Better Than Sex came out a winner. Low fuss and cheeky, Jonathan Teplytzik’s debut feature proves strong direction, a focused script and a glimpse of David Wenham’s bum cheeks equals gold, gold, gold for Australia.

→ But readers will notice an omission from this issue’s chock-a-block review section (beginning p.40). Working Dog’s follow up to The Castle, The Dish, is not reviewed, despite it releasing the same week as publication of this issue. See Newsfront (p.6) for an explanation and Final Cut (p.8) for director Rob Sitch’s take on shooting under the Australian sun.

Working Dog is not among the nominees for AFI awards who will be attending the film industry’s biggest annual party at Sydney’s Fox Studios on November 18, allegedly because The Dish was not ready in time.

→ The makers of Chopper will definitely be in attendance, as will the team behind Looking for Alibrandi. Chopper lead Australia has been a favourite for the Best Actor award since before the film was released but the question on everyone’s lips is ‘will the real Chopper Read be invited to walk the red carpet after being snubbed at the film premieres?’ If Read does get a gait (which is extremely unlikely) last year’s post referendum brouhaha will look like a punch-up at a B&S.

→ If the AFI gave out marketing awards, and maybe its something they should consider, the team behind Looking For Alibrandi would be deserving recipients. From the outside Alibrandi appeared to be the slickest, most intelligent and well-funded campaign of the year. So we asked Roadshow distributor Joel Pearlman if that was actually the case (p.35).

→ In this issue we thought it was time to meet the new head of the censorship board, former Melbourne Mayor Des Clark. Mark Spratt, the bloke who loves making headlines by challenging the censorship board so he can distribute rude movies (Romance, etc) also wanted to meet Mr Clark. Their (edited) conversation, spiced up by lots of suitable pictures, is on p.26.

→ And Adrian Martin, bless his cotton socks, pirouetted with pleasure at our suggestion he write about the plethora of dancing movies being released at this time. Billy Elliot (UK), Center Stage (US), plus the homegrown features Bootmen and Kick, make for an extraordinary confluence of flounces, minces and shimmys not seen since the era of greatness that delivered Flashdance, Footloose and later Dirty Dancing. In Oz we had to wait until the early 90s for Strictly Ballroom but it seems the time has come again to cut loose, footloose...

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

MICHAEL BODEY is THE DAILY TELEGRAPH’S SHOWBiz EDITOR and a former film critic for the AGE.

ADRIAN MARTIN is a film reviewer for the AGE and is fascinated by dancing movies. He’s used to be a competition-winning tap dancer and has a great library of dance films.


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EMMA CRIMMINGS is co-EDITING a BOOK on AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILM and WORKS in ACQUISITIONS at CINEMATICA.

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ANUS Fontaine once lit Jack Nicholson’s cigarette and when not being sued works as a MERCENARY for various TABLOIDS and PERIODICALS while WRITING SCREENPLAYS on DEAD OR DYING AUSTRALIANS.

DARBY HUDSON CARTOONS for MONASH UNI’S COMPASS, MELBOURNE UNI’S FARRAGO AND SELF-PUBLISHES ON THE BACK OF TOILET DOORS AROUND MELBOURNE UNI.

EMMA SLOLEY is a SYDNEY-BASED WRITER who has written about a WIDE RANGE OF FILMS FROM BOYS DON’T CRY TO CHOPPER TO SUPA DUPA SANTA HER PARTNER’S FIRST SHORT FILM.
newsfront

Venice Triumph

→ At the Venice Film Festival in September, Cinema Papers’ cover chick Rose Byrne won the best actress award for her red-haired role in The Goddess of 1967. The Iranian film Dayereh (The Circle) won the Golden Lion Award for best film over 19 others. The US film Before Night Falls won the runner-up grand jury prize. Spanish actor Javier Bardem received the best actor award for his portrayal of dissident Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas in Before Night Falls.
→ Palace is releasing Clara Law’s Goddess in April 2000. As far as Cinema Papers can confirm the other titles do not have Australian distribution.
→ In Goddess Byrne portrays a 17-year-old blind girl who leads a Japanese bloke on an unusual journey through the outback in search of the seller of a 1967 Citroen.
→ The Silver Lion for the best short film was awarded to A Telephone Call for Genrevie Snow written and directed by Melbourne-based Peter Long and produced by Beth Frey. It stars Beth Buchanan.

They Can Dish It Out

→ There is no review of The Dish in this issue because the film’s production company, Working Dog, refused to screen it for magazine reviewers.
→ It was screened at Toronto where audience members voted it second favourite. The Dish was screened in August at the exhibition and distribution convention in BrisVegas but reviewers were not invited.
→ While The Dish is a better looking film than The Castle it doesn’t have the endearing caricatures and sharp comedy of its forerunner. The story and script are firmly middle of the road, in terms of intended audience and effect achieved. The pace is a little slow but The Dish is definitely no stinker. It should review rather nicely and play solidly to its intended multiplex audience. No surprises, no outstanding performances, a few laughs - why not screen it for magazine reviewers?

Safe As Banks

→ The producers of The Bank did not permit media set visits during their recent shoot in Melbourne. Producer John Maynard explained a small number of stills photographers were given more or less unrestricted access during filming and their photographs are likely to form an exhibition released with the film sometime during 2001.
→ Maynard explained in the first week of filming on location in Melbourne, the crew had been bothered by a freelance photographer working with a national daily paper who had staked-out the shoot all day before being ’called off’ by the publication. Additionally, according to Maynard, a TV crew camped outside the set. Which star was generating the interest? David Wenham or Anthony LaPaglia the producer mused?
→ Presumably Wenham was the hot property, but then again The Bank was shooting inside the Supreme Court. Perhaps the assembled media were not interested in the film at all but rather just doing their job as court reporters covering any number of trials underway in the vicinity?
→ We can all get a little ahead of ourselves at times.
→ Though, if true, it wouldn’t be the first time Wenham has been pursued by ’pap’. When making Better Than Sex earlier this year an unauthorized pic of Wenham getting out of bed was published by a Sydney daily.

Local Pay TV Enjoys Southern Exposure

→ In Adelaide’s South Australia Museum on August 17, the Discovery Channel premiered the results of its Southern Exposure First Time Filmmakers Initiative - a joint venture with the South Australia Film Corporation, funding six local filmmakers to produce Australian themed documentaries for $60,000.
→ Six filmmakers were selected in February this year and the documentaries were completed by August.
→ Megan Sloley reports there were two standout documentaries: Love.dot.com (Victoria Connors and Mark Hanlin) and Utopia Revisited (Cole Larsen and Robert Habel). Love.dot.com explored love and sex via a fascinating deconstruction of an internet romance while Utopia Visited, an unforgettable portrait of Aboriginal artist Barbara Weir, was arguably the most potent work. It tapped into the rich and quivering vein of stolen generation issues with respect and creative flair.
→ Ironically, the Discovery Channel launch occurred just days before a discussion paper highlighting the low level of new Australian content on

Oscar, Cesar, Madge

With a record number of films (25) lining up for AFI award nomination, entries have closed for the AFI’s name-the-gong competition. Official entries needed to be sent to The Australian newspaper but AFI staff report at least 10 faxes were received by their office suggesting the gong should be called a ‘Chips’ after Chips Rafferty. No comment there - no comment here.
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local Pay TV documentary channels was released.

Prepared in response to a brief from Communications Minister Alston, the paper examined the possibility of introducing lower limits for the amount of new Australian product screened on pay TV doco channels. Similar industry protectionism - pegged at 10 percent - currently regulates pay TV drama channels.

The compliance rate of the drama channels for the last financial year will be made public in early November but only two out of 17 channels complied in 98/99 when the requirement was voluntary.

At the end of March there were 1.2 million Pay TV subscribers shared between Austar, Foxtel and Optus. Seven million Australian homes have televisions.

Before 1997 The Discovery Channel was the only documentary option for Australian subscribers but there are now five doco channels: Discovery, National Geographic Channel, Odyssey, Animal Planet and The History Channel (part of Fox Kids). Combined, they broadcast over 30,000 hours of documentary product each year. Discovery and National Geographic are both part of global networks; Animal Planet is owned and operated by the Discovery network; Odyssey is fully Australian owned and operated and The History Channel is part of Fox Kids, airing between 6pm and 6am daily.

If the enforceable local expenditure requirement for pay TV doco channels is introduced here, at least one channel director believes the quality of programming may suffer. Discovery Networks’ director Ann Love says, “having to spend a percentage of budget on new Australian made product will result in lots of smaller, low budget documentaries... which is not a good thing if you want to get international producers involved on higher budgets.”

The ABA is due to report to Senator Alston’s office by December 18, 2000.

A Great Time To Shoot

While everyone else was enjoying the Olympics, Becker Films commenced production on the feature Subterano in the centre of Sydney. Starring Alex Dimitriades and Tasma Walton and helmed by Esben Storm, Subterano is about a virtual holographic game in which a killer hunts his victims through a subterranean maze.

Spokesperson Amanda Huddle explained because Subterano was a “high concept project” shot underground, it would be relatively unaffected by the Olympic goings-on. She added that while TV crews were earning big Olympic bucks, feature film crews were not necessarily as busy.

Dear Ms Boland,

Just a quick note to say that, as an occasional purchaser of CP, I was pleased to see its jump in quality and approachability since you’ve arrived. Sometimes I used to read the damn thing and feel completely out of it, like I needed to go to Rusden to read it. It was interesting but dense with facts and seemed too ‘industry’ for the more casual reader - so congrats!!

Troy Hunter, Melbourne.

We’ve decided to print just one of the many kind notes received over the last two months. While we appreciate the ongoing support and welcome the congratulations, we are also keen to receive mail taking up issues published in the magazine. – Ed.

Peter Long, director of A Telephone Call for Genevieve Snow, which won the Silver Lion for best short film at Venice in September.

Beth Frey the producer, my partner Kate Ellis and I are sitting in the auditorium watching the live TV broadcast of what is going on outside, celebrities we don’t know being interviewed by an obsequious reporter as they strut down the catwalk into the theatre. It’s all in Italian but it’s amazing how much you understand from the body language and the fact that you’ve seen this sort of thing before on TV and know pretty much what the questions and the answers are. Rod Steiger is talking half in English and half Italian about how if you want something done in Italy on Friday you tell them to do it on Tuesday.

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There’s no light like Australian light

How *The Dish* became the biggest reflector board in cinematic history.

> I’m fascinated by Australian light. When I say that, people look at me kinda weird but there’s definitely something about it. You know the second you get off the plane you’re back home. Well it’s either the light or seeing airport workers in shorts.

> We shot our most recent film smack-bang in the middle of the winter solstice and I swear it still looks like it’s high summer. I can’t get over that. It’s the lowest that the sun ever drops and you’d swear it’s a day of total fire ban.

> I enjoy fishing shows, not surprisingly. One of the things you notice about them is that the host’s eyes are usually concealed behind sunglasses-cum-radiation shields. If you’re shooting anywhere in Australia that’s almost essential, especially if you want your retinas to accompany you into your 60s. Since the eyes are the window to the soul, we’d do our best to shoot with our sunglasses off.

We attempted this one day on a far north Queensland beach known throughout the world for the whiteness of its sand! Did I say that Australian light is brutal! Eyes may indeed be the window to the soul but not when they look like they’ve been sprayed with tear gas.

> Having said that, the shots were quite magnificent. Making *A River Somewhere* was a good way to come at the problem. You can be nimble with a tiny crew. Cinematographer and filmmaker Terry Carlyon shot our first episode. It was through his eyes that our obsession with Australian light began. He didn’t just shoot the light, he seemed to stalk it, always looking for an angle or a change that made the composition special. Occasionally he’d look up at the sun and then around him and give a nod, as if to say, “It’s on, if you want to do anything, do it now.”

> We shot the next 12 episodes with a young cinematographer called Joanne Donahue. Her version of this nod, often given from the other side of a river valley, was two thumbs up and a big broad smile that raised lighting conditions a half stop. We shot all over the world and the conditions at every location managed to produce Joanne’s big smile and yet Australia was always different. Somehow the knobs here are turned to eleven.

> That’s fine for programs that emphasise landscape but people don’t look great when they’re bathed in the white light you see in near-death experiences. We were originally going to shoot *The Dish* in late summer. This fact worried me. Our schedule meant that we’d have to shoot in the middle of the day and in those conditions people either look like they’ve had dermabrasion or they’re wearing that mask from *Scream*. Not that there’s a shortage of solutions. At one point I was intending to put up a scrim over an area roughly the size of Taiwan. Unfortunately all these things take time and there’s one undeniable fact about Australian filmmaking; we have plenty of light, but very little time.

> I asked John Seale about it one day. I hadn’t intended to but it was one of those clear blue days in Sydney when you need sunglasses made like a welding mask. He smiled, shook his head and said, “It is pretty brutal.”

He’d just got back from shooting in Italy. Personally, I find the light there too far around and we got hit with the total fire ban.

> We shot all over the world and the conditions at every location managed to produce Joanne’s big smile and yet Australia was always different. Somehow the knobs here are turned to eleven.

> I’ve no doubt it requires a number of factors. Magnificent weather in the dead of winter is just plain wonderful. You’d find us all warming our faces with the morning sun. I guess that’s not a bad gauge; if your instinct is to seek the sun rather than the shade, conditions are good. Also, we built a bunch of scale models that had pointers to where the sun would be coming from for all the outside locations. This simple sense of direction was something John Seale suggested. That paid big dividends.

> At one stage the telescope rotated too far around and we got hit with the full power of a 210 feet diameter white reflector board on a bright sunny day. We had the look of Richard Dreyfuss in front of the largest reflecting telescope in the Southern Hemisphere, it could be moved to point in any direction you wanted... and it was painted white! I think it’s fair to say it became the largest reflector board in the history of cinematography.

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> It reproduced what I love about our light without giving a hint of the light we have to have to avoid squinting eyes. That combined with a second unit that seemed to live in the first and last light of the day gave us so much of what we wanted without having to extend the shoot. I’m sure there’s a thousand ways to skin this cat, so I guess, in the end, this was just one way that seemed to work. There’s an interesting postscript to this. We were always going to go back...
At every moment, film is close to dance.

And not just in musicals, either. All it takes is a spark of rhythm in the image or on the soundtrack, coupled with the slightest trace of a stylised body movement.

John (‘Stayin’ Alive’) Travolta turns his stride down a Brooklyn pavement into a dance at the start of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). In David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), a besotted teen stumbles backwards through a schoolyard after his girlfriend has smiled at him – and, for a few magic moments, the sympathetic motion of all the other kids walking through the frame, plus the sudden, subtle, walking-bass beat in Angelo Badalamenti’s floating score, transform the action into a fragment of a Stanley Donen musical like *The Pajama Game* (1957) or *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954).

In Leos Carax’s *Mauvais Sang* (Bad Blood, 1986), the punk-acrobat Denis Lavant begins to limp down the street, accompanied by the sound of David Bowie’s “Modern Love” on a nearby radio – but then he walks, and then he runs, faster and faster, the camera framing his entire body in an unbroken, bustling movement, as the song detaches itself from humble reality and fills the whole film. Even in the days of silent cinema, this feeling of ever-potential dance existed: Eric Rohmer (An Autumn Tale, 1999) has celebrated the way in which German cinema’s old master, F. W. Murnau (*Nosferatu*, 1922), could turn the slightest passage of a character through an architecturally defined space – a vampire cruising...
under an archway, a man searching for his beloved in high, wild, billowing reeds - into a lyrical and expressive ballet.

→ Cinema is always close to dance, but the historical relationship of the two has been, and remains, sadly fractured. Every major form of dance has found its own, discrete ‘ghetto’ in film, robbing us of the pleasure of their unforeseen combinations. Popular dance forms, from tap to the macarena, are the province of the musical - which has long experimented with the integration of plot, characters and spectacle. ‘High art’ dance forms such as ballet once formed the basis for concert films, and now hide out in slots on ‘quality’ television channels - too often shot in an unimaginative, ‘proscenium arch’, documentary mode, as if Michael Powell’s sublime The Red Shoes (1948), with its central ballet rated by one veteran critic as “the peak of cinema”, had never existed. Finally, modern and avant garde dance forms, often partnered with the formal risks of experimental cinema (as in Raul Ruiz’s dazzling Mammarma, 1986), take refuge in specialist, ‘fringe’, artworld events like the local Reel Dance festival. Yet dance is making a concerted comeback right across the cinematic board at present. Lars von Trier’s already much-debated Dancer in the Dark, starring Björk, is a hybrid of European art film and Hollywood musical. Claire Denis’ Beau Travail, a hit on the Australian Film Festival circuit, ends with a flamboyant dance sequence - again featuring the amazing body of Lavant - and subtly infuses stylised, choreographed group movement into seemingly ‘normal’ scenes of daily life in the Foreign Legion. In the commercial realm, there is a sudden crowd of movies about ‘low’ and ‘high’ dancing: Billy Elliot from the UK, Center Stage from America, talk of a Dirty Dancing sequel. And two new Australian films, Dein Perry’s Bootmen and Lynda Heys’ Kick.

→ In Hollywood’s studio era, stars like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly developed their dance craft in and through film; their choreographic and directorial ideas helped shape the musical genre itself, while the possibilities of the cinematic medium influenced how they chose to dance. Nowadays, the situation is very different. Dance needs to be imported into film from outside - a popularfad, a prominent stage career, or an already established troupe. In a relatively small film industry like Australia’s, this kind of cultural importation of a neighbouring medium and its personnel can be canny and revitalising. Such was the drive behind Strictly Ballroom (1992): the mingling of the suburban ballroom dancing tradition with the rising star of Paul Mercurio and the playful artifice which director Baz Luhrmann had developed on stage. And Bootmen is transparently an attempt to take the elements of Perry’s successful Tap Dogs stage show - with its the mostly male, very hetero, ‘blue collar’ energy - and somehow coin a character-based narrative from it.

→ Musicals that not only feature dance but actively explore it as a subject (by centering on auditions, training, benefit concerts, comeback performances, and the like) tend to select between a small number of dramatic or comic premises. The stories are often about the discovery of the dancing vocation - the case for the young boy (played by Jamie Bell) in Billy Elliot - or the refinding of that lost vocation, as much for Sean (Adam Garcia) in Bootmen and Matt (Russell Page) in Kick as for Astaire in Vincente Minnelli’s classic The Band Wagon (1953).

→ Once the initial will to dance has been acknowledged by the hero, other, larger obstacles start to complicate the dream: class conflicts (the working class men in Bootmen and Billy Elliot regard dancing as a bourgeois affectation); changing cultural styles (virtually all modern dance films make the obligatory, respectful, awestruck nod to Astaire and Ginger Rogers in Top Hat [1935], but Sean in Bootmen realises the need to go beyond that model and be ‘modern’); technological challenges (Sean, like Gregory Hines in Nick Castle’s wonderful Tap [1989], makes his breakthrough by finding a way to electronically amplify tap shoes); and that ever-present split between the ‘high’ and ‘low’ arts of dance, which few films manage to mend satisfactorily, although most faithfully try. Then there are the problems of dance in relation to the building (or unbuilding) of the dancer’s personal identity. “Why can’t dancing be just fun?,” laments Jody (Amanda Schull) in Center Stage - and her teacher affirms that it is, while gradually inculcating in her the way to balance spontaneity with hard work; inspiration with discipline. The dance movie is a close cousin to the sports movie - as cleverly avowed in the opening, slow motion shot of Kick, where a balletically twisting hand against a clear sky finally catches a football - because it involves a quite similar set of issues: the generational clash of young talent and mature coach; the testing of the human body as ‘instrument’ and the ever-present threat of its physical injury; the limited time span in which the dance or sports star can truly ‘shine’ in their chosen profession; and, most profoundly, finding a workable relation between those moments of fantastic energy - and somehow coin a character-based narrative from it.

In a relatively small film industry like Australia’s, this kind of cultural importation of a neighbouring medium and its personnel can be canny and revitalising.
intensity in the spotlight (on the stage or the field) and the entire remainder of one’s lifetime.

→ Dance thus becomes a dramatic crucible in which the hero works through his or her flaws and limitations. Where, for little Billy Elliot, dance is a way to release the inner fire of frustrated rage, to literally smash through the walls of social confinement, Aussie dancers tend to have a somewhat more matter-of-fact, less romantic approach to personal overcoming. In Bootmen, the hero and his older, now crippled, mentor (played by William Zappa) argue mainly over whether or not a dancer should ever ‘improvise’. This is a homely, scaled-down version of Strictly Ballroom’s guiding theme, encapsulated in its repeated motto, “a life lived in fear is a life half lived”. Dance in these Australian movies is about individual courage, not social revolution – as it was, for instance, in the floridly modernist and fiercely political dance spectacles from Latin America, China and Hungary during the 60s and 70s.

→ Above all, dance movies like to explore issues of sexual identity, and the influence of family. Bootmen, Kick and Billy Elliot all deal with the taint of gayness that attaches itself to a man who chooses to dance for a living (Perry’s film seems even uptight or defensive on this point). All these heroes struggle with the problem of having an overly stern father and a deceased mother – although (as in Strictly Ballroom and Billy Elliot) grandmothers who still possess the soul of rhythm come in handy as nurturing, maternal figures and plot resolvers.

→ Perhaps even more important than the plot elements in such stories is the style in which they are rendered. Hollywood’s classic musicals of the 40s and 50s devised a fine art from the many ways and means of getting into and out of a song and dance number. Walking leads to dancing which resolves itself ultimately in a graceful exit from the scene by tramcar or skateboard; humble ‘diegetic’ music (as played or heard within the plot itself) is quickly taken over by an other-worldly, ‘extra-diegetic’ orchestra, and finally returned to the bare bones of its original setting. However it happens, the crucial thing is that we feel and experience the birth of a rhythm, the swelling of a song and the explosion of a dance in synchrony as a primal, animating force: it includes everybody and everything, colour and camera movement as well as characters and plot, and it remakes the whole world as it catches alight.

→ Many contemporary dance films, even those with the best intentions and citations, have lost the secret of animating rhythm (for that, we need to open our eyes to the still flourishing traditions of Hindi and Egyptian musicals). Too often today, numbers simply start and end, rather than building up and dying away. Those movies that lead up to a big showbiz finale often seem suddenly scared of boring us, and so whisk the song and dance action away after a cascade of edited ‘highlights’ – this happens in both Billy Elliot and Bootmen.

→ Most damaging of all is the adoption of a widespread, MTV-derived editing and post-production technique. No longer are the dancers’ gestures allowed to work in a synchronous, dynamic, unified way with the music, the moving camera and a precise, pre-visualised sequence of edit points. Rather, the dance is reduced to a random bunch of pictorial flourishes or swirls (slowed down, sped up, shot from half a dozen angles and then frantically intercut), and the editing takes its cue from the metronomic beat of the music – which, for all its technologised splendour, seems awfully removed from the real space in which the dancers move and interact. Strictly Ballroom, Bootmen, Kick and Billy Elliot all fall prey to this terrible stylistic temptation; it’s certainly fun to hear rousing pop tracks like John-Paul Young’s “Love is in the Air” (Strictly Ballroom) or T-Rex’s “Ride a White Swan” (Billy Elliot) yoked to a story of dance – but where is that truly exciting, intricate fusion of sound and image?

→ Center Stage, set in a New York ballet school, is my favourite of the current dance films. Director Nicholas Hytner stages a splendid confusion of free dance, rigorous training and everyday activities – in the busy plot line, and in the multi-planes of many
shots. Carol Heikkinen’s script absorbs elements of melodrama, ‘backstage musical’ and comedy of manners, creating a smooth patchwork that is all at once (and without too much camp) reminiscent of 42nd Street (1933), Fame (1980), A Chorus Line (1985) and The Turning Point (1977).

Like The Red Shoes, Center Stage evokes the delightful imbrication of art and life (power intrigues mirroring classic operatic situations, lovers who move together both on and off stage), while also addressing the fateful problem of how to ultimately untangle them. The film takes on two dominant dance styles – a strict form of classical ballet, with its grand tradition, and a looser, free version of it inspired by salsa dancers in nightclubs – and maps this distinction onto two powerful and treacherous teachers: Reeves (Peter Gallagher, never better) and Cooper (the charismatic Ethan Stiefel). When it comes time for the final show, it’s Cooper’s wild and sexy soapie-in-dance that really sparks Hytner’s cinematic imagination: like in a Busby Berkeley number, the stage limits of time and space are magically dissolved and transcended.

What is most wonderful about Center Stage is its ceaseless flow, its movement, its rhythm – its sense of all things as infused with dance (like the wonderful detail of a dancer butting out a cigarette with a classically arched foot). This is what I miss in our MTV-influenced era, when song’n’dance routines burst forth as isolated ‘numbers’, rigorously separated as spectacle from the rest of a movie’s world. In a way, this disconnection chimes in with one of the chief intuitions of film theory devoted to the musical genre: that the intense, ecstatic, emotional release, and – even more strongly – the ‘utopia’, the perfect world or heaven on earth embodied in singing and/or dancing is merely fleeting, ephemeral, illusory, impossible.

The ‘consumption’ of music or movies or theatrical spectacles is often portrayed in grey terms, as an utterly passive pastime. But viewing and listening are never passive: the body is always engaged by rhythms and energies, always caught up in an infectious wave of transmitted or communicated feeling. That’s what these riskier films about the confusion of art and life are all about: grabbing that energy – which may simply manifest itself at first in a tapping of toes, the humming of a tune, the excited movement of eyes or the quickening of a heartbeat – and taking it along with you to somewhere else, investing it in the actions and movements of daily life, and thereby transforming them. Bootmen at least gives us one terrific set-piece on this theme: the dancers practising their moves and banging out their rhythms on the industrial, factory machinery they operate every day.

Where, for little Billy Elliot, dance is a way to release the inner fire of frustrated rage, to literally smash through the walls of social confinement, Aussie dancers tend to have a somewhat more matter-of-fact, less romantic approach to personal overcoming.
In a cinema not so far away

There’s a brave new world of digital broadcasting just around the corner but Angus Fontaine reports as far as the cinema industry is concerned, everyone just wants to know who’s going to foot the bill.

They say cinema is up for grabs.

But the fate of 21st century filmmaking was probably decided a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. It was June 1, 1977 and George Lucas was sitting in a diner on Hollywood Boulevard morosely picking over a cooling burger and fries while over the road, at Mann’s Chinese Theatre, Star Wars was having its premiere. Having endured a mutinous shoot and harrowing edit, Lucas was dreading the reaction to the film he had taken to calling “a $10 million dollar trailer”. At best, he thought, Star Wars would gross “eight, maybe ten million”. But one thing, he thought, was for sure: mass humiliation was in the post and his reputation as a director in ruins.

→ Five months and US$193.5 million later, Lucas had changed his tune. His vapid space opera – which as he initially put it, was “the story of Mace Windu, a revered Jedi-bendu of Opuchi who was related to Usby C.J. Thape, padawaan learner of the famed Jedi” – had surpassed Steven Spielberg’s Jaws to become the biggest money-maker of all time.

→ Lucas quickly became arguably the most powerful man in Hollywood, capable of demanding – and getting – an unprecedented 77 percent of the gross of all sequels, not to mention the merchandising and video rentals. Even when it was re-released in 1997, the Star Wars trilogy grossed another US$250 million and today it is estimated to have earned upwards of US$3 billion dollars, most of it syphoned into George’s geek wonderland in the California foothills – a sprawling totem to New Hollywood’s ongoing belief in the power of technology over poetry.

→ Lucas’s contemporaries were appalled. Robert Altman called it “the death of film”. Martin Scorsese railed against Lucas’ claim that Star Wars’ success subsidised smaller filmmakers. “They’re not subsidising everything else,” he said. “They’re smothering everything.”

→ As William Friedkin [The French Connection] told journalist Peter Biskind in his book Easy Riders, Raging Bulls, Lucas “swept all the chips off the table. What happened with Star Wars was like when McDonalds got a foothold, the taste for good food just disappeared,” he raged. “Now we’re in a period of devolution. Everything has gone backward toward a big sucking hole.”

→ Twenty-three years on, everything still sucks. But nowadays there’s a new pie in the sky. It’s called ‘digital broadcasting’. This ‘floater’ looms larger than Darth’s Death Star and once more it is piloted by George Lucas, the man who once said that “emotionally involving the audience is easy... get a little kitten and have some guy wring its neck.”

→ The digital ship of industry was until recently hovering over Fox Studios Australia, where Lucas was shooting Episode II – which when released in 2002 will form the insipidly twinkling showpiece for the bold new era of digital projection.

→ For many in the industry digital broadcasting is a natural progression. In a world where the new Sony Playstation 2 comes equipped with a phone line, internet access, and a DVD video player with high resolution graphics, the imminent arrival into cinemas of digital projectors controlled by a central broadcaster shouldn’t surprise anyone. It’s a wonderful life but it’s a wireless world.

→ The advantages of digital are manifold. To a director, one of the prime attractions is that it allows pronto playback (no more ‘waiting for rushes’), thereby allowing filmmakers to view footage immediately it is recorded and alleviating the need to recall crews to re-shoot the same scene weeks or months later at cost.

→ Digital cameras also have special built-in channels for recording data, such as focus position and width of lense, critical stuff when you’re putting a film together and which until now has been laboriously taken down by hand.

→ However, for some directors the loss of celluloid represents a further dilution of the filmmaker’s art. Animated movies aside, the digital imagery we’ve seen so far has been criticised by many...
Still, it's early days. And you've got to make Plan 9 From Outer Space before you can attempt 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Lucas's use of digital imagery in Star Wars: Episode I drew widespread criticism from not only purists who saw their craft being eroded by machines but by audiences who craved the comfort that comes with watching a large man in a Wookie suit rather than a clunky animation like Jar Jar Binks.

→ Still, it's early days. And you've got to make Plan 9 From Outer Space before you can attempt 2001: A Space Odyssey.

"One of the main disadvantages at this stage is that digital film doesn't have the resolution of 35mm," says Peter Giles, Head of Digital Media at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. "With such a low resolution and high rate of compression, the high definition images on digital are going to be inferior. And if you were shooting a very sophisticated FX sequence today you'd have no choice but to shoot on 65mm to achieve that look."

→ Giles says the AFTRS will be conducting trials later in the year where students shoot the same scenes using digital technology and traditional film and then matching them up. "A lot of people on the cinematography side will remain committed to film as a medium but I think people will adjust and adapt and pretty soon we'll see a lot of merging between the two mediums."

→ While he admits digital images at this stage tend to look "too clean and crisp", Giles says that both filmmakers and audiences will adjust. "You've got to remember that this is first generation technology and it will get better very fast. The resolution will improve, the confusion over pixilation ratios and aspect ratios of film will get ironed out and the skills used on film cameras and digital cameras will cross over. People said that radio was going to die when television came in, too."

→ But as sure as good will triumph over evil in Star Wars, digital cinema is coming -- and fast. Disney Studios have already committed to 100 percent digital content by the end of 2002 and all the major Australian exhibitors are beavering away on re-search estimating what it will cost to implement the digital systems while duelling with the studios and distributors as to who's going to cough up the cash.

→ "There is no question that the technology will come about," says Paul Johnson, managing director of Hoyts, "but there are so many factors that need to be considered. One is that all the studios have got to make a unified decision that they're going to release their films in digital format. On that front some studios are progressing. Some are not."

→ Hoyts has begun investing heavily in studies into different types of projectors, their longevity and maintenance, says Johnson. "But taking into account the number of screens around the world and the number of exhibitors, particularly in the US, who are in financial trouble, the biggest question is still who's going to pay for it?"

→ At the moment it's a Mexican stand-off between the chicken and the egg. A digital projector is expected to retail for upwards of $250,000 compared with a traditional projector which costs $30,000. The price of the equipment won't come down until the number of people buying them goes up. However, after that initial expenditure, the projected savings in switching to digital are enough to have everyone salivating into their popcorn.

→ Studios will win in production costs and development and a central broadcaster will negate the need to supply multiple prints to worldwide distributors. They, in turn, will win on freight costs. The estimated savings involved in shipping six DVD discs weighing 200g compared with six canisters of film weighing 30kg are clearly stupendous. And just wait until they're beamed in via optical fibre cables or satellite. Then there's the longevity of digital film.
“It’s an expensive transition and while there are going to be huge reductions in transport and shipping, in the end it’s the presentation that matters. No one is going to go down the digital road until it’s watertight.”

Robert Slaviero, Managing Director, Twentieth Century Fox.

which allows longer runs in cinemas.

"We’re watching the US very closely," says Robert Slaviero, MD of Twentieth Century Fox distributors, "and from what we’ve seen it looks like we’ve got about two years to put the pieces in place. From our perspective, the timing has got to be right. It’s an expensive transition to make and while there are going to be huge reductions in transport and shipping, in the end it’s the presentation that matters. And no one is going to go down the digital road until it’s watertight."

Central to the issue of digital broadcasting is achieving an equilibrium between studios, distributors and exhibitors as to who subsidises who and how much.

"It’s a matter of the wealth being distributed correctly," says Russell Scott, head of Entertainment Technology Imaging Systems at Greater Union. "The biggest challenge to digital broadcasting is the introduction of films on DVD may open the floodgates to mass piracy."

"It’s a very serious concern," says Scott. "If I can send my Visa details down the line to conduct an ecommerce transaction and feel safe in doing so then there will be better minds than mine capable of transporting movie content with a high level of security."

Slaviero concurs. "With the amount of piracy taking place in Asia at the moment, anything is going to be an improvement. At the moment there are big leaps being taken in equipping digital discs with different methods of inscripted coding that will go a long way to protecting a film’s distribution."

While Lucas has chosen us as his testing ground for digital filming, Australia is far from a pioneer in this field. Most of the action is in the US, Europe and Japan. In the past 12 months there has been a frenzy of dramatic acquisitions as big companies snap up small-time manufacturers capable of delivering digital projectors for the boom they see as imminent.

The biggest mover has been the Toronto-based company at the cutting edge of inscription, Qualcom, a satellite communications company which after many years “in denial” has realised that change is imminent and so invested significant time and resources into the new hardware.

Lucas’ approach to film-making fits nicely with the Canadian tech company Christie, which fell over itself to supply the director with a Roadster X4 digital projector for the shooting of Episode II.

To Lucas, the Roadster X4 digital projector fit perfectly with his vision of the digital cinema of the future. For an obsessive post-production guru like Lucas, this is perfect. He can view dailies immediately and move on with minimal interaction with his actors or crew – the two components of filmmaking he is least comfortable with.

Lucas may be a 'pioneer' in the digital age but he remains an insular man who, it is easy to forget, has only directed four feature films in 30 years – THX 1138, American Graffiti, Star Wars and The Phantom Menace.

Famous for his habit of plunking the camera down on sticks and shooting what goes on in front of it, Lucas’ kit-bag of moves for actors reputedly contains just two instructions: “OK, same thing, only better” and “Faster, more intense.” And as a writer, Lucas falls somewhere between Barbara Cartland and The Jetsons. The “inexorable mumbo-jumbo” endured by the first Obi-Wan Kenobi, Alec Guinness, must surely now be wearing thin with the second, Ewan McGregor. However, it was Harrison Ford who famously summed up Lucas’s idea of poetry in cinema: “George, you can type this shit, but you sure can’t say it.”

Yet, it is the fact that Lucas is not a director’s director – like his generational nemesis Scorsese and Coppola – that the success of digital broadcasting rests on his shoulders. Ideas haven’t been currency in Hollywood since Brando was buff. And if you want to get the folks into the cinemas you’ve got to go big – big stars, big budgets, big explosions, big tits, big concepts.

It’s like Lee Marvin said – money talks and bullshit walks. The general consensus is that within the next 12 to 24 months we can expect digital projectors in cinemas for, at least, advertising and corporate presentation purposes. Greater Union has already made the moves in this direction by installing 4x3m screens in metropolitan railway stations in Sydney carrying advertising sent down the line from a unit in Sydney’s west.

From there expect a t-commerce revolution. Multi-screen sports events allowing you to flick to any player or zone on the field. Interactive lifestyle shows where Bert Newton tells you the only way to acquire that exquisite porcelain china dildo is to press a button on your remote and enter your credit card details. And cinemas worldwide premiering films that within 24 hours will be seen from Berlin to Bermagui and West Hollywood to Wangaratta.

But by then we’ll be ready for the comeback of Beta VCRs anyway.
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Australian animation history will be made this Christmas with the release of Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*. Animation director Robbert Smit details how the much-loved children’s book came to life in celluloid.

It was no surprise Norman Lindsay’s much-coveted book *The Magic Pudding* was packed full of drama. An Australian classic with many layers of public acceptance and individual interpretations, it was a wild beast just waiting to be realised for the cinema. One October morning in 1997 the giant oak doors to the Sydney's Mitchell Library were opened and the film’s key creatives and me were asked to be seated in a room reminiscent of another age. A pristine young librarian walked in carrying a book that could have anchored the Titanic. Deliberately she placed it on the table before us and with white gloved hands she slowly started to turn the pages to hundreds of original Norman Lindsay drawings. From that moment we knew we had something big to consider and evaluate.

- Popular children’s author Morris Gleitzman’s script adaptation started the ball rolling. It was a masterful interpretation of character and dialogue, modified to please a modern and discerning public. With the help of additional writers headed by Karl Zwicky, a working animation script and a new villain were developed.
- Unlike most animated scripts, this script was scrutinised by storyboard artists and animators who massaged and developed the characters before passing notes and scribbles back to the writers, who then reworked the written version. This was a time-consuming but essential part of the script pre-production process.
- In addition, we animators compiled an animatic tape of the entire 82-minute film, a complete storyboard edited to dialogue, and rough song sequences. It was an invaluable tool to check story points, character development and dramatic content.
So many times I have seen adaptations of well-known public properties totally changed from their original intention. But why change something the public knows and loves? We ensured the established characters remained true to their origin, and any new characters were treated in a way that could plausibly come from a Norman Lindsay drawing. We used many of Lindsay’s other works as inspiration to finalise the exhaustive process of final character, prop and background design. A new character, the villainous Uncle Buncle went through many changes and finally came into being using some of Lindsay’s anti-establishment inspired characters. Well-defined character profiles became an essential part of the "model pack".

A rigorous schedule of more than 1200 complex layouts had to be produced. A team of 12 people took six months to produce the layouts detailing camera moves, director’s notes and SFX instructions. In addition, the background stylisation and design work commenced. Headed by the highly creative Kelly Wallwork and Helen Steele the team sought to capture accurately the light and subtleties of the Australian landscape. Beautiful backgrounds emerged.

It was decided that backgrounds should be created by computer rather than the more traditional hand-painted style. Sceptical at first of this decision, I have to admit my initial fears quickly disappeared when I saw the results that were emerging. The paint palettes and subtle light sources that were achieved in digital camera and paint box soon outshone the more traditional ways in both quality and time.

We used Energee’s E-Paint and the Toonz platforms for this production. Every drawing had to be scanned, painted and composited to 300 DPI resolution. Keep in mind that our images had to withstand enlarging to a wide screen cinema format — ah, the unforgiving large screen. Each scene in one
Smit's team created a new character for the film, Uncle Buncle, which didn't exist in Norman Lindsay's book.

With character's voices and Chris Harriet's music recorded, and all pre-production in place, the massive task of animation started. With all our available local talent already engaged elsewhere we had difficulty staffing this production.

way or another had special effect requirements — The Magic Pudding's transitions, Uncle Buncle's underground light sources, rain and mist effects. Many of these were developed by an in-house special effects team. All 3D components were created by Digital Pictures using their inferno facilities with an uncompromising and dedicated team.

→ Mostly I love the new digital media although I sense a visual uniformity. Often line variations or styles so easily achieved in traditional hand painted methods now suffer from having to be computer-friendly. The broken line look or soft pencil techniques can be created but are time consuming and costly. A production of The Magic Pudding's size has no alternative but to consider all these digital requirements, as they have a big impact on budget and timing. At times there were more than 30 levels in a single scene to composite, unheard of or largely impossible in more traditional methods.

→ With character's voices and Chris Harriet's music recorded and all pre-production in place, the massive task of animation started. With all our available local talent already engaged elsewhere we had difficulty staffing this production. Overseas animation companies had to be employed to meet deadline requirements, something we did not want to do. Fil-cartoon and Akom did most of this work, not an easy task with language and cultural differences in interpreting Australian characterisation and lip sync requirements. I spent many months overseas briefing animators. Line tests were sent back and forth via the web and edited to dialogue for final adjustments and approvals.

→ The pressures of producing more than 8000 feet of animation were enormous and pushed a lot of us to the limits. Kylie Andrews and Ed Trost carried most of the production brunt, daily monitoring and
The many faces of Possum, Wombat and the dreaded Uncle Buncle circa 98.

Albert the magic pudding emerges...

above: Jan 98 sketches
below: Feb 99 line drawing is approved.

Very early character sketches.

In all his glory

below left and right: First the back drop then...
featuring town mayor Dobson Dawkins, Bunyip, Sam Sawnoff and Bill Barnacle, this scene was left on the cutting room floor.

scheduling were an essential part of keeping the production on course. Approved animated scenes were then scanned and digital ink and paint commenced.

Excitement mounted as we saw our first coloured rushes with backgrounds intact. Compositors and editors were now in full swing, screenings at Atlab, film printing at Cinevex, track laying with Phil Sound and many other integral processes of this production started to come together.

Credit goes to Energee Entertainment's Gerry Travis for acquiring the rights to The Magic Pudding, raising the capital and trusting the abilities of his selected team. Not many animated feature length films are made in this country. Consequently production teams and personnel do not get the opportunity to get formulated with a cohesive and ongoing industry network. Cohesion is further frustrated by the lack of funding and conservative film strategies (but that's another story).

I even notice a large gap between the traditional animators (myself included) and the digital breed of animators. It seems not much interaction has occurred. The Magic Pudding has opened some eyes and a greater understanding and appreciation has emerged. There are so many people I would like to mention that have contributed to this massive project. Steven Doric, Cindy Bower, Danny Fowley, Tim Pieman and Jo Boag, are among the people with exceptional skills and have made what we now see as The Magic Pudding.
How good are our digital to film transfers?

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At AAV, we're very proud to have completed the digital to film transfer for the new animation epic The Magic Pudding. It was a transfer that ensured that the beautifully detailed images that the animators saw on their monitors, were completely identical to what they saw on the big screen. But please don't take our word for it. Go catch The Magic Pudding and see the evidence for yourself.
Money changes everything

Even history

The popular release of director Andrew Dominik’s Chopper raises a serious question to those of us in the film industry: is truth a critical part of filmmaking? The film is great, (Eric Bana you rock), but it is an interpretation of a real man’s life and thus must be judged as more than a fiction. I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.” I think it was Charlie Chaplin who once said, “there are more valid fiction.”

Many films claim - for different reasons perhaps – to represent the truth, but when I looked closely at some of my favourite films I learned that maybe I need to be a little more discerning when sitting in my favourite red velvet seat.

World cinema today has split in two. There are many films, particularly in the US studio system, which are purely commercial ventures, only concerned with box office. Then there are those films made by the people who consider themselves artists and storytellers. Most films sit somewhere in the middle, maybe leaning to one side.

However, the question remains: should a film strive to maintain its original vision for commercial gain?

The studios creating entertainment for financial success are usually dealing with subject matter not unlike fairytales, usually putting an average person into an extreme situation (Armageddon, Con Air, Die Hard, Star Wars, Lethal Weapon, M-I-2). But it is the other true storytelling genre that presents the more important moral challenge. Does a filmmaker have a responsibility to stay true to the story when recreating it for the screen? Or is the story open to the filmmaker’s interpretation?

One of the best examples is Oliver Stone’s JFK. Stone acknowledged he took dramatic licence with JFK. Due to the audience’s naivety about the facts surrounding the case, critics argued viewers were at the filmmaker’s mercy and they worried about the “thought reshaping potential” of the film even though Stone did not place a disclaimer on the film claiming that it was a true story.

JFK stimulated considerable discussion about the obligations of filmmakers in recreating historically-based works. Some argued it was a great film and brilliant propaganda... all film artists create works with points of view and should be judged as such. They argued that controlling a filmmaker’s point of view is censorship, basically arguing that art and journalism do not share the same obligations. But why not? This is where the filmmaker’s dilemma lies. Most viewers without knowledge of the subject matter are going to take on board the filmmaker’s view. This, I guess, is both a blessing and a curse for filmmakers. Stone obviously believes the US government killed JFK. His role as a moviemaker gives him a powerful tool to promote his theory.

JFK is sometimes called a “faction” film – it combines fact with fiction. Steven Spielberg did this to great effect in Schindler’s List. Based on a true story by Australian writer, Thomas Keneally, who interviewed nearly 50 survivors of the Holocaust saved by Schindler, Spielberg’s film did not stick directly to the book. The character of Itzhak Stern, Schindler’s Jewish accountant (Ben Kingsley), is actually a collection of real characters rolled into one, an invention of the screenwriter, Steven Zaillian. Spielberg used this character as Schindler’s conscience; he used his directorial licence to make the story more appealing to the viewer. Although only minimal, it is a distortion within a film dedicated to maintaining the memory of the Holocaust.

Through his film, Spielberg sparked renewed interest in the Holocaust and made the world aware of Oskar Schindler. But where should the line be drawn? The film does not claim to be a documentary, it is an interpretation of a novel based on a true story. The changes do not alter the central premise of the film, the central story of this man’s fight against the injustices taking place. Is it just the premise of a true story that is important, or is it the finer details?

Shine – pianist David Helfgott’s life story, based on a book written by his wife, was deeply criticised by David’s sister. She argues the film completely misrepresents their family, particularly their father who the film, in part, blames for many of David’s problems. Is David’s wife’s story truth enough to base a “true story” on? I believe essentially yes, it’s her story of what happened, although does anyone doubt that David, after shitting in the bath, was whipped with a wet towel by his father? I don’t, and I base that entirely on the film.

Another interesting type of film is that which tells a fictional story yet is set against a real, historical backdrop. Hugely successful in Australia, Gallipoli won nine AFI awards and is now used in schools and universities as a representation of the Gallipoli landing. Did Australian soldiers have a stronger ‘mateship’ with each other than the British and were the British really sipping tea on another cove as ‘our boys’ were mowed down? I know only what I’ve seen in Peter Weir’s film, so a great responsibility lies with Weir to protect the truth of the story. Or should I just be more discerning, and see it as an interpretation? But doesn’t this lessen the impact of the story for me as a viewer?

The Holocaust is a fascinating example, because soon there will be no living survivors. The memories will be passed on to family descendants, historians and artists to be kept alive.

Also of importance is our own sorry history of a “stolen generation” of Aboriginal children. Either for legal or moral reasons the current ignorant and racist federal government won’t apologise, and continues to play down the issue.

In this case, it is important to remain as close to the facts as possible, to ensure the reality of the Holocaust is passed on truthfully. Also of importance, is our own sorry history of a “stolen generation” of Aboriginal children. Either for legal or moral reasons the current ignorant and racist federal government won’t apologise, and continues to play down the issue. We have a people here who have been treated shamefully and white Australia hasn’t formally apologised or acknowledged it. This must be done soon or we may lose the truth of what really happened – in my view, a government policy of cultural genocide.

We must know the facts and we must stick closely to them, ensuring all Australians know what really happened.

This year, actor Kick Gurry is still looking for Alibrandi.
Her name is synonymous with the Australian film industry. For more than 25 years she ran the representation and management agency Hilary Linstead and Associates. Having sold the company, re-named HLA, these days she works there as a consultant in a reduced capacity with a few key clients. One of those clients is Dein Perry, founder of the Tap Dogs dance troupe, creator of the stage show Steel City and co-creator of Tap Dogs and recently director of the feature film Bootmen, on which Linstead acted as producer. Bootmen is not Linstead's first producer's credit on a feature film but it's the credit she'd prefer everyone remembered.

In 1983 she number-crunch director Ned Lander’s children's film Molly. Starring Claudia Karvan, Ruth Cracknell and Garry McDonald, Molly was about a singing dog. Before that there was Phillip Noyce’s Heatwave which was accepted into director’s week at the Cannes Film Festival.

Linstead says the early 80s was a very long time ago, “I didn't know what I was doing in those days. With Heatwave all I did was package and cast it. I did raise the money but it was 10BA days when it wasn’t that hard. The kids’ film called Molly I had a soft spot for, but it didn’t really work.”

Cinema Papers: So that was enough already?
Hilary Linstead: I thought (producing) was too hard and I also thought it wasn’t much fun. People want producers to be business people sitting there number crunching and I didn’t want to do that, I’m perfectly prepared to do the job of raising the money because that’s what you’ve got to do but I didn’t want to stop there. I wanted to be part of the production in a real way with some reasonable expectation of being a creative producer.

CP: So creative input is the key?
HL: Absolutely, that’s the only interesting part of it. Raising money’s not fun.
CP: So how did you come to suggest Dein Perry make Bootmen?
HL: I had a hunch he would be a filmmaker, that he would make a film, that it wouldn’t be talking heads. The fact that he’s a choreographer, movement and rhythm are essential to his work. I think it’s really important in films and I also know he sees pictures.

CP: Who actually penned the script?
HL: Dein, Steve Worland and I wrote the story and Steve wrote the screenplay.
CP: How did that collaborative process work?
HL: Dein was mostly away with Steel City for the first two years that we were working on the script, so it was difficult. I had to keep ringing him up in the States. It wasn’t until the last six months that he actually became very active and he knew where we were at.

CP: What was your input?
HL: Just the story and editing.
CP: Is Bootmen your first script?
HL: With a story credit, yes. The thing is there were 12 people in front of the camera and behind the camera that had never done a film before.

CP: Well, how did you, as the producer, get $8 million dollars to put the project together?
HL: You’ve got to make the script and the package attractive enough that investors think they have a shot at making a profit.

CP: What were the key elements to the Bootmen project?
HL: The key element was unequivocally Dein's reputation. It worked both for and against him. He had a track record of success with Tap Dogs which was one positive. However, the fact that he’d never
directed anything was an extremely big negative. So there was a lot of persuading required but I suppose I thought there've been other first time directors who've brought it off, why not him? And this is at least something where the territory was very familiar. I knew the dance would be spectacular, I had a hunch that he could do it and he really wanted to direct it and we had wonderful help in terms of the actors. I have been a casting director for a very long time so people tend to trust me about talent, so maybe that's a help.

HL: Maybe. I can't tell you what hard work it is, it doesn't matter you could just be a tired old number and be put out to grass. (A history) doesn't necessarily work for you.

HL: You asked me how did I convince investors. Steve Mason who shot Strictly Ballroom seemed to be a likely person to shoot the dance. [Editor] Jane Moran I picked because she was a protégé of Jill Bilcock's and had worked with her a great deal. So it's the whole package with you as the conduit saying I'm convinced the sum of the parts -- though it contains weaknesses, they're balanced by strengths. For example, Kerry Walker, our drama coach, who worked with the boys. When they said 'None of the boys are actors'. So you say 'Well, they've got to be excellent dancers, we will work with them and I think it will be fine'. Of course I was nervous but I thought 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. You never get anywhere if you just do what people have done before.

HL: After working together for many years you must have a very close relationship with Dein.

HL: I wouldn't have agreed to produce it if I hadn't.

HL: How did you keep the other side of your business going when you were working on Bootmen?

HL: I took a sabbatical. I don't own the agency anymore and I haven't for some years. (These days) I look after Wendy Harmer and I sort of take more of a manager role with Dein now. As far as the film was concerned we talked about this a lot and we did it as a partnership; I couldn't move without him and he couldn't move without me.

HL: How did you secure a partnership with Fox Searchlight?

HL: I went to America and saw Lindsay Law (president, Fox Searchlight) and invited him to a Tap Dogs performance. The show was a huge success in Los Angeles so that was the first thing but then when I took the treatment to them they didn't like it, so that sent me into a decline. That's what I always used to tell clients 'don't go to the studio, don't go to anybody until you're good and ready because you only get one go'. I knew I'd gone too prematurely.

HL: So why did you go?

HL: Because I made a mistake. The show was on and I wanted to follow it up and so you make the mistake of going too soon. So then I went away and I didn't go back for 18 months. I didn't go near anybody until we worked and worked and worked on the screenplay and (completed) many, many, many drafts and on and on and on trying to refine it down. Then you put it out there and I did get good feedback from not just Fox, so we had a little flurry happening. The Film Finance Corporation came on at that stage with 50 percent of the money. Michaela Boland

Bootmen is currently screening.

See Michael Bodey's review in Cinema Papers 134.
Mark Spratt, the director of independent distribution company, Potential Films, is awaiting the outcome of an appeal to the censorship board. With a decision due any moment he is anxiously checking his watch and reaching for his mobile phone. 

No stranger to controversy, Spratt made front page news in January with his attempts to release Catherine Breillat's sexually explicit film *Romance*. Originally banned by the censors, *Romance* was given an R rating on appeal. Spratt's latest release *The Color of Paradise*, an Iranian film from the director of *Children of Heaven*, was classified M but Potential's release strategy depends on a PG rating. This is the decision he is waiting for. Spratt is attending the annual Movie Convention for distributors and exhibitors on Queensland's Gold Coast while the censorship board deliberates in Sydney. Another convention guest just happens to be the board's recently appointed chairman Des Clark. A former Mayor of Melbourne and former Chair of the Melbourne Film Festival, Clark and Spratt have never met.

*Cinema Papers* thought it might be interesting to introduce them and Michaela Boland recorded the following exchange.

→ Spratt: When you came to the job in April I remember reading an interview with you in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and it sounded to me like you wanted to stay out of the limelight.

→ Des comments that he doesn't believe he should enter public debate about contentious censorship issues because, as a bureaucrat, his job is at board level where he casts the deciding vote.

→ Spratt: That worries me a little bit and it was also worrying me at the time because there were so many new and inexperienced people on the board. There were a lot of people who really had no knowledge of the history of films, how films like that had been classified and how they'd fit in to the general scheme of things. I think following guidelines, as some of the classifiers obviously did with *Romance*, is just not an approach you can take.

There's got to be a broader understanding of the placement of the film within the film-going community. Certainly there's all sorts of church groups and people who write letters and so on with very strong agendas but they're not necessarily film-goers. (The board members) might think (these people) represent community standards which is not necessarily the case.

→ Clark: Everyone has an opinion about censorship, let me assure you, but (it's a debate) I'm not part of because I'm the person applying the act. (My personal...
There are too many inexperienced people in your office trained to apply these increasingly prescriptive guidelines and I think they might forget the common sense approach of ‘Where does the film generally sit?’

Mark Spratt
The members of the board are certainly not political in any way and they are from the community. They have a range of ages; some of them are quite young in their 20s and 30s.

Des Clark

→ Clark: The Senate Estimates is where the elected members have an opportunity to scrutinise what you do and what you’re doing; how you spend your money, what the proper democratic process is about. All proper and healthy stuff but that’s not pressuring us or making us accountable.

→ Spratt: (Tasmanian independent) Senator Harridine does make very strong demands of officers from the OFLC saying, ‘No, I do want this information. Why isn’t this happening? Can we expect more films to be banned?’ He does ask these questions.

→ Clark: Well, that’s his legitimate and proper right to ask those questions and to make us as accountable and open as we should be but that causes me no problem because that’s why he’s there. He’s doing his job and he happens to represent some particular point of view in the community but we continue to do our job as we are compelled to do by the Act of Parliament and from time to time the Senate might make some suggestions but they’re literally more. They have to go to the ministers and the Attorney General to be applied in law but there aren’t these informal networks of people pushing the Office around at all – it’s a very open process.

→ Spratt: The guidelines are open to personal interpretations so in your role if you felt some Board members were taking an excessively strict view of those guidelines over a period of time is there anything you would say?

→ Clark: I consider it to be part of the professional development for the Board. We have regular standards discussions so if there’s an element in films or magazines then everybody decides where it’s going to fit. So everybody has a debate around common experience regardless of where they personally sit. Same with particular issues that come up. Some of the ethnic communities, particularly the Arabic Council, are concerned with stereotyping of Arabic people in movies, especially American movies. That’s a big issue for the community so we’ll have someone from the Ethnic Communities Council come in and talk about those stereotyping issues and how they fit in with the classification process. When [making] a decision you say which line in the guidelines applies but yes, personal values can influence. The expectation of board members is that you remove your values and actually apply what is in the book.

→ Boland: But Mark’s arguing for greater personal interpretation.

→ Clark: Obviously people have their life experience that they bring into bear with classification and it has to be recognised as there but my task is to make them as objective as possible and I’m doing that through the training process.

→ Spratt: The other thing about the guidelines is community standards are a shifting sand and as someone was saying the other night on network television now the movies are shown without the fuck language and that cut out of them and it’s caused very little stir. Likewise I think one of the reasons I went as far as I could with Romance. [It contravened the guidelines with the explicit sex and all those kind of things] but I felt this film has actually been accepted all over the world. This kind of standard in cinema has not so much reached that level it’s actually come back to that level where it was some years ago. I thought this does seem to be accepted by communities and I don’t think Australia is different to any of these other communities all over the world and well, luckily we sort of achieved the result we wanted.

→ Boland: Des Clark was not part of the Classification Board at the time of the Romance debate. Have you seen it?

→ Clark: No, I haven’t seen any of your movies [laughs].

→ Spratt: I’d like to distribute [Coralie and Virginie Despentes’ Baise-moi]. They’re only showing it in festivals at the moment. Myself and some other distributors have asked for tapes but they don’t want to send them because of two things: they’re scared of the thing being pirated and also that it might get seized by customs somewhere.

→ Clark: But I thought the French government’s

Baise-moi is the story of two marginalised French prostitutes (one of them has been raped), who go on a destructive tour of sex and violence. It breaks norms and shatters the complacency of polite cinema audiences. Known as a Thelma and Louise for the next generation, the title translates to ‘Rape Me’. It stars Raffaëla Anderson and Karen Lancuame. banning it subsequently restricted their capacity to sell it.

→ Spratt: No, it’s been sold to a lot of European territories. I haven’t got it yet but I am planning to re-release In the Realm of the Senses. I don’t know if you’ve seen that.

→ Clark: I saw it in the 60s I think, or the 70s, but it was heavily cut apparently.

→ Spratt: I know the film quite well because I saw it overseas uncut and I’ve seen the Australian video release that came out a few years later. There were three cuts made but there is still a lot of explicit sex in it, more so than Romance. This got an R rating and it’s still available. We’re going to look at it and make a decision, we could make the same cuts as were previously issued and just put the thing out without any reference to the OFLC but probably we shouldn’t do that. The film’s 25 years old with acknowledged artistic worth and so on, so it’s probably worth a fight. Not just for the publicity campaign but just on the principal that it’s a very valid work.

→ Boland: In terms of a publicity campaign, you can’t buy the kind of publicity you got free for Romance, especially if you’re a small distributor.

→ Clark: I started getting letters of complaint about Chopper before it was released. ‘How can you possibly allow this film to be released?’

→ Spratt: I certainly never thought the publicity for Romance would be as big as it was. Certainly I wanted to make the announcement, I thought a few film critics would say they’d seen the film already and it should be shown but editorial writers picked up the whole issue.

→ Clark: They love it. It’s everyone’s business.

→ Boland: How do you feel about everyone telling you how to do your job?

→ Clark: That’s all right that’s why I like the job because you’ve got to manage a whole community of expectations and cut a path through it and that’s occasionally complex and difficult.

The Color of Paradise? Spratt heard later that afternoon the board had re-classified it GC.
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Agency: M&C Saatchi
Producer: Fiona McGregor
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RENEGADE
Two years after Diver Dan consummated his never-ending courtship on SeaChange, David Wenham returns to the big screen in Better Than Sex. Michaela Boland observes his latest character is getting it on before audience members have relaxed into their seats.

Sunday night after Sunday night they sat glued to their tellys in Balwyn, Lindfield, Scarborough and every suburb in-between. ABC viewers in their hundreds of thousands watching the drama of SeaChange unfold. David Wenham was the kinda goofy, detached Diver Dan and Series One focused on his relationship with neurotic judge, Laura. It took an entire season, and lashings of speculation in the women's magazines, for them to become (te he) romantic. But let's face it, Pearl Bay hasn't showcased such electricity since.

> Jump cut to November 2000 when two feature films starring Wenham are theatrically released. The titillatingly titled Better Than Sex and director Stavros Kazantzidis' latest feature Russian Doll. In both of them Wenham's getting, well, quite a bit of action.

> More on Russian Doll later because it's in Better Than Sex that Diver Dan goes down in the first few minutes and more or less stays there, in various permutations, for the duration of the film. Starring opposite Australia's favourite sex kitten,
In Better Than Sex Diver Dan goes down in the first few minutes and more or less stays there, in various permutations, for the duration of the film.

Susie Porter, Wenham delivers a funny, fresh and energetic performance and is obviously bouncing off Porter's equally laudable characterisation. She's Cin (of course) and he's Josh.

→ He's in town for a few days, they meet and get it on but when he tries to say goodbye he finds himself unable to leave her apartment (or her bed, bath tub etc). The duo hold the tension through the film's 90 minutes in more or less one room.

→ Wenham and Porter, natural blood nuts who both 'blonded up' for their roles, first met years ago at the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, not long after Wenham had graduated from drama school and while Porter was still a uni student.

→ Over a cab sav in St Kilda's Fitzroy street, after wrapping for the day on his latest movie [one of five he'll shoot this year], Wenham explains he didn't see Porter for more than 10 years. During some of that period she attended NIDA.

→ Then "I saw her graduation piece and it amazed me. She played a woman much older than she was at the time and she was astonishing. I thought you are a really bloody good actor."

→ Which was just as well because Porter was attached to Better Than Sex before Wenham was approached by first time writer/director Jonathan Teplitzky. Taking on a role which required six significant sex scenes, very little interaction with other characters and which was staged more or less in a single room, meant both stars needed to be confident in the other's acting ability. Plus "it was a role where both of us had to expose ourselves, literally. So you have to work with somebody you felt comfortable with," Wenham explains.

→ Wenham says they stayed closely with the script, which Porter had helped workshop, and which director Teplitzky confides is based on his own courtship with his partner and mother of his children.

→ Despite being personally attached to the story, Wenham says Teplitzky did not attempt to graft his own personality onto Wenham's characterisation of Josh.

→ Teplitzky describes the fast, four-week shoot on a minuscule budget [approx. $1 million] as "a masterclass in acting" and praises his lead actors' performances and good humour off camera.

"David's subtlety and nuance is in keeping with the camera. He understands what the camera does in close-up, the point at which acting stops being a physical thing and becomes an emotional thing," Teplitzky explains.

→ The other romantic comedy releasing in November featuring Wenham is the similarly low-budget feature Russian Doll, co-starring Hugo Weaving and newcomer Natalia Novikova. Wenham's character Ethan is a middle class, yamulka-wearing father who is cheating on his wife. Ethan further threatens everyone's happiness by dragging his single best friend into the mess by asking him to...
“I play a pretty rough nasty cowboy, which was refreshing. It was good to get a bit more dirty,” he explains.

But who could forget his menacingly violent portrayal of Brett Sprague in the AFI-winning film The Boys? A role he developed on stage in Sydney before helping make it into a film. Wenham co-produced The Boys and his recent project in Melbourne, The Bank, comes from the same creative group including producer John Maynard and director Robert Connolly.

Wenham also found himself in Cuba later that year, so he “sent Laura a postcard”.

Portraying Father Damien was closer to Wenham’s usual roles than the romantic leads which have garnered him the most attention in recent years. “I’m playing characters in a narrower range than I have done in the past, which is actually quite new to me. I used to be far more of a character actor which, strangely enough, is something I feel much more comfortable doing. But this stuff over the past couple of years, which people associate me more with, is the much sort of straighter stuff.”

Refusing to be drawn on how Russian Doll came together, Wenham says, “it’s just sometimes the experience can affect your judgment, that’s when you go away…” he shakes his head and doesn’t finish the sentence.

An experience he will discuss is anchoring Paul Cox’s big budget Belgian-funded feature Molokai: The Story of Father Damien, which, after a handful of successful festival screenings may achieve local distribution.

Making Molokai was a heart-breaking process for director Cox (see Cinema Papers 133, p.22) and an experience Wenham found “challenging but eventually rewarding”.

Fresh from the SeaChange set he led a cast including Derek Jacobi, Kris Kristofferson and Peter O’Toole, as he portrayed Belgian national hero and Catholic priest Father Damien. He didn’t feel nervous about leaving SeaChange because he had already committed to Molokai and in fact, only heard about the series’ ratings coup much later, during filming in Hawaii.

Wenham laughs recalling how Diver Dan left Pearl Bay ostensibly to work on an island off Cuba.

Hands on. Wenham and Porter in Better Than Sex.

“Do you think they’ll release this film?” Wenham asks Peter O’Toole in Molokai.

“Play a pretty rough nasty cowboy, which was refreshing. It was good to get a bit more dirty,” he explains.

Dust is a kinda boysy film with clever elements Wenham is hoping will come through.

“I call it an eastern western – or a Balkan western as opposed to a spaghetti western. It’s a film I don’t think has a parallel because it has two narratives in it. An historical narrative which I’m involved in, it’s set in Macedonia a 100 years ago and a contemporary story that’s set in New York and both of them intertwine throughout – they eventually meet up towards the end.

“I know no film, the structure of, that’s similar. It’ll be a hard one to pull off, I think, but if it achieves it, it will be interesting. If it’s as interesting as Wenham’s career, well, I guess we’ll just have to keep watching.”

Wenham co-produced The Boys and his recent project in Melbourne, The Bank, comes from the same creative group including producer John Maynard and director Robert Connolly.

Yet, in The Bank Wenham is again a romantic lead, this time with a twist. While not committed to making any particular film yet, Wenham says he will not combine directing with a starring or feature role. He will not produce but he might have a hand in developing the script. And no, “it probably wouldn’t be a romantic comedy”.

The David Wenham Project is still some way off because after The Bank he leaves to join compatriot Cate Blanchett in New Zealand on Peter Jackson’s top-secret Lord of The Rings trilogy.

Unlike the Star Wars shoot in Sydney recently, where cast members were denied full shooting scripts, Wenham has read The Rings script. Presumably secretive plot twists are not a factor of the shoot because, well, the books on which the films are based have been available for a while now.

Shooting over several years, Jackson is making the three films concurrently in a production of massive proportions. “I think it will be the biggest production I’ll ever be involved with. I don’t think you can ever get a bigger budget than that,” Wenham says.

And by now he’d know. Along with everyone else he worked long and hard on Moulin Rouge, slated for a Christmas release that is looking increasingly unlikely. He also spent the middle of the year working alongside Joseph Fiennes on Dust. Directed by Milcho Manchevski, Wenham is back in comfy territory with Dust.

Wenham also found himself in Cuba later that year, so he “sent Laura a postcard”. 
The screenplay’s the thing

The second important quality control device in the Hollywood system is the existence of conventions or rules which govern the script development process. For instance, there is a vocabulary in place which relates to the structural elements of the screenplay: the three acts, the turning points, the premise and protagonist. These terms provide the basic technical language of the industry and ensure that writers and producers can share ideas while referring to a common framework of industry standards. Without this technical framework, the screenwriting process is reduced to an intuitive, playful mess; the technical equivalent of finger-painting. But what sells tickets is usually a finely-honed masterpiece.

A further quality-control mechanism is the close working tie between the writer and producer, which includes a step-by-step plan for the writing and re-writing process. The writer may first offer a detailed synopsis or outline of their story which the producer may approve. This process is repeated at the completion of a first draft at which point the producer (often using the script executive as mediator) may offer notes to guide the writer toward a certain direction or away from a problem area. The writer then produces a draft based on this outline which is re-submitted to the producer who offers another set of notes. And so the screenplay is honed and crafted over many drafts.

This lengthy development process allows production staff to keep tabs on the basic structure of the screenplay. The writer and producer can then negotiate creative differences while staying focused on the interests of the audience and the distributors. The writer is less likely to wander off in a new direction that may depart from the initial concept. Everyone can then be sure they are making the same movie.

This all requires immense discipline on the part of the writer, who must endure the sheer labour of constant polishing and re-writing. However in my experience, the best professionals understand clearly why they must persevere and toe the line.

The tough laws of Hollywood survival dictate that only the fittest writers survive.

The writer and producer can then negotiate creative differences while staying focused on the interests of the audience and the distributors. The writer is less likely to wander off in a new direction that may depart from the initial concept. Everyone can then be sure they are making the same movie.

A survey of feature films backed by Warner, as well as for ‘boutique’ production houses like Working Title, and institutions such as the American Film Institute. Within this system my role was to select, edit and develop screenplays; to shepherd a writer through anywhere between six, 15 and even 30 drafts.

There is no doubt that this level of technical precision contributes to a much finer screenplay. In this country, however, three drafts is often the upper limit. There is not the same degree of focus on the script as the primary key to production excellence. This is partly due to a lag in funding.

A survey of feature films backed by the FFC over the last three years reveals Australian filmmakers are currently operating without proper script-development support. An average of only 1.4 percent of the total budget of recent films was spent on script development. This compares with an average of two percent spent on development in the UK, five percent in Canada and 10 percent in the USA.

Government bodies like the AFC are currently rearranging their budgets to address this problem. Those who whinge about stricter guidelines governing grants from the public purse might consider the situation elsewhere. Until they’ve established a serious track record, a writer in Los Angeles receives no such support, and yet has a very different attitude to their role within the system.

With their iron-clad work ethic, American writers move quickly to master the complex technical requirements of screenwriting and remain open to the kind of constructive critique applied by nit-picking studio executives and producers. Why? Because all players recognise their roles within an industrial model that’s been thriving since 1917.

Compared to our own, the Hollywood script selection and development process is extremely rigorous. Within the Hollywood system, several procedures are in place to ensure the highest quality script-writing process. Firstly, the selection of screenplay material is limited to work which has been submitted to the producer by literary agents. These agents efficiently sort out the duds from the real thing, identifying writers with a track-record, from eager wannabes who have not yet ‘paid their dues.’

The tough laws of Hollywood survival dictate that only the fittest writers survive. The writer will support him or herself with a day job and still manage to boast several attainments. To ‘get in touch’ with their audience, they devise themselves in genre, structure and technique and are as adept at writing for film as they are for TV, for series, for sitcoms as well as for features. Until the writer gets an agent and their first jobs start to materialise, most of this work is done at the writer’s own expense (‘on spec’). There is no series of government grants to pay the way for this creative research.

The writer and producer can then negotiate creative differences while staying focused on the interests of the audience and the distributors. The writer is less likely to wander off in a new direction that may depart from the initial concept. Everyone can then be sure they are making the same movie.

This all requires immense discipline on the part of the writer, who must endure the sheer labour of constant polishing and re-writing. However in my experience, the best professionals understand clearly why they must persevere and toe the line.
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Releasing Alibrandi

When a film, regardless of its origins, turns out to be a hit it’s tremendously satisfying for everyone involved in bringing it to the market place. In the case of Australian films, this satisfaction is amplified an extra notch for the marketing and sales team and, of course, even more so for the local producers, investors, cast and crew who are so eager for their work to be seen and appreciated by an audience. Just as Looking for Alibrandi was an incredibly personal work to be seen and appreciated by the local producers, investors, cast and crew who are so eager for their work to be seen and appreciated by an audience. We knew if we could build a strong core of word-of-mouth which we wanted to tap into and steer away from looking like an American teen comedy and we wanted to celebrate the Australianness of the film and didn’t want it to be derivative in any way.

We wanted every image of the film to strike a chord with the target audience and while the cast included other terrific actors including Anthony LaPaglia and Greta Scacchi, we wanted to focus on the younger members of the cast with a clear, clean and simple sell which would make it clear to all those who saw it – this was Josie’s story – it was about her and it was for people who wanted to find out more. Almost immediately it created an impact, with our offices receiving many requests for copies of the poster. A big part of our job was to get the film seen by a large audience to build a strong core of word-of-mouth to complement our aggressive advertising schedule. As such, we developed a two-tiered program to bring the film to local communities. Toward the end of 1999 we began to screen the film for high school teachers in each state and we developed an intricate study guide which tied back to the Looking for Alibrandi website in order to assist teachers in developing programs for the classroom. The second stage of our screening program involved exhibition as we wanted to ensure that Looking for Alibrandi had an impact in cinemas. In February 2000, we screened the film to exhibitors and cinema managers to ensure it would become a core part of their marketing campaigns and to allow the cinemas to develop marketing programs which would make them key participants in the campaign. Looking for Alibrandi opened very wide on 173 screens on May 4. In its opening weekend the film grossed $1,248,052 for a per screen average of $7214. Looking for Alibrandi didn’t open to number one – that honour went to Gladiator which became the highest grossing film of the year. Alibrandi has now grossed almost $8.3 million – a truly fantastic result that saw it spend nine weeks in the Top 10. We could not be more proud of its success and the film looks set to be a fantastic launching pad for the theatrical careers of stars Pia Miranda, Kick Gurry and Matthew Newton as well as director Kate Woods. It also heralds producer Robyn Kershaw’s first film and the success of the release is due in no small part to her clear understanding of how to make the film a hit and what it takes to break out from the competition. If Looking for Alibrandi had released in 1999 it would have been the highest grossing local film that year by a significant margin. So far this year it follows The Wog Boy in terms of box office gross – which just means that Australian cinema is having a better year all round than last year and local audiences ARE responding – which is the best news of all for the entire industry.

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Chicken Run

DIRECTORS
PETER LORD AND NICK PARK

CAST
MEL GIBSON. JULIA SAWALHA, JANE HORROCKS, MIRANDA RICHARDSON, PHIL DANIELS, LYNN FERGUSON, TONY HAYGARTH, TIMOTHY SPALL, IMELDA STAUNTON, BENJAMIN WHITROW

PRODUCERS
PETER LORD, DAVID SPROXTON, NICK PARK

DISTRIBUTOR
UIP (DREAMWORKS]

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
UNITED KINGDOM

DURATION
86 MINUTES

Chicken Run is the first feature film from the Aardman Animation Studios, producers of the hugely popular Wallace and Gromit (3x30min) trilogy. Entirely absorbing, the audience spends 86 minutes with bug-eyed talking chickens, (with lips and teeth). The lead chicken’s voice is provided by a ‘cocky’ Mel Gibson, while the heroine of the film, a hen named Ginger is voiced by Julia Sawalha, better known as Saffron from Absolutely Fabulous. Set in a chicken concentration camp Chicken Run is a fast-paced and clever comedic take on the classic The Great Escape. The chicken inmates are all egg layers for their evil masters, Mr and Mrs Tweedy. They battle constantly to abscond from their barbed wire confines. The threat of being turned into chicken pies if they don’t keep up their egg count is forever looming

The characterisation of the chickens and their evil owners is superb, supplied by voices including Miranda Richardson (The Crying Game), Imelda Staunton, Benjamin Whitrow and Jane Horrocks, (Bubble from Absolutely Fabulous). In addition, Timothy Spall and Phil Daniels voice two profiteering rats whose scavenging skills prove invaluable to the chickens.

What makes Aardman’s animation so unique and appealing is their ability to treat the puppets as if they were actors. The humour is sophisticated and accessible to children as well as adults. The idiosyncrasies of each of the hens is both charming and original. One of the hens knits, another is a crazed Scottish escape artist, another a boisterous jukebox dancer.

Gibson’s character, Rocky, is a brash and arrogant American, while all the hens are typically British. A joke which will be lost on most American audiences, is when one of the hens suggests that perhaps Rocky’s American accent is a bit ‘put on’. What really engages the story for adults are the references to other films and pop culture. Rocky does a dramatic jump over the chicken fence, Steve McQueen-style, except he is on a tricycle and not a motorbike.

Another chicken is clearly modelled on Scotty from Star Trek.

It is not surprising that Chicken Run took over four years to make at a rumoured cost of $50 million, (bankrolled mostly by Mr Spielberg and co). Every single item in the film had to be constructed in miniature, from the chicken’s eyeballs to the eerie English skies. Each chicken’s movements were made a tiny increment at a time, 24 movements to make a second, 1440 to create a minute, 123,840 to complete the feature. Some days in the Aardman studios 28 sets and teams of animators were in full operation simultaneously just to complete only 10 seconds of completed film.

Although fashioned by a typical Hollywood formula, the audience should forgive the few predictable moments and enjoy the clever and inventive scenarios and dilemmas the chickens face. The plot is full of every Hollywood cliché from love scenes to
climactic twists, yet they are not disguised. The clichés are deliberate and totally entertaining. Even though you can tell there has been some influence from an external scriptwriter Karey Kirkpatrick, the Aardman Studio's uniqueness is clearly apparent. No other animation company could create such endearing characters and absurdist plots. Part of the success and ultimate charm of Chicken Run is that it has an edge over many other styles of feature animation. Pixar's Toy Story and A Bug's Life, although hugely popular, lack that sense of tangibility. Everyone knows (like all Disney films), that although magical, the characters and their enchanting worlds are obviously not real. The beauty of Chicken Run (and of all stop motion animation), is that the characters are somewhat real; audiences enjoy the sense of tactility and are reminded that as kids how we all wanted our dolls or action figures to come alive. Chicken Run captures the animators' time-based spontaneous performance somewhat lacking in computer animation, which is so often tweaked and fiddled till all humanity and serendipity is sucked out. Financed mostly by Dreamworks Aardman has obviously been given creative control on the project with a co-direction by Aardman founder, Peter Lord, and the three-time Academy Award winner and creator of the Wallace and Gromit phenomena, Nick Park. To me, Aardman's true masterpiece was The Wrong Trousers, yet Chicken Run will thoroughly entertain most devoted plasticine maniacs. The wait has been well worth it. Aardman has orchestrated a long-term agreement with Dreamworks to produce several more features. A full length, Wallace and Gromit, is supposedly one of them. Whatever's next, it's a shame we'll have to wait another four years for it to be slowly put together.

ADAM ELLIOT IS A MELBOURNE BASED CLAY ANIMATOR, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HUGELY SUCCESSFUL ANIMATED TRILOGY - UNCLE, COUSIN AND BROTHER.

It is not surprising that Chicken Run took over four years to make at a rumoured cost of $50 million (bankrolled mostly by Mr Spielberg and co).
Better Than Sex

WRITER/DIRECTOR
JONATHAN TEPLITZKY

CAST
SUSIE PORTER, DAVID WENHAM, KRIS McQUIADE, SIMON BISSELL, CATHERINE MCCLEMENTS

PRODUCER
BRUNA PAPANDREA, FRANK COX

DISTRIBUTOR
NEWVISION

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
AUSTRALIA

COMPOSER
DAVID HIRSCHFELDER

EDITOR
SHAWN SEET

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
GARRY PHILLIPS

What is better than sex? A good film perhaps? Think about it. From the moment the lights dim you can experience the range of corporeal emotions without having to remove a single item of clothing. Further to this, your screen surrogate can be whoever you desire and you don’t have to buy a single drink. Another crucial element is the exit factor, so if for some reason you are not enjoying the experience you can leave through illuminated exit sites with minimal trauma either to yourself or the film. Writer/director Jonathan Teplitzky’s debut feature Better Than Sex is among the list of more pleasurable experiences at the cinema. Shall I say it performed. As a partner in the audience/film encounter, Better Than Sex was in every sense a good score: it was uncomplicated, attractive and most importantly funny.

Better Than Sex is essentially about a one-night stand but contrary to what the phrase might suggest, very little standing actually occurs. Josh (David Wenham) and Cinthia (Susie Porter) meet at a party, share a few drinks, some common interests, a cab and finally a bed. The climate for their unencumbered liaison is perfect. Josh, a wildlife photographer, lives in London and is due to return in three days. Cin, a fashion designer, lives in Sydney and inhabits an apartment with a spatial configuration like the Tardis. The audience is sanctioned to enter the charged domain of Cin’s inner city apartment and experience first hand the escalating energy developing between the fledgling lovers. Susie Porter’s Cin is at once brave and beguiling, never once do we slip from her grasp. Not unlike Sacha Horler’s character in Praise (coincidentally of the same name), Porter imbues Cin with a sexual confidence and assertiveness rarely captured on Australian screens.

Similarly, David Wenham illustrates with each role he embodies the ability to contribute to the visual vocabulary of the much-maligned Australian male. Cin and Josh’s mutual desire for unfettered sex unwittingly leads our romantic duo beyond their initial expectations and comfort zones into an emotional terrain that could prove to be better than sex. And while the amorous protagonists are dancing around one another with their peacock feathers flaring, the audience is afforded the luxury of insight through direct to camera addresses. The mockumentary-style address seems at first to detract from the main thrust of the narrative but soon results in a necessary space for the performers to stretch and play with their characters and analyse their motivations.

→ The chemistry between Wenham and Porter is spectacular. Cultivated and groomed by measured direction from Teplitzky, they present characters both vulnerable and confident. A mix that produces the film’s dramatic conflict. The arrival and exit of Cin’s friend, Sam, played with delicious predatory appeal by Catherine McClements is skillfully deployed by Teplitzky as the narrative’s catalyst for action and eventual resolution.

→ Another interesting device is Kris McQuade’s meddling cabbie. While a humorous and cogent character, one’s ability to suspend disbelief is surely tested, as the reality of meeting a taxi driver in Sydney is hard to imagine. All things considered, Better Than Sex may not, in fact, be better than sex. However one could certainly consider it ‘foreplay’.

Russian Doll

DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER
STAVROS KAZANTZIDIS

CAST
HUGO WEAVING, DAVID WENHAM, NATALIA NOVIKOVA, REBECCA FRITH, SACHA HORLER, HELEN DALLIMORE

CO-WRITER/PRODUCER
ALLANAH ZITSERMAN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
BRUNO CHARLESWORTH

CO-PRODUCER
HUGO WEAVING

CINEMATOGRAPHER
JUSTIN BRICKLE

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
AUSTRALIA

DISTRIBUTION
BEYOND/UPI

A wonderful and surprisingly pleasant opening for this year’s AFI film industry screenings, Stavros Kazantzidis’ Russian Doll captures the light, upbeat magic of Love and Other Catastrophes and meets Green Card somewhere along the way, peppered with the current fashion for comedy concerning Australia’s immigrant populations as evidenced in The Wog Boy, Looking for Alibrandi and the upcoming Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns.

Bubbling along at a peppy pace, the film has that Russian-mail-order bride Katia (Natalia Novikova) arrive in Australia only to discover her intended husband has died, but she quickly bounces into the arms of the married Ethan (David Wenham). Captivated by her nubile charms and desperate for her to stay in Australia, Ethan convinces the chronically unlucky-in-love Harvey (Hugo Weaving playing a private eye by day and a frustrated writer the rest of the time) to marry her once he’s gotten over the shock of Ethan’s betrayal of his charming, but pushy, wife Miriam (Rebecca Frith), who, in turn, insists on organising a huge wedding.

→ Like Strange Planet, which
Russian Doll fires on all cylinders to have the ensemble working well together with a punchy script to produce a light and enjoyable package.

Kazantzidis produced, and his first directing effort True Love and Chaos, this film boasts a stellar ensemble cast. Unlike those films, Russian Doll fires on all cylinders to have the ensemble working well together with a punchy script producing a light and enjoyable package. And like Love and Other Catastrophes, which Kazantzidis also produced, it’s helped along by a great soundtrack.

Indeed, Kazantzidis seems to work best under pressure because Russian Doll, like Love and Other Catastrophes, was made on a shoestring budget and in a hurry in order to secure Weaving’s services. That was clearly worth the trouble as the Film Finance Corp. and Beyond Films later stepped in during filming with completion funds for what was then a promising work in progress.

It’s impossible to say when the first heart-clutching moment comes in Robert Zemeckis’ What Lies Beneath. It could be the opening credits (in accordance with the music, I was hands-over-eyes pre-opening line). It could be when Michelle Pfeiffer first has a creepy ‘vision’. Or it could just be the entire film. All things considered, this is one scary movie.

What Lies Beneath

DIRECTOR
ROBERT ZEMECKIS
CAST
HARRISON FORD, MICHELLE PFEIFFER, DIANA SCARADINO, MIRANDA OTTO
PRODUCERS
JACK RAPKE, STEVE STARKEY, ROBERT ZEMECKIS
WRITER
CLARK GREGG
CINEMATOGRAPHER
DON BURGESS
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
US
DISTRIBUTION
20TH CENTURY FOX

"It's impossible to say when the first heart-clutching moment comes in Robert Zemeckis' What Lies Beneath. It could be the opening credits (in accordance with the music, I was hands-over-eyes pre-opening line). It could be when Michelle Pfeiffer first has a creepy 'vision'. Or it could just be the entire film. All things considered, this is one scary movie."

Russian Doll's affectionate laughs at the tribalism of Russian Jews living at Sydney's Bondi Beach complete with their love of tacky music, bulky jewels, gauche clothing and plentiful food and drink is one of its best assets. What could so easily have been in bad taste somehow works delightfully.

To be sure, the film's ending is a trifle saccharine and will disappoint some, but it's all in good fun in a film that won't change your life any more than Love and Other Catastrophes did, but delivers what it sets out to do.

•  MARK WOODS

What Lies Beneath. This is one scary movie.
time for husband and wife to spend some serious 'Time Alone.' Until 'the voices' begin to manifest, and Claire begins to have visions of dead women underwater... somewhat hampering any ideas Norman may have of romance.

> Director Robert Zemeckis (Contact) goes to town on the suspense factor here - it seems like every five minutes the audience is waiting for the next: 'OH GOD, IT'S BEHIND YOU!' moment. With a brilliant use of mirrors, he teases and taunts us. Only the slightest amount of special effects are required; the magic is all in the fantastic score by Alan Silvestri and the slow, creeping camerawork.

> Pfeiffer holds herself well in a part which requires a great deal of gasping and terrified staring into space - her only downfall is a badly directed 'possessed,' and starts giggling. In her first 'possessed,' and starts giggling moment where she appears to be 'OH GOD, IT'S BEHIND YOU!' moment. Following up the Camera D'Or-winning Love Serenade, Barrett has created Walk The Talk, a film bearing little resemblance to its predecessor. Focusing the attention on Salvatore Coco's character rather than Nikki Raye helps to distance us from what may otherwise have been a rather sad tale of a woman desperate to become famous. Instead, the journey of our characters is more one of self-fulfillment - even if their idea of nirvana may be a little misled.

> Coco, best known for his role as Con in the early days of Heartbreak High, pulls off a surprisingly solid job as the over-zealous Grasso. It's his first lead role in a feature, and while it must be said his performance doesn't roam too far from the beaten track - Coco can see the finish line and works doggedly towards it - there is no sign of the goonish, smart-arsed Con, suggesting this young actor may have more to give.

> Of course, his supporting cast are exemplary. Sacha Horler is reliably excellent as the wheelchair-bound Bonita - or even breaking the law.

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> Of course, his supporting cast are exemplary. Sacha Horler is reliably excellent as the wheelchair-bound Bonita - and there are some wonderful cameos from Jon English, 'Baby' John Burgess and a brilliant Robert Coleby. A notable effort from relative newcomer Bennett as Nikki Raye, whose CV reads as adequate character background - appearances on Star Search, Midday and Hey Hey included. Her sneering Gold Coast-babe is nicely underplayed and possibly closer to the real Bennett than one might think.

> DOP Mandy Walker has captured the Gold Coast perfectly - the soft greys, pinks and aquas of the streets and bowling clubs bring to mind the cool crime backgrounds of Miami Vice... but instead of a strutting Don Johnson, we've got a sweating Grasso. Walk The Talk isn't a comedy - Barrett has never been one for overplaying gags. The gaudier characters are left to their own devices and our leads move from one morally bankrupt moment to the next, redeeming themselves only through their naivé world-view and determination to succeed. It's a slow, dawdling film, just taking its time to tell a very basic story in a clear and pleasant fashion.
Dangerous waters: remake territory. Especially when you head back to the 70s for your source material. Things have altered a lot since then and unless you’re using those changes for some good old post-modern chuckles at the original's expense, ala The Brady Bunch movies, you can easily find yourself bogged down in a mess of political, sexual and cultural no-nos. And then, of course, there’s the whole question of why you’re even doing a remake in the first place.

→ Thankfully director John Singleton has skated clean over most of the pitfalls and come up with a Shaft for 2000 that is downright entertaining. In fact - taking a deep breath - here comes the heresy: in many ways Shaft 2000 beats the (chequered) pants off Shaft 1971 (directed by Gordon Parks). Singleton has wisely decided to go the sequel route rather than the straightforward remake.

→ In his film the original John Shaft is still doing his private investigator schtick, still loving “the ladies” (to be pronounced in sonorous and suggestive Barry White tones) and still played by Richard Roundtree. Isaac Hayes’ original music has not been modified or updated and lives on here in full, glorious, twanging splendour. How can you resist?

→ His nephew, the Shaft of the title is played by Samuel L. Jackson with such gusto and unrestrained delight you can’t help but imagine back in 1971 the 23-year-old megastar-to-be sat in a darkened cinema writhing and grimacing while softly crooning to himself, “It should have been me…” Now, as luck would have it Singleton has given him that chance and boy, he doesn’t waste a moment of it. Jackson is so cool the frame nearly freezes over. His Shaft is still attired in the de rigueur turtle neck, but Roundtree’s wide-lapelled brown leather coat has given way to Armani, a seriously sexy bald head and shades.

→ And “the ladies”? Singleton smartly gets all that over with in the opening credits, where undulating expanses of flesh tell us all we need to know of Shaft’s appropriate surname, without getting in the way of the rest of the plot or disappearing into the murky depths of the very dodgy sexual politics of Shaft 1971.

→ But style-wise the film is wonderfully old-fashioned; in much the same way John Frankenheimer’s Ronin [1998] felt like one of his European thrillers of some twenty years earlier [The French Connection say], Singleton takes the best bits of the previous era and buffs them up a bit. Check those natty diagonal dagger effect dissolves or the way we plunge straight into the action with no messing. Despite running out of steam in the latter stages Singleton’s tight direction means it all rattles along really well and doesn’t waste any time on peripherals.

→ This is very economical storytelling: sparse dialogue is accompanied by plenty of car chases, shoot-outs and some simply delicious villain acting from Jeffrey Wright (as the neighbourhood dealer Peoples Hernandez) and Christian Bale (reprising his yuppie scum from American Psycho, but here giving him a violently racist edge as Walter Wade Jr).

→ OK, there are downsides to the economy - cops that go from Juicy Jonathans to very bad apples on the toss of a coin and less than fully-fleshed roles for the supporting players. Which brings us to Toni Collette - well the “with” credit at the head should alert you to the fact that she isn’t going to be around much. But as the witness with the power to send Wade down for the murder of a young African American man, she makes the most of her limited screen time to put the haunted fear from The Sixth Sense to very good use once again.

→ Convinced yet? Well, here’s the clincher – Isaac Hayes’ original music has not been modified or updated and lives on here in full, glorious, twanging splendour. How can you resist?

Madeleine Swain
The Million Dollar Hotel

DIRECTOR
Wim Wenders

CAST
Mel Gibson (Jimmy Davies), Milla Jovovich (Milla Jovovich), Jimmi Smits, Peter Stormare, Amanda Plummer, Gloria Stuart, Bud Oort

PRODUCERS
Deepak Nayar, Bond, Nicholas Klein, Bruce Davey, Wim Wenders

WRITER
Nicholas Klein (from a story by Nicholas Klein and Bond)

DISTRIBUTOR
Twentieth Century Fox

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
US

RATING
R

The Million Dollar Hotel is set significantly off-kilter from the gags fall intentionally flat. After reading its quick slaps with glimpses of the dark side inherent in this state of being. This tooing with clichés occurs on several levels. You’ve got Mel Gibson playing FBI special agent Skinner all deadpan. His character’s got lots of quirks too. And they should all be funny – like the neck brace he wears throughout and the reason for it – but the gags fall intentionally flat. After all, Skinner is as genuinely deranged and pathetic as the rest of them. This isn’t to say The Million Dollar Hotel isn’t a warm film. There are lots of salutes to the human spirit throughout, just they’re never followed through to a positive conclusion. In among all this, there’s a murder mystery to sort out, an art fraud to pull off. And there are other things to contemplate too. Such as how does the lead character Tom Tom (the aforementioned skateboarding simpleton, energetically played by Jeremy Davies) manage to deliver the film’s narration in such a considered and educated tone?

The story behind The Million Dollar Hotel was co-authored by Bond, and his band’s music is one of the stars of the film, alongside Milla Jovovich, who plays Eloise (the object of Tom Tom’s earthly desires). You get the feeling that, in his head, Bond envisioned Hotel Ecstasy as one of those tragi-euphoric anthems that have become U2’s stock-in-trade. But this is not a love song. It’s a full-blown American feature film, and not a great one at that. – Dino Scatena

Cherry Falls

DIRECTOR
Geoffrey Wright

CAST
Brittany Murphy, Jay Mohr, Michael Biehn, Gabriel Mann

PRODUCERS
Marshall Persinger, Eli Selden

DISTRIBUTOR
Rep

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
USA

DURATION
92 MINUTES

In the opening scene of Cherry Falls, there’s a sustained shot of the first victim’s car number plate. It reads: Supa Nova.

This is Australian director Geoffrey Wright’s cheeky reference to what should have been his American film debut. But Wright was sacked from the production of Supernova a week before filming was due to begin, following disagreements with studio executives over cast and script.

So with that first US attempt forfeited, Cherry Falls might have presented a foreign director coming to terms with the dollar-driven Hollywood system. Wright even adopts a stock-standard formula to further suggest he’s accepted this new work ethic. But then he goes on and mounts a rather subtle offensive from inside this enemy line. And with some success.

On the surface, Cherry Falls – Wright’s first feature since the awful Metal Skin, and eight years on from his brilliant Romper Stomper – is a straight-up teen-slasher flick. Set in a small, quiet American town of the same name, it follows the path of a deranged psycho who kills virgins. Thankfully a large portion of the local high school – aptly named George Washington High School (that President had a penchant for cherries) – are ripe for the picking.

Lead virgin Jody Marken is played by the fresh-faced Brittany Murphy. In a name, she’s a cult celebrity in the making. Jody is the daughter of town Sheriff Brent Marken, who Michael Biehn portrays as a very nervous, odd, beady-eyed man.

As more virgins are savagely killed and an attempt is made on Jody, the plot unravels to reveal a buried town secret that comes – quite literally – back to haunt the place.

As predictable as this story sounds, Wright gives the genre a major twist. Cherry Falls is completely character driven. Where the lead teens in Scream ran around wearing Gucci, and those in I Know What You Did Last Summer professed that it was “all about the hair”, Cherry Falls is laden with very real kids. Except most are virgins.

Sexual tension is not only the undertone here, it’s also very much the overtone. While the purest loins in town are out giving it up to save themselves from harm, the parents aren’t quite as open with their desires. The sexual frustration is evident between Jody’s boyfriend Kenny (Gabriel Mann) and her mother Marge (Candy Clark); the Sheriff and his Deputy, Mina; school teacher Leonard Marliston (Jay Mohr); Jody, Marge and Jody’s friend, Sandy; and most disturbingly, Jody and her Sheriff father.

As more virgins are savagely killed and then left untouched, you imagine Wright’s novel approach to the teen-slasher genre would have been completely compelling. But Hollywood pipped him at the post and Cherry Falls topped more than a few savage edits.

Most of the death scenes were left on the cutting room floor. Reportedly, at least five minutes was trimmed from just one death sequence. And you can tell. Not only is the build-up wasted but the edit points are jarringly obvious.

To Wright’s credit, this super-black comedy horror flick delves into the human condition more than any recent counterpart. But after losing control of the film during editing, it never quite manages to hit a crescendo, so all that character development ultimately leads you nowhere. – Rachel Newman
Cinema Papers goes into the end of 2000 and opens 2001 with the most extensive coverage of the new media juggernaut. Issue 136, due out in December, surveys the developments to date in new media and identifies the key Australian and overseas players in research and development. The issues facing the film industry are canvassed, with commentary on the impact of development on the broad spectrum for film publicists and designers.

To find out how you can advertise in this next issue of Cinema Papers, contact Larry Boyd on (03) 95255566 or email lboyd@niche.com.au

Australia's Centenary of Federation will be commemorated in Victoria with a series of celebrations including the Federation Festival from 9 to 27 May 2001. A short film competition and showcase will be held as part of the Festival and entries are now invited from interested persons or teams.

Submitted films must in some respect deal with indigenous-white relations in Australia. Entries should be submitted on PAL VHS and have a duration of ten minutes or less (except in unusual circumstances).

Approximately ten films will be selected by an industry panel for a public screening in Melbourne during the Federation Festival. The winning person or team, to be announced following the screening, will receive professional development opportunities in the area of filmmaking or associated fields.

Entries should be submitted by 31 March 2001. For further information and application forms, contact Vallejo Gantner at the Melbourne Festival:

Telephone (03) 9662 4242 Facsimile (03) 9663 4141
Email v.gantner@melbournefestival.com.au or visit our website at www.melbournefestival.com.au

Applications are invited for Digital Fast-Track, an exciting free nine day practical course for directors, writers and producers to develop their skills in new interactive media at OPENChannel. Five participants will be selected to develop a one minute piece each. This OPENChannel initiative will take place from December 2 until December 10. Applications close on October 31. For further information please contact Cathy Johnstone at OPENChannel, email cathyj@openchannel.org.au or phone 03 9419 5111

Produced with the assistance of Cinemedia's Digital Media Fund
Peter Bart’s writing style is irrelevant. When you’re the Editor in Chief of the film trade bible, Variety, people have to read you. Fortunately, Bart has a clean, informative style – and he thankfully abandons the arsenal of “Variety-speak” now slavishly aped by some of Australia’s more unoriginal writers. His ideas and knowledge have import and he doesn’t need to jazz them up with fashionable words.

Following stints as a New York Times journalist and studio executive during the tempestuous 70s, Bart has been a wonderfully readable columnist for Variety and GQ magazines for years. Yet somehow it didn’t translate to his 1998 book, The Gross, which lacked the clout of his columns. The Gross was a cool concept, tracking the stories behind the US blockbusters of 1998, but became only an interesting forum looking for substance.

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→ Who Killed Hollywood...and Put the Tarnish on Tinseltown? (Renaissance Books, $54.80) is a far better work. This collection of his columns from both magazines chronicles today’s Hollywood – its studios, creators and celebrities. And Hollywood isn’t always pretty.

→ Bart does Hollywood over with just the right amount of reverence, history and knowledge of the town’s inner workings, leaving the reader thinking they’re in on the secrets without feeling they’re reading a poseur.

→ He says celebrity “is a business that I fail to find very interesting. It’s also one that already is seriously getting in the way of a process that I respect – making good movies.”

→ By covering American cinema so well, Bart will depress those with the same view about making good movies. Film purists must lament the fact the best chroniclers of today’s Hollywood are either business-centric (Bart) or archly cynical (Premier’s pseudonymous Libby Gelman-Waxler). But isn’t this what movies deserve these days?

→ If you don’t accept that Bart chronicles the new Hollywood superbly, Action/Spectacle Cinema, A Sight and Sound Reader, edited by Jose Arroyo (bfi Publishing, $19.95) weakens your case. It makes no bones about the attractions and different landscape of today’s cinema.

→ Why else would the British Film Institute’s publishing arm bother with such twaddle as a critique of the Schwarzenegger canon? Simply because big budget cinema has reached a critical mass without there being a critical capacity for it.

→ Film analysis, dealing in motif, montage and mise en scene, is really too serious to be able to assess visceral, vacuous spectacle. How often have you thought to yourself, if only that critic would get their hand off it and get into it?

→ So it’s a real hoot, and pretty subversive, reading academics poring over dross like Twister with vigour. And the writing is apt for the new, current cinema – funky and alive. Witness J. Jacob name-dropping electro band Orbital and Jean-Luc Godard in an appreciation of Arnie. There’s even an analysis of theme park ride simulators.

→ As Douglas Trumbull notes, sometimes action cinema “makes no sense, but it looks great.” Same with this book. Even when the writing’s iffy, the concept is grand. And that is, after all, spectacle cinema. A top read.

As is Lester Friedman’s Bonnie and Clyde, (bfi Publishing, $19.95), I don’t know whether the BFI Film Classics series is improving, or by reading more they’re better contextualised, but the last few, Taxi Driver, Titanic and now this, have been wonderful. Friedman’s analysis of the film that holds its own among the seminal 70s American cinema (and made critic Pauline Kael) is a more linear, factual analysis than others in the series. And this style works, giving the film a contemporary and historical context worthy of its subject while simultaneously grounding Friedman’s thoughts.

→ Blonde A Novel by Joyce Carol Oates (Fourth Estate $28) is not worthy of its classic subject, Marilyn...
Monroe. Admittedly, I was uppity about this concept even before picking it up. Blonde is another one of those bogus biographies that presume to tell more about its subject by creating fictions around it. A film version of the novel is currently in production in Melbourne. Not until ploughing through Blonde though – and it helps to have a sharp metal instrument to get through its 600 plus pages – did a greater reality hit. There is now a whole generation of American writers, from Norman Mailer to Philip Roth and many in between, who have the cred and ego to produce towering works but no longer the goods. They all, including Oates, need to procure gutsy editors, self-censorship and humility before they become essential again.

In attempting to turn Blonde into some sort of mystery, Oates has fallen into the trap of trying to be James Ellroy. Even her style can wander into Ellroy’s pithy territory. Ultimately, this bloated, unlikely novel is just too implausible on so many levels. Sure, it’s fiction but it tries to create its own alternative reality. It didn’t work for me. God knows how it will work on screen.

Of course, there are novels worth adapting for the screen. Both The Virgin Suicides [by Jeffrey Eugenides, Penguin, $19.95] and High Fidelity [by Nick Hornby, Indigo Paperbacks, $18.50] deserved adaptation, although the former was a very unlikely choice by Sofia Coppola.

As both films were released, the tie-in book for High Fidelity was republished and a new jacket was slapped on Eugenides’ paperback. Only two things need to be said about both. Firstly, both are snappy, engrossing reads, with Eugenides well in control of language and emotion, while Hornby is well in control of pop culture and readable reminiscences. Secondly, Coppola and High Fidelity’s Stephen Frears both did sterling jobs in bringing to screen these two very different worlds but very similar novels.

MICHAEL BODEY
Once Upon a Time in China and America

DIRECTOR TERRY WINSOR
CAST SEAN BEAN, ALEX KINGSTON, CHARLIE CREED-MILES, TOM WILKINSON
PRODUCER PIPPA CROSS
DISTRIBUTOR 21ST CENTURY PICTURES
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN UK
RATING 18
DURATION 103 MINUTES

As one after another of Hong Kong's action-movie stars and directors take up new careers in Hollywood (with, so far, mixed success), this hybrid of classic American western and curious example of what can happen up new careers in Hollywood (with,)

The hardest-working man in Hong Kong cinema, Tsui Hark, has produced and sometimes directed five previous films in the Once Upon a Time in China series, based on the true story of Wong Fei-Hung, a 19th century folk hero. In this sixth instalment, directed by Sammo Hung (another industry institution), Wong (Jet Li) and his entourage are placed amid the myriad dangers of the Wild West, which in this case have mostly to do with the bigoted locals. Of course, where there's cowboys, there's, usually, Indians, and Wong also gets to live there's bound to be trouble.

But let's not forget what we're about here — action. A conventional western spends considerable time building tension with long, leisurely shots and pregnant pauses, but here everything seems compressed. Dialogue is always brisk, whether in English or Cantonese (both are subtitled), rushing us from one encounter to the next. To the unaccustomed, this can get a bit exhausting, but it does make for strangely compelling entertainment.

Essex Boys

DIRECTOR TERRY WINSOR
CAST SEAN BEAN, ALEX KINGSTON, CHARLIE CREED-MILES, TOM WILKINSON
PRODUCER PIPPA CROSS
DISTRIBUTOR 21ST CENTURY PICTURES
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN UK
RATING 18
DURATION 103 MINUTES

The feeling of a déjà-vu during the opening scenes of this film, in which neatly-coiffured advertising man Buck McKay (Aaron Eckhart) takes in his 28-year-old autistic sister Molly (Elisabeth Shue) and finds his life turned upside down. He's a hard time to sleep through his ideas on guns, kids, violence and the media.

Molly

DIRECTOR JOHN DUIGAN
CAST ELISABETH SHUE, AARON ECKHART, JILL HENNESSY, D. W. MOFFETT
PRODUCER AMY HECKERLING
DISTRIBUTOR WARNER HOME VIDEO
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN US
RATING M
DURATION 99 MINUTES

When we first see 13-year-old Stevie, he's babbling into a video camera. In the next shot, we see there's a noose round his neck. His father hasn't gone through it though — he's just bored, too smart for his own good, and a tiny bit hyper. When a kid like this finds a huge gun hand in his closet, there's bound to be trouble.

Molly contains potentially fascinating subject matter, but it's also highly prone to being saccharined up. It's like the greatest film of the nation. The bank siege that ensues gives his characters plenty of time to sleep through his ideas on guns, kids, violence and the media.

The film's major assets are the two young actors: Van Hoy overcomes the limitations of the script to present a credible portrayal of youth gone wrong, and Mischa Barton provides very capable backup as his girlfriend Rocky. They show up the old hands too — while it seems that FBI man Dan Bender is supposed to be hard-bitten, poor Burt Reynolds just looks bored.
→ Snow Falling on Cedars is based on David Guterson’s successful novel of the same name. It is an unconventional love story about an anglo-saxon American, Ishmael Chambers (Ethan Hawke) and a young Japanese American, Hatsue (Youki Kudoh) set against the backdrop of World War II.  
→ The film is an amalgamation of flashbacks but is set six years after the war in a small fishing village in which Hatsue’s Japanese husband is the accused in a murder trial. Boasting beautiful cinematography and strong direction from Scott Hicks (Shine), Snow Falling on Cedars is ultimately a pedestrian courtroom drama.  
→ The DVD’s bonus matter includes an essay-style explanation of the history of the incarceration of Japanese in the US, America’s involvement in WWII and the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour.  
→ The bonus section also includes a discussion of the book with author, and co-producer of the film, Guterson who goes into depth about the research conducted for the book (which took 10 years to write). There is also an interesting discussion by Guterson, Hicks and screenwriter Ron Bass of the transition from novel to film, highlighting the difference between the mediums.  
→ Much like the film itself the DVD presentation promises much but delivers little.

**Snow Falling on Cedars**

**DIRECTOR** SCOTT HICKS  
**CAST** ETHAN HAWKE, JAMES CROMWELL, RICHARD JENKINS, YOKI KUDOH, SAM SHEPARD, MAX VAN SYDOW  
**PRODUCER** KATHLEEN KENNEDY  
**DISTRIBUTOR** TRISTAR PICTURES  
**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** US  
**RATING** M  
**DURATION** 122 MINUTES  
**PRICE** $40

**Jaws**

**DIRECTOR** STEVEN SPIELBERG  
**CAST** ROY SCHIEDER, RICHARD DREYFUSS, ROBERT DAVI, RICHARD D. ZANUCK, DAVID BROWN  
**DISTRIBUTOR** TRISTAR PICTURES  
**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** US  
**RATING** M  
**DURATION** 120 MINUTES  
**PRICE** $40

→ Released on DVD to mark its 25th anniversary, Jaws still stands up as one of the all-time scary ‘monster’ films. For anyone living under a rock for the past quarter of a century, Jaws is the story of an enormous shark that terrorises a small coastal town and its summer holiday-makers.  
→ With a fantastic cast led by Roy Scheider and surprisingly realistic looking special effects (given its age), Jaws remains one of the great films of its genre.  
→ Jaws has an extensive DVD special features section including trivia games and screen savers: although screen savers are only available for PCs. There is a fascinating documentary featuring virtually everyone involved in producing the film. Using old footage, overlapped with recent interviews, the documentary serves as a retrospective look at the making of Jaws and the effects it has had on the director, actors and producers. Perhaps the only thing scarier than the shark is Spielberg’s 70s haircut.  
→ The documentary details the knife-edge approach that the young Spielberg took in order to shoot the shark scenes entirely at sea. It also highlights the risk he took in using an expensive, time-consuming mechanical shark.  
→ The extra features section also contains original storyboards and discussions with Spielberg, Peter Benchley (screenwriter and writer of the original novel), and co-screenwriter Carl Gottlieb about the problems associated with realising their dreams in the days prior to bluescreen. There is also an extensive discussion with John Williams (the musical conductor) who arguably created the most memorable musical accompaniment for film.

**The Bone Collector**

**DIRECTOR** PHILLIP NOYCE  
**CAST** DENZEL WASHINGTON, ANGELINA JOLIE  
**PRODUCERS** MARTIN BREGMAN, LOUIS A. STROLLER, MICHAEL S. BREGMAN  
**DISTRIBUTOR** TRISTAR PICTURES  
**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** US  
**RATING** M  
**DURATION** 114 MINUTES  
**PRICE** $40

→ The Bone Collector is a murder mystery about a clever detective (Denzel Washington) who becomes a quadriplegic while investigating a case. Bedridden and without hope, he is asked to advise on a case and sees potential in a young cop Amelia (Angelina Jolie), who plays a distinct character from her off-the-wall parts in Girl Interrupted and Gone in Sixty Seconds.  
→ The Bone Collector is a step above the usual murder mysteries, mainly due to the performances and the direction by Phillip Noyce.  
→ The bonus section features a fascinating and informative discussion with the knowledgeable Noyce who discusses the importance of mentors and how this relates to his own life and career. He explains the continual theme of resurrection underlying his films and tells intriguing tales of the sources of his inspiration.  
→ Noyce also discusses in detail how he shoots, casts and researches projects, and the use of camera in capturing mood and emotion.  
→ The extra features included in the DVD presentation will prove extremely engaging for anybody remotely interested in film. • SHANE STEPHENS
Shane McKechnie

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New President for SPAA

Parallel importing, tax incentives for film investment, and intellectual property rights are the key issues facing local screen producers; that's according to the incoming president of the Australian Screen Producers' Association (SPAA), independent producer Nick Murray.

In September Murray took over from producer Tom Jeffrey, and he follows his former Artists Services boss, Steve Vizard, into the job of heading up SPAA, which boasts between 250 and 300 members.

Murray is managing director of Jigsaw productions. Established at the end of 1998, with offices in Sydney and Melbourne, Jigsaw has produced two series of O'Loghlin on Saturday Night, a business education series for The Business Skills Channel on cable TV, plus two Sydney Comedy Festival specials. The company is currently seeking capital for its first foray into feature film production.

Murray started his career in network television, before joining Artists Services as the business affairs manager. He later set up thecomedychannel, before resigning to launch Jigsaw in 1998.

He has long been a critic of the Australian feature film culture, which he sees as geared towards producing art films that "no-one wants to see". He promises Jigsaw's first film will be commercially driven.

Though the majority of Murray's experience has been in the TV sector, he acknowledges the glamour of feature film production, "but the reality is most of Australia's export income comes from TV, by miles". He says a strong film industry requires a strong TV industry, but the reverse is not necessarily true.

At SPAA 2000, in Sydney from November 16-18, an estimated 800 members of the screen industry will gather at the Hilton Hotel.

Murray's contribution to the conference's agenda has been limited, because he was not officially appointed until last month but, as in 1999, he will chair some panel discussions. While a session has not been dedicated to the current parallel importation threat faced by the local film industry, Murray says the issue looms large for producers.

Addressing the issue of tax incentives, Murray says, "it remains to be seen what the FLICs (Film Licence Investment Companies) are actually doing". He says the scheme has so far not been a success and now "the industry needs some certainty as to what's going to happen".

Intellectual property rights were discussed at SPAA 1999 and will be on the agenda for 2000. Murray says that for producers the issue is two-sided: they need to know their rights when dealing with the TV networks, plus their rights when negotiating with directors.

Murray adds that the influx in recent years of offshore TVCs shooting in Australia must be nurtured, because the benefits flow through the entire industry. SPAA's members are vigorous competitors for television space and feature film funding. Murray says that as the competition increases, producers are less likely to discuss issues, which in turn weakens the sector. "Part of what SPAA offers is advocacy with the government and semi-government bodies [but] it's also worth bringing the industry together."

As the Australian film industry enters its second generation of filmmaking and television renaissance we are conscious of the need to look forward to future successes and assess new ways of doing business in the changing world economy.

In keeping with this objective, and aimed at both the emerging and experienced producer, the chosen theme for this year's SPAA 2000 conference is A New Way Forward.

Crucial issues facing producers today will be canvassed in longer sessions involving greater delegate participation. These include:

- broadening the funding base
- building a business in the entertainment economy
- the creative producer
- new marketing - new media
- uncovering the truth about domestic distribution
- playing the casting game
- maximising relationships and creating strategic partnerships

We are also pleased to announce that the last day of the conference (Saturday, 18 November) will coincide with the first day of the Australian Writers' Guild Conference, an initiative aimed at strengthening the working relationship between writers and producers and, ultimately, improving the quality of the finished product.

The conference has moved to the Hilton Hotel in Pitt St, Sydney. As a conference venue with in-house accommodation, we are confident this will allow delegates to maximise opportunities to network, conduct business and socialise all under one roof.

Almost 800 delegates attended last year's conference, including film, television, documentary and television commercial producers, broadcasters, post production experts, financiers, directors, writers, film lawyers, government organisations and local and international distribution and acquisition executives. As in previous years, over 60 percent were active in film, television or documentary and video production.

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SPAA is committed to providing a stimulating and productive industry conference that is a genuine forum for business and creative exchange.
Desperately seeking an audience

You've made the short film, now you need an audience. Emma Sloley has some advice for entering the short film festival realm.

Short film festivals provide new and established filmmakers with a valuable forum for getting their product noticed but for first-time filmmakers especially, entering competitions can be a bewildering process. The number of festivals worldwide is growing and with each festival offering – or requiring - different things it can be difficult to know where to start.

- One of the most significant changes to short film festivals over the years has been the availability of the internet. While prospective festival entrants once had to fax or phone around the world for information about festivals, a vast array of information is now available online, considerably reducing the expense and time involved in researching and entering.

- The general consensus seems to be that the short film industry is thriving, with new Australian success stories popping up all the time. Success on the circuit requires a high level of organisation, with an emphasis on marketing and circulating the films for optimum exposure. There can be many benefits to entering short films into festivals, not the least of which is the prospect of having your film seen by as large an audience as possible. The key is to form a strategy and take advantage of the resources available, both on the internet and through film bodies such as the AFC.

RESOURCES

The internet is the most comprehensive resource available for finding out about and entering short film festivals. The Australian Film Commission's web site contains plenty of useful links to festivals and other film-related areas, while filmfests.com provides a complete rundown of festivals both in Australia and overseas. Also the AFC can assist in accessing some of the several publications dedicated to festivals.

- Tim Richards, the founder of filmfests.com, is understandably a big fan of the net for sourcing festival info and he advises filmmakers to “sit down with a coffee and trawl through it” to find the festivals that will most suit their needs.

Richards' site offers alphabetical listings of festivals with comprehensive information on each, as well as web site links containing online entry forms.

- There are plenty of other online directories (see below), which present information in various ways; some list festivals in alphabetical order, some by country or region and others by searchable database.

- Richards believes “people are taking advantage of technology to get their films out there”, which in turn is making it easier and more accessible for filmmakers to get the information they need.

“Another good option is to network with other filmmakers, find out what they’re doing,” he says. In his experience, established filmmakers are more than happy to share their experiences and knowledge and can provide invaluable advice on what works and, perhaps more importantly, what doesn’t.

STRAATEGY

The wisdom on how to market short films varies but it’s agreed filmmakers should have some kind of strategy in place. Budgeting is paramount and should take into account the cost of producing the film plus the cost of entering festivals (which includes freight and administration).

- Australian filmmaker Michael Frank whose shorts Purgatory, In Memory of Laura, and Auteur have been successful locally and abroad says “I find many short filmmakers spend a fortune completing their projects but don’t bother to make the effort to submit them to anything but the most obvious festivals. I’m the opposite - I make cheap films but put most of the money into submissions and marketing”.

- The AFC offers an excellent guide, Marketing Short Films Internationally, which advises films should be “under 15 minutes in length, 35mm and distinguished by conceptual boldness and strength of vision”. The Young Filmmakers Fund Marketing Guide, available from the NSW Film and Television Office, also contains great advice on marketing and selling short films.

CHOOSE A FESTIVAL

With so many festivals around knowing which one is going to give your film the best chance of being selected is difficult but again it comes down to research. Most festival web sites will state their entry criteria and conditions so finding the appropriate one requires reading all the fine print. Certainly genre is a consideration and many festivals specialise in particular genres or have sub categories.

- Richards sees choosing which festivals to target as paramount, saying “You’ve probably got about two years to exploit the film and it’s not something you should rush into. It really is a matter of doing the hard work of finding the festivals that will lead to bigger festivals”. And if you do get selected he advises, “You should hype the hell out of it, to attract the people who go to festivals”. Frank has a slightly different approach; “I send them to everything. This usually takes a couple of years and a lot of money but it’s worth it.”

- Richards adds “(filmmakers) really need to go beyond Australia to look at international festivals as a tool to get both local publicity and international exposure”. It is considered wise to enter both Australian and international festivals; although the locals ones may be smaller and lower-profile, they also tend to be made up of Australian productions therefore making the chances of being selected

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS

- Bilbao International Festival of Documentary & Short Films (Spain) Deadline: September Screening: November www.fic-bilbao.com
- British Short Film Festival (UK) Deadline: June http://www.britishshortfilmfestival.com
- Chilean International Short Film Festival (Chile) Deadline: October www.arcos.cl/festival
- Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival (France) Deadline: October Screening: February http://www.clermont-filmfest.com
- Cork Film Festival (Ireland) Deadline: July Screening: October www.corkfilmfest.org/ciff/
- Sao Paulo International Short Film Festival (Brazil) Deadline: August http://www.kinoforum.org/shorts
- Oberhausen Short Film Festival (Germany) Deadline: January Screening: May http://www.kurzfilmtage.de
- Palm Springs International Short Film Festival (US) Deadline: June Screening: August http://www.palmspingsfest.org
- Tampere International Short Film Festival (Finland) Deadline: December Screening: March http://www.tampere.fi/festival/film
- Uppsala Short Film Festival (Sweden) Deadline: July Screening: October www.shortfilmfestival.com
- Hamburg Short Film Festival (Germany) Deadline: March Screening: May http://www.shortfilm.com

above: Director Michael Frank puts Sarah Berger through Purgatory. left: Catherine Tysoe lapsing time in Michael Frank's Autist.
greater. There are plenty of quality Australian festivals and as evidenced by past Tropfest winners, the ensuing publicity can be extensive.

→ While it’s tempting to restrict your film to the high profile international festivals like Cannes, Berlin and Sundance, anecdotal evidence suggests the chances of being selected cold are pretty slim. Says Frank, “I focus mainly on Europe and Canada and usually avoid the US festivals for about a year until the film picks up a few screenings elsewhere. The Americans are only interested in films with hype and awards”.

→ As well as using the world wide web for research, it is also beginning to be a platform in itself for exhibiting films. See the feature in Cinema Papers issue 134 and note it pays to check that launching your film on the web won’t jeopardise your chances of entering your film elsewhere. (Many festivals, particularly American ones, have very strict guidelines on when and where your film can have been screened, some require first screening rights).

→ CUTTING COSTS/FUNDING

There is not a great deal of funding available locally to assist filmmakers in entering festivals, although various grants can include a marketing component. The AFC offers travel grants, generally worth $3000, to assist filmmakers in entering festivals, although most have always been rejected.

→ “If I’m just making a little experimental film”, he says, “I’d prefer to spend a couple of hundred bucks and do it myself rather than wrangle through red tape”. He also suggests a good sob story can be effective: “If you tell them you’re a poor, broke filmmaker they’ll usually waive the fees anyway”.

→ Similarly, once a film has been selected by one festival, it’s common for other festivals to invite the film to screen at their’s free of charge.

→ There are plenty of encouraging examples of local filmmakers who have had well-received short films. Adam Elliott, with his widely acclaimed and awarded animated shorts Uncle, Cousin and Brother; producer Kath Shelper, who has produced three AFC funded films; Gregory Godhard, whose latest short Mind’s Eye has screened at over 30 international festivals; and Rob Luketic, whose short Titsiana Booberti helped secure a three film deal with Miramax (which has not yet borne fruit).

→ Of course there are the bad luck cases as well, like the anecdote from a local email newsletter which described someone entering an Irish film festival, paying the entry fee and having the film rejected, only to realise that the festival was specifically for Irish filmmakers.

→ Frank describes “flying to Melbourne on my last pennies to attend a hyped festival which was screening my last three films. Only about 15 people turned up, half of which were my guests”. He then discovered that the shorts section wasn’t competitive anyway.

→ Still, the majority of stories convey a sense that the short film industry is at an exciting stage with festivals providing short filmmakers with the opportunity to show their work, win awards and possibly even launch a successful feature film career. And as Tim Richards says, the bottom line tends not to be about the money at all: “It’s a labour of love”. •
In Production

Feature Films

**In pre-production**

- **THE EDGE OF THE STREAM**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Geoffrey Nottage
  - Producer: David Rapsey
  - Scriptwriter: Geoffrey Nottage
  - Cast: Charles Tingwell, Bill Kerr, Vincent Ball
  - Synopsis: A story of redemption between three 75-year-old comrades who flew together in World War II. The men were survivors of a plane crash in which four out of the seven crew died. A film about how the past haunts the future and a salute good-bye to a generation.

- **LANANTA**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Ray Lawrence
  - Producer: Jan Chapman
  - Scriptwriter: Andrew Bovell
  - Synopsis: Crossing the genre boundaries of thriller, mystery and romantic drama, 'LANANTA' centres on a number of characters at a crucial time in their lives. They are connected by a series of coincidences involving misconception, infidelity and false assumptions. The search for meaning by Leen, the main character, drives the narrative and by learning about the pain of others he comes to accept his own.

- **LET'S GET SKASE**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Matthew George
  - Producers: John Tatoulis, Colin South
  - Scriptwriters: Matthew George, Lachy Hulme
  - Synopsis: Anti-hero Peter Della Zandri and his point of view based on his own backyard. He doesn't expect to find it in Tempe. For Max Franklin the search started in a hole in the ground of his own backyard.

- **MR AVERAGE**
  - Global Television
  - Principal Credits: Director: Cameron Miller
  - Executive producer: Russell Williams
  - Producers: Cameron Miller
  - Scriptwriters: Roger Dunn, Cameron Miller
  - Production manager: Ron Buch
  - Director of photography: Alex McPhee
  - Editor: Andrew Scott
  - Cast: Chris Franklin, Gabriel Ross, Dave Grant, Michael Bishop, Margie Bainbridge, Eric Mueck
  - Synopsis: Scott is a builder's labourer from Melbourne's working class suburbs and bit of a larrkin. When he is discovered and is a guest star on a prime time television soap opera, his life is thrown into chaos as he becomes an overnight success and a national star.

**In production**

- **THE BANK**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Robert Connolly
  - Producers: John Maynard
  - Scriptwriter: Robert Connolly
  - Director of Photography: Tristan Milani
  - Editor: Nick Meyers
  - Planning and development: Casting: Matilda Storyboard Artist: Tam Morris
  - First Assistant Director: Phil Jones
  - Production Manager: Elisa Argenzo
  - Production Designer: Luigi Potters
  - Sound Designer: Sam Petly
  - Cast: David Wenham, Sibylla Budd, Steve Rodgers, Mitchell Butel
  - **CROCODILE DUNDEE IN LOS ANGELES**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Simon Wincer
  - Producers: Lance Hool, Paul Hogan
  - Co-producer: Conrad Holland
  - Scriptwriters: Paul Hogan, Matthew Berry, Eric Abrams
  - Director of photography: David Burr
  - Production Designer: Les Binn

**Synopsis**

The large-format docu-drama follows the destinies of three young horses who are born on the same night.

- **EYE OF THE STORM**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Aaron Ware
  - Producers: Helen O'Malley
  - Scriptwriter: Joel Lawrence
  - Synopsis: The film uses the words of Nijinsky, written in 1919 in St Moritz where he had retired, suffering extreme mental agony.

- **PARADISE FOUND**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Mario Andreacchio
  - Producer: Mario Andreacchio
  - Scriptwriter: John Goldsworthy
  - Synopsis: Set in Paris and Tahiti in the 19th century, examines a slice of life of the French painter, Paul Gaugin, in his attempt to create a revelation in painting and thinking and his obsessions, addictions and the question of, 'Where do we come from? Where are we? Where are we going?'

- **QUEEN OF THE DAMNED**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Michael Rymer
  - Producers: Jerone Saremi
  - Scriptwriters: Scott Abbott, Michelle Paterni, Anne Rice
  - Synopsis: Based on Anne Rice's 'Queen of the Damned' - a modern-day vampire thriller tracing the story of Lestat (last seen in Interview With a Vampire) who has reinvented himself as a rock star.

- **RABBIT-PROOF FENCE**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Philip Noyce
  - Producers: John Winter, Philip Noyce
  - Executive producers: Christine Olsen
  - Synopsis: A large-format docu-drama film set in the rural Australian outback to accompany his partner, Sue Chantlon (Linda Havel), a journalist, to bustling, trendy Los Angeles. Sue has been assigned to run the LA bureau of her father's newspaper and investigate a major story. When Mick accidentally gathers a car crash in which four out of the seven crew died. A film about how the past haunts the future and a salute good-bye to a generation.

- **ENEMIES CLOSER**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Rick Idak
  - Producers: Mark Lopez, Adam Vasilevski
  - Scriptwriter: Mark Lopez
  - Synopsis: A two-hour docu-drama film set in the rural Australian outback to accompany his partner, Sue Chantlon (Linda Havel), a journalist, to bustling, trendy Los Angeles. Sue has been assigned to run the LA bureau of her father's newspaper and investigate a major story. When Mick accidentally gathers a car crash in which four out of the seven crew died. A film about how the past haunts the future and a salute good-bye to a generation.

- **EQUUS - THE STORY OF THE HORSE**
  - Principal Credits: Director: Michael Caulfield
  - Producers: Liz Butler, Michael Caulfield
  - Scriptwriter: Michael Caulfield
  - Synopsis: Based on the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky, the dancer who has reinvented himself as a rock star.

- **NIJINSKII**
  - Illumination Films and MusicAL/Two Films distribution company: Sharmill Films and WTV (US)
  - Budget: 1.2 million
  - Principal Credits: Director: Paul Cox
  - Producers: Paul Cox, Aanya Whitehead
  - Executive producers: Kevin Lucas, William Marshall
  - Scriptwriter: Paul Cox
  - Synopsis: Based on the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky, the dancer who has reinvented himself as a rock star.
In production

▶ BLONDE
Director: David Winnick
Producers: Robert Greenland Productions
Principal Credits
Producer: Jacobus Rose
Cast
Poppy McGregor, Kirsty Alley
Synopsis
A mini-series about the life of actress Marilyn Monroe, based on the biography by Jill Konr. "Once a Madam..."

▶ HOPE FLIES
Director: Geoffrey Nottage
Associate producer: Richard Mueck
Principal Credits
Production manager: Andrea Rapsey, John Thomson
Production design: Otello Stolfo
Production co-ordinator: Andrea Sutherland
Production manager: Barbara Gibbs
Synopsis
Liberty And Beyond Productions
December Films Australia
Duration: 90 min
Nottage
December Films Australia
Distribution company: Beyond International
Synopsis:
The story of Hope Flies focuses on a small-town in outback Australia with her local horses.
Crawford Productions/Robert Liberty And Beyond Productions
Producers: Tony Wright, Stuart Fitzgerald
Duration: 90 min
Synopsis:
CINEMA PAPERS.OCTOBER.NOVEMBER.2000

In post production

▶ LIL HORRORS
Director: Don Palmer
Producers: Tom + Steven
Synopsis:
Based on the novel titled: Tales of the East Australian Film Company
Executive producers: Michael Jaffe, Stuart Fitzgerald
Synopsis:
Director: Don Palmer
Post production:
Producer: Chris Sacani
Synopsis:
Dolby
Synopsis:
The story of Hope Flies focuses on a small-town in outback Australia with her local horses.
Crawford Productions/Robert Liberty And Beyond Productions
Producers: Tony Wright, Stuart Fitzgerald
Duration: 90 min
Synopsis:
CINEMA PAPERS.OCTOBER.NOVEMBER.2000

In pre-production

▶ THE SALT OF THE EARTH: MAHATMA GANDHI
Production company: Glass Box Distribution
Distributor: Glass Box Publishing
Synopsis:
Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Albert Einstein and Aung San Suu Kyi have one thing in common: they were all inspired by the vision, dedication and ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. He is a household name but so few really understand why. Tom Weber has spent 20 years finding out and now takes us on a journey to see why Gandhi still rocks.

▶ A FOX WITH TWELVE CHICKENS
Directors: Alan Carter
Producer: Alan Carter
Synopsis:
A Fox with Twelve Chickens
Series Director: Steve Weisst
Executive producer: Michael Jaffe
Synopsis:
A production accountant: CDH
Cameramans
Camera type: DV-Pro
Post-production: Howard Post Production
Synopsis:
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Post-production: Howard Post Production
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Post-production: Howard Post Production
Synopsis:
A production accountant: CDH
Cameramans
Camera type: DV-Pro
Post-production: Howard Post Production
Synopsis:
A production accountan...
Principal Credits
Director: Bob Hardie, Matthew Dow
Producer: Bob Hardie
Co-producer: Matthew Dow
Synopsis: The Australian Ballet is recognised as one of the world’s best. This series examines the way the ballet company works and the personalities that drive it. One of the highlights is an international tour, including performances in the USA. From its inception in the 1960s, the Australian Ballet has gone from strength to strength, with each new generation its character grows and changes. The metamorphosis is guided by the artists whose life is ballet.

MR STREHLOW’S FILMS
Production company: Journocon Productions
Distributor company: TBC
Budget: SBS/FFC Accord
Synopsis: A documentary about the life and works of TGH Strehlow (1908-1978). Tracks him from his work at Mullion Creek to repatriate his remains to his return to his ancestral homeland, the Arrernte country in the Northern Territory.

In post-production

ANIMAL X - SERIES 2
Series Documentary

Executive producers: Mike Searle, Jennifer Wilson
Producers: Mike Searle, Nigel Sweetman, Jennifer Wilson, Melanie Ambrose, Lindy Searle, Caroline Bertram
Synopsis: As with series one, ANIMAL X - SERIES 2 investigates animal stories from around the world. From ghostly phenomena to lake monsters and mysterious sightings to unknown creatures.

AUSTRALIANS AT WAR
Series documentary

Beyond Productions Pty Ltd in association with Mullion Creek

Principal Credits
Supervising producer: Stephen Amor</doc>

A FAMILY UNTIED
Network: ABC
Production company: CAAMA
Synopsis: A family divided by the impact of the Vietnam War who are attending Giant Steps, a special school of holistic one-on-one therapy for affected children in Sydney, whose progress to communication has defined their initial diagnoses.

BUNDY’S LAST GREAT ADVENTURE
Production company: Gulliver Media Australia Pty Ltd

Distribution company: Beyond International
Budget: $500,000

Principal Credits
Director: Larry Zeitlin
Producers: Larry Zeitlin, Edward Theodore, Standing Rock director: Craig Lucas
Sound recordist: Trevor Chalmers
Production manager: Trevor Chalmers
Financial controller: Andrew McSweeney, IJ Grace and Co
Production accountant: Andrew McSweeney
Insurer: Cnesia
Legal services: Goss Crane and Herd
Camera Crew
Camera operators: Craig Lucas
Camera type: Sony Hi Definition

Post production

Production editor: Denise Haslem
Offline facilities: CAAMA
Government Agency Investment Production: AFFC
Marketing: TBC
Synopsis: This unique documentary features the special working relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women who work out on remote Indigenous communities.

TALES FROM A SUITCASE
Production company: Look Television Production P/L
Distribution company: JCM
Budget: $355,000

Principal Credits
Series Director: Andrea Dale Bosco
Series Producer: Will Davies
Directors: Peter Hegedus, Debra Beattie, David Vaclavik, Veronica Lecce
Commissioning Editor: Courtney Gibson
BSB (II)
Production Manager: Simon Heilbronn
Director of photography: Roman Blasko
Editor: Bernard Ashby
Composer: Chapin
Sound designer: Derek Allen, Zig Zag Lane
Production Crew
Production co-ordinator: Trinny Roe
Synopsis: A thirteen-part oral history series which looks at the migrant experience in Australia during the 1950s.

Recent funding decisions

Feature Films

BENEATH CLOUDS
Autumn Films Pty Ltd
Producer: Teresa-Jayne Hamilton
Director: Liza MacKenzie
Distribution: Axiom, SBS, REP
Beneath Clouds is the story of Lena, the light-skinned daughter of an Aboriginal mother and Irish father and Vaughan, a Murri boy doing time in a minimum security prison in North-West NSW. Dramatic events throw them together on a journey with no money and no transport. To Lena, Vaughan represents the life she is running away from, while to Vaughan she embodies the society that has rejected him. And for a very short amount of time, they experience a rare true happiness together.

THE MAN WHO SUED GOD
Dreamstone Productions
Producer: Marcus Radomsky, Jo-Anne McGowan
Director: Mark Joffe
Distribution: ABC International
Synopsis: A true story about family roots, identity, exile, displacement and the dream of sanctuary. When Steve Myer’s fishing boat sinks and he真正做到 insurance company declares it an Act of God and refuses to pay. No man can prevail against the might of the multinational. Angry and hungover, Steve sees no way but to sue the other party—God.

Children’s Television Drama

ESCAPE OF THE ARTFUL DODGER
112 30 minute Children’s Television Drama Series
The Producers Group Pty Ltd/Grundy
Executive Producers: Andrew Brooke, Roger Mirams
Producer: Roger Mirams
Director: Mark Ochshofer
Writers: David Phillips, Karen Peterson, Robert Loader
Presales: Nine Network, NDR, Coral Europe
Distribution: Cumulus Distribution
Synopsis: The story of Jack Dawsen, who, in children’s television Australia is a rejection of the old life, an opportunity to be, not a crook... but a hero.

Documentaries

BREAKING BOWS AND ARROWS
55 [1 minute documentary]
Land Beyond Productions
Executive Director: Liz Thompson
Producer: Mark Ochshofer
Distribution: Minds Eye
Synopsis: In the pristine landscape of the Northwest of Australia a battle for territory is being waged between two forces: feral versus native animals.

SMALL STEPS, GIANT STEPS
Network: SBS
Production company: Emerald Films
Principal Credits
Director: Sally Browning
Producer: Browning
Associate Producer: Paola Garofalo
Director of photography: Romain Baska
Editor: Emma Hay
Script writer: Sally Browning
Format: DVCam & DVC Pro
Synopsis: Autism is a disorder that affects one in every 1000 children born in Australia. Most children with autism are initially categorised as ‘unreachable’ and until recently institutionalisation was the favoured cure. It has only been in recent years that alternative therapies have been explored and starting breakthroughs made by the children who respond to these therapies.

BUNDY: THE MAN WHO SUED GOD
Director: Erica Glynn
Production manager: Marnie Joffe
Producers: Michael Caulfield, Caroline Martin
Dramatic events throw them together on a journey with no money and no transport. To Lena, Vaughan represents the life she is running away from, while to Vaughan she embodies the society that has rejected him. And for a very short amount of time, they experience a rare true happiness together.

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The sum of us

The gurus rate recent releases.

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<th>Movie</th>
<th>Sandra Hall</th>
<th>Vicky Krieps</th>
<th>Julianne Moore</th>
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<th>Cate Blanchett</th>
<th>Richard Gere</th>
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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.
Farscape, Series 3
Producer: Anthony Winley
Director: Various
DOP: Russell Bacon

Ihaka
Producer: Ian Bradley
Director: Peter Fisk
DOP: Mino Martinetti

Journeys
Producer: Becker
Entertainment
Director: Various
DOP: Various

Holy Smoke
Producer: Jan Chapman
Director: Jane Campion
DOP: Dion Beebe

Feeling Sexy
Producer: Glenys Rowe
Director: Davida Allen
DOP: Gary Phillips

Kick
Producer: Ross Matthews
Director: Lynda Heys
DOP: Martin McGarth

Flat Chat
Producer: Richard Clendinnen
Director: Pino Amenta & Adam Blakeclock
DOP: Henry Pierce

In A Savage Land
Producer: Bill & Jennifer Bennett
Director: Bill Bennett
DOP: Danny Ruhlman

My Husband, My Killer
Producer: David Gould
Director: Peter Andrikidis
DOP: Joseph Pickering

Better Than Sex
Producer: Bruna Papandrea
Director: Jonathon Teplitzky
DOP: Garry Phillips

My Brother Jack
Producer: Sue Milliken, Andrew Wiseman, Richard Keddie
Director: Ken Cameron
DOP: Russell Bacon

Blue Murder
Producer: Rod Allan
Director: Michael Jenkins
DOP: Martin McGarth

Two Hands
Producer: Marian McGowen
Director: Gregor Jordan
DOP: Malcolm McCullogh

Cut
Producer: Mushroom Pictures
Director: Kimble Rendall
DOP: David Foreman

Close Contact
Producer: Ian Bradley
Director: Scott Hartford-Davis
DOP: Nino Martinetti

The Next Wave
Producer: Southern Star
Director: Nick Greenaway
DOP: Stephen Broadhurst

Bootmen
Producer: Hilary Linstead
Director: Dein Perry
DOP: Steve Mason

FRAME, SET & MATCH
50 STRATHALLEN AVE
NORTHBREDGE NSW 2063
TEL: 612 8966 5000
FAX: 612 8966 5050
EMAIL: fsm@fsm.com.au
WEB: www.fsm.com.au
We already have the product lined up for several jobs, and we haven't even taken delivery of it yet. Everyone wants to work with this new technology!

ProCam Pigi Post Proprietor

"As soon as we saw the product at the road show, we ordered it. This is an incredibly exciting product, it has created the biggest buzz in the industry I've ever seen."

"The ability to shoot in HD and finish in SD wide screen makes this a very cost effective product for our clients. The tape stock is inexpensive compared to 35mm film, and yet the HDCAM gives you a highly comparable quality in acquisition."

"The learning curve on the product is short. The lenses, controls and operational methods are essentially the same meaning we can quickly recoup the investment with a minimum of downtime in training."

"The HDCAM integrates incredibly well with our existing Sony systems, and across other platforms as well."

The HDCAM is to be first used filming a documentary for Gulliver Media with the support of the Centenary of Federation Committee. It follows a steam train called Bundy through some of Queensland's most scenic country from Nambour to Mosman. The film has already been pre-sold to the 7 network.

"We already have the product lined up for several jobs, and we haven't even taken delivery of it yet. Everyone wants to work with this new technology!"

Network Ten is an avid supporter of Sony, we enjoy an excellent relationship with Sony, who have provided outstanding support for many years. This is why we went with the HDCAM, and why we have just placed an order for another unit!

"Using the Sony HDCAM will reduce production costs significantly, and will compare favourably to 35mm film for quality."

"Ten has a great history with Sony cameras, all Ten's news facilities and on-road crews are Sony equipped. The HDCAM will be another welcome addition to a long association with Sony technology."

Ian Bates
ProCam Digi Post Proprietor

"Ten chose to invest in the Sony HDCAM to shoot native HD material in Australia. We want as much HD material as possible, in order to get it on air as soon as possible. Sony HDCAM makes this an affordable reality."

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Stephen Ireland
Network Operations & Technology Manager Network Ten

HDW-F900 - Digital Camcorder
HDW-F500 - Digital Recorder

For further information please call 1800 017 669 www.sony.com.au