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This serial is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/cp/136
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Almost Famous
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Animated Helmets on the Red Planet. Digital FX team leader Tony Clark writes about creating objects around Val Kilmer’s head.

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Welcome to Woop Woop

→ Welcome to our Critical Issue examining, among other things, whether Australia really does have a culture of art cinema. This was an issue first touched on by BVI distributor Alan Finney in his To Market, To Market column in issue 132. Now, coinciding with the launch of Paul Cox’s Innocence, Melbourne critic Adrian Martin takes the debate one step further in a feature that’s sure to set tongues a-wagging.

Still, our international returns for features and TV drama remain low, as detailed by the AFCs annual production report (see newsfront p.8). But aided by the insight of the AFC's development paper and recent re-examination of the role of that body, plus the FFC, the stage is set for the local industry to move gainfully into 2001 and beyond.

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**CEO for Cinemedia at last**

After almost a year of uncertainty, the Victorian Government has appointed a CEO to run the Victorian film industry’s peak body, Cinemedia. John Smithies was appointed in November for 12 months, after acting in the position since March, following the departure of Jennifer Hooks who held the job for under a decade.

The CEO announcement had not been expected for several months to allow the state government time to prepare its response to a recent report into the Victorian industry. The report advocated splitting Cinemedia into two bodies, one responsible for administering screen culture, the other charged with funding film and TV production.

The short-term of the appointment will allow the CEO to assist Cinemedia’s transition into two separate entities if the government accepts the report’s suggestions, as is expected.

**Dip in the SPAA**

The key issues facing local screen producers are; directors’ copyrights, the need for a high-end broadband network, and the pending introduction of digital broadcasting. That’s according to the president of the Screen Producer’s Association of Australia (SPAA), Nick Murray, who welcomed 650 delegates to the 15th annual conference on November 15.

Addressing a full auditorium, Murray, an independent producer and former network executive, said SPAA was working towards an agreement with the Australian Screen Directors Association (ASDA) on directors’ copyrights.

He said directors and producers were divided, and producers could not even agree among themselves, on the issue which had arisen due to a landscape of growing multimedia sophistication, plus a determination by networks to reduce licence fees.

Murray argued reaching a consensus would, “Allow us to concentrate on more important commercial issues, such as the terms of trade with Australian broadcasters and the attraction of international funding to our film and television projects”. Praising the federal government’s “interest” in establishing a high end broadband network to enable the post-production sector to better service offshore productions, Murray said he was nevertheless disturbed that, “this may be the sole focus of the government”.

“The failure of the local industry to provide throughput to the post production sector will ultimately render it uncompetitive in any event.” On that note, he praised the recent Australian Film Commission (AFC) report which advocated a “smarter” approach to production investment.

Digital TV is due to launch in Oz on 1 January, 2001 but Murray joked HDTV’s arrival was as exciting as the introduction last decade of “new, stereo AM radio”.

“No one wants it and even if they did want it, they can’t receive it,” he said. “Like the US, it’s now generally accepted that the networks here have been granted a vast public resource which they are unlikely to use for the intended purpose.”

International guests at SPAA 2000 included screenwriter Robert Towne film business strategist Jonathan Olsberg and producer Gary Levinsohn (The Patriot), plus acquisitions consultants including USA Film’s Amanda Klein, Universal Picture’s Graeme Mason and Miramax’s Matt Brodlie.

To them Murray demanded, “Put up or shut up. Let’s see something better than the usual ‘Send us your film when it’s finished’, we need more support than that.”

The loud applause which greeted Murray’s speech set the tone for the most energetic conference since guest speaker George Lucas announced his intention to shoot Star Wars: Episode Two in Australia on the eve of SPAA ’98.

**Annual Accounts**

The local film industry produced ten fewer feature films in the past twelve months, compared with the previous year, but due to the mega-budget for Fox’s Moulin Rouge (more than $50 million), overall production grew by seven percent.

News of the drop to a production slate of 31 features, was contained in the Australian Film Commission’s annual production report released in November. It also found local televisual production expenditure had risen only slightly to $570 million, aided by an increase in TV drama production up 22 percent on last year.

Feature budgets are continuing to skew towards the lower end of the spectrum, all but Moulin Rouge were produced for $6 million or less, and 13 of those were produced for less than $1 million.

Spending on international co-productions rose from $87 million to $109 million, slightly offsetting the decrease in spending by foreign productions from last year’s peak of $181 million, to $115 million.
Getting Scripts Right

The local film industry is dogged by an abundance of poorly-financed scripts which are languishing too long in development. So says a report released by the country's leading marketing and development agency, the Australian Film Commission (AFC).

The study, which compared local funding and practice with other significant non-US industries, was presented to the federal government in November. It reveals Australia's development-to-production ratio, at 17-to-one, outstrips by double the European and Hollywood average of eight-to-one, revealing monies wasted seeding too many projects which fail to materialise.

Local features spend an average 4.8 years in development, double the usual US timeframe, and more than a third longer than Europe. With development budgets commonly hovering around $60,000, local projects are twice as rich as their Canadian counterparts but receive, on average, just under a third of European project funding, and a quarter the UK average.

The report establishes that low and declining overall development investment is resulting in elongated, fractured and impoverished projects plus stifled practitioner development.

Our penchant for combining the roles of writer, producer and director equates to a further drain on the talent pool when an individual moves offshore.

The AFC is planning to reduce the number of projects it invests in while fostering an environment which encourages sustained and concentrated practitioner development and separates the roles of writer, director and producer.
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The regional coding of DVDs has entered the next chapter with the Regional Code Enhancement (RCE) program. The RCE is designed to overcome the proliferation of altered DVD players able to bypass the region code requirements. Shane Stephens reports retailers are currently openly marketing players as “region free” and “multi zone.”

The DVD market is broken up into six regions - Australia is in region 4. DVD players that play all regions are decrypted with DeCSS, a technology that has multi-regional capabilities the RCE will not allow the altered player to play the disc: displaying a message that the player is unauthorised to play the program.

The RCE program is designed to discourage the export of Region One discs to other regions. As Hollywood staggered film releases around the globe (so that they don’t have to make as many copies of the film), it is possible for people outside of Region One to buy DVD versions of films prior to the film being released at their local cinemas.

The reasoning behind the proliferation of multi-region players in Australia is the lack of titles available, combined with the lack of extra features included on the Australian discs. With only 1000 Australian titles compared to approximately 6000 titles available in Region One, the incentive to cross regions is great.

Siren Entertainment’s licensing and distribution manager Paul Wiegard says “If Australian suppliers don’t release with the same features as US discs, [purchasers] will go to the US or UK.”

Whether it will work or not is the big question. According to Wiegard, “people don’t fully recognise the advancement in this technology - there were a lot of teething problems early on. Certain hardware was not reading some discs, people were not used to the technology. People are still coming to terms with the technology.”

The RCE discs are scheduled for release in the US market in late October. According to Wiegard, the first RSE disc introduced to Australia will be The Patriot (released in January 2001).

Dear Ms Boland,

I am writing in response to your reference to Working Dog’s The Dish in the Newsfront section of your October/November edition. Although there are many points with which I and my partners take issue, there is one matter raised in your curious article that cannot be left unchallenged. Your claim that Working Dog insisted on reviews for The Castle being submitted before an interview was granted regarding The Dish is untrue.

Michael Hirsh at Working Dog

Cinema Papers stands by its publication of this item. The reviewer in question volunteered the information in the presence of other members of the film industry.
I've only ever had “the red carpet treatment” once before, and that was when I got my living room steam-cleaned. I'm pretty sure there weren't as many paparazzi around then, as there are now, crammed as they are along the entranceway to the Horden Pavilion at the 2000 AFI Awards. It's damn lucky there is a red carpet to follow. Who knows, without it some of these confused looking starlets might mistakenly follow some other primary-coloured parade - say, a blue line on the macadam - and end up in Homebush.

But the red carpet and the treatment traditionally associated with it says to all those who walk its plush path - This is it! This is the big time! You've made it! To the foyer! I take my turn to walk down this magical fairway of fame, immediately ignored by the assembled photographers and onlookers, although I got the feeling just for an instant that one photographer thought I was Ralph Fiennes (I get that a bit). Anyway, forget Alibrandi, I'm Looking For Pia. The parade of celebrities and nobodies continues unabated and unperturbed by the drizzling rain, but there is no sign of Best Actress nominee. There's actor Chris Haywood (looks cool). There's Guy Pearce (needs a shave). Catriona Roundtree (nominated for Getaway?) looks a little too comfortable in the camera's gaze. Rob Sitch is here for some reason, perhaps rehearsing his arrival for next year's awards. There's Eric Bana, but where's Mark 'Chopper' Read? Probably snubbed the awards in favour of his regular Saturday night jazz club gig. He plays clarinet, you know.

Just when it looks like she's not coming, there she suddenly is, Pia Miranda, striding up the red carpet looking positively angelic. I hate those damn paparazzi for making her stop and turn and smile, all the while screaming Pia! Pia! Pia! at her. At least they could scream her name politely, like I do.

In the media centre, some journos have already staked out their places on the folding chairs by taping their business cards to the seats. Hello! is up front, and Woman's Day subtly in the second row. Penthouse Magazine had pegged the third row, but let's not go there.

A table with four microphones sits on a small stage.
**2000 AFI results**

**Features**
- Best film for producer: Looking for Alibrandi.
- Best actress for newcomer: Looking for Alibrandi.
- Best supporting actress for: Looking for Alibrandi.
- Best adapted screenplay for: Looking for Alibrandi.
- Best editing for: Bootmen.
- Best director for: Bootmen.
- Best lead actor for: Bootmen.
- Best supporting actor for: Dan Jinks, American Beauty.
- Best original screenplay:
- Best original music score:
- Best costume design:
- Best cinematography:
- Best sound, David Lee,
- Best production design:
- Best foreign film, producers:
- Young actor's award:

**Non-features**
- TV drama episode, producer for Grass Roots.
- TV drama screenplay for Grass Roots.
- TV drama director for Grass Roots.
- Lead actor in drama series, Grass Roots.
- Lead actress in a drama Series, Something in the Air.
- Actor in a Telefeature or Mini Series, Halifax I.P.
- Actress in a Telefeature or Mini Series, Waiting At The Royal.
- Episode drama series, All Saints - Valley of The Shadow (part 1), Seven Network Australia, Producer, to Rome.
- Mini-series or Telefeature, On The Beach, Southern Star
- Children's television drama, Eugenie Sandler P.I., Burberry Productions
- Documentary, The Diplomat.
- Short fiction film, Confessions of a Headhunter.
- Direction in a documentary, The Diplomat.
- Cinematography in a non-feature, La Nina.

I take my turn to walk down this magical fairway of fame, immediately ignored by the assembled photographers and onlookers, although I got the feeling just for an instant that one photographer thought I was Ralph Fiennes (I get that a bit).

This is where tonight's winners will sit and answer asinine questions like 'How does it feel to win?' I grab a glass of champagne and a canapé and head back down the red carpet again, hoping to be mistaken for Ralph Fiennes. No one buys it.

**Empire** film magazine is launching in Australia and they are having a pre-AFIs party in a small tent near the entrance to the Horden Pavilion.

The party is packed with surprisingly few celebrities, unless you count Mikey Robbins. I figure the reason might be in the small details.

Full marks for the chilled champagne, but there's a real problem with the olives and the pistachios. I mean, you have to actually remove the pits from the green olives yourself! And the pistachio nuts still have their shells on!

I shake my head in dismay and wonder what Kate Fischer would think of having to remove the shell of a pistachio like any common nut eater.

This lack of attention to detail has probably cost Empire a Terry Norris or a Tom Long.

Back in the media room, the paparazzi hover like camera-toting vultures. These guys have honed harassment to a fine art. No wonder people drive at very high speeds through tunnels to escape them.

The Who Cares awards are quickly dispensed with. These are the gongs handed out before the actual SBS telecast, and later shown as a highlights package while everybody goes to the toilet.

The actual awards are now called Lovelys. What a bloody stupid name. They had a nationwide competition to figure out this moniker, and it was, unbelievably, the best they could come up with. It doesn't really have the same ring as Oscar, does it? I doubt if the AFI are going to be in too much of a hurry whacking a (TM) next to it. Myself, I would have gone with the Pias.

The award ceremony itself is a pretty ho-hum affair. Where were the cutaways to the nominees squirming in their seats as their names were announced? Where were the split screen reaction shots as the winner was read out? It's even duller in the media room with the sound turned down on the TV half the time while the award winners face questions from the assembled media.

The Television Lovelys are through first, and
predictably there is much concern for the future of the ABC and the state of local drama. Again and again the same theme comes up - the phenomenon of Reality TV is killing locally produced comedy and drama, like some Crown of Thorns starfish choking the life out of the local industry as if it were coral (although of course coral forms over thousands of years while television in this country hasn't been running for anywhere near as long). I considered putting this analogy to Noni Hazlehurst, but in retrospect it's perhaps best I didn't.

I catch another glimpse of the delightful Pia Miranda when she fronts the media after winning for Best Actress. She looks exquisite in an outfit designed by Morrissey, which explains what he's been doing since his last solo album.

I'm primed to ask Pia a question when somebody else - I think it was Angela Bishop - beats me to the punch with 'How does it feel to win, Pia?'. Sharp.

The after-party is held in a huge hall that resembles the inside of a dirigible. Down one end is a dance area and a DJ. To the right there's a closed off area full of corporate VIP tables. All over the floor are free bars stocked with beer, wine, and those sickly sweet Vodka drinks that I'm happy to drink all night when they're nix.

And there's the food. Stalls are set up all around the hall specialising in various regional dishes from Europe, Asia/South Pacific, Australia and Africa.

The latter continent seems the most popular. Perhaps everyone has had enough of celebrating ourselves - as a consequence the Australian food stalls are barely attended. I opt for African myself, tucking into some tasty little ball things. Sated, it's on to the serious business of schmoozing and Looking For Pia. The latter is especially difficult to achieve, given she is one of about a million people at this party, but I give it my best shot.

If only I had some sort of Global Positioning System (GPS) where I could pinpoint the exact position of the elfin actress at any given time via a global satellite network. Perhaps the AFI could lobby the government for funding in this area. A few laps of the hall and no sign of Pia, but I do spot Matthew Newton, another actor featured in Looking For Alibrandi. In the film, you'll remember, he plays a high-achieving teenage schoolboy who kills himself because his father hosts Good Morning Australia. I ask him if he's seen his co-star and he says no, but he agrees a GPS that could pinpoint the exact position of the elfin actress at any given time via a global satellite network might be a good idea.

The DJ is packing up. It's 2am. The dirigible is emptying out. The taxi rank is filling up. There's word of a must attend party at Potts Point (you Sydney people are wild!) but for this writer, the AFIs are over for another year.

Oh, and I never did find Pia.

After midnight I bump into schoolboy Kane McNay, winner of the AFI Young Actors' Award. I commiserate with him over Mailboy's lack of award nominations, consoling him with my opinion that the films nominated in this year's Best Film category are all exactly the same anyway.

After midnight I bump into schoolboy Kane McNay, winner of the AFI Young Actors' Award. I commiserate with him over Mailboy's lack of award nominations, consoling him with my opinion that the films nominated in this year's Best Film category are all exactly the same anyway. Looking For Alibrandi is basically about a young girl coming of age. Bootmen is about a pair of tap-dancing brothers coming of age. Chopper is a film about a violent criminal coming of age. And of course, Better Than Sex is a film in which there's just a lot of coming.

By the end of the night, I've caught sight of Steve Bastoni 27 times, Kate Langbroek three times, and I think I might have caught a glimpse of Chopper director Andrew Dominik - although it was dark and it could have been Steve Bastoni. The DJ is packing up. It's 2am. The dirigible is emptying out. The taxi rank is filling up. There's word of a must attend party at Potts Point (you Sydney people are wild!) but for this writer, the AFIs are over for another year.

Oh, and I never did find Pia.
a hit on Red Planet

When the Warner/Roadshow Val Kilmer feature Red Planet decided to shoot at Sydney’s Fox Studios and in outback Coober Pedy, they also required some local digital effects expertise. Tony Clark led a team charged with creating animated helmet sequences.

Based in Adelaide, Clark’s team was one of 12 digital effects units who worked on the mammoth task of creating 900 different effects shots. The other units were all based in LA. One company did all the robot animations, one did the colour grades, and another did the matt paintings. In addition to the animated helmet sequences, there were a number of shots where actors had helmets on, but the visors were left out presumably due to camera and lighting reflections. Those shots needed to have the visors created and added back in. Sounds like no big deal, but let me assure you, from an effects perspective, it is. Especially for a fight sequence (where the actors are moving around a lot) and the camera is hand-held.

All the shots we worked on required the creation of 3D elements that would be attached to and blended with the live action background plates. In the fight scene, the helmets were already on the actors and red tracking marks had been placed on them to allow us to follow the motion of the helmet. On slow shots, it’s possible to use these marks to find out how the helmet is moving (using 3D tracking software), but in this case the helmet and camera were moving so radically, they weren’t much help. The motion ended up being tracked manually, using a stand-in model of the helmet for reference. If the helmet is not tracked into the shot correctly, it looks as if it is sliding around, and big film close-ups leave no margin for error.

Once the helmet was tracked, several 3D elements were created to produce the effect of the glass on the visors. The elements included scratch elements, a layer to show the surface angle to camera, transparency layers, highlights, etc. The finished look was created in compositing, by combining these layers. Creating the look in the compositing phase, we set our in-house programmers to the task of solving the problem of matching the images we see on our computer screens with the final look on film. The resulting product (which we called ‘cineSpace’) has now been released commercially. For Red Planet the software was further modified to allow us to colour correct the images and QuickTime movies that went up for preview on the internet, allowing the LA-based visual effects supervisor, Jeff Okun, to view them in roughly the correct colour. This was a major factor for us in working remotely, as it meant we could be sure we were all looking at the same image.

As the US production was all based around NTSC, we also were required to deliver temp shots on NTSC SP. Due to the courier delay (best case: two days), this was ultimately foregone in favour of the internet delivered QuickTime movies, which offered faster turnaround and equivalent quality.

When working with Australian films, we are generally hired by the producer or production manager and deal directly with the director, DOP and editor. We’re also responsible for supervising the shooting, and possibly supplying motion control or camera equipment.

-> The helmet animation sequences, where the helmet retracts into nothing, required further work again, as the only thing that existed on the actors was the collar ring. Everything from there up was created in 3D. This was trickier again, as the shots had some parts of the real helmet in shot along with parts of the 3D helmet, so matching was critical.

One of the shots in this sequence was particularly tricky because when we received the live action elements, we found that the collar ring was hanging very low and it was obscuring the front of his space suit. So we ended up re-building the collar ring and the front of his suit in 3D to get around the problem. The shot has an actor standing in a field of algae, and his helmet animates on followed by the visor. It’s at night, so reflections in the visor were tricky, but we were supplied a frame from a matt painting in an adjacent shot providing visor reflections of the landscape and another actor in the foreground.

-> Generally, with Australian films where we’ve been required to do anything complex, we’ll insist upon having one of our people on set to supervise the shooting. In this instance, we were bought in once shooting was complete, so didn’t have the opportunity to do so. This left us without a whole lot of information about lenses, exposures, camera position, etc that we’d normally collect on set. This was overcome by spending more effort in the post-production.

Plus, the production had contracted the scanning and recording of the digital images to a single contractor in Los Angeles. We received data tapes of the elements and dispatched them on data tape in return, which meant we never got to see the final shots before the visual effects crew in LA. In fact, as I write this, I’ve only ever seen two very short shots on film, which we’d shot at AAV in Melbourne. About two years ago, I came up with an idea on how to solve the problem of matching the images we see on our computer screens with the final look on film. We set our in-house programmers to the task of developing software which we tested on our own work. The resulting product (which we called ‘cineSpace’) has now been released commercially. For Red Planet the software was further modified to allow us to colour correct the images and QuickTime movies that went up for preview on the internet, allowing the LA-based visual effects supervisor, Jeff Okun, to view them in roughly the correct colour. This was a major factor for us in working remotely, as it meant we could be sure we were all looking at the same image.
The downside of the distance was the lack of face-to-face communication, the fact we never saw our shots on film or the film, as a whole, but I'd expect this to become less of an issue once technology advances and bandwidth become more affordable.

In this instance, all that was taken care of, and the production managed all the visual effects with the crew headed by the visual effects supervisor - Jeff Okun (Deep Blue Sea, Sphere).

From the beginning of production, we ran two 3D teams on the project; one doing the animated helmets and the other doing the visor replacements. Quite early in that process, we worked to lock down the look of the various shots, which involved us posting test QuickTime movies and high resolution stills up on the internet for Okun to review. As these shots had been colour corrected using cineSpace, we were confident the colour and density of the shots would appear the same on the production’s monitors in LA as on ours - thereby eliminating one variable from the mix.

Rising Sun has a fast internet link as does the Studio, so it took only a minute or so to download the complete shot. For really specific detail, we'd put up high resolution still frames, so they could be seen in the same level of detail as we were seeing. This process worked very well, but could be better if there was greater access to affordable bandwidth out of Australia.

Due to our differing time zones (9am in Adelaide was 4.30pm in LA), we could also work late in our day, prepped material for them to see, upload it to our server and advise them. Okun would look and comment on it, providing feedback early in his day. We'd then have a phone chat in the morning our time and review any changes, which would be implemented through our day ready for him the next morning. This was less effort on the supervisor’s part than driving across town in LA to review the other companies’ work as Okun could look at our work from his office at the studio or home depending upon the time of day.

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Shane McKechnie

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From silk to celluloid

Screening Asia

Australia is a market where moviegoers embrace Hollywood features, and local films comprise only five percent of box office, so is there a demand for Asian films? We asked ourselves this question earlier this year when we saw an increase in our slate of Asian films. 

We can attribute this product increase to Columbia TriStar’s film production house in Hong Kong and the efforts of our New York acquisition division Sony Pictures Classics. For us to determine the commercial potential of each film we investigated the market and raised questions such as: do discerning filmgoers embrace Asian language films? How were previous Asian films distributed and what were the box office results? Which are the cinemas that perform best with foreign language films and who are the patrons these films attract? Our inquiry uncovered some interesting details. For example, Asian films are seen by discerning filmgoers but Asian-Australians account for a very small percentage of the audience. We also realised that while most foreign language films receive a national release, they have historically been staggered across the country diluting the impact of a national marketing campaign. A staggered release can put additional pressure on the sales and marketing team. Finally, the research uncovered how little continuity there was with cinemas presenting these films which means the films struggle to receive benefit from customer loyalty or in-house marketing and cross promotions. With this information at hand we were convinced there was a viable and untapped market for Asian titles. Our goal was to find an effective way of managing the release of five Asian films we had on our books, while increasing the box-office potential for each of them.

It was then that we came up with Silk Screen. The idea was to collectively market a group of quality Asian films under one banner and make them available to audiences over a clearly defined season of six months. We knew the success of the program was reliant on good quality product and the support of premier cinemas across the country. We were fortunate to receive both. Silk Screen launched on July 6 with The Road Home, the winner of the Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear prize. The program concludes on January 4 with Ang Lee’s Cannes festival hit Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon. 

We made a commitment to deliver to cinemas quality product, solid marketing support and geographic exclusivity. This won us the support of 11 cinemas with all locations agreeing to host the six-month program and support the films in-house. Once the line-up was confirmed and the partners were on board the next step was to fine-tune the marketing strategy. 

While the advertising and publicity budgets for these films are small relative to the big Hollywood blockbusters, they absolutely required a strong publicity and promotion campaign. Of course this project has been active for five months and I could spend pages detailing the activity. Rather than do that, I’d like to take you through the development of Silk Screen’s campaign with the inclusion of a few promotional highlights.

The first stage involved creating a logo so we could in turn establish the brand and produce communication material. Once the image was finalised it was time to commence production of an internet site. We believed it was important to have an on-line presence to ensure the media and the public was able to access information on the new program. We proceeded to segment the market, targeting the arts media, educated cinema patrons and local Asian-Australians. The campaign was then executed in stages commencing with a June media launch in Sydney and Melbourne. This was followed by a national publicity and promotion campaign and the introduction of print advertising two weeks prior to launch. One of our main goals was to capture the elusive Asian Australian audience which is relatively new to us and for this reason we hired the services of ethnic marketing consultancy group. This company helped us gain a better understanding of the local marketplace as we made contact with the Asian media and opinion leaders within the community. 

We then translated and printed the communication material and under the guidance of the ethnic marketing group executed a press and radio advertising campaign through the Asian media. The good news is it would seem our efforts have paid off with our partners reporting a dramatic increase in movie attendance by Asian Australians. Our core target has always been the ‘discerning filmgoer’ and to capture this somewhat broader market we are running considerable publicity and promotional activity. 

Another partnership of note is the NSW Art Gallery. Currently we ran a promotion for Silk Screen’s Japanese film Kikujiro in association with the Japanese “Hang” exhibition. In December, we launch a cross promotion and ticket incentive for Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon in association with the Chinese “Masks of Mystery”. Over the opening weekend patrons of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon will receive a ‘buy one get one free’ ticket to the gallery presentation.

In November, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon premiered at the re-launch of Pay TV’s “World Movies” channel. The purpose of this screening was to generate further media exposure and positive word-of-mouth. Of course, interview access to the directors and stars provided the foundation for our publicity campaign. Beyond that my team did a wonderful job generating feature stories on ‘fashionable’ Asia and promoting Silk Screen to Asian culture study groups and student press.

To date we consider Silk Screen to be a wonderful success. As the campaign gains momentum and we continue to promote one film off the next, Silk Screen has made it possible to elevate the profile of each film and give them the attention they deserve. I would have to say Silk Screen has been particularly work-intensive for our marketing team but then it has also been so rewarding; not only personally for our team but at the box-office as well.

After four months the program had grossed over $1.2 million. The Road Home had grossed over $630,000 after 13 weeks, placing it among the top five grossing Asian language films released in Australia. While The Emperor and The Assassin tracked just as well, grossing over $400,000 in the first weeks. We have been asked many times if there will be Silk Screen 2001. The answer to that question is: if we can deliver the quality of Asian films next year and with continued support from our partners, you bet there will.

SUZANNE STRETTON-BROWN IS NATIONAL MARKETING MANAGER FOR COLUMBIA TRISTAR FILMS. THE SILK SCREEN FILMS WERE THE ROAD HOME, SHOWER, THE EMPEROR AND THE ASSASSIN, KIKUJIRO AND CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON.
Four Feathers
Director: Shekhar Kapur
Production commences: March 2001
Scheduled US release: October 2001
War film about a British officer who resigns his post just before battle and subsequently receives four white feathers from his friends and fiancée as symbols of what they believe to be his cowardice.
Cast: Heath Ledger, Kate Hudson

Legally Blonde
Director: Robert Luketic
(Filming began in October)
Scheduled US release: 2001
Comedy about a sorority queen dumped by her boyfriend who follows him to law school for revenge.
Cast: Selma Blair, Reese Witherspoon

In the Cut
Director: Jane Campion (NZ)
Erotic thriller
Scheduled release: Late 2001
Cast: Nicole Kidman

The Others
Director: Alejandro Amenábar
A woman named Grace retires with her two sick sons to a mansion on an island near the English Coast, towards the end of the Second World War.
Filming in Spain
Cast: Nicole Kidman

A Beautiful Mind
Director: Ron Howard
The story about Nobel Prize winner Josh Nash.
Cast: Russell Crowe

Giant
Director: John Frankenheimer
World War II story of a soldier who saves disabled children from the Nazis.
In development
Scheduled US Release: Unknown
Cast: Russell Crowe

The Husband I Bought
Director: Stephan Elliott
Production commenced in October
Scheduled UK/US release: 2001
Drama based on the Ayn (Fountainhead) Rand novel.

Jurassic Park 3
Director: Joe Johnston
Filming began in August
Scheduled US release: July 2001
Action and horror-filled sequel to the other Jurassic Parks.
Cast: Sam Neill, Tea Leoni, William H Macy
The Queen of the Damned
Director: Michael Rymer
US production shot in Melbourne
Horror sequel to Interview With a Vampire based on the third of Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles books.
Cast: Simon Baker-Denny, Claudia Black, Lena Olin

The Sleeping Dictionary
Director: Guy Jenkin
Filming began in Borneo in September
Scheduled US release: 2001
Cast: Jessica Alba, Bob Hoskins, Noah Taylor

The Matrix 2
Director: Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski
Scheduled US release: 2002
Shot in Sydney
Sci-fi/thriller sequel to The Matrix.
Cast: Keanu Reeves, Hugo Weaving

I Was Amelia Earhart
Director: Fred Schepisi
In development
US release
Fictional biography of aviator Amelia Earhart
Cast: Juliane Moore

Tempted
Director: Bill Bennett
US release
Story of a bloke who decides to find out if his wife is cheating on him.
Cast: Burt Reynolds

Bride of the Wind
Director: Bruce Beresford
Scheduled US release: 2001
Cast: Vincent Perez, Sarah Wynter

Talk of the Town
Director: Bill Condon
Scheduled US release: Mid 2001
Cast: Glenn Close, Toni Collette

Cold Mountain
Director: Anthony Minghella
Cinematographer: John Seale
US civil war drama

Valentine
Director: Jamie Blanks
(Urban Legend)
Filming began in July
Scheduled US release: 2001
Horror wherein four friends receive morbid Valentine's day cards from stalkers.
Cast: David Boreanaz, Denise Richards

Me and My Shadows (TV)
Director: Robert Allan Ackerman
Scheduled Canadian release: 2001
Dramatisation of Judy Garland's life.
Cast: Judy Davis

Buffalo Soldiers
Director: Gregor Jordan (Two Hands)
Scheduled US release: 2001
Comedy/drama set amid a criminal subculture of US soldiers stationed in West Germany just before the fall of the Berlin wall.
Cast: Kick Gurry

Anasazi Moon
Director: David Seltzer
Filming scheduled to begin by November
US release
Comedy
Cast: Gary Oldman, Skeet Ulrich, Radha Mitchell

Phone Booth
Director: Joel Schumacher
Filming scheduled to begin in December
US release
Thriller
Cast: Colin Farrell, Radha Mitchell

The Time Machine
Director: Simon Wells
In development
US release
Drama based on HG Wells' novel (Simon Wells is his great-grandson)
Cast: Guy Pearce

The Count of Monte Cristo
Director: Kevin Reynolds
Filming began in August
Scheduled US release: Summer 2001
Cast: Guy Pearce, Richard Harris

Outlaws aka The Bandits
Director: Barry Levinson
Filming began in September
Scheduled US release: 2001
Cast: Cate Blanchett, Bruce Willis, Billy Bob Thornton

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring
Director: Peter Jackson (NZ)
Filming began in September
Scheduled US release: 2001
Filming in New Zealand
Fantasy adventure based on the famous books by J R R Tolkien.
Cast: Cate Blanchett, Miranda Otto, David Wenham

Charlotte Gray
Director: Gillian Armstrong
Filming commences: February 2001
Scheduled UK release: Autumn 2001
Drama of a young Scottish woman who joins the French Resistance during World War II to rescue her Royal Air Force boyfriend who is lost in France.
Cast: Cate Blanchett

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Black Perceived and Interpreted.

→ Five hundred tribes or nations, hundreds of different languages, thousands of hours of celluloid, even more sound and even more written about black Australia. How much of it controlled, conceited, owned or even produced by black eyes and hands? Bugger all. This is the way it is.

We have several feature films with black subject and content matter coming out of Australia in the next year or so. Black producers? Nope. Black directors? One. Black writers? One. Great that it’s being done, that our stories are being told. I only wish they could be told more so through our eyes and by our hands.

My opinion is this: Given the renaissance of indigenous film making, any film with indigenous subject or content matter, unless clearly stated that it is an interpretation only, should have an Aboriginal person in a key power position over the creative and artistic side of the production.

We already have highly professional, internationally celebrated indigenous writers, directors and producers, for example, the Sand to Celluloid, Shifting Sands series, thanks to the Indigenous Branch – now unit – of the AFC.

So where is the true and demonstrated reconciliation process in the other areas of the Australian film industry?

What the hell is wrong with real and true collaboration between the races on productions? Why aren’t there more films being made with real Aboriginal producers, directors and writers? Why do we have so many Aboriginal consultants?

Surely the film industry is one of the most powerful communication mediums we have in this country that can change attitudes.

We all know that attitudes perpetuate legislation and policy, (see mandatory sentencing in the NT and WA). We all know that attitudes perpetuate legislation and policy, (see mandatory sentencing in the NT and WA). We all know that attitudes perpetuate legislation and policy, (see mandatory sentencing in the NT and WA).

We need active financial, institutional and personal commitment to achieve what can be the greatest example of reconciliation in this country. We have the oldest living culture in the world, surely we can collaborate across the cultures to achieve a world statement in reconciliation and film industry renaissance.

Perhaps this is impossible at this time in Australian society. Perhaps I ask too much.

I don’t stand on one leg pointing to the sunset although I have been known to do so. I am a writer, director, musician, father, uncle, labourer, human being, who is Gunditjmara. I can do all these things around or with my Aboriginality – my heritage.

In my opinion the only true historians are the artists of the day. Let’s stop being paralysed by the past. Let’s cultivate indigenous filmmakers as seeds of the present so that they can use their stories to shape the future for us all. Let us tell stories of Australia together, in the spirit of true reconciliation.

RICHARD J FRANKLAND IS A FILMMAKER WHO HAPPENS TO BE ABORIGINAL – GUNDITJMARA

“We study the day before yesterday in order that yesterday may not paralyse today and today may not paralyse tomorrow.” F W Maitland
Better known as the founding member of Melbourne rock band 'The Underground Lovers', first-time feature film director Vince Giarrusso is hoping to strike a chord with the forthcoming release of *Mailboy*. His story of a tough, self-reliant teenage boy, coping with chaos in a broken home in Melbourne's north-western suburbs caught the attention of producer Fiona *Romper Stomper* Eagger. With Kane McNay (Laura's son in *Seachange*) as the 15-year-old Shaun, *Mailboy* was the only Australian film honoured with selection at this year's Cannes Film Festival, despite being largely ignored by the AFI awards. Australians can make their own mind up about the film, which started life as a poem, when it comes to a shopping mall nearby in January.

Vince Giarrusso. About five years ago I sent off for guidelines on how to write a script and managed to get Fiona (Eagger) interested in the project.

**Cinema Papers:** How did you get from there to directing your first feature film?

**Vince Giarrusso.** I'd had no real experience behind the camera. I'd done video clips (but) I had no experience working with actors, so once the money came through it was a question of setting up a mini film school. I'd never been on set, so Fiona organised a director's attachment for me on TV shows and I watched the MTC rehearse. I went on set with Ana Kokinos, Rowan Woods and Fred Schepisi.

**CP.** Why was it so important for you to direct the script?

**VG.** Because the subject is difficult. More often than not, working class people are caricatured or depicted in a derogatory way and we were really aware of that. I had a real feeling for the characters as people who have a lot of outlooks that you don't see anywhere else. There was always that risk someone who hadn't had my experiences would get the tone wrong.

**CP.** And the characters from *Mailboy* are based on your experience as a youth worker?

**VG.** Mostly yeah, from working closely with street kids and people like (lead character) Shaun.
“We cut the film to the music, rather than the music to the film, which is the way it’s usually done, so you’re hearing the performance.” (Vince Giarrusso)

CP. Why do you think audiences will be interested in a bleak film set in Melbourne’s north-western suburbs?
VG. As a teenager I would love to have seen a film which I could relate to, where kids spoke to each other the way they really speak, instead of some marketing idea of how kids talk.
CP. Was your experience as a musician helpful in the directing process?
VG. A lot of the processes were similar, although on a different scale. I could express myself with rhythm. I could tell [the actors] I want it to go at this pace and beat it out for them. I also found being a musician very helpful in post-production.
CP. You also wrote the film’s soundtrack. How did you approach it?
VG. Well, we recorded the music without reference to the film. We improvised pieces of music, then cut and chose our favourite bits which were texturally and sonically compatible with the sounds in the film. We cut the film to the music, rather than the music to the film, which is the way it’s usually done, so you’re hearing the performance.
CP. How did you deal with challenging scenes like the party?
VG. Well, we had a five-week rehearsal period, plus a two-week director’s workshop. So there were a lot of rehearsals. For the party scene we had the opportunity to go to the house the day before we started shooting, so we could block the party with the main actors. But yeah, it was chaotic and tough...
CP. Why do you think Mailboy was picked up for the Directors’ Fortnight at Cannes this year?
VG. Having spoken to the people who selected it, they responded to the characters and the universality of it, the separation of the mother from the son and the rejection of the father, they were moved by it.
CP. You’ve already started work on a new project?
VG. Yes, Fiona and I are working on Orange, which is at second draft. Basically it’s a teenage love story set in a wholesale fruit and vegetable market. It’s a journey through the life of a 15-year-old girl as she navigates her way through the whole construct of love.

→ Still only 16, recent AFI young actor recipient, Kane McNay graduated from playing a minor character in a television series to starring in his first feature film with Mailboy.

Cinema Papers. What’s the major difference? Kane McNay. In Seachange I sort of hang around the main plot... I’m not really in it. It’s all rush and you don’t really have time to go into what you want to do, because there’s no focus on your character. But with Mailboy, you’re it and if you have ideas they get heard by everybody.
It's 2pm in a back lane in the centre of Adelaide and the cast and crew of a low budget indie film, *Dope*, are settling into their groove. There's no 5am set calls on this shoot because it's not until after dark that the script really arcs up.

Patterson (*Innocence*) was brought into the mix. When they sought the guarantee of a local distributor, Palace Films was coaxed on board. But scan the cast list and you may not recognise a single name. NIDA graduate Nathan Ramsay, who portrays Russell and Travis McMahon, who plays the third key character, Jack, have some stage and TV experience but *Dope* is their feature film debut.

**→ Beanie-clad, McMahon is leaning against a spray-painted brick wall in a lane way. In the scene being filmed, he's lighting a spliff but the wind keeps extinguishing the matches. Five, six, seven, eight exasperating times. J Harkness is kneeling on one knee beneath the camera watching McMahon intensely. Talking him through the frustration.**

"Last shot before dinner" the second AD calls out signalling a break in the tedium is imminent. "A bit of green on the top," another call and 'pot wrangler' Andrew Gibbs reaches for more 'green' from the container behind his feet.

Another crew member who would surely prefer anonymity espouses the benefits of rolling matches in one's ear-wax. They burn longer in windy conditions - don't you know.

Finally Russell lights his spliff, luxuriates in a toke and the shot is in the can. The 22 crew members exit for the meal room.

**→ Over dinner Harkness is quietly spoken but very firm in his opinions. He refuses to position *Dope* alongside other Australian releases.**

"I really wanted to do this film with an unknown cast because I wanted to separate it from other Australian films. I didn't want it to be pigeon-holed as that sort of hip, cool Australian version of *Pulp Fiction*. That wasn't why I wrote it or what I wanted to achieve," he explains.

Nevertheless, "I wanted to communicate a story the way people my generation communicate." He confesses *Dope* is pitched directly at the key movie-going demographic of 24 to 30-ish year olds and describes the narrative as "'channel-surfing style' where you miss out all the boring bits."

Harkness also hopes his unknown cast will bestow...
"Beanie-clad, McMahon is leaning against a spray-painted brick wall in a lane way. In the scene being filmed, he's lighting a spliff but the wind keeps extinguishing the matches”

the film with added authenticity. “I wanted characters that you could believe and be involved in.” But that factor makes a film harder to sell. “Definitely, but it’s a stupid thing. I think in Australia there’s more of a phoney star system than there appears to be anywhere else in the world. I really don’t believe people my age, especially, pay their money to see a film just because (with all due respect to the people I’m speaking about) a well-known actor is in it. I think the exact opposite is so.”

Harkness has elected to shoot Dope with minimal gear and without a video split, primarily because over five weeks they’ll visit an exhausting 37 locations. Plus he puts a lot of trust in the actors, “and I like them to put a lot of trust in me. I always spend a lot of time on my writing and the biggest frustration for a writer is actors basically screw up your words. So developing a love and affection for actors was the big breakthrough for me”.

“I love actors,” he repeats enthusiastically. “They give me things that are far better than what I wrote but they need to feel very secure and very nurtured continuously. Any form of video split gets in the way and they direct themselves and I’m not trusting what I see and they’re not trusting what they see,” he explains.

Harkness rejects any attempts to compare his script style with any of the current indie masters, insisting instead that the script has been in development years before that crowd wowed cinephiles with their innovations. Robert Altman and similar ’70s films are an influence plus Harkness’ experience making Fred’s Van just won’t go away.

“That doco gave me insight into street kids longing for family, the same things everybody wants. People always talk about common experience but I think human experience is always very precise and unique and specific but the things we want are common. So talking to the street kids, they weren’t cool and detached like in Trainspotting or whatever. They were very open-hearted and warm and I just let them tell their story, so there’s that element to this film.”

MICHAELA BOLAND

CINEMA PAPERS.DECEMBER.00 JANUARY.01 [23]
I'm a novelist converted to the movie business. Got the bug. Though as much for reasons of accepting reality than it is a passion for movies. The challenge of wearing several hats, from a producer-partner to the screenplay writer to even, at times, a co-director role, is what I relish. Of course telling a good story is the heart of it, a skill I happen to be born with. But I'm less than excited about Hollywood activity Down Under. Are Australia and New Zealand the next Canada? Used by Hollywood, as they use anyone, from individuals to tax departments to entire nations. I mean to say, do they really care that they're creating a film industry here? The hell they do. They're here because it's cheap. Not because they love us. Hollywood's the game of Great White Sharks. Except they ain't appealing like Greg. And, unlike the legendary Mr Norman, who has to make the shots to keep his place, in Hollywood it's not for a moment about talent, or passion, or creative genius. It's about who's the toughest kid on the block. So let's get it straight who and what we're dealing with in all this dizzy, hand-waving, thank-you-thank-you clamour.

In my home country [I've temporarily forgotten the name as it's so long since I was there for any more than five days at a stretch] they reckon director Peter Jackson walks on water. His trilogy adaptation of Tolkien's epic fantasy novel (yes, someone thought of it before Hollywood and Jackson, just in case you're another who can't acknowledge creative originality and instead give all the credit where it's definitely not due: to the director and the actors) is several hundred million mouth-watering bucks the Kiwi film industry is getting a share of. Not the lot, but plenty. But what is it doing for our own filmmaking? Um, nothing. Feature film budgets in New Zealand are even worse than Australia, which now averages $4 million each. Our feature films have budgets that wouldn't pay for Hollywood stars' little extras, never mind the mega-pay and share-of-gross deals now the norm. Which is not to say I don't accept market forces at work, I do. Audiences go to movies chiefly to see their favourite stars. They don't go to catch a glimpse of the writer now do they? So, no begrudging what the stars get paid, what anyone gets paid. Just not getting excited at the thought Hollywood loves us. Mate, Hollywood can't spell even love, except when it's applied to money. Though this novelist ain't no leftie who has disregard for money. (Love the stuff.) He's a realist, he says yet again, who accepts the market for what it is. Here's the reality I'm talking about.

No true matinee idol stars, not for many years. Hardly any truly superb actors, they all play ego-inflated comic book hero roles. And don't believe a word of what Russell Crowe is reported as saying, how he 'fought on' in Gladiator despite having 'serious physical injuries incurred during rehearsals of light scenes." Bullshit, who writes this garbage? I'd challenge Mr Crowe to come with me to any bar full of my Maori bros and see how much of a gladiator he is there. Front up to the real Jakes. Or else go to a good old-fashioned rugby league pub anywhere in the Big Country where, mate, even I would talk in respectful whispers! No true stars, no good stories. Or so few, compared to special effect, super-hero garbage, you can't remember the good tales. No morality, no wisdom to be gained. No insights, no life-influencing experiences. No intellect, no nothing, except super-paid posers pissing us off with their look-at-me! antics on screen. Oh, and don't forget yet another director with a beard. (My theory on bearded men is: insecurity, arrogance.)

CINEMA PAPERS DECEMBER 00 JANUARY 01

Move over Hollywood and stop buggering-up the local film industry - Alan Duff has arrived.
The lovely ladies are only doing marginally better than the blokes in the good script stakes. In other words, Hollywood has killed itself. And what is emerging from the grave is a monster called Mediocrity.

Not kidding. The movie industry needs some good writers. Not good writer wimps, but writers who believe in themselves. Writers prepared to smack the posers in the mush if they try and muscle us out of the way. That’s what I mean about a certain kind of writer arriving in the nick of time against this enemy called Mediocrity. The film industry needs another kind of hero. Yay, bring ‘im on, bring ‘im on!

Well, only in your fantasies, Duff. Quite right. Except you can make a fantasy come true. By becoming an independent producer/writer with brilliant mates who can access private finance. And get a legitimate tax deduction. Of course it means no high-budget projects, but then who says everyone wants a big budget? Give us small to medium and we’ll hand over, most times, no-one gets it right every time a bloody big picture, a bloody good one that people will remember. Hey, I’m proud to say I’m the originator of Once Were Warriors. And What becomes of the Brokenhearted? I stole the title from the song of the same. Wrote the novels and the screenplays.

No-one can take on Hollywood except Rupert. But then he’s become part of it. The rest is not the stuff of movie moguls of old. They’re executives now, who can and do get fired by higher-up executives, unless they make a shipload of money. Even then they’re still subject to being fired by a nastier executive type who has managed to out-maneuver them. Can’t stand the type myself. They bite cigars in half and yell at writers before firing yet another one off a project. [Except this writer’ll punch anyone in the snout who yells at me, I promise.]

I’m saying the obvious: Aussie, and to even lesser degree New Zealand, is not going to enjoy a sudden burst of film creativity inspired by Hollywood working down here. I aim to work in both countries, New Zealand and Australia. We’ve got the talent, without question. And Australia has the attitude; New Zealand, I’m less sure about. But there’s always hope. Hollywood is never going to come to our countries and finance our own stuff. Except, aha, if they can see a buck in it. But watch for the fine print: it looks like two legs running off with your money.

Before I finish, here’s what I admire about Hollywood: they’re 70 years ahead of the rest of the field when it comes to thinking big. They have access to an endless gold seam of hungry, ambitious, hard-working wanna-be stars and talent. They’re not afraid of anything, not budget-size, not scale of set construction, not even the silliest, fantastic story-setting which costs zillions to build. They invented SELF-BELIEF, spelt like that. Which is why they are the best at what they do. [So can’t the rest of us aim that high, and higher, too?].

Alan Duff’s recently published book Out of the Steam and Mist is reviewed on p. 42. His fee for this story was donated to the charity Books in Homes, Australia.
Locally It’s Been A Good Year
Now for the rest

→ While it’s not uncommon for filmmakers to look back 20 years to a reputed Australian film heyday comprising the likes of Picnic at Hanging Rock, Newfront, Breaker Morant and generous tax concessions, I too find myself recalling better times when I started writing for Variety six years ago. Then, everyone was abuzz with the global success of Strictly Ballroom, followed by Muriel’s Wedding, Priscilla and then Shine elevated the industry to a critical and commercial high.

Along the way came global critical acclaim with Shirley Barrett’s Palm d’Or-winning Love Serenade, while Love and Other Catastrophes provided inspiration to a generation of local credit card filmmakers and TV programs walked off the shelf at major overseas trade markets. But between then and now, much has changed for Australia’s screen industry, which has weathered serious decline as Britain re-energises with the likes of The Full Monty, Brassed Off, Billy Elliot and Lock, Stock... Local box office for Australian films between then and now, much has collapsed, substantial foreign sales became elusive and the collapse of European demand for independent fare combined to see returns to federal funding agencies plummet and the likes of Beyond, Southern Star (which has now mothballed its film activities) and Becker’s time as stock market darlings quickly pass.

Along the way, the screen industry had other shocks, including an exhibition consolidation that saw screens become ever harder to obtain and hold. A shakeout in distribution saw not only the demise of several supportive local distributors, but also of traditional foreign supporters of Australian film like Polygram and Cibi, while mini-majors like Miramax and Fine Line moved away from acquisitions and into producing their own films. Other negatives included deep funding cuts to the ABC, which should be a crucial training ground for screen practitioners, while early corporate mayhem in the Pay TV sector perhaps limited its potentially positive impact for younger producers. But probably the industry’s biggest shock was the election of the conservative federal government, which, apart from encouraging a more restrictive censorship climate, slashed direct screen subsidies by about 30 percent and staged numerous inquiries, while several government agencies turned themselves inside out perhaps at the expense of tending to development. All the while, the locations business went from strength to strength and, while providing great employment opportunities for many, also allowed for obfuscation on serious issues for indigenous production.

While some modestly successful or important films were made during the past six years, including Head On, The Road to Nhill, Kiss or Kill, Feeling Sexy, Angel Baby, The Boys and (overseas) Cut, the industry had to face the harsh realities of a rapidly changing international environment and redefine and reorganise itself so its films might follow its directors, actors and technicians in finding global acclaim and prosperly once more. A recent pact between FLIC company Macquarie and UIP suggests something good might come from the thus far under-active FLICs initiative after all, while TV players SBSI and *Showtime have become important sources of part-financing films, between them backing more than 30 films into production in the past few years. The FFC and others are making good on plans to back somewhat higher budgeted films to lure back successful expatriates, including Fred Schepisi, Bruce Beresford and Phil Noyce. While Oscar and Lucinda is a reminder that bigger budgets guarantee nothing, early sales of Noyce’s Kenneth Branagh starrer Rabbit Proof Fence are encouraging and change is sure required when even the FFC itself admits much of its output resembles TV movies rather than features.

There’s a new influx of European money, led by France (with France TV/President Films’ backing Better Than Sex, Gaumont funding Me Myself J and TF1 backing Bill Bennett’s latest effort Tempted) and Germany (with much of Beyond’s activities funded by MBP, Becker having a development pact with MBM and both major local animation houses falling under Germanic charms), as the three integrated film and TV majors move away from risky deficit financing in favour of presales and foreign financing. Holland’s Endemol has joint ventures with Southern Star, Britain’s Granada owns Artist Services and Channel 4 and Carlton are producing dramas here, just like the local office of Columbia TriStar. The UK’s Working Title is also eyeing an Australian office, led by Tim White.

While such foreign engagement is positive and welcome, it’s not a cure-all and some of the recent link-ups look suspiciously like shot-gun marriages that may not produce happy creative offspring. A battle wearyied industry with a battered currency, probably makes Australian outfits bargains for cashed-up Europeans seeking cheap English language product as they prepare for bigger things in Hollywood. While Australians can’t ignore this process, foreign companies don’t pretend to nurture new Australian talent (but they sure like to spot it) and it presents challenges for creatives to maintain the individual distinctiveness that often attracted foreign attention in the first place, not to mention devising workable definitions for what comprises Australian content. It’s worrying that many filmmakers must now rely on overseas sales agents (whose appetites for films from any particular nation will vary over time) since we only have one major agent left here - Beyond.

While there are always fortunate filmmakers working happily with foreign companies, think Luhrmann with Fox, Shirley Barrett with DreamWorks and Jane Campion with Miramax, not every foreign embrace is productive. Witness the terrible missed opportunity that was Fox-Icon, which, in turn, recalls Rupert Murdoch’s and Robert Stingwood’s similarly unproductive R&R Films in the 1980s. Still, it seems something’s gone right and the first important steps of recovering the industry confidence have been taken with the local box office successes of Chopper, The Dish, etc. After all, if Australians don’t watch Australian films, who else will?

Sure, the trick is balancing commercial and artistic vibrancy, while building a diverse industry supporting both cultural and competitive imperatives, like the theatre sector, which, while addressing serious challenges, staged memorable – and successful – pieces like The Sunshine Club, Stolen, Cloudstreet and Small Poppies, not to mention the $60 million grossing musical The Boy From Oz.

And wouldn’t it be something if our existing output also included those sharp, fresh, wildly original and globally appealing AFI foreign film nominees American Beauty, Being John Malkovich and All About My Mother?

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At regular intervals since the 1970s, Australian filmmakers have been getting the bright idea to make a small, jazzy, uniquely local movie with a 'French New Wave' flavour, following the handy formula once prescribed by Philippe Garrel: "By showing a man and woman in a single room, the cinema can say everything." One can chart a little sociology of 'counter-cultural' life in our major cities by watching in rapid succession *Inside Looking Out* (Paul Cox, 1977), *Third Person Plural* (James Ricketson, 1978), *Apostasy* (Zbigniew Friedrich, 1979), *Sweet Dreamers* (Tom Cowan, 1982), *Sweethearts* (Colin Talbot, 1990) and *Fresh Air* (Neil Mansfield, 1999). The lifestyles, political slogans and smart buzzwords change slightly, but it's still pretty much the same parade of inner-city bohemians, proud eccentrics, social 'marginals', and self-important artists scratching away at their new painting, novel or film, and navigating the confusions of new sexual mores, while cruising between their bare, dishevelled rooms and outdoor cafés — rather like New Wave icon Jean-Pierre Leaud did in *The Mother and the Whore* (1973). And the manner of all these Australian films is also roughly equivalent: long, intimate dialogue scenes broken up by surreal inserts, games with the speed and grain of the image, bursts of music, colour and montage. All very Godardian.

But hang on - what were those Local films I just mentioned? You can be excused for not being au fait with much on that list, because these movies have fallen into every conceivable kind of cinematic oblivion. *Inside Looking Out, Third Person Plural and Apostasy* belong to a lost age of Australian 'independent' filmmaking associated with the Sydney and Melbourne Filmmakers' Co-Operatives; some of the celluloid traces of that era can be found among the 16mm holdings of the National Library's film collection, but nowhere else. *Sweet Dreamers*, briefly released theatrically in its time, seems entirely inaccessible now. *Sweethearts*, as I write these words, is having what could well be its second-ever screening - on a commercial TV channel at 1.30 in the morning. *Fresh Air* was exhibited in a few places thanks solely to the efforts of the filmmakers themselves; at least this one is currently in plenty of video shops.

Beyond the fact that most of these films are quite hard to see these days - which is not their fault - one other thing needs to be said about them all: they are...
not very good, and this is at least partly their fault. Even the bravest and most dedicated cinephiles or archivists of local film would baulk at having to see them twice. Australian art cinema seems to be such a delicate flower with such a precarious existence that criticism of it is often held off, or gently, circuitously phrased - as if we are all meant to be grateful for such 'brave' mediocrity. One glaring exception to this rule is a 1982 review of Sweet Dreamers by Meaghan Morris, reprinted in An Australian Film Reader (Currency, 1985). Ironically, this critique is nowadays much easier to access than the film itself. "The gallant mistakes of Sweet Dreamers are only possible in a culture which actively discourages critical reflection on film by filmmakers, which is smugly unaware of all that is most dynamic in other new cinemas of the world and which is so technocrat in orientation that it produces some students who boast that they never read books and rarely watch films."

Eighteen years later, Morris' critique of the Australian film scene still has the bitter ring of truth.

That smug unawareness of what is best in world cinema, for instance, has now been virtually institutionalised by our major arthouse distributors and exhibitors: apart from on SBS and the World Movies cable channel, it is not easy to keep pace here with the truly exciting, innovative artistic developments happening in world cinema, such as the extraordinary films of Abbas Kiarostami in Iran or Hou Hsiao-hsien in Taiwan. Forget, for a moment, the arguments that most movies made in this country are (certainly to American eyes) small, independent, art films; or that some of Australia's very best film art is to be found in the too-often overlooked 'underground' of experimental cinema. Put aside, too, the philosophical objection that art is wherever you find it in cinema, no matter its cultural pedigree. The art film, internationally, is a particular form - feature length, narrative - with an easily recognisable history and a now flourishing world market. In Australia, we face the sad evidence of a paralysis in this area of filmmaking. Why does our art cinema still seem in a fitful, embryonic state?

The answers are simultaneously industrial, cultural, historical and aesthetic. As with so many kinds of filmmaking here, what we survey is a scattered, always broken line of experiments. Like most comparatively small countries, we stumble from one fragile 'high hope' - the movie that the industry prays will make money, grab an audience and kickstart a trend - to the next, with many disappointments and abandoned projects along the way. The astoundingly high attrition rate noted above - whereby most of our art films end up as rare videotapes, mere rumours or citations in scholarly essays - is proof enough of a lack of available history in this area to learn from and build upon.

So, a 'critical mass' of artistic work is never reached in this country, and no momentum builds; there is little sense of a dialogue between films, or makers and viewers linked in an ongoing exploration. To claim that Australia lacks a strong art cinema means that we are bereft of a recognisable, vital, self-generating tradition of such work. This doesn't mean that there aren't individual
examples of strong or intriguing art films here. A range of examples gives a sense of the diversity of international art cinema styles that have been sampled and mixed. Ian Pringle’s work, from Wronsky (1979) to The Prisoner of St Petersburg (1988), is moody and mannered in the Wenders road-movie vein. Rowan Woods’ The Boys (1998) evokes the finely-chiselled pessimism of Abel Ferrara, Larry Clark and Mike Leigh. Clara Law’s Floating Life (1996) reimagines the themes, moods and pictorial sensibility of Antonioni for the disconnected, postmodern world. Leo Berkeley’s Holidays on the Yarra River (1991) brings a certain ‘poetic realism’ to bear on the lives of troubled teens, reminiscent of French directors like Jacques Doillon. In his more frenzied passages, Geoffrey Wright [Metal Skin, 1996] pushes Oliver Stone-style pyrotechnics to arty disintegration. And John Hillcoat’s equally violently fractured Ghosts... of the Civil Dead (1989) once earned a memorably snobbish Parisian compliment from Cahiers du Cinéma magazine: ‘It is interesting to see how Godard’s style has been spontaneously “reinvented” by an Australian filmmaker who has probably never seen a Godard film!’

But, on the whole - including in a number of the films just cited - Australian art cinema lacks a sophistication, a maturity, a real intelligence. Such words can carry an excessively middlebrow, old-fashioned connotation. But I mean to point to something that cuts across spurious distinctions between high and low, old and new, classical and modernist art. Above all, our art films lack the really vital interrelationships between form and content, or between style and ‘personal vision’, which characterise the work of this cinema’s masters, from Ingmar Bergman and Akira Kurosawa through to Leos Carax and Alexander Sokurov.

Let’s take a contentious test case: Paul Cox. The audience for Cox’s work is sharply divided these days. For every respectful homage in a reference book (such as The Oxford Companion to Australian Film) or from a high-profile critic such as David Stratton (who regards Cox as a “deeply committed, sometimes misunderstood and neglected artist”), there is an equally intense expression of distaste or indifference from a younger generation of arthouse filmgoers. There are many ways to interpret the schizophrenic fact that, while Cox’s latest film Innocence wins awards on the festival circuit overseas, it is passed over for a nomination in most categories including Best Director in the AFI Awards. Is Cox - as novelist Thomas Keneally said when comparing him to Patrick White - ‘a bit of a genius and something of an Elijah?’ I don’t think so. The one remarkable aspect of Cox’s career, to my eyes, is how little it has changed, evolved, developed or deepened over the past two decades. Innocence is, in so many ways, exactly the film that Cox has always made. In one sense, this is an admirable sign of consistency - just the sort of ‘signature’ we demand from art cinema auteurs. But a signature can be a prison, if it leads to stasis. Cox’s films, from one to the next, catch themselves in a facile loop: they all start with vague malaise, churn through a dark night of the soul, and end in a redemptive flourish (Innocence, for instance, ends with the bald exhortation to “love the world”). Even more grievous, to my eyes and ears, is the matter of Cox’s filmmaking style. I remain unconvinced by assertions of Cox’s “formal subtlety”, “restrained ingenuity” or “inspired craftsmanship”. To me, his films have a sometimes shocking air of amateurishness and off-handedness - as if ‘near enough’ a particular effect, mood or meaning is always good enough. Innocence displays the self-same clumsiness with respect to establishing a coherent fictional world, laying out the terms of a
What seemed striking and personal in Cox's first features (such as Kostas, 1979) can now seem tired and calculated, a species of cliché - especially those early, step-printed, Super 8 flashes of birds, streams and naked bodies. The long dialogue scenes are often inert, unimaginatively staged and framed: Cox may have given up his penchant for the meandering pan-and-zoom shots that once punctuated Man of Flowers (1983), but now he seems to have settled into the evenly lit, stodgily centred, glacial mode of mise en scène announced in Lust and Revenge (1996). His films betray a tin ear for the properly cinematic soundtrack - unsubtle noisescapes (like the thundering clocks in Golden Braids) alternate with reams of quoted and composed music. As for the acting in these films, it is no fault of the performers that they must struggle with such unutterably miserable, clunky dialogue (from Innocence: "We shared a lot of lust") and the sorry lack of any 'ensemble' effect blending the entire cast.

Cox's closest auteurist cousin in the annals of Australian art cinema is Rolf de Heer. It would probably be better for these two filmmakers if they were not so often acclaimed on their native turf as masters or visionaries. It would be more fitting to describe them as practitioners of a form of 'naïve' art cinema, akin to the genre of naive painting - a terrain they share with Werner Herzog and the recent adherents to Lars von Trier's dubious "Dogma" manifesto. De Heer's films are, in the naive mode, excessive, declaratory, over-reaching, and earnestly sentimental. He embraces the figure of the naive visionary with a vengeance, by centring successive films upon the subjective consciousnesses of a mute child (The Quiet Room, 1996), an exiled alien (Epsilon, 1995), a 'pre-social' misfit (Bad Boy Bubby, 1994) or a disabled outsider (Dance Me To My Song, 1998). The disconcerting rawness of de Heer's film language - handheld camera shaky, ugly lighting, grating sound - has been justified in terms of a punk aesthetic; unfortunately, since the rude blast of Bad Boy Bubby, his movies have been like Cox's offering diminishing artistic returns.

Although neither Cox nor de Heer have developed very much as filmmakers, at least they have cannily worked out ways to keep making exactly the films they want to make, cheaply and prolifically. When we come to the realm of the first-time art cinema maker in Australia, we encounter a truly gloomy graveyard - since so few of these directors, since the late 1980s, seem to have won another chance to improve their craft. Solrun Hoaas (Aya, 1991), Tracey Moffatt (Bedevil, 1993), David Perry (The Refracting Glasses, 1993), Susan Murphy Dermody (Breathing Under Water, 1992), James Clayden (With Time to Kill, 1987), Martha Ansara (The Pursuit of Happiness, 1988), Susan Lambert (Talk, 1994) - these are just a few of the many names, often distinguished in the areas of short or experimental or documentary film, or in other art forms, that have effectively disappeared from our merciless film culture ledger. But one has to take off the critical kid gloves when dealing with these films, too. Many are simply too ambitious, too layered - as if a linear story could not possibly be engaging without the extra trappings of an 'essay' or a mind-bogglingly convoluted structure, of the kind we see once more in Belinda

The latest low-budget, first-timer, Australian art movie is Vince Giarrusso's Mailbox. Like some of those just mentioned, Giarrusso came to directing via, his already well-established career in music and songwriting. His inexperience shows. Mailbox is a downbeat, observational film in a realist mode, reminiscent of John Ruane's early work (Queensland, 1976, and Feathers, 1987). It adopts a type of art-film narrative which is often a trap for unwary devotees of Robert Bresson (Mouchette, 1967) or Roberto Rossellini (Germany Year Zero, 1947): a story centered upon a largely passive, inexpressive youth (played here by Kane Mcnay) who silently absorbs and 'reflects' his miserable milieu. Giarrusso's direction has a flat, overly literary, distanced feel. The film never achieves a successful level of subtle stylisation (especially on the level of imagery and mise en scène) to lift its material out of the kitchen sink. As a result, it slides into a soft, social-worker sentimentality: this mailboy would be fine if only he had a Mum and Dad who gave him more 'quality time'.

Mailbox is a typically flawed Australian art film. Like many genuinely sincere and artistically ambitious movies, it seems to be grasping towards something beyond itself: a certain cinematic fluency, a shared community of interests, a greater knowledge of possible aesthetic models. Art cinema, more than any other kind of cinema, needs not just stable industry support and development but that true measure of film culture - an ongoing, in-depth relationship to everything significant within world cinema, present and past, and everything important that is talked, taught and written about it. Until our film scene begins to instil that sort of fluency into its would-be artists, many of our attempts at art cinema will look, to the rest of the world, like strange reinventions of films by Godard, Bresson, Angelopoulos or Kiarostami - by people who appear never to have seen the originals.

Chayko's City Loop. And, although Morris in 1982 found much to criticise in the sort of culture inculcated in students by the major filmmaking schools (such as AFTRS and VCA), a lack of such training is not necessarily the magic key to artistic creativity or skill - as films by honoured novelists with little or no prior film experience (such as Sweethearts and Richard Flanagan's The Sound of One Hand Clapping, 1998) have shown.

The recent adherents to Lars von Trier's dubious 'Dogma' manifesto. De Heer's films are, in the naive mode, excessive, declaratory, over-reaching, and earnestly sentimental. He embraces the figure of the naive visionary with a vengeance, by centring successive films upon the subjective consciousnesses of a mute child (The Quiet Room, 1996), an exiled alien (Epsilon, 1995), a 'pre-social' misfit (Bad Boy Bubby, 1994) or a disabled outsider (Dance Me To My Song, 1998). The disconcerting rawness of de Heer's film language - handheld camera shaky, ugly lighting, grating sound - has been justified in terms of a punk aesthetic; unfortunately, since the rude blast of Bad Boy Bubby, his movies have been like Cox's offering diminishing artistic returns. Although neither Cox nor de Heer have developed very much as filmmakers, at least they have cannily worked out ways to keep making exactly the films they want to make, cheaply and prolifically. When we come to the realm of the first-time art cinema maker in Australia, we encounter a truly gloomy graveyard - since so few of these directors, since the late 1980s, seem to have won another chance to improve their craft. Solrun Hoaas (Aya, 1991), Tracey Moffatt (Bedevil, 1993), David Perry (The Refracting Glasses, 1993), Susan Murphy Dermody (Breathing Under Water, 1992), James Clayden (With Time to Kill, 1987), Martha Ansara (The Pursuit of Happiness, 1988), Susan Lambert (Talk, 1994) - these are just a few of the many names, often distinguished in the areas of short or experimental or documentary film, or in other art forms, that have effectively disappeared from our merciless film culture ledger. But one has to take off the critical kid gloves when dealing with these films, too. Many are simply too ambitious, too layered - as if a linear story could not possibly be engaging without the extra trappings of an 'essay' or a mind-bogglingly convoluted structure, of the kind we see once more in Belinda

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JOY

2000. 16mm colour. 9min

DIRECTOR CATE SHORTLAND
WRITER CATE SHORTLAND
PRODUCER RACHEL CLEMENTS
CINEMATOGRAPHER ROBERT HUMPHREYS
COMPOSER KIRKE GODFREY
EDITOR YOOL

CAST DEBORAH CLAY, TANIA SEGURA, MEG EVANS,
ARI MATTHEWS, MATT BAKER, LOUIS WESTGARTH

Her parents, like so many others, don’t really talk - they just spout the rote crap parents think they should, trying to shape and mould their daughter into a decent young girl, rather than really attempting to understand her.

Joy, directed by A.F.T.R.S graduate Cate Shortland in her final year, is a rare thing indeed; a short film which seeks to be mysterious, disturbing, funny and sexy - all at the same time and within its nine minute running time - and actually achieves it.

Additionally, Shortland has made things triply hard for herself by making a film about teenagers and their problems, an area where filmmakers who aren’t teenagers themselves anymore must tread on eggshells not to make it look contrived, and yet she pulls this off too with aplomb. Rarer still, Joy is an A.F.T.R.S film, so it looks beautiful and the actors are great... but among the slickness is a story, with a character we care about. It is a huge victory for Shortland because watching Joy you sense this would have been a very easy film to get wrong - very wrong.

Imagine a remake of Larry Clark’s Kids with the focus changed from boys to girls, and for financial reasons, the location is switched from New York to a shopping mall in Parramatta, Sydney. Then imagine a less pretentious effort that runs just nine minutes.

No? OK, I’ll explain. Joy is a film people will say centres around a teenage girl. Joy

is an

fantasises about all the boys wanting her and then gets into a fight. When she returns home that night to the furious cries of her parents, we realise she is the way she is because of her home environment. It’s a simple story covering well-trodden ground but the beauty is not the story itself, it is the way in which Shortland tells it.

First of all, Shortland obliterates the problem of having to write teenage dialogue, which for one reason or another so often comes off sounding fake or forced. Trying to cram wit and realism into the mouth of any character who is Australian and under 25 years old - a species whose favourite word is 'fuck' (I know mine is) - is a task that in my mind requires massive talent to conquer properly. (Angst anyone? I mean, who do you know that talks like that?) Big, long Kevin Smith-ish speeches about why the Evil Dead films are “a lot like life” do not work in an Aussie accent. OK, bitch over.

Joy does centre around a teenage girl, Joy (played exceedingly well by WAAPA grad Deborah Clay, especially since she’s well past 16 years old) but I wouldn’t say she’s Lolita-like. I’d say she’s pretty much a normal teenage girl. Joy

is the sound design which truly makes it what it is.

The main card Shortland has up her sleeve in the storytelling though, is the slices of text which scroll across the screen at various times during the film. When we see Joy applying make-up in the mall toilets in the film’s opening scene, the words ‘You Should Take A Long Hard Look At Yourself In The Mirror’ slide across the screen.

At first the device is jarring, and feels a bit hokey - like an arty type saying ‘wouldn’t it be cool if we had these words slide across the screen right at this one moment.’ Shortland, however, sticks to her guns and repeats the device throughout, making it an intricate part of the story. After getting used to this device we realise it is the voice of her parents berating her in the typical way a parent would a teenage girl.

Joy says like ‘Don’t think you’re walking out the door dressed like that’ and ‘No man in his right mind would touch a girl like you’ remind us of the huge number of ‘sting in the tail’ joke films entered into festivals. It is simple one, which doesn’t attempt too much emotional depth for its length and wraps itself up concisely. Comedy is sometimes too easy a thing to do with short films because you basically only need to tell one joke. As evident in the huge number of ‘sting in the tail’ joke films entered into festivals. It is short films of dramatic or experimental content that are much harder to do without falling flat on your face and in this case Shortland has managed to stand tall. Joy won’t change the world or get her a three-picture deal with Dreamworks... but who really cares?
graphic scenes of exploding bodies or rampant Hollywood-style sexual encounters without batting an eyelid, begin to squirm in their seats at the sight of a bit of no-longer-quite-so-firm flesh. But this is an extremely gentle film from Cox, with surprising dashes of humour and beautifully judged performances from Julia Blake, Bud Tingwell and also Terry Norris (Blake's real-life husband) as Claire's husband, John. Claire has been married to John for 30 years but the physical side of their relationship has long since died.

While sensitively executed, the screenplay does have problems - some of the dialogue has a stagey and unconvincing ring to it. That this isn't the overriding impression of the film is a tribute to Cox's deft touch and dedication to the material and, above all, Blake's wonderfully centred work in the pivotal role of Claire.*

MADELEINE SWAIN

DIRECTOR
PAUL COX

CAST
JULIA BLAKE, CHARLES TINGWELL, TERRY NORRIS, ROBERT MENZIES, MARTA DUSSELDORP, CHRIS HAYWOOD, KRISTINE VAN PELLCOM, KENNY AERNOUTS

PRODUCERS
PAUL COX & MARK PATTERSON

DISTRIBUTOR
SHARMILL FILMS

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
AUSTRALIA

RATING
M

DURATION
95 MINUTES

It's a tale of twilight love, a theme that is always guaranteed to get the romantics smiling wistfully. Half a century after falling for each other in post-war Belgium, Andreas (Charles Tingwell) and Claire (Julia Blake) meet again and renew their relationship. Starring two of Australia's best-loved mature actors, the film is already way ahead in the audience-friendly stakes. But it's more than that. There is a genuine warmth, compassion and understanding at work here. Cox is now 60 years old. He says he finds that hard to believe. Yet many of his most accessible and, indeed, satisfying films have explored different aspects of aging. Think of the loneliness and isolation of Norman Kaye's character in Man of Flowers (1983) or Sheila Florance's acceptance of her approaching death in the brilliant A Woman's Tale (1991). But examining a passionate sexual relationship between characters we would normally only see on our screens playing lawn bowls or pottering in the garden is a whole new ballgame. And it's one that is undeniably confronting for viewers. But what a telling discomfort it is - that audiences who can sit through
“Not only does Crowe’s art imitate his own life, but the writer/director has gone to great pains to make each scene faithful.”

Almost Famous

DIRECTOR
CAMERON CROWE
CAST
BILLY CRUDUP, FRANCES MCDORMAND, KATE HUDSON, PATRICK FUGIT, JASON LEE, ANNA PAQUIN, NOAH TAYLOR, PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN, ZOOEY DESCHANEL, FAIRUZA BALK
PRODUCERS
CAMERON CROWE, IAN BRYCE
SCREENWRITER
CAMERON CROWE
DISTRIBUTOR
COLUMBIA TRISTAR
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
US
RATING
M
DURATION
123 MINUTES

→ In demystifying the greatest rock 'n' roll cliche of all - the on-the-road story - ex-Rolling Stone journo-turned-filmmaker, Cameron Crowe, portrays the reality of such adventures as far more amusing and ultimately more rock than any glorified send-up or tall-tale from backstage will have you believe. Almost Famous' authenticity is its most striking attribute and "keeping it real" is also one of its main themes. For a start, the very nature of the subject matter is close to Crowe's heart. Like the lead character -15-year-old William Miller (Patrick Fugit) who's been assigned to write his first feature for Rolling Stone - Crowe made his start with the same legendary magazine, only he was 16 years old. Not only does Crowe's art imitate his own life, but the writer/director has gone to great pains to make each scene faithful. Set in 1974, Crowe has littered genuine 1970s musical artefacts throughout the film, and has even drawn upon bona fide 70s rock greats like Peter Frampton to coach the 'almost famous' band, Stillwater. (Actors dressed as David Bowie, Neil Young and others also make cameos throughout the film.)

As Stillwater makes its way across America in a bus, the circus picks up the 'band aids' - sympathetically seen as a group of female music fans rather than groupies - and the utterly engaging William. Together, they confront the usual rock hang-ups: on-the-road monogamy (or lack thereof), egomania, trusting the enemy (ie, the press), making friends with your subject (ie, the band) and drugs. But more pertinent than any of this pulp is the story of a little boy coming of age. Albeit a very, very clever little boy, but still just a little boy. This backstage, tour-bus environment is completely foreign to him, and on the other side of this tug-of-war is his overly-protective and equally intelligent mother (played brilliantly by Frances McDormand), who injects Almost Famous with some of the funniest moments. But William's true guide through all of this is the film's moral conscience and real-life legend, rock writer Lester Bangs. Played by Philip Seymour Hoffman, he warns William of the dangers in getting too close to the band. Cautions him that the band will lure him into thinking they're his friends, drain him of his objectivity. Then there's the girl. The 'band-aid' girl. The wonderful Kate Hudson plays the main 'band-aid', Penny Lane. In love with the music and lead guitarist, Russell Hammond (Billy Crudup) - or is that the same thing? - she is vulnerable in this tough-girl world and winds up providing William with his biggest life lesson. In his first US role, Noah Taylor portrays a very odd little band manager named Dick Roswell. Afforded little dialogue and even less character development, there's not much scope for him to (ahem) shine. But through each of the very individual characters, there's a great rock story being told. And most of them are funny, very funny (because they're true). You don't have to be a rock journo, in a band or even be a big music fan to get into this film, although it will help. •

RACHEL NEWMAN
Sobering to say the very least, the latest documentary from Dennis O’Rourke (The Shark Callers of Kontu, Cannibal Tours, The Pagode da Tia Beth) sees him returning to Australia to continue doing what he does best: prising the sores on the underbelly of society and having a good old poke around underneath. His most notable (or infamous, depending on your point of view) endeavour in this direction to date was 1991’s The Good Woman of Bangkok - an utterly downbeat and unavoidably distressing biography of Aoi, a young Thai woman forced by circumstances to work as a prostitute in Bangkok.

Thankfully Cunnamulla isn’t quite as desperate a show - indeed there are several moments of undisguised levity - but it’s pretty formidable material all the same. O’Rourke seems to be determined to make films that will ‘shake the bastards up a bit’. It’s as if he’s deliberately targeting his work at members of the smug middle class, sitting in their North Shore or eastern suburbs polished-floor apartment, pondering life’s big decisions: stir fry or pasta for dinner? and saying, hold on a minute: let’s take a look at how other people are living their lives. In Cunnamulla, the town ‘at the end of the railway line’ deep in outback Queensland, the population is divided into white Australians and Aborigines, but the living conditions are fairly basic for all concerned. Without preamble, O’Rourke introduces us to a fascinating cross-section of the townsfolk and then just lets the camera roll - the interviewees seemingly needing very little prodding to let us in on some of the most personal and complicated details of their lives.

And this is where O’Rourke really excels. Like Nick Broomfield (Kurt & Courtney, Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madam) he has an extraordinary ability to communicate with people and get them to open up on camera. But unlike Broomfield, the viewer doesn’t get the sense that his success is simply due to an overdose of pushiness on his part. There seems to be an extraordinary amount of trust too - even when the subject doesn’t understand why they should be subjected to such scrutiny (as in The Good Woman of Bangkok). O’Rourke is also much more successful at keeping himself out of the film than Broomfield. In Cunnamulla his interviewees refer to him only once or twice and then the mention has a point: serving to highlight the differences between: his life and that of, say, Herb the scrap metal merchant.

Having said this, you can’t help wondering what the townsfolk of Cunnamulla will make of O’Rourke’s view of their lives. Maybe they’ll be glad he took the time to get to know them and film them, or maybe sections of the community will feel the town as a whole has been woefully misrepresented. Surely life there can’t be that bleak for everyone? Or can it?

The film was made in the pre-Christmas period, but the picture O’Rourke paints is not a remotely festive one. Perhaps most jarring of all are his conversations with Cara and her best friend Kellie-Anne. Cara at only 13 years old is a school dropout whose lack of concern about the possibility of pregnancy lies in the fact that she’d just “dump the kid on the father and let him deal with it”. We last see the duo packing their bags and heading off for Brisbane - doing whatever it takes to get away from Cunnamulla and the endless parade of oversexed males. But you can’t help feeling life in the state capital won’t offer them much either. The end of the line indeed. Madeleine Swain

Cunnamulla will screen in Sydney’s Vaialalia and Canberra’s Electric Shadows from December 14, with Melbourne to follow in January.

→ An aspiring screenwriter is often advised to ‘write what you know’ and Melbourne writer/director Vincent Giarrusso has elected to do exactly that with his debut film, Mailboy. Giarrusso is best known as lead singer with Melbourne rock outfit Underground Lovers. However, he was once a youth welfare worker, an experience he has obviously drawn Underbelly Lovers to. The film is set in Melbourne’s northern suburbs. Giarrusso’s film, characters do everything that Neighbours characters don’t. They go to the toilet; they veg in front of the telly; they smoke and get drunk and swear. And then there are issues of unemployment, drugs, spousal abuse and petty crime. Giarrusso clearly aspires to a kind of Ken Loach-style gritty realism, while recalling local efforts like Moving Out and The Year My Voice Broke in its teenage rites of passage theme. In a social context, there are also parallels with The Boys and Nirvana Street Murder, among others. Shaun (marvellously played by Kane McNaught) spends most of his time down at the local mall. If he’s not shoplifting or dining out in the food court (where his mother works as a cleaner), he
"The American dream of everything being possible for everyone without burdening taxpayers for study or artistic grants is still alive."

"In Giarrusso's film, characters do everything that Neighbours characters don’t. They go to the toilet; they veg in front of the telly; they smoke and get drunk and swear."

The film has Violet (Piper Perabo) as a wannabe songwriter moving from the clutches of her nice but boring life in New Jersey where Kiwi native Melanie Lynskey gives a great turn as Violet’s quintessential New Jersey friend Gloria and protective father Bill (played well by Roseanne’s John Goodman) to a seedy life in Manhattan. There, she finds that her night job providing cheap thrills for guys on the prowl in the racy Coyote Ugly bar, owned by the cliched iron maiden Lil (Maria Bello), overshadows her aspirations and budding romance with the elusive Kevin (Garcia), making for some of the obligatory jealous boyfriend scenes. In a hugely surprising turn of events, Kevin helps her overcome the stage fright she feels about performing her own works at the very last possible moment, which unlocks the key to success.

However derivative it seems, there are enough nice moments, a spicy tone and great music and art direction that make this film more than watchable for its target audience of teens and young adults, most of whom will be too young to compare it to producer Bruckheimer’s previous hit Flashdance.
And like Flashdance, it will probably inspire a whole new generation of wannabes, while, in America at least, their parents will probably applaud a film that celebrates the maxim that it doesn’t really matter what you do to succeed or realise your dreams, or how much you spurn the person you once were in getting there. This very American film celebrates women in a post-feminist environment, where catering to humanity’s base desires is fine so long as you’re saving the money for law school or to press your own CDs along the way. No doubt middle-America will be relieved to know that, based on what you’ll see in this film, the American dream of everything being possible for everyone without burdening taxpayers for study or artistic grants is still alive.

García’s main contribution to all this is to look cute (often by disrobing at key moments and occasionally tap-dancing a bit while showing off his beautifully buffed body), smile a lot and every so often be a tiny bit mysterious about his past. We get no hint of what sort of Yank accent he has either, as, no doubt in an attempt to empower women to be equally base and exploitative of basic human desires? One can’t help feeling if Bruckheimer or Garcia had stopped to consider such things in anything other than a superficial manner, the film would have been richer for it, in the way Billy Elliot manages to make its characters, story and central performances both more engaging and even entertaining for being so informed by its politics. Indeed, while Ugly, Bootmen and Billy all have that artistic triumph over adversity theme, the first two shirk serious considerations of their socio-political contexts, while the last two have almost identical plots fright down to deceased mothers and battling the shocking perceptions that dancing is only for poofs, which the Oz film handles with all the sensitivity of a bull in a china shop, but the difference is in the execution, making Billy’s 11-year-old lead 20 times the character of Bootmen’s young man. While each of these films tries to be The Full Monty meets Brassed Off with dollops of The Commitments thrown in, only Billy Elliot comes close to the mark, while Bootmen mysteriously even manages not to tell its audience just how big the Tap Dogs phenomena became and Ugly ends up being a plain old American popcorn movie.

Still, as for young audiences in the mood for pointless fun, a bit of toe-tapping and a fair bit of leering at gyrating flesh, this rather formulaic number, which at 101 minutes is about 15 minutes too long, might be just the ticket.

→ The cinema of puddings is little explored by filmmakers - in fact, this loose adaptation of Norman Lindsay’s perennial children’s favourite (first published in 1918) is the very first attempt in this country at tackling this most risible of genres. Apart from Grendel (1981), Blinky Bill (1992), Yoram Gross’ Dot series, and one or two others, Australian animated feature films have been relatively scarce. It’s a budget thing of course. Animated films are extremely costly and labour-intensive. Gross’s Dot And the Kangaroo, for example, isn’t even fully animated - the cartoon Dot is overlaid on a ‘real’ bushland background. So here is a rare example of a full-length animated Australian film, as Aussie as you can get in fact. Alas, The Magic Pudding is not the apogee of animation one might have hoped for. A trio of screenwriters have adapted Lindsay’s book and chosen to diverge from it rather drastically. In recounting the adventures of Bill Barnacle [man], Sam Sawnoff [penguin] Bunyip Bluegum (koala) and Albert (pud) the screenwriters have chosen to replace the book’s rather episodic nature with a narrative structure that is disappointingly familiar and at odds with the source material’s colonial charm. We now have the entirely new idea that Bunyip is an orphan who discovers his parents are still alive and sets off on a ho-hum quest to find them. It turns out they have been imprisoned by the monstrous, Oliver Reed-like Buncle [wombat; not found in the book] who lives in an underground dungeon that stirs ancient memories of the Australian animated TV series King
The Dish is the antithesis of the Local Hero period of filmmaking that came out of Britain during the early 80s.

Arthur and his Square Nights of The Round Table (1966).

It has become commonplace - at least in the latest efforts from the Disney studios - to pitch animated classics at two levels. Usually there's one level for the kids, and one for everybody else over the age of 11.

There's nothing of the sort here. No wit, no surprises, no good jokes (unless you think a rooster with a voice oddly similar to that of Joh Bjelke Peterson is either funny or relevant). The songs - de rigeur in animated films these days - are largely forgettable.

The best part about The Magic Pudding is guessing whose voice has been lent to which character. Geoffrey Rush, Hugo Weaving and Sam Neill are all excellent in the lead roles, while Jack Thompson is terrific as the odorous Bunce. John Laws has a nice cameo as the poetry-spouting Rumpus Bumpus, but Toni Collette and Mary Coustas unfortunately have less to do.

The animation in The Magic Pudding is certainly competent and the character renderings thankfully remain true to Lindsay's own wonderful creations. But while the whole exercise is obviously designed to be good fun, somehow the book's innocent nature has been left behind. In its place is a very dubious recurring theme which appears to actually celebrate greed and gluttony.

But there is little point in exploring this notion further, nor dwelling too studiously on the inexhaustible pudding as a metaphor for an economic utopia where there's always enough to go round for everybody. After all, this is just a kids' film about a talking dessert.

The Dish, a fairly decent family feature, seems to come out of Britain during the early 80s. In those films the Big Bad American would swing into the backward British village and be won over by the local charm. In The Dish the Big Good Americans come to the bush and win over the simple townsfolk.

It's moonwalk time, in this based-on-true-events period piece, and the small New South Wales hamlet of Parkes has found itself at the centre of this history-making event. The town's sheep paddock-located satellite dish is to relay pictures of man's first step among the craters. The people of Parkes rally together to ensure they make their mark.

So, out come the quirky characters, who seem only to exist to be patronised. The local guy charged with guarding the passing American lifeform. The satellite dish is so dim he believes the Parkes-relayed, sight of humankind's giant leap. As with the other female characters in The Dish, she is allowed on screen for nothing more than a cheap laugh (Denise Roberts and Collette Mann, in other minor roles, are similarly wasted). The Dish also mimics the Hollywood movie score. Every Important Moment is telegraphed far too often by what is possibly the worst soundtrack ever composed for an Australian film. So overwhelming are the orchestral build-ups to sentimental scenes and moments of folk wisdom that a John Williams soundtrack seems subtle in comparison.

One characteristic of The Castle has survived through to this film. The Dish is at least host to an easy-to-watch cast that know exactly how to handle the dry humour and, more importantly, the often mushy script.
Reading.

> Often it's my job to encourage actors to talk about themselves, their films, their doubts. Thankfully, and rightfully, I'm paid to do so. It's some consolation. Just as journalists are arrogant, so are actors self-obsessed.

> So the prospect of reading John Hargreaves... a celebration (Parrot, $30) was consternating. Thank goodness the experience was not only painless but joyful. Here was an entertaining actor who wasn't overly self-indulgent and who had greater concerns than himself.

> In some regards, this was to be expected of an amalgam of interviews and recollections conducted with Hargreaves and his peers by Genevieve Picot and Tony Watts in the last year of Hargreaves' life, 1996. The authors have compiled a portrait of a charming, blunt man with much to say about his career and his craft. Disappointingly he has nothing to tell of his personal life and sexuality other than choosing to act after seeing Marlene Dietrich in 1965! but there is more than enough in a professional life which began with an audition in the NSW town of Mendooran in the early 1960s. His recollections of the early years in Sydney are fascinating and, at times, embarrassing. One of Hargreaves' troupe interpreted the tragic The Dutch Courtesans as a comedy.

> It didn't take long for Hargreaves to attract the attention of Crawford Productions before his inevitable move to film (for which he wanted to change his name to Racy McKennel!). In retrospect, his choices of projects were interesting. He produced the most literate screenplays of Looking For Alibrandi (by Melina Marchetta, Currency Press, $17.95) and The Sound Of One Hand Clapping (by Richard Flanagan, Picador, $20.78) will take different spots in the Australian film library. They crystallise why on screen the former worked and the latter bombed. Marchetta's writing for Alibrandi is crisp and very readable. More importantly, the welcome inclusion of deleted dialogue or scenes shows exactly why this country is mad to encourage our film libraries-

> Hargreaves was a fine actor and director - "I was to learn that filmmaking runs on terror, rewards mediocrity, and views everyone as expendable." If only his screenplay was as incisive as his observation.

> Cracking stuff.

> Both screenplays include illuminating introductory essays by their authors, although Flanagan's is a touch too prosaic. Unfortunately, he was hardened by the experience of directing - "I was to learn that filmmaking runs on terror, rewards mediocrity, and views everyone as expendable." If only his screenplay was as incisive as his observation.

> Alan Duff's memoir, Out Of The Mist And Steam (Tandem Press, $24.95), is bursting with incisive and emotional stuff. The New Zealand author of Once Were Warriors and What Becomes Of The Broken Hearted? tells of a rambunctious rebel growing up torn between his father's civelity and his mother's aggro. As he says: "It breaks your fuckin' heart."

> It's a pacy and blunt memoir about grappling with two cultures, Maori and English. Don't come here looking for writing or cinematic tips, this one is purely personal, and it's all the stranger for it. In a boys' home aged 13, in gaol by 15, Duff was a troubled kid but he writes: "I make no apologies for what nature has made me."

Ronald Bergan's Coen Brothers (Orion, $49.95) is that worst kind of biography, the one where the author thinks he has the talent and wherewithal to trade wits with the stars. Bergan even quotes the Coens' fictional editor, Roderick Jaynes. So, so clever.
John Hargreaves
... a celebration
an actor's life
as he saw it

This toadying, skittish bio lacks
flow, Bergan's self-acknowledged skill
allowing him to slip into stream of
consciousness writing full of tame
similes, try-hard writing and bad puns.

But the Coens are enigmatic, elliptical
subjects and their quotes and
mannerisms sustain the book. They
re-tell how they had to fire some
babies while filming
Raising Arizona
"and they didn't even know they were
being fired, that's what was so
pathetic about it."

I put it down once I read the Coens
screened
The Conformist, The Third
Man
and
Mad Max
before they shot
Raising Arizona.

Three classics by
two outstanding filmmakers spawned
another classic. That's all I needed
to know.

The Bond Files: The Unofficial
Guide to the World’s Greatest Secret
Agent
(Andy Lane and Paul Simpson,
Virgin Books, US$7.95) begins with a
caveat, an Oscar Wilde quote - "It is a
very sad thing that nowadays there is
so little useless information."

Indeed, this collection of useless
information may be pulpy like an Ian
Fleming novel, and possess the same
literary impact, but it's great fun. I'm
not up on the James Bond minutiae
but as a role model, I've found him to
work quite well. This fabulously
irrelevant breakdown of the Bond
persona, with categories such as
'single entendres', 'sadism' and
'mistakes can be fatal' gave me more
than I needed to know. But now I feel
fulfilled knowing Stanley Kubrick
helped with the lighting on
The Spy
Who Loved Me
and Sean Connery
wasn't the first on-screen Bond [it
was stunt co-ordinator Bob Simmons
as the behatted agent in the first
opening sequence). And there's more
where that came from. Much more.

By the way, there's a
Leonard
Maltin's 2001 Movie & Video Guide
(Signet, $16.95) released. At 1648
pages, the binding will surely go on
this one but I hope not. The Maltin's is
an indispensable and liberal pointer
to everything on screen. This one
includes 2000 DVD reviews and mail
order addresses for the true buffs but
lamentably not the directors’ lists.

One day he'll get it perfect but until
that day, this will do.

MICHAEL BODEY
An actress couldn't ask for a more attention-grabbing debut than Dominique Swain's in Lolita. Even that film's detractors have to acknowledge the mesmerizing quality of her performance, embodying perfectly the ambiguities of the role. So, does Dominique Swain have more to offer us? Intern would suggest she certainly does.

A credit sequence that starts as a fashion industry cocktail party, then transforms midway into a choreographed musical number, is not only a pleasant surprise, but also a good indicator of the strange, loopy vibe the mesmerizing quality of her performance. Joan Rivers has a few terrific scenes as a company executive Walter (Robert Forster), a psychiatrist who keeps the myth alive. When drug company executive Walter (William Hurt) takes the family along on a business trip, his wife Cathryn (Jennifer Tilly) is more than a little anxious about the idea, especially with their mute 10-year-old daughter Melissa (Francesca Brown) in tow. Her fears are realised when Melissa gets lost, witnesses a murder, and is pursued by evil guys who want her dead.

It's bad enough that in this version of Amsterdam, every character is straight out of Hollywood central casting and goes about their predictable business speaking an English of pure cliché. What's worse is that while the gist of the thing is meant to be, the screenplay is full of the expected barbs and quivery hand-drawn lettering of Peter Sellers can rest in peace. Los Angeles to wards Utah, intending to pick up her sister Alice (Fairuza Balk) along the way. Fate intervenes, in the form of Jake (Robert Forster), a psychiatrist who has adopted a simple guiding philosophy - every decision is to be made by the toss of a coin. His reasons for this are explained with a few rants about the collapse of society, the need to embrace chance, and so on, but never you mind about that.

Road movie, psycho-thriller, with a touch of philosophical musing... all are apt in trying to describe this odd little film. Constructed from the most familiar of genre elements, there's a patchwork feel to the whole that will perplex some viewers but leave others perpetually puzzled as to what the gist of the thing is meant to be. Director Paul Chart's screenplay is rather erratic, and this is the film's major problem - the characters' actions don't always make sense (and not just the crazy ones). The lead actors' idiosyncratic performance styles are all given full rein - sometimes a little too much - but it's flaws just outweighing its virtues, American Perfekt is a frustrating near-miss.
Stuart Little
DIRECTOR ROB MINKOFF
CAST HUGH LAURIE, SEENNA DAVIS, JONATHAN LIPNICKI
PRODUCER DOUGLAS WICK
DISTRIBUTOR TRISTAR PICTURES
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN US
DURATION 81 MINUTES
PRICE $39.95

Magnolia
DIRECTOR PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON
CAST TOM CRUISE, HENRY GIBSON, PHILLIP BAKER HALL, PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN, WILLIAM H MACY, JULIANNE MOORE, JASON ROBARDS
PRODUCER JOANNE SELLAR
DISTRIBUTOR ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN US
RATING R
DURATION 191 MINUTES
PRICE $39.95

Looking for Alibrandi
DIRECTOR KATE WOODS
CAST PIA MIRANDA, SIRETA SCACCHI, ANTHONY LAGAGLIA, ELENA COTTA, KERRY WALKER
PRODUCER ROBYN KERSHAW
DISTRIBUTOR ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AUSTRALIA
RATING MA
DURATION 99 MINUTES
PRICE $34.95

Joan of Arc
DIRECTOR LUC BESSON
CAST MILLA JOVOVICH, JOHN Malkovich, Faye Dunaway, Dustin Hoffman
PRODUCER PATRICE LEDOUX
DISTRIBUTOR TRISTAR PICTURES
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN US
RATING MA
DURATION 152 MINUTES
PRICE $40

A pleasant children’s film that adults will also enjoy, Stuart Little is the story of an orphan mouse adopted by a human family. The cast, headed by the rubber-faced comedian Hugh Laurie, includes Geena Davis and Michael J. Fox (who provides the voice for Stuart). There are plenty of extra features included on the DVD, mostly aimed at the younger audience, but some of the features are specifically for adults and those interested in the nuts-and-bolts of animation work. The extra features section includes ‘Stuart’s Central Park Adventure Game’, a children’s game in which you have to answer questions relating to the film in order to make it through Central Park, New York, to the Littles’ house. There is also a ‘Read-Along’, which is a reading of the virtual book. Also included is a making-of featurette, which is a funny take on Stuart Little being an actual mouse and a real actor; Geena Davis goes into great comic detail about why Stuart’s scenes were cut from the film A League of Their Own.

In the vein of Braveheart, although not quite as polished, Joan of Arc is an epic film based on the life of the teenage peasant French girl who rallied a nation to victory over the English (boy the English are getting a rough deal in cinema lately). Only to be betrayed by the man she foretold as, and aided in becoming, King of France who handed her over to the English to be subsequently burned as a witch, Milla Jovovich puts in a good performance as the strong yet delicate, confident yet overwhelmed, Joan.

The extra features on this DVD presentation are the usual fare - talent profiles and movie trailers for the film. What stands out in the bonus section is ‘The Messenger: The Search for the Real Joan of Arc’, an extensive historical account of the plight of Joan of Arc, narrated by Jovovich. The extent of research conducted for the film is highlighted by this involved, documentary-style account of the history behind Joan of Arc’s legacy. ‘The Messenger’ is a history lesson on the extraordinary journey of a peasant farmer’s daughter who took on the burden of leading a nation at the tender age of 17 to reclaim her country, standing up to the tyranny of an entire English army, literally by herself. Well worth it if you’re interested in the incredible story of Joan of Arc.

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St Kilda Film Festival • City of Port Phillip • Private Bag No 3 • PO St Kilda • VIC • 3182 • email: filmfestival@portphillip.vic.gov.au • www.stkildafilmfestival.com.au
The movie industry is working hard at co-opting web surfers into cinemas and Karl Quinn reckons it makes perfect sense.

Exterior, night. The camera tilts down from a full moon to reveal a barbed-wire fence. A guard and his dog patrol the perimeter, stopping midway to check the huge padlock on a forbidding gate. Somewhere in the shadows a pair of eyes track the guard’s movement, waiting for the perfect moment to make a break. The guard passes, the escapee makes a dash for it. He’s carrying a teaspoon. He starts digging. He’s a battery chicken, and he’s about to fly the coop.

→ The scene is from Chicken Run, the first feature movie from Aardman, the British animation team responsible for the Academy Award-winning Wallace and Gromit shorts. It opened in the US in June, but in Australia we’ve had to wait until the Christmas school holidays for the comic caper to hatch. That is unless you’ve got a computer and an internet connection, in which case you can check out the first seven minutes of footage online at www.apple.com/trailers any time you like.

→ The internet has finally arrived in Hollywood, and the marketing of movies will never be the same. Virtually every film released these days - and certainly any film aimed at the all-important male-14-to-25 demographic - has an official web site dedicated to it, and in all likelihood a host of unofficial links to boot.

→ Most studio-generated sites offer the sort of information that used to be the province only of movie reviewers and those in the publicity loop: cast and crew biographies, behind-the-scenes snippets, quotes from the stars and directors about how working on the latest Adam Sandler film totally, like, changed their lives.

→ Some offer games, chat rooms and even competitions (sadly, the trip-to-Hollywood prizes are only on offer in the US]. Some, like the site for New Zealand director Peter Jackson’s top secret Lord Of The Rings, allow you access that would be all but impossible in the real world.

→ And all you need to access Hollywood’s most intimate public moments are a reasonably fast modem, enough memory on your computer to handle all the image files (they can be pretty hungry beasts), and some free downloadable multimedia software, usually Quicktime, Flash, Real Player or Shockwave.

→ It may have taken Hollywood a while to cotton-on to the full potential of the web, but savvy studio executives realised years ago that chat rooms could be an effective way of reaching a younger audience that had turned its back on more traditional media such as newspapers and television. Rumours, gossip, leaks from the set - all could contribute to the crucial “word of mouth” that can make the difference between a so-what and a must-see movie.

→ They also realised that even if this beast couldn’t be controlled, it could be fed a healthy diet. So they began to co-opt fan-based sites such as

That Hollywood should have fallen in love with the web is hardly surprising, the movies and the internet share a similar demographic – the young, the media-savvy, the novelty-hungry.
WEB CHANGES FILM MARKETING AND INTERNATIONAL RELEASE PATTERNS

→ Buena Vista International has recently appointed trendy Melbourne publicity company Spin Communications to the job of publicising their film promotion web sites.
→ Through SPIN, BVI is urging reviewers to print the URLs for official web sites at the bottom of reviews. The initiative appears to be designed to direct web traffic along official channels, making it difficult for web surfers to visit unofficial sites.
→ If successful, it will also validate the (estimated average) $40,000 spent by local distributors for the new compulsory web site for each film.
→ Distributors contacted would not confirm whether www spends came from increased or existing marketing budgets, thus taking money away from traditional media advertising.

MICHAELA BOLAND

darkhorizons.com.au - launched by 22-year-old Sydneysider Garth Franklin in 1997 - and countdown.com - which Lincoln Gasking in Melbourne, Phillip Nakov in Los Angeles and Tim Doyle in Toronto, launched in 1998 at the height of Phantom Menace fever - as de facto marketing organs. You won’t find much by way of a maverick voice on these sites, but if you want to find a trailer or an exchange of views on a forthcoming piece of mainstream cinema, they’re excellent places to start.

→ It wasn’t until 1999 that the bulk of Hollywood started to take notice of the web. What prompted the change was a low-budget horror film that virtually turned its back on conventional marketing techniques in favour of photocopied handbills posted on lamp posts and a network of official and unofficial web sites that spread rumour, information and misinformation that all contrived to blur the lines between fact and fiction. The film was, of course, The Blair Witch Project and its phenomenal success ensured that even the most committed Luddites in Los Angeles paid attention.

→ Television and newspaper campaigns are still with us, of course, but these days there’s barely a film released that doesn’t have a dedicated web site. With shorter cinema seasons and the overwhelming importance of the “opening weekend”, building a sense of expectation is now seen as key to the success or failure of a film.

→ So it is that up to a year before a movie is scheduled for release it can be making itself felt online. Sony Pictures’ fully digitally animated sci-fi feature Final Fantasy is slated for a theatrical release some time in 2001, but already you can check out sneak footage and get details on the back story and characters at www.finalfantasy.com.

→ That Hollywood should have fallen in love with the web is hardly surprising, as the movies and the internet share a similar demographic - the young, the media-savvy, the novelty-hungry. The net delivers visuals at far less cost than TV, and allows anyone who feels so inclined to download, replay and pass on trailers and stills.

→ And while TV is a broadcast medium, which means that advertisers pay for the privilege of sending their message to a lot of people who simply aren’t interested, the internet is far more user-directed.

→ In theory at least, anyone interested in finding out about the film Titan AE can search for it online, visit official and unofficial sites, and send the URLs to anyone else they know who shares their interest.

→ The net effectively allows Hollywood to park its trailers in cyberspace and sit back as a community of interest (people keen on science fiction, say, or romantic comedy) does the hard work of distribution for it. It’s cheap, it’s targeted, and it’s effective. And you can bet it’s only going to get bigger.

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Lunar Lighting Balloons has provided glare-free lighting and effects for some of the biggest movies, events and rescues.

**BIGGEST MOVIES:** Mission Impossible II, Star Wars III, Crocodile Dundee III

**BIGGEST EVENTS:** The giant pink Box Jellyfish that astounded live and TV audiences during the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games

**BIGGEST RESCUES:** The Thredbo landslide and the Glenbrook train crash rescues

Lunar Lighting Balloons are the indoor or outdoor, glare-free, uniform lighting system with virtually unlimited use, including civil & construction work, emergencies, entertainment, special events, movies, TV shows and commercials.

For full details on Lunar Lighting Balloons, visit our website:

www.lunarlighting.com.au
By Megan Sloley

The Australian Broadcasting Association (ABA) and the local television industry are confident networks Seven, Nine and Ten will commence metropolitan digital broadcasting on January 1. But the general manager of TV retailer Harvey Norman, Don Clift, says only three digital receiver products will be available to consumers by that date.

→ SET TOP UNITS (STUS)

The cheapest option, STUs are computers that convert digital signals for analogue TVs and in doing so provide a higher quality picture, free of interference and ghosting. STUs can also be programmed to receive multichannelling, datacasting and surround sound which could be broadcast by networks which chose to utilise their digital bandwidth in this way. However, extra audio equipment may also be required for consumers to fully appreciate the signal. Pay TV operators and equipment manufacturers need to work together to develop STUs able to receive satellite and digitised cable signals but so far the going has been slow.

→ STANDARD DEFINITION INTEGRATED TV

SDI TVs have built-in digital receivers to deliver a sharp image in genuine wide screen. But according to Clift the difference between a good analogue and standard definition picture is “minimal at best”.

→ HIGH DEFINITION TV PLUS STU

To obtain the benefits of high definition digital broadcasts, consumers will need a high definition TV monitor plus specific STU and audio equipment.

→ THE NEXT TWO YEARS

TV networks will not broadcast continually either in high definition or utilising the other features of digital. Free-to-air broadcasters are not obliged to transmit anything but a standard definition signal for two years after commencing digital output. After those two years each broadcaster will be required to output 20 hours per week of high definition. Clift estimates a standard definition integrated
television set will retail at Harvey Norman for around $3000 and a HD monitor for $6000. He predicts "rapid price de-escalation" if the market becomes flooded with products.

→ **SHOW ME THE MONEY**
Brand manufacturers generally concur with Harvey Norman’s prediction of the digital TV consumer products range. NEC, Sharp and SONY are due to roll out these three main products next year. Philips is launching an SDI set only. Sony’s national TV and video product manager, Alex Streeter, nominates the target pricing of the first SONY STU at $1499; its first SDI set at $4999; and its first HD monitor (imported) at $7999. He claims so far the media has generally overstated the cost of the first digital TV receivers, with 4 Corners recently quoting a "grossly inflated" figure of $20,000 for a high definition monitor and STU.

→ SONY, Sharp, NEC, Philips, Panasonic and the Digital Broadcasters Association (DBA), there will be no STUs or digital receivers of any kind on display at the recent Sydney Olympics. The "zapping box" enabled the receipt of a clear digital picture in this instance, but Webb says that the unit is not ready for general use. “There are still changes to be made to the software,” he explains, “that will prevent the units from launching with digital free-to-air. In fact, according to Nokia, SONY, Sharp, NEC, Philips, Panasonic and the Digital Broadcasters Association (DBA), there will be no STUs or digital receivers of any kind on display at the recent Sydney Olympics.”

→ Nokia is also the first to produce an STU to Australian specifications with 32 Nokia “zapping boxes” used to download Channel 7 test digital broadcasts to analogue sets at the recent Sydney Olympics. The "zapping box" enabled the receipt of a clear digital picture in this instance, but Webb says that the unit is not ready for general use. “There are still changes to be made to the software,” he explains, “that will prevent the units from launching with digital free-to-air. In fact, according to Nokia, SONY, Sharp, NEC, Philips, Panasonic and the Digital Broadcasters Association (DBA), there will be no STUs or digital receivers of any kind on display at the recent Sydney Olympics.”

→ Nokia is also one of the most proactive digital product players currently developing a multimedia home platform to be priced around $2000. The ‘platform’ is being designed to download digital terrestrial transmissions to TV, PC or mobile phone. According to Nokia’s multimedia terminals manager, Bruce Webb, this product may also be used for satellite or cable transmissions using an encryption system that “works like sim card technology.”

→ While Webb claims Nokia is “talking” to pay TV operators, Optus’ head of business affairs, Chris Keely, says “this proposal might be technologically possible, but there are many other considerations for us”.

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→ Despite these issues, the DBA believes the lack of consumer product in the short term is not problematic. “The transition from analogue to digital broadcasting is intended to take eight years,” says consulting member Peter Webb. “The gradual introduction of receivers will eventually become a wave of new sets and models, providing consumers with plenty of choice and variety.”
PayTV Kicks On

By Megan Sloley

The Pay TV industry is facing a future dominated by digital broadcasting and, increasingly, demands for consumer interactivity. Unlike free-to-air broadcasting, where existing channels received digital spectrum free of charge, Foxtel, Optus and Austar will need to substantially crank their budgets to fund looming digital ventures.

→ FOXTEL
Currently operating in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Newcastle, Canberra, Gold Coast and most of regional WA, Foxtel’s subscriber base is split evenly between cable and satellite. The cables are leased from part owner. Telstra and the satellite platform is owned in conjunction with Austar and Cable and Wireless Optus. Kerry Packer’s Publishing and Broadcasting Limited and Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited each own 25 percent of Foxtel with Telstra owning 50 percent.

→ OPTUS
Cable only Pay TV in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Optus is owned 52 percent by Cable and Wireless PLC, a UK telecommunications company, and 48 percent by private and institutional investors.

→ AUSTAR
A satellite service with a handful of MMDS (microwave) customers who will soon be migrated over to satellite. Austar is 72 percent owned by United Global Com Inc, 28 percent publicly owned and operates in all regional areas except for WA.

→ SUBSCRIPTIONS
Ninety thousand additional Australian households subscribed to Pay TV in the seven months to October this year. The figure is up on 1998 and 99, when, according to the ABA, Pay TV subscriptions increased by 150,000 annually.

→ At the end of October, 1.29 million Australian households received Pay TV. Foxtel had the largest share – 650,000. Austar’s customers numbered 420,000 with 220,000 household paying for Optus.

→ Foxtel’s head of programming, Ross Crowley, says, “Cable has reached as many homes as Telstra and Optus want it to reach for now”.

→ Both Foxtel and Optus have merged Pay TV with their other telecommunications products, offering such things as internet and phone calls as part of cable subscriber packages. According to Crowley, Pay TV comprises a very small part of their businesses.

→ Still, all three operators are keen to expand that side of their business. Foxtel is currently installed in only around 325,000 of the 2.5 million homes passed by its cable; Optus in 220,000 of the 2.1 million homes on its cable run and Austar with a potential satellite market of 2 million.

→ The head of business affairs for Optus Television, Chris Keely, confirms his company is looking at expanding its Pay TV penetration “with existing cable or satellite”. Austar is aiming for “60–70 percent market penetration” via satellite in the long term, according to the company’s head of corporate affairs, Bruce Meagher.

→ WHAT’S ON OFFER
Foxtel and Optus each offer 36 channels, with six channels common to both. Foxtel owns Fox 8, Fox Kids and FX and has a stake in the comedychannel, arena, Channel [V], Nickelodeon, while Optus produces MTV, D'li and Ovation in-house.

→ “Optus reflects the broader industry in that we have a series of different relationships with channels – some cost per subscriber per calendar month and some are revenue split”, says Keely.

→ Austar has 32 channels similar in range to Foxtel, but also offers the two C7 Sport channels (also available on Foxtel during the Olympics). It owns The Weather Channel, a third of Main Event and has what Meagher defines as “a close commercial relationship with Foxtel, in that we jointly own XYZ Entertainment which produces and distributes Nickelodeon, Discovery, Channel [V], Lifestyle, arena plus we jointly own our respective satellite platform with Cable and Wireless Optus”.

→ The three operators agree movies and sport are the most popular and successful channel formats, but the broader distribution of channels like Showtime and FOX 8 need to be factored into ratings.

→ Foxtel’s Crowley says reach is not the only measure of success. “The less than 1 percent of subscribers who love racing” he says, “are amongst the most loyal viewers of Pay TV”. Interestingly, FOX 8 out-rated Channel 9 and 10 at various times during the Olympics fortnight with its "Simpsons’ Fanfest" according to Foxtel’s head of marketing, Nick Nichles.

→ EXPANSION OF SERVICES
Optus and Austar claim federal government legislation is hampering the expansion of Pay TV. “Pay TV sports channels are denied the chance to screen large sporting events, despite the fact that free-to-air cannot offer the same breadth of programming,” says Optus’ Keely.

→ Pay TV sport broadcasting was also the impetus for recent litigation involving Foxtel and Channel 7, according to Foxtel’s Crowley. “The Supreme Court eventually ruled that anyone, including Channel 7, could have access to the Telstra cable to create a Pay TV service”.

→ “The Pay TV industry has been a sea of red ink since its inception – we should have had the opportunity, like free-to-air, to ramp up Oz programming over a decade,” he says.

→ Austar’s Bruce Meagher concurs with the view that Pay TV interests have been overridden in favour of free-to-air expansion: “The allocation of digital spectrum to the free-to-air networks by the federal government at no charge, is an unwarranted anti-competitive decision.”

→ DIGITAL AND PAY TV
Satellite Pay TV already transmits digitally but it may be some time before operators offer digital features such as extensive interactivity, more pay-per-view channels, enhanced vision and a much broader choice of programming.
Current set top units that convert satellite signals to users' analogue sets must be programmed to enable these features. Austar and Foxtel maintain most of their existing set top satellite converters are digital feature friendly, but the expansion of interactive and other digital services will require the purchase of additional satellite space. However, the scope and cost of digitising cable and upgrading conversion boxes appears to be far more substantial.

The Australian newspaper recently published an estimated figure of $369 million for Foxtel to fully digitise its cable service. Chris Keely acknowledges "the significant capital operational expenditure involved in Optus cable digitalisation". Although Keely also maintains that "digital Pay TV platforms is the future of industry" he admits that Optus is unsure as to how this will enable Pay TV to deliver a much broader choice of programming, how free-to-air channels will interact with Pay TV services and importantly, whether the design and operating costs of digitalising Pay TV services will be passed on to the subscribers. The last is a critical consideration for all three operators.

"Looking at the European models," says Keely, "there has either been a small increase in rates or none at all." Bruce Meagher promises that Austar will "make improvements to the service at no added cost to consumers". But Ross Crowley reckons that FoxTEL is concerned about the limited economic ability of the Australian subscriber market to fund digital and interactive features. "There is already a helluva lot of Pay TV that has to be paid for," he cautions.

In the meantime, all three operators are looking at initiatives that can be launched using existing technology like FoxTEL's home video delivery service with movies downloaded via cable and more cross platform products like the Optus program "Space" which can be viewed via Pay TV, internet and WAP mobile phones.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>THE COST OF PAY TV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOXTEL</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Package</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satellite - $47.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cable - $37.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 channels</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Add Ons</strong></td>
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<td>Showtime, Encore - $10.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Movies - $6.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adults Only Channel - $14.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment Plus - $9.95</td>
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<td>Foreign Language - $9.95</td>
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<td><strong>Installation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satellite - $199.95</td>
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<td>$99.95 or free if subscriber</td>
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<tr>
<td>takes up local telephony</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satellite - $199.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 channel digital music - $1.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>C7 Sport - $6.95 (wireless)</td>
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<td><strong>One-off</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cable - $37.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 channels</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pay Per View</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Event - $16.40 - $39.95</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prices and channels available are subject to changes</strong></td>
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Roth Warren offers comprehensive legal services and practical advice for Film, TV, Multimedia, Music and Theatre, Financing and Production.

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(03) 9650 5888
Feature Films

In pre-production

- EYE OF THE STORM
  Principal Credits
  Director: Aaron Ware
  Producer: Helen O’Malley
  Executive producer: Aaron Ware
  Co-producers: Krystal Pace, Joanna Grioli
  Associate producer: James Morgan
  Scriptwriter: Aaron Ware
  Based on the novel titled: Events from School Yard
  Director of photography: Aaron Ware
  Production designer: Aaron Ware
  Costumes: Krystal Pace, Joanna Grioli
  Sound recordist: James Morgan
  Warzone
  Costumes: Krystal Pace, Joanna Grioli

Synopsis
  It tells the story of a British opium
  years later Shaggy and Scooby-Doo
  from School Yard
  Director: Aaron Ware
  Producer: Helen O’Malley
  Writer: Aaron Ware
  Based on the novel titled: Events from School Yard
  Director of photography: Aaron Ware
  Production designer: Aaron Ware
  Costumes: Krystal Pace, Joanna Grioli
  Sound recordist: James Morgan
  Warzone
  Costumes: Krystal Pace, Joanna Grioli

Synopsis
  Another baffling mystery.
  Based on the original title: Events from School Yard
  Director of photography: Aaron Ware

Synopsis
  The story revolves around Daryn, who
  after many weeks has realised he
  gay but can’t tell anyone.
  He goes to his best friend Bree-ana for
  help. Little does he know that a
  ‘bitch from school, Rebecca,
  overhears this and tells everyone at
  the homophobic school.

- THE QUIET AMERICAN
  Principal Credits
  Director: Philip Noyce
  Producers: William Horburg, Anthony Minghella, Sydney Pollack
  Line producer: Antonia Bernard
  Scriptwriter: Christopher Hampton
  Based on the novel by: Graham Greene

Synopsis
  It tells the story of a British opium
drug of Southeast Asia in the
1950s, who
  the young American for the affections
  of a Vietnamese beauty.

- SCOOBY-DOO
  Principal Credits
  Director: Raja Gosnell
  Producer: Charles Roven
  Scriptwriter: Craig Tiley
  Synopsis
  The Mystery Ink team break up
  Beattie-style after solving yet
  another baffling mystery.
  The friends go to separate
  ways and lose contact, each
  pursuing their own tentative dreams.
  Two years later Shaggy and Scooby-
  Doo instigate a reunion to help
  solve the mystery of a spooky
  theme park haunted by real-life
demons.

In production

- ENEMIES CLOSER
  Principal Credits
  Director: Steven Aldridge
  Producer: Linda Fraser
  Director of photography: Mark Bliss
  Editor: Tim Limgard

Synopsis
  Moving in to your own place with
  three of your nest mates should be
  fun right? Not if you move in with a
  serial killer! Accusations fly and
  no one is quite sure who can
  trust. Everyone must keep their
  wits about them and stay alive until
  the police reach the house. Keep
  your friends close but your
  enemies closer.

- EQUUS - THE STORY OF THE HORSE
  Principal Credits
  Director: Michael Caufield
  Producer: Liz Butler, Michael Caufield
  Editor: Tom Cowan

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

- FIRST MEN
  Principal Credits
  Director: Rick Idak
  Producer: Rick Idak
  Scriptwriter: Rick Idak

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

- MY DRUG BUDDY
  Principal Credits
  Director: Lester Francois
  Producer: Shirley Walter, Lester Francois
  Production manager: Emma Moulthord

Synopsis
  A young co-dependent couple
  reach the crossroads of their
  relationship when they can’t score
  hits.

- PARADISE FOUND
  Principal Credits
  Director: MarioAndreacchio
  Producer: Mario Andreacchio,
  Michael Campagna

Synopsis
  Set in Paris and Tahiti in the 19th
  century, examines a slice of life of
  the French painter, Paul Gauguin,
  in his attempt to create a
  revolution in painting and thinking
  and his obsession with the
  questions of ‘Where do we come from?
  What are we? Where are we going?’

- QUEEN OF THE DAMNED
  Principal Credits
  Director: Michael Rymer
  Producer: Jorge Saralegui
  Scriptwriter: Scott Abbott, Michele Patrone, Anne Rice
  Cast

Synopsis
  Based on Anne Rice’s Queen of the
  Damned - a modern-day vampire
  thriller, drawn from the story of
  Lestat (last seen in Interview With
  a Vampire) who has re-invented
  himself as a rock star.

In post-production

- THE BAN
  Principal Credits
  Director: Robert Connolly
  Producer: RachelHall
  Scriptwriter: Robert Connolly
  Director of Photography: Tristan
  Milani
  Editor: Nick Meyers

Synopsis
  A family relocates from Australia to
  America and discovers that the
  house they’ve moved into is
  actually a gateway to Hell... and
  all of hell is about to break loose.

- THE ENCHANTED BILLABONG
  Principal Credits
  Director: Tom Sleigh
  Producer: Rob McKenzie, David
  Waddington
  Executive producer: Jack
  Wegman
  Scriptwriter: Michael Wagner
  Based on the original screenplay
titled: The Enchanted Billabong
  Director: Michael Wagner, David
  Waddington
  Producer: Wayne Bryant
  Sound Designer: Julian Hill
  Planning and Development
  Casting: Bedford & Pearce
  Video Master by: FMTV
  Cast

Synopsis
  A boy learns to believe in an
  enchanted world and the
  characters that exist there and in
  doing so he learns to believe in himself.

- HILDEGARDE
  A Duck Film Pty Ltd
  Distribution: Providence Entertainment (US)
  Principal Credits
  Director: Di Gregri
  Producer: Heather Ogilvie, David
  Hannay
  Associate producer: Colleen Camp
  Scriptwriter: Gabrielle Presneau
  Production manager: Elizabeth
  Symes
  Producer: Georgina Greenhill
  Art Department
  Art director: Ken James
  Post Production
  Editor: Suresh Appar
  Cast
  Richard E Grant, Tom Long, Tara
  Marie, Dezzie Bynes, Sam Bear, Dan
  Hudson
  Synopsis
  Hildegarde, a much-loved family
  pet, is kidnapped by smoothers.

- JET SET
  Principal Credits
  Production Crew: Sean
  Callinan
  Production designer: Sean
  Callinan
  Special fx make-up: Pro FX
  Special fx: Kevin Chishnall
  Art Department
  Art Director: Adam Head
  Post Production
  Editor: Brian Kavanagh
  CCI: Complete Post
  Cast
  Joshua Leonard, Belinda McLearcy,
  Amy Reil, Craig McLachlan
  Synopsis
  A family relocates from America to
  Australia and discovers that the
  house they’ve moved into is
  actually a gateway to Hell... and
  all of hell is about to break loose.
LA SPAGNOLA
Production company: Wild Strawberries Pty Ltd
Post Production: Until November 2000
Principal Credits
Director: Steven Jacobs
Producer: Anna-Maria Monticelli
Co-producer: Philip Hearshaw
Scriptwriter: Anna-Maria Monticelli
Cast
Laia Marcelli, Lourdes Bartolome, Alex Dimitriades, Alice Ansara, Simon Palonesare, Helen Thomas
Synopsis
A comical story of a Spanish mother/daughter relationship: their love, revenge, prejudice and survival in a small industrial town during 1960.

MOULIN ROUGE
Production company: Bazmark
Distribution company: Twentieth Century Fox
Principal Credits
Director: Baz Luhrmann
Producers: Baz Luhrmann, Martin Brown, Fred Baran
Scriptwriters: Baz Luhrmann,Craig P. Mitchel
DOP: Don Alpin
Cast
Nicole Kidman, Ewan McGregor, Richard Roxburgh, John Leguizamo, Gary McDona
Synopsis
A young man casts aside the shackles of his middle class society to become a writer and join the ranks of the free-loving artistic underworld of Paris.

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 McPhie
Editor: Andrew Scott
Cast
Chris Frankin, Gabriel Rossi, Dave Grant, Michael Bishop, Margie Bainbridge, Eric Mueck
Synopsis
Scott is a building labourer from Melbourne’s working class suburbs and a 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.

NUINNSKI
MusicArts/Dance films
Distribution company: Sharrmill Films and WTV (UK)
Budget: 1.2 million
Principal Credits
Director: Paul Cox
Producers: Paul Cox, Aanya Whitehead
Executive producers: Kevin Lucas, William Marshall
Scriptwriter: Paul Cox
Based on the diaries of Nasvad Nijinsky
Composer: Paul Grabowsky
Planning and Development
Research: Leonie Verhoeven, Margot Wiburd
Dance Consultant: Alida Chase
Shooting schedule: Aanya Whitehead
Budgeted by: Aanya Whitehead
Production Crew
Insurer: Cinesure
Completion guarantor: Film Finances Ltd
Legal services: Marshals and Dent
On-set writer: Alida Chase, Leigh Warren
Unit publicist: Catherine Lavelle
Synopsis
Nasvad Nijinsky was probably the greatest dancer of all time – the God of the Dance – and his “Cahiers (Diaries) must be one of the most extraordinary and moving literary works ever written. The film uses the words of Nijinsky, written in 1919 in St Moritz where he had retired, suffering extreme mental agony.

RAABBIT-PROOF FENCE
Jabal Films
Distribution company: Oenon Films
Principal Credits
Director: Phillip Noyce
Producers: John Winter, Phillip Noyce
Co-producer: Christine Olsen
Executive producers: David Ellick, Jeremy Thomas, Kathleen McLaughlin
Associate producer: Laura Burrows
Scriptwriter: Christine Olsen
Director of photography: Christopher Doyle
Production designer: David Ford
Sound recordist: Bronwyn Murphy
Planning and development
 Casting: Christine King
 Casting consultants: Colin Murdoch
 Extras casting: Christine King, Colin Murdoch, Angela Hossom
Dialogue coach: Rachel Mazur
Production Crew
Production manager: Julie Sims
Production co-producer: Suzanne Mallos
Production secretary: Jessica Breuer
Location managers: Mark Evans, Maude Heath
Transport manager: Linda Taylor
Unit manager: Wilie Milne
Production assistant: Lucia Noyce
Production runner: Chris Taylor
Production accountant: Jane Smith

ired on to a virtual holographic game in which Ektoman, a God-like killer, hunts his victims through a subterranean maze.

TEME TIP
OV Productions
Distribution company: Becker Films
Principal Credits
Director: Michael Ralph
Producer: David Rowe
Line producer: David Lightfoot
Scriptwriter: Rob George
Based on an original screenplay by: Adam Handy
Synopsis
Subterano is a virtual holographic

TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE US
Production company: DND Productions/ Key Entertainment Investor/ South Australian Film Corporation, SBS
Synopsis
Radio-Five Pheonix tells the true story of three Australian Aboriginal girls who are forcibly taken from their outback families in 1931 to be trained as domestic servants as girls who are forcibly taken from their outback families in 1931 to be trained as domestic servants as part of an official government policy. They escape and embark on an epic 1500-mile journey to get back home, with the authorities chasing them all the way.

SUBTERANO
Production company: Becker Films
Distribution company: REIP Films
Principal Credits
Director: Esben Storm
Productions: Richard Becker, Barbi Taylor
Scriptwriter: Esben Storm
Director of photography: Graeme Wood
Production Designer: Chris Kennedy
Planning and Development
Casting: Ann Faye
Production Crew
Production manager: Anne Sullivan
Production co-producer: Clare Kershaw
Location manager: Peter Hicks
On-set Crew
1st assistant director: Chris Webb
Unit publicist: Amanda Huddle
Art Direction
Art director: Scott Bird
Special Effects supervisor: Peter Stubbs
Wardrobe
Wardrobe designer: Tessa Schaeffer
Wardrobe supervisor: Katrinia Pickering
Marketing
Publicity: Amanda Huddle
Cast
Alex Dimitriades, Tasma Walton, Chris Haywood, Alston Whyte
Synopsis
Subterano is a virtual holographic game in which Ektoman, a God-like killer, hunts his victims through a subterranean maze.

TWO WELLS
Production company: OIV Productions
Distribution company: Becker Films
Principal Credits
Director: Michael Ralph
Producer: David Rowe
Line producer: David Lightfoot
Scriptwriter: Rob George
Based on an original screenplay by: Adam Handy
Synopsis
Subterano is a virtual holographic

WATERMARK
Potoroo Films
Principal Credits
Director: Georgina Willis
Producer: Kerry Rock
Scriptwriters: Georgina Willis, Kerry Rock
Director of photography: Paul Kosky
Synopsis
Life, like the ocean, is everchanging and deceptive. This film is a rock and forth in time, between the 70s and the present, to reveal the elements of one man’s life.

Teletaffles
in pre-production

THE ROAD TO COORAIN
Chapman Pictures Pty Ltd
Principal Credits
Producer: Penny Chapman
Scriptwriter: Sue Smith
Synopsis
Based on Jill Ker Conway’s

CINEMA PAPERS DECEMBER 00 JANUARY 01 [55]
**In production**

**BLONDE**

Crawford Productions/Robert Greenwald Productions

**Principal Credits**
- Producer: Jacobus Ross
- Synopsis: A mini-series about the life of actress Marilyn Monroe, based on the biography by Jill Ker Conway.

**FOH FLIES**

Liberty And Beyond Productions

**Principal Credits**
- Director: Geoffrey Natteff
- Producers: Simon North, Geoffrey Natteff
- Synopsis: The story of a childhood. Set mainly in the western plains of NSW, the relationship between an ex-pat Aussie vet who lives with her husband and son.

**L'IL HORTORS**

December Films Australia

**Principal Credits**
- Director: Chris Langman, Helen Gaynor, Declan Elmes, Ralph Strasser
- Program producers: Tony Wright, Stuart Menzies
- Executive producer: Tim Brooke
- Synopsis: A documentary about a coastal town outside Melbourne where a small number of boat operators with differing philosophies compete to run dolphin swim tours.

**FOND MEMORIES OF CUBA**

Frontier Films

**Principal Credits**
- Director: David Bradbury
- Producers: David Bradbury, Mike Rubbo
- Synopsis: An Australian filmmaker David Bradbury is sponsored by Jim Mitsos, an agisting Australian communist, to travel to Cuba and make a film but he is faced with a moral dilemma: sent to Cuba on Jim's money, to bring back a positive story of the revolution, he can't help but see the contradictions.

**From Korea with Love**

Iris Pictures Pty Ltd

**Principal Credits**
- Director: Jennifer Cummins
- Producers: Jessica Douglas-Henry, Executive producer: Catherine Gibson
- Synopsis: A espionage thriller set in South Korea.

**In pre-production**

**DOLPHIN MANIA**

Singin' Humps Productions

**Principal Credits**
- Director: Sally Inglton
- Producers: Sally Inglton, Continuum Williams
- Synopsis: A documentary about a coastal town outside Melbourne where a small number of boat operators with differing philosophies compete to run dolphin swim tours.

**AERIALS**

Cinema Papers

**Principal Credits**
- Director: Andrew Cameron
- Producers: Andrew Cameron, Faye Cameron
- Synopsis: A 52-part live action puppet sitcom set in a spookily gothic school run by a retired movie actress. It features the mis-adventures of a group of children who just happen to be rather familiar monsters as well.

**The Salt of the Earth**

Mahatma Gandhi
Recent funding decisions

**Feature Films**

**BLOOD AND GUTS**

Wildheart Films Pty Ltd
Producer: Al Clark
Director/Screenplay: Roberts
Distribution: Alibi Films International, Village Roadshow

Three bank-robbing brothers have found a uniquely profitable way to spend their jail time. Their prison code, and no one gets hurt - until they discover the catch. When sex and greed come between bad cop and good criminals, the strange consequences are both fatal and funny.

**Adult Television Drama**

**HALIFAX (s x 100 television)'**

Beyond Simpson Le Mesurier Executive Producers: Mike Boult, Simon Peters Directors: Roger Le Mesurier, Roger Simon Writers: Rob Simpson, Peter Gawler, Katherine Thomson

Presale: Nine Network Distribution: Beyond Distribution

Three new series in the award winning “Halifax” series.

**FLASHPOINT**

After a catastrophic fire at a back-packers hostel, Jane Halifax works to recover the memory of one of the few survivors who might be able to help the police with their inquiries.

**THE JUDAS MOVE**

Jane Halifax is brought in by the police to advise on an investigation into the escalating antics of a serial killer who appears to be working in tandem with someone else.

**MY LEARNED FRIEND**

Charismatic and controversial Australian author Michael Cummins has gone from the public eye to the front of the line. The film follows the Nyikina/Mangala residents and local government in the town of Mowla Bluff, it intertwines the oral history, scientific research, and the special working relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women who work out on remote stations and in the bush. Strehlow set for himself, the Nyikina/Mangala community participation.

**D I S T R I B U T I O N**

**THE COUNTRY INSIDE**

(52 minute Accord documentary)

-Sawtwood Films Producer/director/writer: Frank Ripper


Released as one of the Adrian Herring series of documentaries. Mowla Bluff it intertwines the oral history, scientific research, and the special working relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women who work out on remote stations and in the bush. Strehlow set for himself, the Nyikina/Mangala community participation.

**THE WEDDING IN RAMALLAH**

(90 minute Accord documentary)

Flying Carpet Films Producer/director/writer: Michelle Torres

Presale: ABC TV

A Wedding in Ramallah is an intimate observational documentary set in the West Bank town of Ramallah. It uses the dramatic events surrounding the wedding of a young Palestinian couple as a way of exploring life under occupation for ordinary Palestinians.

**WHISPERING IN OUR HEARTS**

(192 minute Accord documentary)

Mayfan Pty Ltd
Producer/director/writer: Sherine Salama

Presale: ABC TV

A Wedding in Ramallah is an intimate observational documentary set in the West Bank town of Ramallah. It uses the dramatic events surrounding the wedding of a young Palestinian couple as a way of exploring life under occupation for ordinary Palestinians.

**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

Series Documentary

**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

(Blood & Guts documentary)

-Sawtwood Films Producer/director/writer: Frank Ripper


Released as one of the Adrian Herring series of documentaries. Mowla Bluff it intertwines the oral history, scientific research, and the special working relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women who work out on remote stations and in the bush. Strehlow set for himself, the Nyikina/Mangala community participation.

**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

(5 x 55 minute Accord documentary)

-Vias Productions Producer: Franziska Wagenfeld

Director/writer: Diana Leach

Presale: ABC TV

An exploration and celebration of how Australian rural women’s identities have been shaped by the land. Surviving Shepherd’s Pie documents four cowgirls who live in rural Australia and ride the rodeo circuit.

**SURVIVING SHEPHERD’S PIE**

(5 x 55 minute Accord documentary)

-Vias Productions Producer: Franziska Wagenfeld

Director/writer: Diana Leach

Presale: ABC TV

An exploration and celebration of how Australian rural women’s identities have been shaped by the land. Surviving Shepherd’s Pie documents four cowgirls who live in rural Australia and ride the rodeo circuit.

**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

(3 x 55 minute Accord documentary)

-Prospero Productions Producer: Ed Puchard Director/writers: Peter Du Cane, Julie Redwood Presale: ABC TV, National Geographic Channels International Distribution: Granada Media International

The Shipwreck Detectives are Maritime Archaeologists internationally renowned for their discovery and excavation of Australia’s earliest shipwrecks. Three major expeditions will examine a graveyard of lost ships, sunk WWII flying boats and the victims of an ancient mass murder.

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**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

(52 minute Accord documentary)

-Abel Books Films

Producer/director/writer: Shane Morris

Presale: SBS

A documentary about the life and work of pre-eminent and controversial Australian anthropologist and Arrernte linguist TGH Strehlow (1908-1978). Tracks the challenges Strehlow set for himself, the Nyikina/Mangala community participation.

**ANIMAL X - SERIES 2**

(5 x 50 minute Accord documentary)

-Flying Carpet Films

Producer: Steve Thomas

Director/writers: Anne O’Casey, Katina Sawyer, Veronica Iacomo, Michael Cummins, Celeste Geer

Presale: ABC TV

An intimate, entertaining and challenging series exploring the notion of family at the start of the new millennium. Each episode features a different family at a turning point in its life.
The sum of us
The gurus rate recent releases.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reviewer</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Ryan (THE AGE)</td>
<td>A ROOM FOR ROMEO BRASS</td>
<td>6.9</td>
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<td>Margaret Pomerantz</td>
<td>BETTER THAN SEX</td>
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<td>Madeleine Swann (WE TV)</td>
<td>BILLY ELLIOT</td>
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<td>Andiee Pavoir (WHO WEEKLY)</td>
<td>BOOTMEN</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<td>Margaret Pomerantz</td>
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<td>Megan Spencer (WI)</td>
<td>CHICKEN RUN</td>
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<td>Sacha Mullorizs (DVD)</td>
<td>MR ACCIDENT</td>
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<td>Adrian Martin (TJ)</td>
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<td>Vicky Roach (HOME MADE)</td>
<td>SHAFT</td>
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<td>Sandra Hall (THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD)</td>
<td>SNATCH</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawrie Zion (FOXTEL CHANNEL 10)</td>
<td>THE DISH</td>
<td>7.2</td>
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<td>Mark Naglazas (THE WEST AUSTRALIAN)</td>
<td>THE EMPEROR AND THE ASSASSIN</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adrian Martin (THE AGE/CINEMA PAPERS)</td>
<td>TIMECODE</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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**The Average**

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ERRATUM 135: Allistar Shew was not credited for penning the 'straight to video' reviews. In The Sum of Us Richard Wilkins was credited as working for The Age and Cinema Papers. The Age has no record of Wilkins' employment but Channel Nine's Today show are eager to claim the New Zealander as their own. Cinema Papers failed to return calls from Erratum and Wilkins refused to comment, though he did send through his scores for this issue. Meanwhile, Cool Paulter's celebrity grows.

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\textbf{VOX POP}

"I got nominated for an Oscar by putting on an extra 50 kilograms, losing 100 kilograms dying myself blonde, then wearing nothing. I call it 'method oscaring'. It's all very psychological ... very psychological ..."
Beyond Films scores a perfect 10 at AFI’s

1. Best Film
   Looking for Alibrandi, producer Robyn Kershaw

2. Best Achievement in Direction
   Andrew Dominik, Chopper

3. Best Actor in a Leading Role
   Eric Bana, Chopper

4. Best Actress in a Leading Role
   Pia Miranda, Looking for Alibrandi

5. Best Adapted Screenplay
   Melina Marchetta, Looking for Alibrandi

6. Best Original Screenplay
   Stavros Kazantzidis & Allanah Zitserman, Russian Doll

7. Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role
   Simon Lyndon, Chopper

8. Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role
   Greta Scacchi, Looking for Alibrandi

9. Best Achievement in Editing
   Martin Connor, Looking for Alibrandi

10. Young Actors Award
    Kane McNay, Mallboy

Beyond is proud to represent the international rights of the above films.