Rock by running up the flag? Perhaps the Finns have got there already? It’s only by spending the first two weeks of June in darkened rooms in Sydney or Melbourne that you may come close to any answers. Personally, I’m most optimistic of finding enlightenment in the witty monologue of American Spalding Gray - whose Monster in a Box at both festivals finds him reporting from Bondi Beach.

JEREMY ECCLES is a Sydney freelance writer on film. Both Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals open on Thursday June 4.
'real' instruments—something that, theoretically, could be recreated in real life. No synthesisers, in other words; no gimmickry that sounds like something it's not. No manipulations.

Sometimes, we simply deny what we're hearing because it doesn't fit with what we're seeing. Take, for instance, the video for John Farnham and Jimmy Barnes' *When Something is Wrong With My Baby*. Oz rock's two most famous vocalists are sitting at a pub table—accompanied only by younger statesman Diesel on guitar—and they're wrapping their vocal cords around a classic soul singalong. The interesting aspect of this chart-topper is the extremely prominent rhythm machine in the mix: a simple, unabashed piece of drum programming. It certainly doesn't detract from the song: however, it might have detracted from the video if, before settling down into the classic anthem either Barnesy or Farnsey had to crouch down and figure out how to turn the machine on. The rhythm track is denied.

So, too with Yothu Yindi's *Treaty (Filthy Lucre Remix)*—a huge hit for the group based on a free-working of their song *Treaty*. While the single was, in essence, a dance workout made in the studio, the video was full of shots of the band playing live, singing the original version of the tune. The remix could never be recreated on a stage.

Neither of the above are bad records: in fact, they're excellent. But they are being sold—in part—on notions of heartfelt rock honesty, as though being in love or in pain made making a record that much easier. *When Something is Wrong With My Baby* should be much more a product of Barnesy's angst than it is a product of the studio budget Michael Gudinski allotted him.

In 1956, we assume, people really did make 'records': records in the same sense as 'archive'. But by 1992, the word 'record' means something quite different. A hit song is more likely to take three months to record than the three minutes it takes to listen to it.

The recording process is such, after all, that a rock record which appears to feature musicians jamming and gelling in inspirational unison is probably a perfectly synchronised collection of recordings made at different dates over an extended period. This is not to say that the record is artificial. The point is that it is no more 'real' music, it is as calculated and crafted as any dance or rap track.

And of course diehard real music fans would be appalled by the amount of studio trickery involved in the production of their heroes' records. Whether the original signal comes from a state-of-the-art synthesiser or a 200-year-old mandolin is ultimately irrelevant: the sound signal is altered and translated in the studio until it meets the producer's requirements. If anything, the mandolin will probably need more technical attention, via audio wizardry, to put it in tune. Programmable drums, for instance, are nowadays used in preference to real drums—they sound more 'authentic'.

This, then, is the state of play with rock. The deception is not overt: but when the selling of the product revolves around the notion that the product is too pure for 'selling', we're moving into strange territory indeed.

DAVID NICHOLS is a real musician.