



FilmAustralia leaders in documentary

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Stanley Hawes Award

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY MICHAEL GISSING, 2007

The last award ceremony I attended was in 1973 when my student film "The Trundle Kid Comes to Town" won a schools competition and the judge, Jerzy Terplitz, gave me encouragement to pursue a career in the industry. So my uncharacteristic appearance here tonight is very much an indicator of the importance of this award to me.

Firstly the previous winners are friends and colleagues that I greatly admire and to be included in their ranks is an honour. Secondly, it represent a career, not a one off program. It is fair to say that some of my best work has been on documentaries that would never win awards. But they might have been docos that changed peoples lives rather than just entertained for 55 minutes.

It is the ability of documentary to spread knowledge that sets it apart from its flashier cousin – the drama. I nearly got side tracked by a TV drama series many years ago and count it as an important moment in my career when the job went to another studio. My enduring enthusiasm comes from both the content and the people I work with. Doco people are special.

In a world where the politics of fear and spin relies on ignorance, the documentary challenges that narrow world our so called leaders want us to live in. And when the insurance world wants us wrapped in cotton wool straight jackets, the intrepid doco maker dodges bullets in Baghdad or treks the frozen deserts of Antarctica to remind us that life is for living, not fearing and avoiding. When bigots and racists try to promote difference, documentaries show what humanity shares.

When society looks back at the great people to admire it is the impoverished artists, composers and story tellers they remember, not the economic rationalists.

The next twenty years are going to be an interesting time for documentaries. Free to air TV is in its last decades. Technology continues to shape approach and content. The distance between the audience and the film maker is shrinking. The conventional world of production and distribution is changing. But what won't change is the human desire for knowledge and the documentary will continue to be a vital conduit.

I want to use this opportunity to thank some very important people who have in every way made it possible for me to be standing here tonight with this award. Mark Keating, Philip Myers, Kimmy Sekel and Michael Glennon have been the team at Digital City studios who have shouldered

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the enormous creative load over the last twenty years. The fact that the list of sound editors who have worked with me is so short, indicates the importance of each of them. Without their dedication and craft, Digital City would never have survived.

And the list of producers, directors and editors who have trusted me with their babies is conversely long so to all I give my thanks both for the work and the enduring friendships. Thanks also to Film Australia for not only the Stanley Hawes Award but for the backbone role they play in the Australian documentary industry.

Family is always the support base that makes any individuals efforts possible. Firstly my parents help and enthusiasm, buying cameras and super 8 film and trusting me to make my career decision at the age of 13. Both my ex and current wife Jo-Anne have made extraordinary space for my career in their lives. Our partners support is the very foundation of our creativity.

As I plan the next twenty years I shun the concept of retirement. A graceful withdrawal and a handing of the baton to the next generation plus a chance to help my wife to manage a small farm in Tasmania is the next frontier. Like my father, still working at 81, I might need a hearing aid and glasses, but I will stay working in documentaries and promise one hell of a party when I pass my 1000th doco soundtrack.

MARCH 2007

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