



ABC
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New Media and
Digital Services



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Media Release

ABC New Media and Film Australia explore *Pacific Stories*

Pacific Stories is the first cross-platform co-production between ABC New Media and Digital Services and Film Australia's National Interest Program. *Pacific Stories* will be broadcast exclusively on free to air, digital channel ABC2 and online at abc.net.au/pacificstories.

Pacific Stories comprises a curated season of acclaimed titles taken primarily from Film Australia titles, with each episode for television introduced by Tongan-Australian performers Vika and Linda Bull with original music by David Bridie (*My Friend the Chocolate Cake*). Included in the *Pacific Stories* collection are:

- *Sugar Slaves* (1995)
- *My Father, My Country* (1989)
- *My Valley is Changing* (1970)
- *Paradise Imperfect* (2000)
- *A Place of Power in French Polynesia* (1983)
- *The Marshall Islands – Living With The Bomb* (1983)
- *Fit For A King* (1994)
- *Land of the Morning Star* (2003)

The films, which explore events spanning the past century, trace the remarkable shift in social, cultural and environmental realities for people of the Pacific.

The *Pacific Stories* website (abc.net.au/pacificstories) extends the experience of each film with new material including production interviews and stills, updates on people and issues, film trailers and supporting graphics, maps, text and audio.

"We are delighted with our first collaboration with Film Australia on *Pacific Stories*, which has revealed a wealth of material that, using cross-platform production, is enriched to provide both historical and contemporary contexts," said Lynley Marshall, Director of ABC New Media and Digital Services.

"Film Australia has one of the largest and most historically significant libraries of archival, documentary and stock footage in the country. *Pacific Stories* is like a having a guided tour of the best our library offers on the subject of the south west Pacific -- and then meeting the filmmakers. It's a great opportunity to revisit truly exciting material that shows the changing relationships with our neighbours," said Film Australia Chief Executive Officer, Ms Daryl Karp.

***Pacific Stories* will be online from 1 November and broadcast on ABC2 for six weeks commencing 17 November at 7pm and 9.15pm each Thursday.**

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EPISODE SYNOPSES

1. SUGAR SLAVES (1995) TX Date 17 November, 7pm and 9.15pm

Australia's slave trade is an untold story. Few people know that the Australian sugar industry was founded on the sweat of men and women enticed or kidnapped from the islands of the South Pacific.

Sugar Slaves is the story of that human traffic, euphemistically known as "blackbirding".

Between 1863 and 1904 about 60,000 islanders were transported to the colony of Queensland, where they toiled to create the sugar plantations of the far north. Then, after the introduction of a White Australia policy, most were deported. A few thousand were permitted to remain and today north Queensland is home to 20,000 of their descendants.

In 1994 Australian Islanders at last won official recognition as a distinct ethnic group. According to a Government sponsored report, it has suffered "a century of racial discrimination and harsh treatment..."

Now Islanders are beginning to trace their history and are finding their long-lost relatives in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific nations.

A unique community—the only substantial black migrant group in Australia—is at last uncovering the little known story of Australia's sugar slaves.

Finalist - Best Social Issues Documentary, ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Awards 1996
Finalist - UNESCO Award for Cultural Issues, New York Festivals: International Television Programming & Promotion 1997

2. MY FATHER, MY COUNTRY (1989) Tx Date 24 November, 7pm and 9.15pm

In 1938 three Australian patrol officers - Jim Taylor, John Black and Pat Walsh - set off on an epic journey into the unexplored highlands of Papua New Guinea. Their purpose: to make contact with "stone age" tribes who knew nothing of the outside world and explain to them that their lives were about to undergo incredible change.

Fifty years later, Jim's daughter Meg took time off from her legal practice and set out on her own journey of discovery, retracing the footsteps of her father's historic patrol. On the two-and-a-half month expedition, Meg and her fellow travellers have to cope with illness, fatigue and constant rain as they find their way through almost trackless jungle over one of the highest mountain ranges in Papua New Guinea.

Along the way, Meg meets people who vividly recall the day her father's patrol arrived. Having no knowledge of the outside world, they thought the white men were spirits of the dead they'd buried, come back to life to harm them. Meg's observations of how her country has coped since then are combined with excerpts from her father's beautifully written journal to provide a personal and poetic narrative about an extraordinary meeting of cultures.

Finalist - Shanghai Television Festival - Magnolia Awards 1989

3. MY VALLEY IS CHANGING (1970) and PARADISE IMPERFECT (2000) Tx date 1 December, 7pm and 9.15pm

My Valley is Changing: The building of a giant open-cut copper mine on the island of Bougainville brought profound change to local landowners. Despite royalties, training programs and extensive development, landowner concerns eventually escalated into conflict, which resulted in the closure of the mine. These issues are already clearly evident in this film, made shortly after the mine opened in 1970.

Paradise Imperfect. A unique and personal insight into the ten-year secessionist war in Bougainville from acclaimed ABC correspondent Sean Dorney.

4. THE MARSHALL ISLANDS – LIVING WITH THE BOMB (1983) and A PLACE OF POWER IN FRENCH POLYNESIA Tx date 8 December, 7pm and 9.15pm

The Marshall Islands – Living With The Bomb: The people of the Bikini Atoll were removed from their homelands as a result of American testing of nuclear bombs in the Pacific. They now live on another island, dependent on American food and support. They can never go back to Bikini Atoll because it is poisoned beyond the possibility of habitation. This film is a poignant, impressive study of a people whose culture has been vanquished.

A Place of Power in French Polynesia: Tahiti a rugged, forest clad island surrounded by coral reefs in the South Pacific, is part of France. The traditional Polynesian way of life has been swamped over the years by foreign influences. Nowadays however, there is a long awaited re-emergence of the traditional culture that is the focus of this documentary. We look at some of the people responsible for the cultural revival and their arts including the building of a double-hulled canoe, the art of full body tattooing and the fierce dance competitions at the high point of celebration of Polynesian culture, the Tiurai Festival.

5. FIT FOR A KING (1994) Tx date 15 December, 7pm and 9.15pm

An intimate portrait of the King of Tonga, ruler of one of the smallest monarchies in the world. Filmed during the elaborate celebrations for his 75th birthday and the 25th anniversary of his reign, it shows King Taufu'ahau Tupou IV as a revered figure in Tongan society. The film also looks at the question of democratic reform as the country changes and modernises, and the people of Tonga speak about their future.

6. LAND OF THE MORNING STAR (2003) Tx date 22 December, 7pm and 9.15pm

The western half of the island of New Guinea has been known by many names including Netherlands New Guinea, West Papua, Irian Jaya and Papua. It is an extraordinary place where snow-capped mountains drain into massive rivers and 250 languages are spoken.

Yet, despite its wild beauty and rich culture, it remains strangely forgotten.

Narrated by Rachel Griffiths, *Land of the Morning Star* (written and directed by the late Mark Worth) reveals the turbulent history of a troubled country, swept up in the power-play of international politics.

For centuries, the world has jostled for control of this rugged, isolated region, with its abundant natural resources and strategic position. First outside contact was with the Muslims of Malacca, who came in search of slaves and the prized feathers of birds of paradise. The European spice traders followed, staking out colonial territory. By the mid 1800s, the Dutch had secured their claim. Then during World War Two, the sleepy outpost was transformed into a massive US military base. By the 1960s, President Sukarno had made the area the 26th province of Indonesia. Today, if transmigration continues, the indigenous Melanesian people are set to become a minority in their own land.

Through eyewitness accounts and rare archival film, this fascinating documentary paints a picture that is intimate in detail but epic in scope. It is a sweeping saga of colonial ambitions, cold war sellouts and fervent nationalism, which highlights the role of players such as Australia and the UN at crucial points.

By providing a background to this complex story, this timely film helps us understand the reality of life today in the land of the morning star.

Winner - Best Achievement in Sound for a Documentary, Australian Screen Sound Guild Awards 2004

BIOGRAPHIES

Series presenters: Vika and Linda Bull

Born of a Tongan mother and Australian father, Vika and Linda Bull grew up in Australia but maintained close links to the Tongan community. As children they enjoyed singing with the family and also at their Tongan church. They went on to sing with many top Australian musicians, before forming their own band, and touring internationally - including an invitation to perform at WOMAD in the UK. They were invited to sing for the King of Tonga's birthday celebrations, and on that visit recorded part of their album *Princess Tabu* in Tonga.

Writer/Director/Producers for Film Australia: Les McLaren and Annie Stiven

Les McLaren and Annie Stiven have spent 15 years in PNG since the early 1970's, working in government cultural institutions, and on independent film projects about culture & change. They both speak & read tok pisin (Melanesian Pidgin) fluently.

They have written, produced and directed five documentaries - which have been invited to international festivals - including nominations for Best Film at Cinema du Reel in Paris, Golden Gate in San Francisco. They have been invited to present films at festivals in Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, New York, and Hawaii.

Cowboy and Maria In Town was awarded Best Documentary at Dendy Awards, Sydney Film Festival, also nominated for Best Documentary AFI, Australian Human Rights Award, ATOM Awards, and in International Festivals. *Pikizjaa* was also nominated for the Dendy Awards Best Documentary. *Taking Pictures* about documentary filmmakers in PNG has screened widely and continues to sell internationally.

Les was the Senior Video Producer with the Training Technology Centre who have produced award winning multimedia products - including the Australian Humanitarian Award (Education) for CDROM in 1999, and the AIMIA Grand Prize, and Best Education & Reference award for a CDROM in 2003. In 2003 Les spent four months in Bougainville working with the UN-led peace monitoring group as a liaison officer with Bougainvillean, Australian, New Zealand, Fijian and ni-Vanuatu personnel.

Annie has over 20 years experience in the film and television industry including research and writing for the PBS America series 'Fire on the Rim'. She has trained as an anthropologist, and has researched several projects relating to Pacific including the *Life & Times of John Kolia*, *Cane-a Fijian Story*, and the feature film *Tukana*

Composer: David Bridie

One of Australia's most sought after soundtrack composers, David Bridie first came to attention as a member of two successful bands.

Between 1984 and 1994, *Not Drowning, Waving* built a reputation for innovative music that crossed genre boundaries including world music, neo-classical, rock and pop. On piano and vocals, David was a strong songwriting force.

After writing a number of songs that didn't fit into the *Not Drowning, Waving* style, David and fellow band member Helen Mountfort formed *My Friend The Chocolate Cake*, with the intention of playing all acoustic music. This band emerged as a popular ensemble with a unique sound.

In 1996 *Not Drowning, Waving* performed as part of the 'Next Wave Festival', which brought together indigenous musical culture from across Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait Islands.

In 1990 David was composer on the acclaimed feature film *Proof*. He has since composed for seven more films, including *What I Have Written* (1995), *Idiot Box* (1995) and *The Man Who Sued God* (2001). In 2001 he composed the soundtrack to a television mini-series, *My Brother Jack*.

In May 2000, David released his debut solo album, *Act of Free Choice*, followed in April 2003 by the release of his second solo effort, *Hotel Radio*.