



In this issue

- Gillian Armstrong to direct
A Colourful Life
- Operation Babylift
- Gone to a Good Home
- Remembering Rain
- Air Australia

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A creative future for documentary

Film Australia has unveiled a new corporate vision and won the promise of additional government investment to lead Australia's documentary sector into a creative and dynamic era.

Recently appointed CEO Daryl Karp outlined a corporate vision for Film Australia to documentary filmmakers in Melbourne and Sydney in October as part of a national tour to discuss the organisation's plans.

Her vision comes as the Federal Government earmarked a boost in funding to Film Australia that Ms Karp says will be distributed back through to the industry via Film Australia productions.

Film Australia aims to be the industry leader in all aspects of Australian documentary by pursuing four strategic objectives:

- **distinctiveness**—to produce outstanding documentaries, education programs and quality services
- **expertise and leadership**—to support a healthy documentary sector by maximising opportunities for production and be a strong voice for the documentary sector
- **value and appeal**—to connect and engage with audiences
- **legacy**—to shape a cultural record of Australia.

Film Australia has a funding agreement in place with the government until 2008 which will underpin delivery of the corporate plan.

"As industry leaders in Australian documentaries, Film Australia is committed to supporting a healthy documentary sector, by maximising production opportunities and being a strong voice for Australian documentaries," Ms Karp said.

She said the challenges of financing for documentaries would be tackled through flexible, adaptive approaches and creative responses to the market by Film Australia.

Acknowledging its reliance on a robust independent sector, Film Australia will use its resources to support that sector's development, creatively and industrially. Local funding for investment in Australian documentary has decreased dramatically, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics reporting a 48 per cent decline in expenditure on documentary production between 1999 and 2003.

Despite some recent documentary success stories in cinemas, its main audience is television, particularly the public broadcasters, ABC and SBS. Film Australia aims to continue to strengthen relationships with these broadcasters, develop programs for a range of timeslots to reach the widest audience in Australia and expand broadcast opportunities into new areas.

Further industry discussion will be held in Canberra and Perth with more details revealed at the Australian International Documentary Conference in February 2005.

International awards for Film Australia

Film Australia programs have received awards and accolades from around the world in a recent spate of film festivals and award nights.

At the **Australian Film Critics Circle Awards**, *Mr Patterns* won the **Best Documentary Award** (under 60 minutes). *Mr Patterns* tells the story of Geoff Bardon who, together with the Papunya artists, was a catalyst for what many consider the greatest art movement of the 20th century.

The program—produced by Nic Testoni, Jo Plomley and Megan McMurchy, and directed by Catriona McKenzie—also won **Best Documentary** at the **Hawaii International Film Festival** and screened at the prestigious **Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival** in New York.

Film Australia received further international recognition winning the main prize at the **International Vega Awards** for Excellence in Scientific Broadcasting for *Troubled Minds –The Lithium Revolution*.

Troubled Minds was also recognised locally with writer/director Dennis K. Smith winning the **Australian Writers' Guild (AWGIE) Award for Best Documentary**. The film—produced by John Lewis—tells the story of Australian doctor John Cade who, when he discovered a drug treatment for bi-polar disorder, revolutionised the way we treat mental illness.

At the **NSW Premier's History Awards** in October, *Dhakiyarr vs the King* was awarded the **Audio/Visual Prize**. In the film, the descendants of a great Aboriginal leader tell an inspiring story of two laws, two cultures and two families coming to terms



From *Mr Patterns*

with the past. This is the fourth time Film Australia has won the award since it was established in 1997. *Silent Storm* was also nominated for the prize.

Dhakiyarr vs the King also received the **Rouben Mamoulian Award** at the **Sydney Film Festival** and was a finalist for Best Documentary at the **Australian Film Critics Circle Awards**. It has been selected to screen in the Word Cinema Documentary competition at the **Sundance Film Festival** in January—the first Film Australia project to show there. Produced by Graeme Isaac, the film was co-directed by writer Tom Murray and cinematographer Allan Collins.

Land of the Morning Star, produced by Janet Bell and directed by Mark Worth with a soundtrack by David Bridie, won an **AFI Award for Best Sound in a Non-Feature and Best Achievement in Sound for a Documentary** at the **Australian Screen Sound Guild Awards**. It tells the turbulent history of the land known as West Papua, Irian Jaya, Papua and Netherlands New Guinea.

The Last Great Amateurs received an honourable mention at the **Sport, Movies and TV Festival** in Milan, Italy. The program follows the Melbourne Phoenix netball team through a year of elite-level amateur sport.

See Film Australia's website for more festivals information: www.filmaust.com.au



Operation Babylift

In April 1975, in the closing days of the Vietnam War, more than 2500 babies were suddenly airlifted from Saigon.

Many Australians saw Operation Babylift as a humanitarian act, while many Vietnamese considered it blatant kidnapping.

Thirty years on, an emotionally powerful documentary will tell the story of some of the 278 children brought to Australia. Who are they today? And how do they feel about themselves and their past?

In *Operation Babylift*, writer/director Dai Lee, herself a Vietnam War refugee, will present a human face to decisions made with "the best of intentions".

Through candid interviews with the children (now grown), their adoptive parents, those involved in the airlift and some of the families left behind, the film will explore complex issues of inter-racial adoption and cultural identity, and provide an insight into the political background, propaganda and negotiations behind this controversial episode.

The one-hour documentary is being filmed in Vietnam and Australia, with producer Helen Barrow also working as director of photography. Anna Grieve is executive producer. It will air on SBS next year for the 30th anniversary of the airlift.

Gone to a Good Home

For three decades, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Australian authorities pressured unmarried mothers to give up their babies for adoption into what they considered "better" homes—those of married couples.

At a time when society had no place for single mothers and their illegitimate children, these women were unaware of their legal rights. Sometimes they were coerced, even drugged, and their babies literally stolen. Despite arguments that the practice was well-intentioned, for the individuals involved the psychological pain and social dislocation has often been devastating.

Gone to a Good Home will explore the experiences of these women and their efforts to contact their children and gain recognition for past wrongs, while revealing the dramatic change in social values that has since occurred.

Developed and produced with the assistance of the Pacific Film and Television Corporation, this one-hour documentary for SBS-TV will be produced by Mark Chapman and directed by Karen Berkman. Mark Hamlyn is executive producer.

Remembering Rain

While the worst drought on record tests rural Australians to their limits, it has inspired Film Australia to go into production on a one-hour documentary called *Remembering Rain*.

A Film Australia National Interest Program to be produced with the assistance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Remembering Rain* takes its name from a work by painter and farmer Angus Nivison, which won the Wynne Prize for landscape painting last year.

Written and directed by Australian-born and BBC-trained Mandy Chang, the program will present moving, insightful and often humorous stories of triumph and failure in the face of extremes, and show how the people of the bush are sometimes challenged to question the viability of farming in the driest continent on earth.

"Every bush family has a story about how much rain means to them," says Chang. "Farming families, faced with financial ruin, are leaving the industry at an ever-increasing rate. Most kids don't want the family farm—blind optimism and hope for better times is no longer enough for them," she says.

Chang directed and produced *Antoni Gaudi: God's Architect*, which won last year's British Council Grierson Award for Best Arts Film and has made programs for the BBC, Channel 4, Five, ITV, and for many US broadcasters. She will produce *Remembering Rain* along with independent producer Megan McMurchy. Penny Robins is executive producer for Film Australia.

Bertram Wainer's story

Dr Bertram Wainer's campaign for abortion law reform in the 1960s is the subject of a one-hour documentary which has recently gone into production in Melbourne.

The Bertram Wainer Story is a Film Australia National Interest Program in association with John Moore Productions. It has been developed and produced with the assistance of Film Victoria and produced with the assistance of SBS Independent. Director/writer John Moore is producing with Sue Seary. Penny Robins is executive producer for Film Australia.

In 1967, a young woman came to Dr Wainer's Melbourne surgery seeking emergency medical attention after a backyard abortion. For Wainer, it was the start of a long and hard-fought campaign to overturn laws that made abortion an offence punishable by up to 15 years in jail.

Within months, Dr Wainer uncovered a web of corruption involving highly paid medical specialists, backyard abortionists and a police protection racket. His tenacity would lead to threats against his life and, eventually, the first Royal Commission into a state police force.

Air Australia

Australia's aviation history is a saga of daring feats, can-do attitude, pig-headed visionaries, iron-fisted politicians and warring pilots; of humble beginnings and mega deals. A new three-part series will revisit this grand but turbulent history, beginning in World War One with the bold young airmen who would later establish Australia's first airlines in difficult conditions.

Air Australia will be produced in association with Vue DC and with the assistance of ScreenWest, Lotterywest and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Helen Clucas is producing with writer/director Alan Lindsay. Tony Virgo is associate producer and Mark Hamlyn is Film Australia's executive producer.

Tenth series of Australian Biography

The landmark Film Australia production, *Australian Biography*, continues to build a unique record of our nation's life by profiling some of the most extraordinary individuals of our times.

Directed and produced by Rod Freedman with Mark Hamlyn as executive producer, this latest series of seven programs for SBS-TV will bring the total number of episodes to 69.

Writer/presenter Robyn Hughes has recently completed extensive interviews with two distinguished Australians: Tom Bass and Anne Deveson.

Tom Bass is one of Australia's leading sculptors, having created some of our country's most significant public works, including commissions for the National Library of Australia, Canberra's Civic Square and numerous churches and universities. He established his own sculpture school more than two decades ago and is still a passionate teacher at the age of 88.

Writer, broadcaster and documentary filmmaker Anne Deveson has been on the leading edge of social change throughout her career. Illuminating social issues and influencing policy in areas from poverty and aging to child abuse and disability, she is well known for her work on mental illness.



Gillian Armstrong to direct *A Colourful Life*

Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant Career*, *Oscar and Lucinda*) will direct a one-hour documentary about the colourful life of flamboyant design pioneer Florence Broadhurst for Film Australia.

Born on a cattle station in outback Queensland in 1899, Florence worked as a singer and dancer in Shanghai in the 20s and ran a fashion boutique in London's Mayfair in the 30s before sweeping into Sydney society in the 50s as a painter and charity queen. But it is as a designer that she really left her mark.

It was 1959 when she set up her business and her exotic patterns and bold use of colour shook up conservative Australia and revolutionised its approach to interior design.

Then in 1977, she was found dead in her studio—many thousands of dollars worth of jewellery stolen. Her murder has never been solved.

Now, almost 100 years after her birth, Florence Broadhurst's work has been rediscovered by the world's leading fashion, interior and homeware designers and style setters, and her prints are in huge demand from New York to Hollywood, Melbourne to Milan.

This project will mark Gillian Armstrong's return to Film Australia, where she directed *14's Good 18's Better* and *Bingo*, *Bridesmaids* and *Braces* in the 1980s.

Made in association with Becker Entertainment and SBS Independent, *A Colourful Life* will be produced by Charles Hannah and Sue Clothier and written by Katherine Thompson. Mark Hamlyn is executive producer for Film Australia.

Also in production

The Art of War

Scheduled for broadcast on SBS-TV next year to coincide with Anzac Day, this four-part series is currently in the final stages of production. Made with the generous support of the Australian War Memorial, the series will explore Australian art that has been inspired, or provoked, by our involvement in wars and armed conflicts during the past century. Produced in association with Early Works and SBS Independent, it is written and presented by Betty Churcher, who is also co-producing with director John Hughes.

Executive Producer: Anna Grieve

Australian Biography Online 2

Producer Ron Saunders and website director Thomas Ashelford are adding seven more interviews to the 28 *Australian Biography* profiles already featured on this online resource, hosted by the National Library of Australia: Betty Churcher, Charles "Bud" Tingwell, Thomas Keneally, Inga Clendinnen, Bill Roycroft, Barbara Holborow and Rosalie Gascoine.

Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn

The Last Great Amateurs Launch



Film Australia's one-hour documentary *The Last Great Amateurs* was launched at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image on 8 November.

The film—which follows the Melbourne Phoenix netball team over a year of highs and lows, pain and passion—was enthusiastically received by an audience of over 250 people including Lindsay Cane (CEO Netball Australia), Leanne Allen (President Netball Victoria), Kate Palmer (CEO Netball Victoria) and many of the Phoenix players and fans.

Hosted by comedian Brian Nankervis, a Q&A session after the screening with now-retired Phoenix co-captain Liz Boniello, director Sue Thomson and Richard Keddie (who wrote the film with

Angela Buckingham and produced with Lisa Keddie) gave insiders' views of the making of the film. Australian netball star Susan Meaney and Victorian netball captain Sarah Wall ran microphones to the audience in their Phoenix tracksuits.

Special guest for the evening was Magda Szubanski who features in *The Last Great Amateurs* as Sharon Strezlecki (star of *Kath & Kim*).

The Last Great Amateurs screened on ABC-TV on Wednesday 17 November, attracting almost three-quarters of a million viewers.

Pictured above from left to right: Magda Szubanski, Liz Boniello and Richard Keddie.

Divorce Stories

Filming continues on this three-part series from director/producer Jessica Douglas-Henry, producer Mary-Ellen Mullane and series director Steve Westh. Developed with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission and produced in association with SBS Independent, the program will explore the real impact of divorce on society and individuals—not just couples but also children, family and friends.

Executive Producer: Penny Robins

From Wireless to Web

This interactive website will explore the development of broadcast media in Australia over the last 80 years—from radio and newsreels to TV and the internet—and consider how technological change has affected both the way the broadcast media operates and how Australians see themselves. It is being made in association with Roar Film, with Craig Dow Sainter and Kath Symmons as producers and Steve Thomas as director.

Executive Producer: Chris Warner

The Safe House

Lee Whitmore is using an unusual technique in the production of her animation for SBS-TV, involving a mixture of paint and oil on glass plates which she then digitally photographs. Produced by Denise Haslem, the half-hour program is inspired by the infamous Petrov Affair of the 1950s.

Executive Producer: Anna Grieve

Trafficked

Writer/director/producer Luigi Acquisto and producer Stella Zammataro are currently editing their one-hour documentary about the child sex trade between Australia and Asia with editor Jane Usher. The program, produced in association with Abracadabra Films and SBS Independent, follows former Australian Federal Police officer turned private detective, Chris Payne as he investigates stories of women and children caught up in prostitution "trade routes".

Executive Producers: Franco di Chiera and Anna Grieve

Vietnam Symphony

Filming has been completed and editing is underway on writer/director Tom Zubrycki's latest documentary, which tells the story of the students and teachers at Hanoi Conservatorium of Music who, at the height of the Vietnam War, were forced to flee to the countryside where they built an entire campus underground. Made in association with Stonebridge Productions, the program has been developed with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission and produced in association with the NSW Film and Television Office and SBS Independent. Kerry Herman is producer.

Executive Producer: Penny Robins

A successful year for Film Australia

A recent spate of awards and accolades (see page 1) completed a successful year for Film Australia. Having just released its 2003–2004 Annual Report, the company is looking ahead, with a new five-year agreement with the government until 2008.

“With a secure future, the challenge now is to take Film Australia into its next phase of growth, namely offering leadership and support to the industry in all aspects of Australian documentary,” said Ms Karp.

In her final report, former CEO Sharon Connolly paid tribute to Film Australia staff and thanked outgoing Chairman Rob Fisher and fellow board member Eve Mahlab for their guidance and support.

Among the programs completed in 2003–2004 is the high-profile series *Colour of War—The Anzacs*, depicting Australia and New Zealand at war using only colour footage and movingly narrated by Russell Crowe. This highly successful collaboration between Film Australia, TWI, Nine Network Australia, ScreenSound Australia, NZ on Air, TVNZ and the New Zealand Ministry of Defence screened on Channel Nine in late November. The three one-hour episodes won the ratings for their time slot both here and in New Zealand.

Extending its program delivery into new media, Film Australia continued to develop its *Australian Biography* series online. Hosted by the National Library of Australia, the website includes interviews, video files and study guides. In 2003–2004, 28 interviews from the series were posted added to the site.

2003–2004 was the second year of Government funding for Film Australia’s library, distribution and facilities activities which all offer crucial support to Australia’s independent production sector.

With this funding the Library made significant advances in the preservation of its unique collection. It also made this important asset more accessible with the launch of Film Australia Library Online in February 2004, enabling researchers to search online for archival materials and stock shots.

Also in 2003–2004, the first Educational Production Initiative project, *Australians at Work*, commenced production. There are now five EPI projects in production and more in development. The aim of this initiative is to enhance the education sector’s access to Film Australia’s audio-visual heritage.

The 2003–2004 Annual Report was tabled in Federal Parliament in October and can be viewed at Film Australia’s website (www.filmaust.com.au).

Printed copies can be obtained from Film Australia: tel 02 9413 8723 or email web@filmaust.com.au

In brief

Film Australia executive producer Mark Hamlyn has been appointed to the newly created position of Head of Production, in an acting capacity. This role is responsible for the National Interest Program production unit, with a particular emphasis on development, managing the production slate and forward planning.

On 31 August, the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator Rod Kemp, announced the three-year appointment of Ms Yasmin Allen to the board of Film Australia. Currently a non-executive director of the Australian Government’s Export Finance and Insurance Corporation, Macquarie Specialised Asset Management, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service and the Salvation Army Investment Advisory Board, Ms Allen has extensive experience in company analysis and strategic advice, with prior roles in investment banking and the brokerage industry in Australia and overseas, including as vice president of Deutsche Bank in Sydney and as a director of ANZ Investment Bank.

On air

The Pilot’s Funeral—a half-hour documentary from writer/director Rose Hesp, producer Denise Haslem and co-producer Trevor Graham—will screen nationally on ABC-TV on 27 February 2005 in the Compass timeslot.

The program recounts the life of pilot, Adrian Wagg, who forged a deep connection with Arnhem Land and its people, helping the Yolngu build homes on their ancestral lands and establish their own airline. But more than this, it tells of the extraordinary ten-day funeral ceremony that followed his tragic death in a helicopter accident.

Not since the arrival of missionaries in the 1930s had the Aboriginal people of northeast Arnhem Land buried their dead in a dhakandjali, a sacred hollow log. But in 2002 in Yirrkala, they revived this ancient practice—not for an Indigenous person but for this white man who they embraced as one of their own.

The ceremony, captured in this moving film, celebrates a remarkable bond, connecting black and white, people and land, past and future.

Also on ABC-TV early next year is the award-winning *Mr Patterns* (see page 1), which will screen on 8.30pm on 12 January in the Big Picture timeslot.



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