

real2reel

In this issue

July 2005 Volume 17 Issue 2

Hothouse Recipients Announced	Tom Zubrycki Doco To Be Launched at MIFF	Operation Babylift On Air This Month
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Film Australia's Wilderness

What you think about wilderness depends on where you are...

Film Australia's Wilderness journeys across the country from the early 20th century to the present day. Drawing on remarkable films from the Film Australia Library and the Archives Office of Tasmania, this beautifully designed two-DVD set explores the concept of wilderness.

In addition to magnificent still photographs, it includes selections from some of the nation's most significant documentaries. Interviews with contemporary commentators such as cartoonist Michael Leunig, filmmaker Bob Connolly, art critic Peter Timms and academic Dr Peter Hay, examine themes from art to activism.

Combined with a website that provides access to additional materials such as transcripts and a study guide, the project is a thought-provoking and visually stunning foray into the Australian wilderness—real and imagined.

"The two-DVD set and website presents a whole raft of ideas, both contemporary and historical, that could not have been covered in a single, linear documentary," explains writer/director/producer Steve Thomas of Roar Film. "Although it is not intended to be a definitive history of wilderness, it does track the key historical developments in Australian wilderness thinking—from a landscape to be avoided to one that must be preserved."

"This media-rich project is a wonderful way for people to access some of the extraordinary material in Film Australia's library," says Film Australia Executive Producer Anna Grieve. "It means that, in addition to current thinking on 'green' issues, there is an opportunity to see how Australians have seen their landscape over time."

The films include two of the most acclaimed environmental documentaries of recent times, *Franklin River Journey* and *Wildness*, as well as Jeannie Baker's gorgeous animation *Where the Forest Meets the Sea*.

There's also *Frozen Images*, showcasing cinematographer Frank Hurley's work in the Antarctic since the early 20th century; and *Among the Hardwoods*, a 1930s film about timbergetting in Western Australia. *Kakadu Man* tells the story of the lands in this national park from an Indigenous perspective, while *Small Island Big Fight* explores the relationship between Murray Islanders and the sea. *Lake Pedder* charts the campaign to save a Tasmanian icon, *The Edge of the World* features author and environmentalist Tim Winton, and 1962's *From the Tropics to the Snow* is a classic "mockumentary" with a young Reg Livermore in search of the perfect tourist destination.

The DVD-set was released in June to co-incide with World Environment Day. It is available through Film Australia direct, and to home-viewers through ABC Shops & Centres, department stores and other selected retailers.

Visit www.filmaust.com.au/wilderness

Alex West appointed to Film Australia history role

Film Australia has appointed internationally renowned executive producer Alex West to the role of Executive Producer, History.

West will join the company's Melbourne office in July, with the responsibility to devise, develop and commission high-end documentaries for Film Australia's history initiative.

As part of the Australian Government's 2006 film industry package, Film Australia will receive an additional \$7.5 million over three years to produce a 10-part history series to meet growing audience demand for high-quality Australian documentaries made to international standards.

"The history project is a fantastic opportunity to raise the bar in Australian factual filmmaking while producing a legacy of films that show audiences at home and overseas just how powerful and fascinating the Australian story is," said West, who will work collaboratively with an advisory panel of eminent Australian historians, including Film Australia board member Dr John Hirst.

Film Australia CEO Daryl Karp says West's broad-ranging factual experience and international reputation will enhance Film Australia's production capacity, bringing a different perspective to the history initiative.

West was most recently Executive Producer at Wall to Wall in the United Kingdom where he was responsible for the BBC hit of 2004, the genealogy series *Who Do You Think You Are?*—winner of the 2005 INDIE Award and nominated for the 2005 Grierson Documentary Award and BAFTA Award for best historical series.

With an emphasis on history and factual credits ranging from formatted series to docudrama, and international co-productions including history series *Inside the Mafia* (Five/National Geographic Channel), science/history format *Salvage Squad* (Channel 4, Discovery Channel UK) and docudrama *Ice Age Columbus* (Discovery Channel, NDR, France5 and Telefilm Canada), West has been extensively courted since his arrival in Australia, working as a consultant for Film Australia and the ABC.



Alex West

Meet Alex West and Liz Hartford at our History Workshop [Details back page](#)

Accolades for The Art of War & Immigration DVD

The documentary series **The Art of War**, written by Betty Churcher, received the scriptwriting prize at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, held on 23 May. Another Film Australia documentary — **Mr Patterns**, written by Nic Testoni and Jo Plomley—was shortlisted.

Mr Patterns was also a finalist for best use of footage in a history factual production at the FOCAL Awards in the UK where **Film Australia's Immigration DVD** won the top honour from an international field for best use of footage in electronic publishing.

Australians at Work and **From Wireless to Web** (both produced for Film Australia's learning@filmaustralia portal) have been shortlisted for best secondary school educational website at the 2005 Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing, to be announced in August.

Dhakiyarr vs the King continues its run of North American festivals with an invitation to this year's Vancouver International Film Festival. It has also been chosen, along with **Mr Patterns** and **Mabo—Life of an Island Man**, to feature this November at a one-day screening event in Paris called Paroles d'Aborigènes.

Another remarkable Indigenous film, **Djungguwan—Speaking to the Future** (part of Film Australia's **Ceremony DVD**), has been invited to the prestigious Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) International Festival of Ethnographic Film in the UK.

Silent Storm has been selected for the Green Film Festival in Seoul, Korea in September.

Troubled Minds—The Lithium Revolution and **Who's Afraid of Designer Babies?** will screen at the SCINEMA Festival of Science Film in Canberra as part of National Science Week (August 13–22).

Mr Patterns, Sadness and **Bush Mechanics—The Series** recently screened at the Australian Film Festival in Israel.

(below) Still from Film Australia's Immigration



In production

Air Australia

Filming will soon begin on this three-part series which will revisit Australia's grand but turbulent aviation history. Produced in association with Vue DC and with the assistance of ScreenWest, Lotterywest and the ABC, it is being produced by Helen Clucas and writer/director Alan Lindsay. Tony Virgo is associate producer. *Executive Producer: Anna Grieve*

Australian Biography

Having completed programs on Anne Deveson, Tom Bass, Noel Tovey and Sir Zelman Cowen, the *Australian Biography* team are working on a further two episodes in this tenth series. The first of these features surgeon turned vigneron Max Lake who was once described as "a person who could make gastronomic poets of us all". The second features the former Premier of Victoria, Joan Kirner. Rod Freedman is producing and directing with Robin Hughes as writer/presenter. *Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn*

A Colourful Life

Post-production continues on this dramatised documentary about the life of flamboyant design pioneer Florence Broadhurst, from director Gillian Armstrong. Made in association with Becker Entertainment and SBS Independent, the program is being produced by Charles Hannah and Sue Clothier and written by Katherine Thomson. *Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn*

The Floating Brothel

Filming has been completed in London and Australia for another dramatised documentary, which tells the extraordinary story of how 222 women prisoners in London's Newgate Gaol ended up on board a "floating brothel" bound for Botany Bay. Mark Lewis is writer and director with Chris Hilton and Sonja Armstrong producing. The program will screen on ABC TV. *Executive Producer: Mark Hamlyn*

The Road to Tokyo

Director Graham Shirley and producer Sally Regan are filming contemporary interviews and bringing together archival film to tell the story of the final year of World War Two in the Pacific, from an Australian perspective. The program is being made for ABC TV to co-incide with the 60th anniversary of the armistice in August. *Executive Producers: Mark Hamlyn, Alison Leigh*

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*

New media projects

Film Australia has three documentary-based new media projects in the works: **Ceremony** and **National Treasures**, which are being produced through the Educational Production Initiative, and **Pacific Stories**, a digital television/broadband program produced under the National Interest Program with ABC2/ABC New Media.

The **Ceremony** website is an interactive broadband website for secondary school students, tertiary students and lifelong learners that will complement the **Ceremony DVD**.

The project is the result of over 40 years involvement by Film Australia filmmakers with the Yolngu community and their law and culture in remote northeast Arnhem Land. The Djungguwan initiation ceremony was filmed in 1976 by renowned ethnographic filmmaker Ian Dunlop at the invitation of clan elders as a record for future generations. It was not performed again until 26 years later when another Film Australia crew on location in Arnhem Land was asked to document the ceremony. The two-DVD set features some of that remarkable footage as well as breakout studies that background the art, songs and dance of the ceremony and how they relate to Yolngu law, land and religion. The DVD is directed by Trevor Graham and produced by Denise Haslem.

The **Ceremony** website will contain video excerpts from the DVD and interactive elements, with the flexibility to accommodate tertiary and secondary level studies. It will be produced by Tasmanian company Roar Films in collaboration with Denise Haslem and the Yirrkala community.

The **National Treasures** website is an interactive educational website which will showcase video portraits from the **National Treasures** television series. *Phar Lap, Bradman's Bats* and *Gallipoli Boat* among others will bring Australian culture into focus for secondary students. The website will show teachers how they can build a study of these treasures into their curriculum as well as provide support materials and engage secondary school students with interactive learning tools. Ryebuck Media's Tim Gurry is producer, Robert Lewis is principal researcher and author, and Troy Mortier is creative director.

Chris Warner is executive producer for Film Australia on both **Ceremony** and **National Treasures**.

Pacific Stories is a co-production between Film Australia and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It explores the geography, history and culture of the South Pacific through a season of acclaimed documentaries from Film Australia to be broadcast on ABC2. These will be accompanied by a broadband internet website, created by ABC New Media. Presented by popular singing sisters of Tongan heritage Vika and Linda Bull, the project traces the remarkable shift in social, cultural and environmental realities for the people of the Pacific over the last 50 years. With Anna Grieve as Film Australia executive producer, the project is directed by Les McLaren and Annie Stiven.

Photo by Sarah Johnston



Vietnam Symphony Q & A with Tom Zubrycki

In 1965, as the Vietnam War intensified, students and teachers from the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music were forced to flee the city for the relative safety of a village in the countryside. With the help of villagers, they built an entire campus underground, creating a maze of hidden tunnels connecting an auditorium and classrooms. There, as the war raged around them, they lived, studied and played music for five years. A new one-hour documentary from writer/director Tom Zubrycki and producer Kerry Herman tells their extraordinary story.

Vietnam Symphony includes stunning black-and-white archival footage that captures surprising scenes from the war—pianos wheeled on handcarts along dusty tracks, lessons held in subterranean caverns, and performances for soldiers among the heavy armaments.

In this edited Q&A, Tom Zubrycki gives us an insight into the project.

Q: What drew you to the film?

A: When Kerry showed me the unique footage of the conservatory in the village filmed during the war, I knew that this was an incredibly strong foundation for a film. It was then a process of finding the right people to tell the story.



The other thing that excited me was how the story of the underground conservatory was a way of telling the story of how the war was experienced from the North. What happened to the people who lived through the American bombing, and what happened to the next generation? Very few films have looked at this side of the story.

Q: What ideas does the film embody?

The film is a look at Vietnam today through the prism of the past. The historical story of the underground conservatory is told through a large cast of interviewees, blending archive, interview and music. The key character is Professor Huong—a cellist—and his son—also a musician. The son goes against his father's wishes, turning his back on a concert career to work as a quiz show host on television—a relevant metaphor for modern Vietnam and the rapid social changes sweeping the country.

What really interested me were the tensions between the older and younger generations and I wanted to use the music to build and explore the generational change.

I also wanted to explore the legacy left by the war. One of the interesting things is how the country's younger generation just wants to get on with the present. Wearing fashion labels and watching pop on TV quiz shows is more important than contemplating a war that for them has little relevance and is long since past. It's ironic how Vietnam—still a one-party socialist state—is flexible enough to absorb a range of influences emanating from its former arch-enemy and still remain true to its ideological roots.

Q: What were the challenges?

A: The film changes styles as it unfolds. The first half uses an interview-driven style to tell the story of how the conservatory survived in the village. In the second half the film changes gear and tells the contemporary story in more of an observational style—especially the return to the village. To get the historical to blend into the contemporary, I needed to find a meeting point between the two distinct styles. Music was the key to making this work. It was the film's unifying element and an expressive one as well.

Vietnam Symphony was developed with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission and produced in association with Stonebridge Productions, the NSW Film and Television Office and SBS Independent. Penny Robins was Film Australia Executive Producer.

Vietnam Symphony will premiere at the Melbourne International Film Festival on Saturday 23 July and screen on SBS TV later this year.

Operation Babylift



Operation Babylift on air in July

A powerful new Film Australia documentary will screen on SBS TV this month in the Storyline Australia timeslot.

Operation Babylift tells the stories of Vietnamese children brought to Australia in the final days of the Vietnam War. The film takes its name from the airlifts that evacuated more than 3000 babies from Saigon orphanages in April 1975, delivering them into the waiting arms of couples in the US, Canada, Britain, Europe and Australia in the largest act of adoption in history.

Although many Westerners saw the operation as a humanitarian necessity, many Vietnamese considered it kidnapping—particularly as some children were not, in fact, orphans.

Thirty years on, this compelling documentary tells the stories of three of the 281 children brought to Australia. Who are they today? And how do they feel about themselves and their past? Their personal experiences are remarkably different; their answers likely to surprise you.

Filmmaker Dai Le, herself a Vietnam War refugee, takes us on a journey of discovery that presents a human face to decisions made with "the best of intentions". She accompanies one of the adoptees on an emotionally turbulent trip back to Vietnam, in search of her past.

Through candid interviews with the children (now grown), their adoptive parents, those involved in the airlift and Vietnamese families and politicians, the film explores complex issues of inter-racial adoption and cultural identity as well as providing an insight into the political background to this controversial operation.

Produced by Helen Barrow and executive produced by Anna Grieve for Film Australia, **Operation Babylift** will premiere on SBS TV at 8.30pm on Thursday 28 July.

History Workshop

History television is the point of convergence for documentary and drama. The swing has been so strong that fully dramatised narratives are now regularly commissioned as factual programs. And it's being done on a documentary budget!

This is one of the key issues that will be discussed at two masterclasses entitled *There's No History Without Drama*, with UK producer Liz Hartford.

Hartford has been producing factual history programs for all the major UK channels for over 12 years. Her most recent drama/documentary, *A Most Mysterious Murder*, attracted over five million viewers on BBC1.

From *Simon Schama's A History of Britain* to *Princes in the Tower—England's Medieval Anastasia*, her programs have combined the best of documentary and drama. She says she knew she was on to something when one of her programs pipped *The Simpsons* for the number one ratings spot.

Hartford believes that "history has all the best stories" and sees the tags "low budget" and "large audiences" as a challenge.

In her masterclass, she'll share the outcome of her own steep learning curve and divulge the secrets of creating drama on a documentary budget. She'll also reveal what someone with a documentary background has to offer drama, and what factual has to offer the drama producer.

The first masterclass will be held on Tuesday 16 August between 2.30pm and 4.30pm as a Film Australia sponsored session at the 2005 SPAA Conference on the Gold Coast.

Another masterclass will be held in Sydney on Thursday 18 August as part of Film Australia's one-day history workshop, which will explore contemporary trends in Australian history.

At this workshop, filmmakers will also have the opportunity to meet Film Australia's new Executive Producer, History Alex West (see page 1).

Places for the workshop and the masterclass will be limited, and bookings will be required.

For further details, check our website at www.filmaust.com.au/production

Experienced trio selected for Hothouse

Filmmakers Margie Bryant, Jennifer Cummins and Danielle Roet have been selected for the Film Australia and NSW Film and Television Office (FTO) Hothouse Scheme. They will form a new company to be based at Film Australia.

The selection committee was impressed with the strong development slate and vision for their company, which has already attracted a level of broadcaster interest and is supported by a number of presales.

Producer Margie Bryant is currently developing co-productions with SBS and Channel 4 UK following local and international success with recent productions *Singer—Dangerous Mind* and *Calling the Shots*. Jennifer Cummins has recently returned to independent production after a three-year stint at ABC TV as Manager of Factual Development and is currently producing a documentary for Film Australia with ABC TV (see next column). Danielle Roet has recently returned to Australia after working on a variety of factual programs for UK terrestrial channels.

"It is an incredible privilege to have been selected for Hothouse," Margie Bryant said. "In Australia it is a challenge to get development funding and this represents a unique opportunity to be assisted to put the time, energy and thinking into making internationally attractive programs. This is an innovative approach to developing factual-based production companies and we are committed for the long term, and thank Film Australia and NSW FTO for their show of confidence in our vision."

Film Australia and the FTO launched the pilot scheme in February with an investment of \$150,000 that will nurture and support a team of independent documentary filmmakers to establish a viable business.

The scheme will provide the filmmakers with \$100,000 as well as on-site production services, facilities, training and advice, with particular emphasis on developing business and marketing skills. Additional support will be provided by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, Holding Redlich and Horwarths (NSW) Pty Ltd Chartered Accountants and Management Consultants.

Film Australia CEO Daryl Karp said "We are excited that these talented documentary makers will be taking part in the Hothouse Scheme. It is intended this pilot will produce a model for enhanced commercial viability and professionalism in the documentary-making sector."

Jane Smith, Chief Executive NSW FTO said, "This initiative is adding strength to the documentary sector and we look forward to the focused support offered to this team resulting in the growth of a new and viable production company with an exciting slate."

Your child on TV?

Film Australia is looking for children to take part in a new documentary series for ABC-TV.

The program is being made in conjunction with the single largest national study of children ever in this country—10,000 kids are taking part over a seven-year period.

Growing Up in Australia—The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children has been initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and is being managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The Film Australia documentary is being directed by Catherine Marciniak and produced by Jennifer Cummins, with Penny Robins as executive producer. It will follow just eight children, their families and carers as they participate in the study. They will be filmed for short periods every 18 months to record the events that shape their early years.

The filmmakers are currently looking for children aged 6 to 12 months and 4 to 5 years, and an expectant mother due between mid August and the end of September 2005.

For more information, call 1800 077 471 or visit www.filmaust.com.au/growingup



Photo by Paula Bray

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