

SPADA

Screen Production and Development
Association of New Zealand Inc.
Waka Pāpāho.

SPADA NEWS

Issue 74, March 2004

Film and TV a \$500 million industry

Our official – film in New Zealand was on a roll last year. Feature film financing was up by \$70 million largely due to foreign film activity.

And New Zealand film and television is now a half-billion dollar industry, if investment in news, current affairs and sport is included.

These are among the key findings of the annual SPADA-Colmar Brunton screen production survey, which will be published in full on the SPADA website later this month.

For a sneak preview of these and other selected highlights, please turn to page 5. ■



New Zealand's favourite Sunday morning children's show *What Now* re-launches on TV2 this month under the guidance of Janine Morrell and Jason Gunn, of *Whitebait-TV*. The show's presenters are from left, Richard Mills (aka Vinyl Riche), Carolyn Taylor, Vicki Lin and Tamati Coffey. For more on *Whitebait-TV*'s plans for *What Now*, see pages 6-7.

Stop Press Movie history is made

The extraordinary success of the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* at the 2004 Academy Awards is a great reflection on the depth of talent in the New Zealand film industry, says SPADA chief executive Penelope Borland.

Movie history was made at the 2004 Academy Awards when the third movie in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy won 11 out of 11 nominations.

This makes it the equal of *Ben-Hur* and *Titanic*.

"It's an inspirational and remarkable achievement, one that has made all New Zealanders extremely proud," says Penelope.

"It shows, once again, that Kiwis can do anything, and that the talent, resourcefulness and ingenuity of our filmmakers is outstanding."

11 out of 11

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King won all 11 of the categories in which it was nominated.

BEST PICTURE

Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, Barrie M. Osborne

BEST DIRECTOR

Peter Jackson

BEST ART DIRECTION

Grant Major (Art Direction); Dan Hennah and Alan Lee (Set Decoration)

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

Jim Rygiel, Joe Letteri, Randall William Cook, Alex Funke

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

Ngila Dickson, Richard Taylor

BEST FILM EDITING

Jamie Selkirk

BEST MAKEUP

Richard Taylor, Peter King

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

Howard Shore

BEST ORIGINAL SONG

"Into the West"

Music and lyrics by Fran Walsh, Howard Shore, Annie Lennox

BEST SOUND MIXING

Christopher Boyes, Michael Semanick, Michael Hedges, Hammond Peek

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson



The Christmas break can be very deceiving. The endless hot summer daze lulls you into a feeling that things might not actually be that bad. So, into 2004, the now calm and possibly naive Bambi trots out into the open, only to be shot dead at a distance of 600 metres by someone you have never met who wants you only as a trophy.

Sounds like reality television in 2004... and it is my idea so don't steal it!

There is a great deal going on in our industry in 2004. The industry enjoys a very high profile and has seen the Government move to promote it aggressively. Although the Government initially took a leadership role, it is now looking to the industry to provide the solutions that will see the sector prosper. It should be clear that this is not exclusively about local production but more about the totality of screen activity in New Zealand and, in particular, its economic and cultural benefits to the country as a whole.

The introduction of the Large Budget Film Grants is a device designed to encourage foreign film production here. This will have positive benefits on some sectors of the industry. From a local producer's point of view, we must now find solutions that will encourage and result in more New Zealand productions.

In the last 12 months, there has been a lot of tension in the relationship with TVNZ. We hope in 2004 that we will see this relationship improve. Early in 2004, we will see the appointment of new members of the commissioning team at TVNZ. SPADA looks forward to meeting them and gaining an understanding of their aims and objectives.

SPADA believes it is vital that we take an active role in the work of both the Screen Council and the funding agency review. It is critical that the voice of those who make their living (by creating the very content that powers networks and the box office, and contributes to New Zealand's cultural identity and international profile) are represented in any policy decisions that affect them.

Who we deal with to raise funds locally and under what terms and conditions are key issues. Clarity needs to exist here in order for us to attract other funding from overseas. Encouraging private investment in the New Zealand industry is also critical to the sector's future development.

As can be seen in Australia at the moment, nothing is certain. Australia believed it had the triggars in place that would see long

term growth of international and local production. Increased incentives in the US as well as change in the value of the dollar can neutralise these benefits very quickly. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has promised to halt runaway production. The solutions we must find for New Zealand will need to take these sorts of threats into account.

SPADA expects to be very active this year. As a result, of these reviews and new initiatives I see us as an advocacy organisation, operating at a high level in both the public and private sectors. Our role is to negotiate, advocate and propose solutions that benefit the industry in the long term.

It is imperative, therefore, that industry members actively share intelligence and knowledge with SPADA so that we are well positioned to advise Government on policy.

So like Bambi stepping boldly out into the public domain, we are vulnerable for a few pot-shots from media and interest groups, but we'll be donning the body armour and sharpening the antlers to fight for the principles we stand for.

I am proud to be president of SPADA in 2004 and to share the responsibilities with a very experienced and committed executive. I think there is a wonderful future ahead for both cinema and television production in this country. We must seize it with both hands and not let self-interest or competitive concerns blur our vision. ■

A stylized, cursive handwritten signature in black ink.

Andrew Shaw
President

Your SPADA Board, 2004

Congratulations and thanks to the following people who have been elected to the 2004 SPADA board. We offer a short profile of each member, and a first person statement saying why they were motivated to get - or stay - involved.

Andrew Shaw

South Pacific Pictures, Auckland

Andrew is the Chief Operating Officer for South Pacific Pictures. He is a former presenter, producer and director, and during his time at TVNZ, amongst many other senior designations, was Head of Content responsible for programming, acquisitions and commissioning. Andrew's aspirations while on the Board include seeing the role of the creative community developed in partnership with broadcasters. Andrew is SPADA's President.

"We are at a critical time in the development of our film and television industry. I believe it is very important to take an active role in building its commercial and cultural structure. As president, it is my aim to make a constructive contribution to the industry's strategic direction."

David Baldock

Ninox Films, Wellington

David Baldock started his career in broadcasting at the NZBC in Dunedin in 1970. After moving to Wellington in 1975, he became a director for TVNZ's national current affairs programmes. David joined the specialist documentary unit in 1979, producing and directing documentaries until 1989 when he formed the independent factual television production company Ninox Films Ltd. David's company has been responsible for producing more than 100 hours of documentary and reality series on all three networks in New Zealand. David is also Chair of the New Zealand Screenrights Advisory Committee.



"My roles as Chair of the New Zealand Screenrights Advisory Committee and Board Member of Screenrights has given me a clear insight into the issues facing producers as rights holders. These issues are becoming more relevant as producers negotiate contracts both domestically and internationally."

Vincent Burke,

Top Shelf Productions, Wellington

Vincent has been a producer for more than 13 years, and established Top Shelf Productions which has offices in both Wellington and Auckland. While his experience is mainly in television, he has produced a feature and is actively involved again in feature development. As a consequence, his principal focus is the sustainability of the business of independent television and film production. He has held a number of senior positions on industry organisations including the position of SPADA president and member of the SPADA Board.



"I regularly attend international television and film markets, and have produced a number of international co-productions. My strengths include a considerable experience in policy development and implementation at a government and non-government level."

Rachel Jean

Isola Productions, Auckland

Rachel has worked as an independent producer for the last 10 years. Her Auckland-based production company Isola specialises in documentary and drama. Now in her third term on the SPADA Board, she is interested in increasing SPADA's membership by encouraging producers to get involved in the organisation, and developing SPADA's seminar programme in 2004.

"What do I have to offer? I have made my living for the past ten years as an independent producer and survived! My work has been mostly in documentary having produced over 35 documentaries, but I've also produced television drama, factual series and short films."



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Dave Gibson

The Gibson Group, Wellington

Dave is managing director of The Gibson Group, one of New Zealand's largest independent production companies. Since its establishment in 1978, the company has made programmes spanning a range of genres, including primetime drama, children's drama, comedy, documentary, arts magazine and information programmes. Since 1994, The Gibson Group has worked with international co-production partners from Australia, Canada, Britain and Sweden. Its programmes have won numerous awards, in New Zealand and around the world. Dave has been on the SPADA Board previously and President on two separate occasions.



"We need to find a way, perhaps akin to a family, where we can have our film or programme-making independence, yet meet more regularly and discuss in more depth the political issues that affect us. We need to lobby and negotiate as a group because if we don't, many of the threats that face independent producers will overwhelm us. Our representative organisations need to be strong and well funded and able to take part in the incredibly wide-ranging discussions that are taking place in Wellington every day."

Virginia Wright

Southern Screen Productions, Christchurch

Virginia has been producing and directing television programmes since 1986 when she was one of the last trainees taken on by TVNZ. As an independent programme maker, currently concentrating on documentaries through her company Southern Screen Productions, she is very interested in the continuing development of a strong, thriving independent production industry.

"Having cut my teeth on fast turn-around children's programmes like Spot On, What Now, and Playschool, I am very aware of the need to help graduates into positions where they get some training, or at least a quality mentor on their first professional job. I have been closely involved in establishing infrastructure in Christchurch, including Film South - our regional film office (currently Chair of Trustees), and the local industry association, Screen Canterbury."

Ross Jennings

Screentime, Auckland

Ross is the Executive Director of one of New Zealand's best-known production houses, Screentime (formerly Screentime Communicado). With 30 years experience both here and overseas, Ross has built up a CV of successful shows covering the broad spectrum of television programmes.



"Mentoring emerging producers by encouraging thorough training, preparation and dedicated, focused enthusiasm is both a strength of mine, and a passion. I have an ambition to see New Zealand producers afforded greater respect than has been the case for some years now. As we earn that respect, we should be in a much better position to work alongside the networks on a more equal but always professional footing."

Richard Fletcher

Feature film consultant, Wellington

Richard has worked in Australia, the UK and New Zealand in a variety of roles in the film industry, including the last three years as Business Affairs Manager at the NZ Film Commission. His current position as an independent consultant affords him a broad view of almost every aspect of the film business.



In addition, his experience in film financing, distribution, strategy and government policy makes him an ideal SPADA spokesperson for feature film issues. Richard is SPADA's Vice-President, Film

"The independent film industry is still enduring difficult economic conditions, both locally and internationally. The industry needs its representative body SPADA to be strong, focused and well managed. SPADA's strength and leadership is critical to the continuing success and expansion of our industry."

Angela Littlejohn

Little Ed Films, Wellington

Prior to coming back to New Zealand in 2000, Angela was in the UK working in the film and television industry. This included working at Channel Four Television as Deputy Co-Production Executive for Film on Four, and Programme Finance Manager for Drama Series and Serials. As well as running her own feature film production company now, she is a consultant for the New Zealand Film Commission and an Executive Producer for their short film fund scheme.

"Since joining the SPADA Board a year ago I have been heavily involved with the Film Focus Group, an organisation umbrellaed by SPADA and focussed solely on local film industry issues. We have recently been successful in co-ordinating all the guilds to sign an unprecedented joint submission in response to the Government's introduction of the Large Production Expenditure Grant. We must maintain this focus on the particular needs and issues associated with the feature film industry."

Philippa Mossman

Greenstone Pictures, Auckland

Philippa has been a contract producer for Greenstone Pictures for eight years and has experience producing documentaries, arts programmes, a daily studio advice show and a short film. She has also established Third Party Productions, and brings to the Board both her new interest and appreciation as a small production company owner, and the experience gained through her years with Greenstone Pictures.



"There is a great deal of work to be done behind-the-scenes to ensure SPADA is an effective and robust organisation for its members. I will continue to focus my energy on actively promoting, pursuing and representing the things that matter to both small and large production houses, in particular to producers of factual series and documentaries." ■

Highlights of film & TV production survey

The gargantuan task of gathering, collating and interpreting the 2003 SPADA-Colmar Brunton film and television production survey is finally over. The full survey results are close to being published, and will be available on SPADA's website later this month. Meanwhile, to whet your appetite, we are including some of the highlights:

- Total production financing is holding steady at \$440 million. If investment in news, current affairs and sport was included, the figure would exceed \$500 million.
- Feature film financing was up by \$70 million, largely due to foreign film activity.
- Large budgets of offshore-funded feature films continue to dominate. Substantial investment in the final film of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, is still apparent in the 2003 figures as well as major investment in *The Last Samurai*, both accounting for a large proportion of offshore finance.



Sylvia, starring Hollywood actress Gwyneth Paltrow, above, was one of nine feature films worth \$210 million that were produced in New Zealand in 2003.

- In 2003, nine feature films worth \$210 million were produced in New Zealand, compared with 11 films worth \$149 million in 2002. They include *Return of the King*, *The Last Samurai*, *Sylvia*, *Perfect Strangers* and *The Nemesis Game*. Five features had budgets of over \$5 million, three had a budget under \$5 million and over \$1 million, and one had a budget of under \$500,000. Four of the nine received New Zealand public funding investment.
- NZ Film Commission funding shows an increase from \$2,780,935 to \$5,510,000 in the 2003 survey.
- Foreign exchange figures show a 14 percent drop on 2002, down \$36 million, mostly in television because of reduced television investment from Europe (the USA and Canada provide 82 percent of forex).
- In terms of regional expenditure, while Auckland still takes the main slice of production expenditure at \$158 million, there has been a decline in overall production expenditure in Auckland and a proportional increase in Wellington. The capital city attracted expenditure of \$135 million. The decline in Auckland is likely to be related to no significant offshore television series being shot.
- The level of employment in the screen production industry has remained relatively stable on 2002 and bodes well for the industry (the industry is dependent on very high levels of individual contractors as it is largely project-based). ■

So What Now?

New Zealand's favourite Sunday morning children's show *What Now* re-launches on TV2 this month in the experienced hands of Janine Morrell and Jason Gunn, of South Island production company Whitebait-TV.

What Now, celebrating its 23rd year on screen, will introduce a new format, where the programme's 20-strong production team will travel and broadcast from around the country.

New Zealand On Air has allocated \$2.5 million to the reformatted programme.

"We live in Christchurch, and this is where the show will be produced from," explains Janine. "The idea is that the 'mothership' will be in Christchurch.

"Having said that, we will have a team in Auckland, based at a beach house in Takapuna, as well as a 'Spyrider', an amazing vehicle that roams the country, visiting small towns and communities with another team.

"This means we can be in Christchurch, Auckland and a small town all in the one show. We'll use new satellite technology to keep up communication. Every week, the 'Spyrider' will be at some special place or event that is newsy, like the Weetbix kids triathlon near Nelson, in our first show [which aired on March 7].

"We want to put the now into *What Now*," says Jason. "We want to really promote the fact that the programme is live, 8am-10am Sundays."

What Now is targeted at five to 14 year olds, and has always rated well. This year, it will run to December 12. Interestingly, more than half of its audience is based outside the main centres, says Janine.

She maintains that the South Island/North Island production sites, as well as the roving crew, means many more opportunities for its fans to get involved and to see the show being taped.

Whitebait-TV want to make sure the show is high energy and fun, and full of variety. They're also looking to maximize the show's interactive opportunities using the latest technology.



Key members of the *What Now* team: Jason Gunn and Janine Morrell, centre, flanked by, from left, Richard Mills, Carolyn Taylor, Vicki Lin and Tamati Coffey.

"The satellite technology is unique - we're the first production in the country to have this kind of equipment. *What Now* will be live and interactive, and the satellite enables us to get to places we would otherwise not be able to reach and that's really important to us," Janine says.

"We want the show to combine the best of live radio with the visual nature of TV," adds Jason.

"We want to capture what young New Zealanders are thinking about now and also give them something to think about."

To illustrate how they want to make the show as topical as possible, Jason gives the example of the All Blacks playing in the Bledisloe Cup at Eden Park. His point is how the *What Now* crew might explore the challenges and difficulties of hitting (or missing) a crucial goal.

"Each of the crews would line up our own 'Daniels' from various places around the country to attempt the kick, and score the winning points," he expounds with his usual high velocity enthusiasm.

It could be a Daniel Jones, 9, in Ashburton, a Dan Karaitiana, 13, in Te Kuiti and a Danny Kalivati, 12, in Raglan who all attempt to kick the same goal, at the same angle, as Daniel Carter did.

"And, bang, we have three different shots that compare with the original All Black shot with a commentary that links it all together," says Jason.

"We want it to be seamless."

It would probably be hard to find a couple with stronger credentials in children's programming and entertainment in New Zealand.

Janine has spent more than 16 years making children's programmes, including seven years as Executive Producer of TVNZ's Children's Unit.

In 1998, Janine formed production company, Whitebait Productions, which the couple now runs together. It was called Whitebait for several reasons, as Janine explains.

"It's my favourite food. It's only found in the South Island. Whitebait is a small fish in a big pond. It's rare and precious, and it dares to swim against the tide. That was as relevant to the company ethos in 1998 as it is today."

Now called WhitebaitTV, the company has produced some 300 episodes of the pre-school series *Bumble*, two series of *jessie.com* for WNTV, which has been sold to Disney Australia, as well as English programmes for Japan.

The company has now successfully produced four series of the interactive pop talent quest *Wannabes* for TV3, and is currently finishing the first series of *Tuhono*, a youth hip-hop show for the Maori Television Service, which launches on April 3.

Jason Gunn probably needs no introduction. After being cast as the lead role in the touring musical comedy "*Adrian Mole aged 13 and 3/4*" at age 17, he was given a six week contract with TVNZ's children's department. That contract rolled over for 14 years and he became the face of children's television in New Zealand.

In recent years, Jason has done little on screen, instead extending his skills in writing, directing and producing television for a number of shows both here and overseas. (He received a nomination for Best Comedy Director at the 2003 New Zealand Film & Television Awards.) Jason is now working with his brother Andrew on a film script for South Pacific Pictures, and in which Jason will also act.

"It's very exciting, but it's still at the infancy stage," he cautions.

At the same time, he has cultivated his growing celebrity status, as presenter of the Touchdown Production's TV2 series *World Famous in New Zealand*, and appeared in *Celebrity Treasure Island*.

"I am really enjoying the balance of appearing on screen, and working behind the scenes," Jason says.

Striking a balance is also an important issue for the couple outside work. They have four children - Eve, 14, Grace, 8, Faith, 5, and Louis, 10 months - whom they call their "touchstone". They live on four hectares on the southern outskirts of Christchurch, where they are accumulating a menagerie of animals including two ponies, a dog, two doves and chooks.

Janine explains that they have a large blackboard in the house on which the children's daily activities for the week are set out in meticulous detail. The

couple juggles their work commitments with the help of a nanny, and nearby doting grandparents.

"We all pitch in," explains Janine. "It's very organised, but we like to think there is still room for spontaneity. We try hard to be part of our community, and we get involved in the kids' schools, helping with fundraising and drama productions," she says.

"We know that Sunday mornings won't be the same for a while," she continues, referring to their *What Now* commitments.

"But the girls will come on set with us. They are very lucky that way. That may include a helicopter ride somewhere. And they will also help us with our debriefing - children are amazingly insightful

"If you decide to work in this industry, consistently achieving a high standard, you have to be prepared to work hard. Nothing can be left to chance."

Janine is also appreciative of the support from TVNZ.

"This is a huge gig and the network has been great in helping us get *What Now* up and running," she says.

Naturally, they are excited about the show's potential, and are looking forward to seeing the production team's planning come together.

Says Jason: "We're keen not to completely refurbish the show. We need to move it forward and we have some fantastic technology to do that, which forms an integral part of the format.

"Having said that, we also need to move it back as well, to include some of the good old stuff. We want to bring the best of the old, and showcase the best of the new."

The couple see themselves as caretakers of the *What Now* brand.

"We understand that others who tendered for the contract wanted to change the name of the programme," Janine says.

"But we believe that would have been a mistake. The brand is bigger than us. We are here for a couple of years, and the programme and the brand will last beyond us. This is just our turn.

"*What Now* is a New Zealand icon and we're rapt to be given the opportunity to bring our experience, creativity and energy to it.

"It's an absolutely fantastic opportunity, and we feel very honoured." ■



Screen Council update

In an effort to keep our members informed about the proposed new Screen Council, we are reproducing below the latest information that is publicly available. It is listed on the website of the Ministry of Economic Development.

The particular page was a little hard to find, so you might care to keep the following reference handy to keep abreast of developments on the site:

http://www.med.govt.nz/irdev/econ_dev/growth-innovation/screen/cabinet/resp-support/resp-screen-11.html

Appendix A: Screen Council

Description

- Stand-alone industry organisation managed under an appropriate structure such as a Trust.
- Government funding for two years, thereafter funded from industry sources.
- Membership to be approved by the Ministers for Economic Development, Arts, Culture and Heritage, Broadcasting and Maori Affairs.
- Membership drawn from industry practitioners, providing the Council with expertise in: relationship building and networking; leadership and building effective cooperation within the sector; strategy development; wide representation of industry practice including, but not limited to production; post production; domestic and international marketing; production financing; training and education.

Issue/s Addressed

- Mobilise industry ownership of and support for growth targets identified in the SPT report.
- Oversee the implementation of other SPT report recommendations relating to film financing, taxation, broadband and industry training and education.

Agencies Involved

- Ministry of Economic Development
- Ministry for Culture and Heritage
- Te Puni Kokiri
- New Zealand Trade and Enterprise

Timeline

Commence in 2003/2004.

Total Cost (Over 2 Years)

\$0.9 million

Q&As with

SPADA NEWS also put the following questions to Brent Harman, chairman of the Screen Council, to help increase the industry's understanding of the Council's future role. We print his replies below:

1. What structure will the Screen Council operate under?

The intention is that the Council will be a charitable trust. The 11 members of the Council will be the trustees.

2. We understand that at this stage a Trust Deed and Business Plan have not yet been drawn up. Can you tell us what your key objectives will be?

The Trust Deed and Business Plan are both in draft form and I expect both to be finalised in the next couple of weeks [by the end of February - Editor's note]. The key objectives, to be articulated in the Trust Deed and the Business Plan follow closely the recommendation of the Screen Production Task Force and the Government's response.

h Brent Harman

Broadly, they will be as follows:

To facilitate, promote, foster and develop a dynamic and innovative screen production industry in New Zealand to achieve economic growth within the framework agreed by the Screen Production Task Force and endorsed by the Government for the benefit of the people of New Zealand by:

- Communicating with the wider screen production sector in regard to development issues and the implementation of a strategy for the development of the screen production industry in New Zealand.
- Creating cohesion and encouraging the screen production industry in New Zealand to work in partnership to maximise the development of the industry.
- Providing leadership rather than being representative.
- Overseeing the development of a screen production industry training and monitoring advisory body.
- Investigating the sources and means of financing the growth in the screen production industry in New Zealand.
- Avoiding duplication of the functions of existing statutory organisations.

3. Have you had a good response to your CEO advertisements? Are you getting suitable candidates replying?

Yes. We have had almost 40 applicants. We intend to make an appointment in March.

4. One of the key objectives that the Screen Council has been charged with achieving is to “Mobilise industry ownership of and support for growth targets identified in the SPT report”. Namely, foreign exchange earnings of \$400 million a year within five years, and at least 10 companies with over \$50 million and 20 companies with over \$10 million. Has there been any discussion amongst the members of the Screen Council about this objective? Do you think it is achievable?

The Council has not really focused at this stage on the specifics of the target. Growing the size of the sector is definitely achievable.

5. After two years the Screen Council will cease to be funded by the Government. How do you see the Screen Council supporting itself? And if the issues identified in the Cabinet paper that outlines the goals and description of the Screen Council (see above) have been addressed, do you see a need for the Screen Council to continue?

We have barely come into existence. We have yet to appoint an executive officer. It is too early to talk about funding options after the initial two year period. I think it is also too early to talk about the life expectancy of the Council other than to say that it is very focused on achieving its objectives which will result in a bigger, more cohesive and strategically driven industry. ■

Reviving the Anzac spirit

The Anzac spirit joining New Zealand and Australia is at times a bitterly dry drop - so said a local newspaper recently.



Dave Gibson

Yet despite a degree of tension underlying the trans-Tasman relationship, particularly on the political and diplomatic fronts, there are innumerable opportunities for Kiwi entrepreneurs.

That's certainly true of the New Zealand film and television industry where there is a small – but promising – sign of increased trans-Tasman activity.

For a start, there are television producers like Julie Christie of Touchdown Productions and David Baldock of Ninnox Films who are dealing directly with the Australian networks and companies, pitching reality show programmes, among other concepts.

Then there is the co-production model.

Dave Gibson of The Gibson Group is one industry player who has had a positive experience working with co-producer colleagues across the Tasman.

Gibson's first Australian co-production was in the mid-1990s with *Mirror Mirror*, a children's television drama series which was shot in New Zealand, but financed through Millennium Pictures of Sydney. Millennium was then headed by Posie Graham-Evans and Andrew Blaxland.

Gibson is currently working on another children's drama series, *Holly's Heroes*, with a Melbourne company, Tosi Westside Pty Ltd. Shooting on the 26-half-hour programme series begins this month.

Gibson Group found financial support from Television New Zealand and New Zealand On Air, and funding in Australia via Tosi Westside from Channel 9, the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and the distribution arm of the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF).

"This is one of the first times the ACTF have paid a very significant advance for a production that they are not producing," says Dave Gibson. "So it was a bit of a breakthrough."

So how easy was it to pull together the co-production financing?

"It wasn't too bad actually," says Gibson. "It's a little bit of a guinea pig in the sense that ...New Zealand On Air, as it is named, has always been interested in [seeing] New Zealand on air so co-productions like *Mirror Mirror* were shot here. Previously, if we had tried to shoot them in Australia, I think we would have struggled to get New Zealand funding.

"So this current production is interesting because apart from a brief shoot here, the majority of it will be shot in Australia. And I think this was quite an interesting thing for New Zealand On Air to come to grips with... But because it's about a young New Zealand girl who goes to Australia with her parents, a big part of the

story is the cultural difference aspect. She struggles to get on with Australians because she's a Kiwi, and there's a lot of references to the fact she's a Kiwi. I think that's quite an important point to make."

Gibson said it was instructive to look to countries like Canada, which has an industrial model for co-productions, rather than what he called New Zealand's cultural model. The Canadians were much more oriented to the employment of their own rather than the telling of Canadian stories.

"You're much more likely to be successful if you have a natural reason for coming together,"
Sue Rogers

"New Zealand On Air really doesn't care about who's working on [a production] they really only care about what it feels and looks like to audiences.

"In that sense in the past, talking both film and television, New Zealand has not been a very good co-production partner because we tend to want other people to help us make our things, and we're not very good at helping them make theirs. So we're a bit of a one-way street.

So I think [*Holly's Heroes*] is quite a nice mix. It's a sort of a New Zealand and Australian story... it works both ways."

Senior New Zealand film producer Sue Rogers makes a similar point when talking about her latest feature film project for which – for the first time – she has an Australian co-producer.

"We have a project which we feel is a *natural* co-production," says Rogers.

"We're not trying to manipulate it to make it fit and I think that's probably how things work best anyway, anywhere, if you're trying to do a co-production. You're much more likely to be successful if you have a natural reason for coming together."

Rogers' project features one Australian lead character but the story is a New Zealand one.

"We'll look to shoot it in Queensland because what we're looking for in the location will be less easy to get here in New Zealand. The project has been developed here though, so it's a big ask to expect an Australian funding body to come on board. But the fact that the production will happen in Australia, with Australian crew, and with key creatives, is a positive for their industry. And it's a positive for our industry because we're telling our story."

Rogers said she naturally expected a degree of caution from each country's film funding bodies. Nevertheless, she was feeling positive about their chances of success.

"A funding body is bound to be quite cautious about whether it can make a commitment to a project that's

from another country. It's natural to be suspicious...

"However, there is a recognition that [the two countries] do have special cultural links, and there is a potential for strength for both of the industries if we can find a way of working collaboratively.

"So we're very much hoping that ours will be first out of the starting blocks to show that."

If her project is successful, Rogers believes that it will be the first official feature film co-production between Australia and New Zealand.

She said she felt the timing was auspicious.

"I do think the climate has changed. I thought it was particularly noticeable at the SPADA conference in November. My Australian co-producer and I both felt that there was a lot of goodwill to try and make those links stronger and make co-productions work between the two countries. We talked with representatives from the FFC and I think there's a willingness to try and make cooperation between the two countries work. So if historically it hasn't been positive, I think there has been a wind of change there now."

In trying to pin down reasons behind this 'wind of change', Rogers and Gibson both pointed to a greater international respect for New Zealand since the success of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. One or two of the 'old guard' in Australia had moved on too, allowing for an infusion of new people with more positive attitudes toward New Zealand, Gibson noted.



Mirror Mirror

"New Zealand's profile has obviously been raised with *Lord of the Rings*, and *Whale Rider* hot on its heels has really helped," commented Rogers.

"And I think too there's a sense in the Australian industry that more recently it hasn't made such a big impact on the international stage as it did in the past. It hasn't had the big successes."

Gibson agreed. "Yes, there's a little bit of a feeling in the film area that New Zealand is doing some things right. It helps. I personally think that this business is cyclical and we're just having a good run – but if they want to give us more brownie points than we probably deserve, that's fine."

Another reason co-productions were slightly more attractive to people is that pre-sales on film and television were increasingly hard to come by, Gibson continued.

"They are harder now than they were five to 10 years ago," he said.

"In the film area, it's tougher, just generally the market is tougher. There are a lot more big films taking up a

lot of screens so the smaller films are not getting in.

"In the television market, it's because a lot of territories are making more of their own product now rather than buying overseas product. So [there is the issue of] the rise of local production worldwide. And probably also the rise of reality programming, which is often done on formats and licenses, rather than buying completed programmes.

"I think the wheel has just come round. People are seeing the realities and advantages of co-production. It makes the money go further. You can maybe make a show that you wouldn't otherwise be able to make because you can't get enough money in your own territory.

"New Zealand is a really, really small territory, and so is Australia and if you can pick up 20 or 30 percent of the money from across the Tasman it may mean the difference between never making your show – and making it." ■



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Taika Waititi



Taika Waititi

by **Gordon Campbell**

NZ shorts success

A New Zealand short film, *Two Cars, One Night*, directed by Taika Waititi, won the Panorama Short Film Award at the Berlin Film Festival last month.

Two Cars, One Night was also picked up for screening at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival in January, and at the Toronto Film Festival later in the year. Producer is Ainsley Gardiner. (Please see the adjoining *Listener* article on Taika Waititi.)

Two other New Zealand short films were accepted for screening at the 2004 Sundance festival. They were:

- *Water*. Director Chris Graham. Producer Karl Zohrab.
- *Tiga e le Iloa*. Director Popo Lilo. Producer Lisa Schulz and Ashley Coupland-Stewart.

Congratulations to all those involved.

So you're 28, your movie is in the Sundance Film Festival ... and in a few days Robert Redford will be shaking your hand and patting you on the back. In the circumstances, a little bit of preening and bragging would be forgivable, but Taika Waititi is taking it in his stride. "People go there [to Sundance] basically to pitch any projects they've got and to make contacts, which is something that I know I'm not going to be that good at." If he could, he would take along a real salesman to network for him. "I'm just going to try to enjoy myself, get away from Wellington," he says, laughing.

In person, Waititi seems as modest and smart as the short film – it's called *Two Cars, One Night* – that got him to Sundance. In an industry rife with hustlers, he moves at his own pace on several fronts. As the writer/director of *Two Cars, One Night*, Waititi is one of our most promising film talents. As Taika Cohen, he has long been one of the country's most promising actors in theatre and film – he made it to the finals of the NZ Film Awards in 2000 for his role in *Scarifies* and also appeared in *Snakeskin*.

As half of the Humourbeasts, with Jemaine Clement, he is one of the country's best comedians – which may not be saying much – and has performed at festivals in Melbourne and Edinburgh.

In addition, Waititi is a talented painter - an exhibition of painted-on banknotes earned him some media notoriety in 2000 - a book illustrator, art photographer and musician. Not that there's any confusion, in his mind at least, about who he is. "Cohen" is the name on his birth certificate and "Waititi" is his father's surname, but his current choice of surname doesn't signal a shift in identity. "I've used both names throughout my life, for different things. 'Cohen' has always been what I've used for my acting, writing and the stuff to do with theatre ... and 'Waititi' is what I've used for my art, painting and photography. For all the visual arts stuff, as opposed to all the performing ..."

Presumably the name Cohen helps him to avoid getting typecast – enabling him to be seen more as a Maori who acts, rather than a Maori actor? "Yes. That's the problem I've had with everything I've done. I don't ever want to be seen as a Maori artist. I'd rather be an artist who just happens to be Maori."

Ironically, though, *Two Cars, One Night* is appearing in Sundance's "Native Forum" section. It's a peculiar distinction, given Redford's PC credentials. Does Waititi mind being included in this "darkies with cameras" kind of category? "I don't understand why it's there," he says with a laugh, "but I don't really care." One advantage: "Native Forum" directors, he says, are the only ones who get their fares paid to attend.

Not that he sees his film as some exotic slice of indigenous life. For those

 **Radio Waves**

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Two Cars, One Night

who missed it at last year's film festivals, *Two Cars One Night* is a sharply written, beautifully acted account of three children left to their own devices outside a pub, while their parents are inside. "That situation is universal," Waititi says, "no matter what race you are, or your socio-economic origins. Everyone has been left somewhere by an adult. The film is trying to deal with that sort of thing – the feeling of being left, coupled with being a kid trying to create your own world."

Waititi drew on his personal experience and filmed in the East Cape setting where he grew up, shooting outside the local pub. After scouring 10 schools to find his cast, Waititi finally found all three children at the same school. Rangī Ngamoki, his eight-year-old lead, won the award for "best performance in a short film" at the NZ Film Awards last month.

"It was a little bit difficult," Waititi says drily, about the shoot. "It was madness to do a first short film with kids. Madness." When he tried to tell them what he wanted, he recalls, they'd look at him like ... what on earth are you talking about? Finally, things clicked into place. For one thing, the kids were locals – so they talked the talk naturally and showed no trace of the overacting commonly seen in child performers.

At the end of the day, the elaborate storyboards that Waititi had drawn and the fully scripted dialogue proved secondary to what evolved organically. Nothing in the film was improvised. "Yet he [Rangī] seemed to naturally find his own way. He had this amazing ability to stick his own signature on the lines." Such as? Well, Waititi says, think about the moment in the film where the boy is handling a ring entrusted to him by the girl. Somehow, Rangī found just the right note of longing for the lines ... "Whee-ew, I wish I had one of these." A small miracle, typical of many.

Almost everyone who sees the film loves it. However, Waititi felt no inclination to jump straight into doing a feature film. Instead, he's working on another short film – this time it's about a band of Maori teenage soldiers in an interlude during wartime. The kids are caught in a grimly adult context, but reveal in this instance just how young they really are.

Given his success to date, is there an expectation that whatever he does next will be great, fabulous, a surefire good thing? "Yeah," he concedes, "the level of expectation has risen. Totally. And I'm totally unsure of my next move, and don't know whether I'm making the right decisions."

In the meantime, he's not suffering for his art in some lonely garret. One of the few lasting advantages of the degree in film and theatre that he did at Victoria University, he says, has been that it put him in contact with a raft of talented colleagues all roughly the same age. People such as Jo Randerson, Gentiane Lupi, Bret McKenzie of the Black Seeds, and Clement, his partner in comedy, who also belongs to the much celebrated Flight of the Conchords.

The same people form the core of the Wellington Artists Charitable Trust (aka WACT), who have managed to hang onto a shared studio and work space in the inner city.

WACT has been a supportive nest, Waititi agrees. "At times, it seems as if we have all the facets covered, you know? I get a lot of inspiration from my friends, and everyone is starting to really find themselves ..."

Fine, but it might not last. Any day, WACT could end up banished to the suburbs, to a more affordable space. The uncertainty comes with the territory. Some days Waititi is not even entirely sure that he wants to be a film-maker, primarily. "I've just started getting into fashion design," he says, apropos of nothing much. Clothes for women mainly, although he has had a lifelong ambition to make a suit for himself. It could happen.

"I've just got a sewing machine. I'm learning how to sew, how to handle the patterns. I'm still trying to figure it out, but if I get any spare time in the next few months, I'm going to sit down and teach myself how to make clothes."

It's just one more form of visual art, I suggest, given the beauty with which fabric falls. "That's right," he says excitedly. "And there's no real way to describe it, the way it comes off the shoulder. It's about making the body look good, you know? Making something that attracts the eye ..." Film or fashion ... one way or another with this guy, the hits will keep right on coming. ■

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Telecom

New

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TV commissioning editors

As a helpful reminder to our members, new and old, SPADA is printing the current list of commissioning editors at both TVNZ and TV3 with their contact details.

The TVNZ commissioners are current at the time of printing and we have been told to expect the announcement of two new appointments later this month, and in May.

TV3

Emma Watkinson
Acting Head of Entertainment
ewatkinson@tv3.co.nz

Head of Factual
Sue Woodfield
swoodfield@tv3.co.nz

Caterina De Nave (please
send hard copy only, no
email)
Head of Drama and
Comedy
CdeNave@tv3.co.nz

Renee Johansen
Production manager -
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Jude Callen
Commissioning Editor
Documentaries
(09) 916 6979
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Competitive calling rates, and production-friendly mobile calling plans, for SPADA members are a feature of SPADA's new sponsorship agreement with Telecom.

The sponsorship provides members with special rates for international and national calling. It also includes industry rates for Internet access, high-speed data and Telecom's range of remote working solutions.

To learn more about Telecom's offers for SPADA members, please see: www.telecom.co.nz/spada, or contact Blue Sky Wireless at www.blueskywireless.co.nz or 0800 444 475. ■

New possibilities

by John Boon

Until recently, the SPADA conference would have been seen as an unusual place for a telecommunications company to be.

However, the evolution of communications technology, and its increasing role in the production process, is creating new partnerships and possibilities.

Attending the conference signaled that we at Telecom recognise in the production community an abundance of opportunity to facilitate the work of New Zealand producers through technology.

The opportunity to present to, and then talk with, so many of you confirmed this, and greatly accelerated our knowledge of your industry and its specific business and technology requirements.

Thank you for your warm welcome and generosity of thought and advice.

John Boon is Telecom's Corporate Manager Finance & Business Services. ■

Telecom sponsorship

Specialist industry team operational

A dedicated team at Telecom has been established to provide producers with a single point-of-contact for communications needs.

According to Aaron Barsanti, head of Telecom's Screen Production Industry Team, Telecom recognised that the screen production industry often has unique communications needs.

"Through our *The Lord of the Rings* experience, and through working with a variety of local and international producers, we've grown to understand that your unique needs reflect the broad scope of what you do and the amazing pace at which you do it."

As a result, Telecom has launched a dedicated screen industry team and developed a business framework to meet the industry's specific needs called FilmNet.

"The team's aim is to provide a hassle-free and cost-effective access to communications technologies that can best help you complete your production," Barsanti says.

He cited the example of a recent three-month shoot in Auckland.

"The filmmaker involved was able to deal directly with our industry team to arrange telephone, mobile, internet and email services to support their production office and crew.

"We were also able to put in place a temporary agreement that allowed the filmmaker to access the communications tools required to complete the project without committing to contract terms that exceeded the length of the project, or making extra investment in software or hardware.

"The production-friendly agreement ensured the filmmaker

had access to competitive national and international calling rates on a short-term plan. At the same time, we were able to lease the technology required to provide internet and email access, reducing the cost to setup a production office.

"We also provided mobile phones on-loan for the duration of the production, with competitive calling rates built-in," Barsanti adds.

"Ultimately, the combination of Telecom's wide range of services and growing knowledge of the film industry means we're able to provide solutions that help producers' achieve extraordinary things in remarkably tight timeframes."

Barsanti says he is the first point-of-contact for screen industry inquiries. He can also help with:

- more advanced technologies such as international video conferencing for casting sessions or co-production meetings;
- high-speed data links for transferring digital or online collaboration with overseas partners;
- on-location data and internet links to studio facilities; and
- data housing and processing for file rendering.

"Standing behind me is a team of people who have the ability to work miracles at a moment's notice," he says.

Email: aaron.barsanti@telecom.co.nz

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Technical

Hanimex NZ Ltd proudly represents Fujifilm in New Zealand. The Fujifilm product range includes consumer and professional photographic film and cameras, digital cameras and printers, motion picture film, computer media, broadcast and professional video and audio tape. For more info, please contact John Bicknell on (09) 414 0984 or Mob 027 270 7206

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Sony New Zealand is a leading supplier of cutting edge technology. Contact David Colthorpe on (09) 488 6134

Kodak is a major investor in the New Zealand film industry. Internationally Kodak has won eight academy awards for quality and service. For more information about any Kodak product or service, call Peter or Grant on 0800 500 135 or 025 988 431.

Legal Advice

Members receive first 15 minutes of advice free. For larger inquiries members should seek a quote.

Buddle Findlay

- **Wellington:** call Alastair Sherriff on 04 498 7327 or 021 430 462 (employment, OSH)
- **Auckland:** call Neil Russ on 09 363 0702 or 021 750 510 (tax) or call Philip Wood on 09 357 9385 or 021 624 356 (entertainment law)

Crengle Shreves and Ratner - Call Teresa Shreves in Wellington on 04 473 6655

Sinclair Black - Call Mick Sinclair in Auckland on 09 360 9995

Karen Soich - Call Karen in Auckland on (09) 376 6382

Professional Services

Pieter Holl & Associates Limited provides specialist screen industry tax advice to individuals and companies. The first 15 minutes is free. Contact Pieter at (09) 356 2646 or pieter@phaal.co.nz

Locations

DOC

- 10% off all charges (except consents) associated with filming on Department of Conservation land.
- Ask for the SPADA discount at any Conservation office.

Travel

Budget Rent A Car

- Reservations can be made by calling our Central Reservation Office 0800 652 227, ask for the SPADA rate.
- For further information, call Louise Kelleher on 04 924 9907

The Corporate Traveller

- 2% discount on all Trans-Tasman airfares.
- 4% discount on all other international published airfares.
- Management of existing travel discounts.
- Call Sheree Barker on 04 495 9617 and tell her you are a SPADA member. sheree_barker@corptraveller.co.nz

Accommodation

Heritage Hotels

- Heritage Auckland - Deluxe suite \$130 + GST
- CityLife Auckland A Heritage Hotel - Deluxe suite \$130 + GST
- CityLife Wellington A Heritage Hotel - Studio room \$150 + GST
- Rutherford Nelson A Heritage Hotel - Executive room \$135 + GST
- Heritage Queenstown Deluxe room \$130 plus GST OR try the new luxury 3 bedroom self contained villas \$425 + GST

Rates are quoted per night and valid 1 April to 30 September 2004.

Net non commissionable. Subject to availability. Some terms and conditions apply. Call : 0800 36 88 88 and quote SPADA rate.

Rates also available upon application for: Heritage Hanmer Springs and Heritage Christchurch.

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