

First NZ film opens Sydney Festival

The New Zealand mystery drama *In My Father's Den* was chosen from 230 films to open the 2004 Sydney Film Festival on June 11.

Festival director Gayle Lake even chose the film before it had finished post-production.

Lake told the *Sydney Morning Herald* in May that she had chosen the film not because she wanted to jump on the Kiwi bandwagon after the Oscar success of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider* – but because of the film's fantastic quality.

When I saw it I just thought, 'this is it'," she told the *Herald*.

"It's blow-you-away material."

Den has also attracted high praise from Bill Gosden of the International Film Festival in New Zealand that opens in Auckland on July 9. He calls *Den* "the strongest New Zealand dramatic feature since *Once Were Warriors* and *Heavenly Creatures*."

In My Father's Den, based on the Maurice Gee novel, is the story of a prize-winning photo-journalist returning to New Zealand after the death of his estranged father, only to be implicated in the disappearance of a teenage girl. It is Brad McGann's directorial debut, and stars UK actors Matthew McFadyen and Miranda Otto. ■



In My Father's Den

Please see page 10 for an interview with *Den* producer, Trevor Haysom, who optioned the book in the early '90s and has been working on the film since then.

Inside

- 3 Film Business School a great success
- 8 An update on Maori TV
- 10 Up against the wall – Trevor Haysom on *In My Father's Den*
- 12 From cellulose to celluloid - a profile of Tim Thorpe

Editorial



Punctuated by international recognition and celebration, the last six months have given the New Zealand industry a new outlook, an international mindset and a renewed faith in our ability to make an impact on the world – *and to do it from here.*

This level of recognition has meant that opportunities are opening up for the New Zealand industry. SPADA was delighted to co-organise the Film Business School with the New Zealand Film Commission, supported (as its first initiative) by the NZ Screen Council. We believe it will prove a watershed in the development of the New Zealand industry, and it was a real coup for this country to host this prestigious school for the first time in the Southern Hemisphere.

We thought it would be interesting to talk to a few producers who took part in the very intensive Film Business School about how it had changed their thinking and approach to making films. While much of the content focussed on finance plans, the key message was that securing cast, finance and distribution were all dependent on the quality of the material, the script.

We also spoke to one of the stars of the school, LA-based ex-pat New Zealander Bob Hayward, COO of sales agency Summit Entertainment. Bob encouraged pushing the boundaries of thinking about international financing opportunities. As a result of the school, he is actively working with and encouraging several producers who took part to try to go with international money only for their projects. He has shown others how to make the best use of leveraging Film Commission and Film Fund investment.

This was the first occasion that Bob had spent time with people working on-shore in the New Zealand industry. Significantly, he gave advice on the Large Budget Grants Scheme and thought it was the right thing to do. Now he strongly recommends lowering the threshold from \$15 million to \$3-4 million to help get some New Zealand movies off the ground. He says that, as the rebate is based on what is spent here, the economy is still gaining more than the rebate gives back.

At the same time as all of this, SPADA has been very active in the policy arena and has put together the new SPADA/ Buddle Findlay seminar series. The seminars are launching on Friday, 25 June in Auckland, on contracting with funders and broadcasters. We are also designing this year's seminars as opportunities for industry networking during the year.

We have been doing a ton of policy work on your behalf, putting together film and TV policies. We responded to the Film Commission's three year strategic plan which takes into account the extra \$10 million inclusive of GST. We have also written a major policy paper on issues to do with Government support for the screen industry, in response to the Screen Funding Agency Review discussion paper released by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. Both papers are on our website: www.spada.co.nz.

A warm welcome goes to our two new staff members. Kim Baker has become a permanent employee, taking on the Membership and Information Manager position, and Penny Cantlon has replaced Catherine Juniot as the Project and Accounts Manager. The SPADA Executive is delighted to have two new members on board, Tony Manson (Greenstone Pictures) and Rhonda Kite (Kiwa Films).

We look forward to seeing many of you at the seminars.

Penelope Borland

Long-term effects of Film Business School

The impact of the hugely successful Film Business School held at Easter in Martinborough, near Wellington, will be felt and heard for years to come in the New Zealand film industry.

SPADA chief executive Penelope Borland says the residential nature of the school, the extremely high calibre of instructors, and the one-to-one focus on the small group of producers with 'live' projects meant that everybody climbed a steep learning curve.

"It was really inspiring to be there," she says.

"Because we were there night and day, we all left as friends, and there were some fantastic discussions throughout the week... The one-to-one sessions with instructors meant that people felt free to ask all the questions they'd ever wanted answers to.

"Everyone left on a high," she says.

This was the first time that the intensive five-day school has been held in the Southern Hemisphere. Begun in 1993, the course has been run twice a year in Spain by the prestigious Media Business School, with support from the European Union's Media Plus programme.

The aim of the school is to accelerate the careers of participating producers. Being project-based, it offers the chance to develop script-to-screen strategies under the guidance of experienced industry professionals working in seminars, workshops and tutorials.

Particular focus was placed on feature film financing and legal structures, with emphasis on creating a financial plan for individual projects.

Twenty-one producers took part, including two Australian producers. Several staff from the Australian Film Commission were observers.

Says Penelope: "It was richly informative, and provoked lots of great discussions during the group sessions – and then over breakfast and lunch and dinner, and then long into the night – about the myriad opportunities and ways of putting movies together, and attracting finance and distribution internationally."

Penelope says the focus on upskilling producers was very welcome, and was likely to lead to new international investment for New Zealand films.

"As someone said to me during the school, and I think this is very true, that because of the nature of filmmaking here, New Zealand is a hotbed for nurturing writer and acting talent. Writers and actors will go off and do great things in other markets, and many are now coming back, which is great.

"But producers tend to stay here, so they need to be educated on how they can build a sustainable business in *this* market. It's the producers who stick around and foster the talent. So the more experience and the more training that New Zealand can give our young producers, the better it is in the long term for everybody."

The School was organised by the NZ Film Commission, SPADA and the NZ Screen Council. Support was also provided by lawyers Simpson Grierson, film production accountants Money Penny Services, and completion guarantor Film Finances. ■



International tutors

A key aspect of the school's operation was the individual sessions with instructors.

These were led by **Hugo Lasarte**, director of the Media Business School, and Spain-based New Zealander **Margaret Nicoll**, head of the Madrid production company New Zeal, who is also a former managing director of Sogepaq, the distribution arm of Canal + Spain.

The four European producers included:

- Austrian-born **Karl Baumgartner**, whose German production company co-produced *Whale Rider*, and who distributed *An Angel at My Table* and *The Piano* in Germany. He has produced more than 20 features including two by Emir Kusterica, *Underground* (1995) and *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998) which won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival.
- Spanish-born British producer **Rosa Bosch**, who was associate producer of *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999), and who is a former co-director of the London Film Festival.
- British producer **Judy Counihan** whose seven features include *Before The Rain* (1994), the Academy Award-winning *Antonia's Line* (1995) and the Academy Award nominee *No Man's Land* (2001).
- **Bertrand Faivre**, producer of 12 international features including *Ratcatcher* (Scotland, 1999) and *Night Shift* (France, 2001).

Others tutors and speakers included:

- **Neil Peplow**, Head of Production at Civilian Content Plc (*24 Hour Party People*, *River Queen*). Before taking up this position, he produced several successful UK feature films including *Waking Ned Devine* and *Shooting Fish*.
- **Wouter Barendrecht**, an international sales agent based in Hong Kong who specializes in Asian cinema, and
- New Zealanders **Bob Hayward** of Summit Entertainment, a film financing and sales company based in Los Angeles,
- **Mark Gooder**, head of Icon Distribution in Sydney, and
- **Paul Davis**, formerly President of Marketing with Intermedia in London. ■

Make film and money

Australian producer Helen Bowden reflects on the value of the FBS

"Four weeks out, it is the exhortation from Neil Peplow that we should 'lead from the front' when financing our films that has really stayed with me.

"For him this means being right on top of the financial data for the film i.e. the projected sales figures and the rates of return to different investors. These are complex and confronting equations but they are how financiers ultimately make the decision to invest.

"As a producer I have always preferred to concentrate on promoting the creative strengths of the project. But Neil urged that as well as knowing the film and its market, you need to understand how the numbers work and be the one presenting them. Otherwise the financiers will take away your chance of making any money. The Film Business School gave me the confidence to think about making money from my film as well as making my film.

"There are now quite a lot of script workshops and some business skills courses for filmmakers but it is a rare and fabulous opportunity to be specifically coached in the financing of one project.

"The Film Business School tutors were both highly experienced and very generous. It was an absolute coup to get that particular group of people together in New Zealand and keep them there for a week.

"I learned an enormous amount about pitching, financing, co-productions and marketing, made some great new relationships with the international tutors, ate and drank delicious New Zealand food and wine, and experienced first hand the dynamism of the New Zealand film industry.

"It was a blast."

*Helen Bowden is an independent feature film producer. Originally from New Zealand, Helen has been in Sydney for 18 years. She has produced two feature films in Australia, *Soft Fruit* and *Travelling Light*. She has another feature in development, *Shiver*, an adaptation of a novel by Australian writer Nikki Gemmill, which she hopes to make a co-production with New Zealand. She can be contacted at helib@bigpond.com ■*



Crunch the numbers

An interview with emerging New Zealand producer Rachel Gardner during the FBS

“**T**here are so many options for putting a deal together. You need to have several plans, and you need to have worked through each one.

“What I’ve found with this course is that it’s helped to fill ... there are so many gaps in my knowledge that have been filled. Really, really basic things, like...a finance plan! This finance plan (*she brandishes a sheet of paper*) – I’ve never seen such a detailed one before! Just to be able to sit down with someone like Neil Peplow and dissect it... What he taught me is that the finance plan is a key tool of producers in the driving seat. It stops financiers from getting control. It keeps you in the financing mix, and hopefully [allows you to] understand the different motivations of the different investors.

“You have to have an idea of sales projections, which hopefully you will get from a sales agent if you’ve got one on board. They are completely random figures, plucked out of the air, of course, but those are the figures that bankers come on board with and that financiers look for. Banks depress those sales figures massively, so you need to make them 40 percent higher than what you need, if they’re going to get depressed by 30 percent!

“After a couple of days [at the School] I had a clearer idea of which direction we should take in terms of financing and, having made that decision, I was able to sit down with the right people and ask all my questions. It has been a great experience.

“Information sharing is so important for young producers. [It means that] you can put together a cohesive plan that is likely to work. I mean, putting a film out is one of the hardest things in the world to do, so to have that support in the financing process on putting a deal together is [enormously valuable].”

She reflects a month later:

“Bringing the Film Business School to New Zealand was possibly one of the best investments the NZFC could have made for the future of our film industry. It was an intensive week of training in the financing of feature films and without a doubt will boost the projects and careers of all the producers lucky enough to be there...”

“The fifteen tutors were major players in the international film industry – the sort of people you are lucky to get ten minutes with at a market, and here we were with their constant and undivided attention.

“The one message that came across loud and clear was that it’s all about the material. The script is the one thing you have the most control over as a producer and which is most important in securing cast and finance.

“Ensure that all the elements in the script add up and can compete with what studios are doing, and remember the package as a whole needs to make sense. Distributors need a reason to buy a product, and New Zealand films are hard to sell in some markets – even *Whale Rider* bombed in France...”

“Always think commercial, commercial, commercial. Films need to be made for the right amount of money, or not at all.

“I walked away with three very different, but all achievable, plans to finance the film I’m producing with Angela Littlejohn, which we are in the process of putting into action now. Watch this space...”

Auckland-based Rachel Gardner describes herself as an “emerging producer”. A former journalist for the BBC and The Financial Times in London, she graduated with an MSc from the London School of Economics. On her return to New Zealand, in 2002, she established artists (script writers and film directors) agency Rachel Gardner Management. She has two film projects in development, including one she is developing with Angela Littlejohn. She can be contacted at rachel@rachelgardner.co.nz ■



Rachel Gardner



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Think hard cash

An interview with LA-based Bob Hayward, COO, Summit Entertainment

“**O**’ve done some speaking engagements at the UCLA film school but this is the first on-location conference I’ve ever been to. I’m quite impressed. Film production has always been a cottage industry in New Zealand up till now, and the industry here is going through a learning curve in becoming more sophisticated and professional in what it does.

“[During my session on international film financing, with top LA-based sales agent Jeremy Barber] we talked about a lot of things that are maybe over New Zealand producers’ heads – like ‘at source gross’ etc. They are things that are probably not relevant to a lot of these people’s efforts to get their movies off the ground. But what it does is take you into the mindset of the realities of putting movies together, and how Hollywood works.

“The more producers can find out, and know and understand about the process, what can and can’t be achieved and the different options you’ve got of putting movies together with the various different players, then the more ability they will have to get different types of movies off the ground.

“They could deal with a sales agent like us, with a studio directly, with an equity player, or get financing from the Film Commission and some other subsidy money that’s available in the world through co-production agreements or whatever. But the more they understand the myriad of opportunities or permutations by which movies come together [the better].

“I’ve noticed that a lot of the projects [that the New Zealand producers are talking to us about] are movies where everybody is thinking solely in terms of putting together the money from the NZ Film Commission...soft money...

“To a couple of them I’ve said, well, why don’t you skip the subsidies, and come in and just do this directly in Los Angeles, and make the picture survive on its commercial merit? And they sort of look at you like, you know... If the

picture’s got some commercial value, it can attract equity and it can attract distribution. Or maybe they could use this soft money out of New Zealand, and with someone like us putting up an advance, it gets distribution. It opens up a new world to them.

“So, yes, [I do think] a lot of producers here think subsidy money and not enough about hard cash. The indigenous film industry is not really a commercial business like [it is] in the States. That’s not just a criticism of New Zealand, it’s the same in Australia; you’d find everybody is trying to live off a similar environment there. I think it’s tremendously valuable for them [producers] to open their eyes to how the system works outside of the umbilical cord of the New Zealand Film Commission. And that’s no disrespect to the Film Commission...

“At Summit, we mainly focus on foreign distribution. Our core business is to handle studio-level movies outside of the studio system. A producer will have, say, a deal with Warner Bros for the US-Canada rights and we’ll take the foreign rights. We’ll broker off each of the individual territories and, by doing so, we get minimum guarantees that are payable on delivery of the movie. We then take all those minimum guarantees, take it to the bank and then discount those contracts to help secure the production loan to give the producer the money to go and [make and] distribute the movie in the first place.

“That’s our primary business, that’s what pays the rent and covers the overhead. But we also have another business where we are trying to acquire, or in-house produce, three to four movies a year.

“This year we will have three movies start principal photography that we’re involved in on an ownership level. The idea is to mix it up, and not take a level of risk where we’re putting the company on the line. We can take a series of selected bets. If they don’t come in, it hurts but it doesn’t kill us, and we live to fight another day.

“The idea is that every now and then you hit the jackpot. We had [foreign rights to] *American Pie*, which was a huge windfall. So next time I want to own the US [rights] as well to the next *American Pie*!



“At the end of the day, you need those successful movies to provide the gravy to support the rest because it’s a slow haemorrhage. You know you can do six movies, lose on four, break even on one and make money on the sixth and still do well overall. It’s just the nature of the business.

This sort of thing [the FBS] is good. It’s all part of that training process to develop the next generation of producers who are sophisticated on a world level and can put movies together outside of just pure subsidy money. I think it’s important. It’s really valuable.

“**O**bviously, New Zealand has become a recognised spot for making movies, you have a lot of credibility now in terms of crew quality. Weta is recognised as one of the leading special effects places in the world. So that’s all great.

“Obviously there’s a lot of big productions coming down here. That’s not *directly* helping the indigenous movies but it is indirectly because there are a lot of sophisticated people getting trained up, there’s a spillover effect. Of course, against that, there’s a lot of crew rates going up, making them a little bit more expensive. But overall I think the positives outweigh the negatives.

“[Film] is a good industry to be bringing into New Zealand. It’s high employment, it’s exporting labour, services and location, and it’s environmentally friendly. The only thing I’d like to see happen is for the Government to lower the threshold of the \$15 million for the 12.5% rebate.

“The 12.5% rebate was a correct thing in doing and I think they’ve done it right. The only thing I would do is I would recommend a reduction in threshold from the \$15 million to \$3 - \$4 million. It would help get some New Zealand movies off the ground outside of just the Film Commission, and it would help attract some lower budget movies to New Zealand as well which is also important.

“The 12.5% you’re giving back is only based on what is really spent here, what becomes part of the tax base here, so you’re still giving back less than you gained.” ■



Bob Hayward

New Zealand-born Bob Hayward is chief operating officer of Summit Entertainment in Los Angeles. Bob graduated from Auckland University with a commerce degree before going on his OE to London. He worked for United International Pictures, which was the foreign distribution arm of Paramount, Universal and MGM/UA, and handled all the distribution to theatres outside the US. After several years, he established his own business doing international royalty audits for producers with major movies like *The Last Emperor*. In the early 1990s, he and two partners formed Summit Entertainment in Los Angeles. This company is both a sales agent, specialising in foreign rights, and a movie producer.



Maori TV doing OK

Maori Television has more than held its own since its March 28 launch, says Maori Television's Executive Producer of General Programmes Haunui Royal.

"The bottom line is, we've got to keep our viewers interested and entertained, or we've lost them", he argues.

Yes, the channel is language driven, he says – a product of its history and development. But that does not mean that it fills its broadcasts with worthy and dull language programming.

One of Maori Television's most successful programmes, he says, is *Korero Mai*, a nightly programme to help beginners make a start on learning Maori. It includes a soap opera with Maori characters and waiata to reinforce the language being taught, but is a fun programme that is working well.

"OK, it's not high drama," Royal concedes. "But we know from what we have learned from overseas experience that soap opera works well as a way of normalising the language and getting people using it every day, and that's our biggest challenge."

Other than this, however, Maori Television does not produce drama, because it is the most expensive TV to make. The channel has only limited funding, Royal says, with a cap of \$20,000 for a half-hour of programming – considerably less than the big channels generally offer.

"And some of our programmes come in well under that," he says – so much for the cliché of profligate, high-spending Maori.

Ironically, Maori Television was helped by some of the negativity surrounding the long and torturous process of Maori Television getting to air, Royal believes.

It lowered expectations so much that the good standard and technical proficiency of Maori Television's product has been a surprise to many.

However, because Maori programming was for so many years 'ghettoised' and kept well away from prime time on the mainstream channels, Maori Television now struggles with a dearth of independent producers with the experience to carry a prime time show.

"People need the discipline of working in prime time formats, budgets and expectations to develop those skills. One of our tasks now is to build up that capacity."

One of the ways Maori Television is doing that is by working with experienced Pakeha producers, and having them pass their skills on to Maori who work alongside them.

Richard Driver has long experience in producing music programmes, so his company, Visionary, is working with a largely Maori crew to produce Maori Television's weekly Friday night live music show, *Coast*. People can walk off the street in Newmarket into a live concert with top Kiwi bands – part of Maori Television's commitment to being open, accessible and part of the community.

"Lots of TV stations are like fortresses," says Royal. "We want to welcome the community in. The Newmarket Business Association came in for a tour the other day, and loved it."

Cinco Cine is one of the production houses producing for Maori Television, and producer Matai Smith says it feels exciting to be contributing to the new channel. He calls what he produces 'educainment' – programmes that both inform and entertain.

"It's not there yet, and there have been some bumps along the way, but it needs time. I think the level is pretty good, given the funding level people have to work within."

Smith produces *Pukana*, which has been showing on TV3 for six years, and is now repeated on Maori Television. Cinco Cine also makes the language programme *Korero Mai*, and has other Maori programme ideas in the pipeline, including an animated cartoon series.

"TV is a hungry beast," says Haunui Royal.

"It's all about evolving, getting good people, and learning to do it better. We won't get it right overnight, but we're moving in the right direction." ■



Government's moves on screen

In the last month, SPADA has been extremely busy preparing two major policy response submissions.

The first was for the Screen Funding Agency review. The second was for the New Zealand Film Commission Draft Strategic Plan for 2004-2007.

We provide summaries of each below.



Richard Fletcher

Screen Funding Agency Review

This paper was the first phase of a review of the government funding agencies involved in the screen production sector. It was conducted by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and released in April.

While SPADA feels the paper has highlighted real issues about Government support, we think that the options presented aren't going to improve the capability of screen funding agencies or lead to better outcomes for viewers or the development of the industry. It is unclear what the problems are that they seek to address.

One of the most important issues for SPADA that is discussed in the review is around contestable funding arrangements. SPADA feels that contestable funding arrangements have been very successful for viewers and the industry. SPADA supports the retention of existing funding arrangements and suggests the benefits of better communication amongst the agencies and with the industry, including SPADA and the screen guilds.

Other key issues include:

- The need for an appropriate mechanism to engage satellite and digital distribution services with the production of local content;
- The need to prioritize the growth of the domestic industry base;
- The combining of cultural and commercial objectives in funding structures which SPADA does not support. Wide industry and public debate around the implications of pitting commerce against culture has yet to occur; and
- The review of funding agencies' aggressive recoupment schedules and the retention of intellectual property rights for producers in their productions.

New Zealand Film Commission Draft Strategic Plan, 2004-2007

The current Film Commission strategic plan runs to June 2004. This year, the Film Commission has an additional \$10 million (including GST) in its budget. The draft plan was drawn up by Film Commission staff, taking into account Government requirements, the changing environment and the Film Commission's view of the best ways it can support New Zealand films and filmmakers.

SPADA's response to the Film Commission was devised by the SPADA film sub-committee and incorporates the views of the broader membership. However, SPADA felt it was unable to comment comprehensively on the draft plan, given the lack of detail surrounding many of the proposed initiatives.

SPADA was very supportive of the Film Commission's plans to grow and improve the relationship between the organization and the industry, and to put much more into feature film production. SPADA advocates strongly for a partnership approach to the issues facing all those working in film in New Zealand.

Other key issues include:

- The need for open and direct access to Board members and senior staff, and a responsive and effective approach to communication with the industry;
- The need to work with industry guilds to ensure the continued investment in upskilling producers, writers, directors and actors;
- The need to develop funding and equity models which offer incentives to filmmakers that enable them to benefit from the financial success of their films;
- The need for continued investment and focus on development;
- The need for continued choice over sales agency arrangements, without producers being compelled as a condition of funding to use NZ Film Sales; and
- SPADA did not support the Signature Television initiative being funded by the Film Commission.

The full documents along with other policy and submission papers can be accessed online via www.spada.co.nz. Many thanks to those members who contributed to these papers. ■



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Good things take time

By Mhairéad Connor

It is a well-established fact that, in New Zealand, most good films are a long time in the making. Finding material, finding director, waiting for script, funding material ...*long pause* ... making material, marketing material.

And in New Zealand, in most cases, you can eliminate the chance you'll have enough development money, or a company that has enough other projects going on to support you comfortably through this period.

A lack of infrastructure and minimal development money – these are some of the challenges that face the New Zealand producer.

Trevor Haysom has been considering *In My Father's Den* as a feature film since the early nineties.

Says Haysom, "You can get to a point where your back is right up against the wall and you either have to let go and pass, or go into production. A lot of projects get into that situation, I've been in that situation..."

"It's hard, it's very hard but it's not impossible," says the Aucklander who has produced short films, commercials and feature films.

In 1998, Brad McGann, a director with one short film behind him, began to write an adaptation of the Maurice Gee novel that Trevor had optioned.

On 11 June, *In My Father's Den* opened the Sydney Film Festival, the first New Zealand film ever to do so.

When asked about how he feels about the time this project has taken out of his life, Trevor replies philosophically: "That's just how long it takes. That's it, nothing you can do about it."

In My Father's Den is a film about a disillusioned war reporter who, upon returning home to Central Otago, is implicated in the disappearance of a teenage girl. It is a New Zealand/United Kingdom co-production and one of the first films to receive funding from the UK Film Council's new Cinema Fund. *In My Father's Den* is the first finished feature film to have emerged out of a concerted effort by New Zealand and United Kingdom producers to encourage co-production between the two countries.

Co-production was a natural and advantageous option for the film from an early stage.

The story's central character has returned from Europe after 17 years. Haysom says he was reluctant to put too many restrictions on McGann while he was writing the script and, once it was finished, wanted access to the acting and technical talent pool that a co-production offered.

Despite all of the advantages a co-production offers, Haysom describes looking for co-production partners as somewhat like putting a child out for adoption. With the amount of work behind the production already, this is understandable, although the metaphor bends a little when it is revealed that the ideal co-parent to this project was met at a lunch queue.

In reality, and in Trevor's defence, the lunch queue was at Cinemart in Amsterdam. For an intelligent, independent film producer, Cinemart is a great adoption shopping ground. It is an exclusive film market attached to the Rotterdam Film Festival and is dedicated to the propagation of independent art film. The lunch queues, which are apparently incredibly long, are renowned as one of the best producer networking opportunities in Europe.

The lunch queue co-production partner was Lizzie Franke, ex-director of the Edinburgh Film Festival and now with U.K production company little bird (*Bridget Jones Diary*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*). After the successful pitch, Trevor flew to England and met with little bird's Dixie Linder. The UK/NZ co-production agreement requires that the percentage of the finance contributed by the UK is matched by the percentage of UK key creatives involved.

Aside from Linder, actors Matthew McFadyen (*Spooks*), DOP Stuart Dryburgh (*The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*, *Bridget Jones' Diary*), composer Simon Boswell (*Shallow Grave*, *The War Zone*) and other key department heads came on board.

These names are fairly significant. It's important to remember that Trevor was pitching a script written by a first time feature film director. What that says about the quality of the script is



impressive. A New Zealand producer with relatively little international experience and a director with even less managed to attract a major UK co-production player, a DOP in demand all over the world, and a hot UK actor.

Trevor happily admits that, for a first time feature director, what they achieved is quite remarkable.

It was the script too, which attracted an excellent New Zealand production crew, all of whom were very happy to be working on a quality New Zealand film. Both Haysom and his co-production partner Dixie Linder have commented on both the quality and the Americanization of the New Zealand film crews. This has bonuses and downsides.

It is a mark of a developing film industry that HODs can charge (justifiably) large fees for the skill and experience that they bring to a film. It is a mark of a film industry less developed that the producer must often reduce or defer his fee in order to get the film into production. This was the case on *Den*.

At this end though, it seems that all of the balls have been juggled successfully, and it has been worthwhile. Both Bill Gosden and Gayle Lake, from the NZ Film Festival and the Sydney Film Festivals respectively, have

given the film glowing reviews. Gosden even goes as far as to say "...In *My Father's Den*, the strongest New Zealand dramatic feature since *Once Were Warriors* and *Heavenly Creatures*."

This is fantastic feedback – but with big expectations comes big pressure. New Zealand feature films have never had more attention. The massive Oscar success of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider* is hard to match.

Recent initiatives such as the SPADA/NZFC Film Business School and the Investment New Zealand outward missions to Los Angeles generated reports of serious players on the world stage of cinema showing more interest in New Zealand film than ever before.

It certainly seems as though Trevor Haysom, his talented first time director and his co-producer have made a very good film. Ironically, since the end of production, the UK tax funds have been dis-established and, with them, another funding door has been firmly closed.

This is the nature of feature film financing, and part of the reason that good films take time to make.

It is, as Trevor Haysom says, very hard. It's hard but it's not impossible. ■



A lofty ambition



Tim Thorpe

Tim Thorpe likes to grow things.

As a forester, Tim Thorpe grew trees for export sale.

In his new role as executive director of the New Zealand Screen Council, Tim aims to seek a quantum lift in the performance and profitability of our film and TV sector.

While clearly the end-goal is the same, the shift from forestry to film is still an interesting one to have made.

As Tim likes to joke, "I've gone from cellulose to celluloid.

"In fact, after forestry I worked on biotechnology briefly before ending up with screen production so you could say I went from cellulose to *cellulite* to celluloid," he laughs.

SPADA News has met Tim at the New Zealand Trade and Enterprise building in central Wellington where he has been given a desk until the Screen Council is finally established. He's been three weeks in his new job, and there's been a small glitch in setting up a Trust Deed, which has meant that he's been unable to open bank accounts, or set up an office yet.

Nevertheless he's been spending his time reading, travelling around attending various conferences and workshops (including WIFT and the Film Business School), and meeting and talking to people in the industry.

Of course, he's not unknown to film and TV folk. He has spent the past two years focusing on screen production policy at the Ministry of Economic Development (MED).

He had joined the MED 18 months earlier, after a 22-year forestry career that had seen him working on the West Coast, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, among other places. Initially, at the MED, he concentrated on forestry and wood processing when he was asked to shift sectors. First came his brief stint in biotechnology; then came screen production.

Tim was intimately involved in the Screen Production Taskforce, and the Government's response to the Taskforce. In addition, he led the policy development of the Large Budget Screen Production Grant scheme.

He agrees that, in some ways, he has made a monumental leap – from an old style, primary sector industry to a cutting edge creative industry.

"There's no doubt about it, that when you join MED to work in wood processing and forestry, and then they ask you to move on and work in other sectors, it's a huge shift," he said.

"And it's not just the technical side, it's the culture that's the big change. I feel extremely comfortable in both now, and I think when you've made that move once, it's easier to move from one sector to another.

As an example of the culture shift, he offers this: "When you attend a forestry meeting, it's hard to get people to speak up. When you attend a screen production meeting, it's hard to get people to shut up!"

He also vividly remembers his first film party. "At the end of the Taskforce, we had an 'It's a Wrap' get together. First of all, I didn't know what 'It's a Wrap' was. Secondly, when we stood around the fireplace toasting each other, we all had to say how things had gone over the last year or two. I'd never had to do something like that ... but apparently that's quite common, these 'It's a Wrap' parties. It was a new experience for me..."

In other ways, however, he says there are many parallels.

"For example, the whole exposure of the screen production sector internationally was something the forestry industry had to grapple with about 1987 when the Government dissolved the NZ Forest Service," he said.

"And it's interesting to see how the screen production sector is reacting to the enormous international success of *Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider* etc.

"Yes, film is a sexy industry unlike forestry. However, there are many people who are passionate about trees – people are passionate in any sector. It's just that in forestry, agriculture it's not quite such a media darling.

"At the core of it all, you've got the same drivers of finance, and international markets. And let's face it, there's creativity in all sectors."

Tim believes he was chosen for his new role because of his demonstrated expertise in sector development. While his first degree was in forestry, his second was in development studies. He also has a diploma in business administration.

"The skills that were being looked for were not how to make a movie per se but how to grow the sector, and that's what I've been working on, for the Ministry of Economic Development, and in other areas, for a number of years now," he points out.

"I've had reasonable experience in how to grow sectors. I've also been president and chair of various organisations so I have the leadership and networking skills, and a solid background in the private sector, as well as an understanding of the complexities of central government arrangements."

Tim says he's looking forward to getting stuck into the job.

He's keen to advance the issue of education and training with the Tertiary Education Commission. He also wants to move on the whole post-production arena, in particular, trying to better exploit the opportunities internationally of advances pioneered in New Zealand, and ensuring the benefits are drawn back here.

"Part of that is making sure we have the right sort of broadband connections, the skilled people, the software infrastructure... and it needs a lot of cooperation between the various agencies. We've already seen with *Lord of the Rings*, that you can move from making a film to – as Peter Jackson is doing right now – making digital interactive games."

Tim said that a lot of work needs to be done to attract more investment capital into screen production, and Screen Council board member, and investment banker, Bill Birnie had initiated some work in this area.

One potential source of funding was the \$300 million Venture Investment Fund which the Government has established in concert with private interests, he said. Another potential source were the trading banks, although their first question was 'where's the tax break?'

"Regarding tax breaks, it's not on the [political] agenda at the moment. The Government is not keen at all, and is trying to clamp down on residual ones already so I think there'll be some difficulty pursuing that too far. However, if something comes up we'll look at it. We have to keep in mind that there is an election next year so who knows what opportunities might arise."

The Government was keen to look at whether there were better ways of collecting information about the screen production sector.

"That process has just started. There's some real scope there to get some quite useful material – I should add, over and above what SPADA collects because that already gives a good basis."

Tim said he was also looking forward to trying to help refine the Large Budget Screen Production Grant.

"When it was announced last year, there was to be a review in 2006. But in the media release that accompanied the announcement, it said there would be discussions between Government and the Screen Council around the issue of 'bundling'.

"At the moment, a screen production or a television series that wants

to access that grant must have a minimum New Zealand spend of \$15 million. One of the options though is to bundle, say, three lots of \$5 million, or whatever the ratio might be, to achieve that \$15 million. So you could either have one production worth \$15 million or a series worth \$15 million."

Did he mean from one company?

"Well, that's the thing. How do you actually set it up?" he answered.

"This is where Government has backed off a little - 'where do you draw the line?' But there is potential to look at it again and say, 'Well, OK, if we had the right sort of parameters, maybe there are opportunities to bundle productions together, including domestic productions.' But whether it would be for one company or a series of companies – or however you do it – remains to be seen."

Tim said the Screen Council's job is to try to grow the sector, and work collaboratively across the sector. He also aims to work closely with Government, and notes that the industry needs to be careful to be seen to be positive and constructive in this quarter.

"One point that's coming back, is that ...I'm trying to find the right words ...this sector seems unable to appreciate the assistance that Government does provide.

"I know that some Ministers have really wondered what they were trying to do in helping the sector. And I do think we have to be mindful that this sector gets a huge contribution from Government vis a vis other sectors. Perhaps before expressing views about the various actions of Government to help the sector it might just ... the expression 'breathe through the mouth first' ...comes to mind."

Tim confirms that while he has an open contract, the Screen Council only has government funding for two years. After that it will need to be self-funding.

"Maybe at the end of two years there's not a role for us, and that's fine. That's not something I'm thinking about right now, though.


"Our goal is to grow the sector sustainably. Certainly, it's an up and down sector, and that won't change. But we aim to promote underlying growth ... and if we make a real difference, I'll be satisfied.

"My job now is to get out there and have a crack at things." ■

SPADA film policy



SPADA is determined to be the leading advocate for film policy and is currently developing its "Film Policy Objectives" for 2004-2005.

 Our overall objective is to advocate for an environment that supports the growth of original New Zealand production, and to continue to forge strong links with Government bodies and the industry stakeholders in order to represent our members and their interests.

In early April, SPADA held successful meetings with feature film practitioners in Auckland and Wellington. As a result of issues raised at those meetings, a questionnaire was sent to members on key issues for feature film producers.

The responses formed the basis of SPADA's input into the New Zealand Film Commission's "2004-2007 Strategic Plan" and its proposals for allocation of its increased \$10 million (incl GST) per annum funding.

Below are a few points from the summary of responses to the film policy questionnaire. You can read the full version – as well as SPADA's submission to the NZFC – at www.spada.co.nz

- The biggest issues facing businesses within the NZ film industry, with the exception of creative ideas and tax, is continuity of funds – sustaining cash flows and securing development funding.
- The biggest challenges in attracting private investment in the film industry is lack of investor knowledge, investment process and potential returns – proof of return through success stories (eg. Whale Rider) as history of NZ film profit is low.
- Most of the responses overwhelmingly thought that the Film Fund should be continued and as a separate entity from the NZFC. Some feel it should be further distanced and more industry driven; and remain an alternative funding source for larger budget films.
- It was suggested that it would be useful to re-visit existing co-production treaties for potential re-negotiating and greater flexibility.
- Many producers find it difficult to take the time off work to participate in producer training.
- The majority of responses noted producers should have more choice in selecting a sales agent and it should be openly debated. It should not be demanded as a condition of finance.
- There was a consistency in response to how the NZFC's additional \$10 million (incl GST) should be allocated. Feature film production was a clear number one, with development funding and Film Fund-type projects ranked close together for two and three.
- Many noted a need for more flexibility in decision making to provide opportunity for more innovative work. ■

Telecom sponsors film festival

Telecom New Zealand is the principal sponsor of this year's nationwide International Film Festival.

Telecom sponsorship manager Molly Nunns says Telecom's two-year commitment to the festival complements its relationship with the New Zealand screen production industry.

"As well as working with producers behind the scenes, we're helping to inspire New Zealanders through exposure to the work of the world's best," Ms Nunns says.

Kicking off in Auckland on 9 July, the festival will travel to 15 regional centres including last year's newcomers, Gisborne and Whangarei.

"The fact that the films are being screened around the country means the world of film is accessible to even more New Zealanders," she says.

More than 120 films from all corners of the earth have been hand-picked for the event, ranging from documentaries and features to animated and short films.

Organisers say martial arts film *Hero* was a box office phenomenon in China, and should draw large crowds.

But it is mountaineering film *Touching the Void* – the true survival story of two British climbers fighting for their lives in the Peruvian Andes – that is being picked as the festival highlight.

The full programme will be announced in Auckland on 15 June, and in Wellington on 17 June.

Telecom is also developing a secondary school education programme based around the film festival. ■

All current SPADA members can access a discount on tickets to the Telecom International New Zealand Film Festival. Contact kim@spada.co.nz for details.

Special calling/ mobile rates

Competitive calling rates, and production-friendly mobile calling plans, for SPADA members. These are a feature of SPADA's sponsorship agreement with Telecom.

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

If you haven't already checked out these special offers, please visit www.telecom.co.nz/spada or contact Blue Sky Wireless, phone 0800 444 475, or www.blueskywireless.co.nz ■

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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)

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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 Justin Faulke 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 Mathers on 04 495 9617 and tell her you are a SPADA member. sheree_mathers@corptraveller.co.nz

Accommodation

Heritage Hotels

- Heritage Auckland - Deluxe suite \$130 + GST
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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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