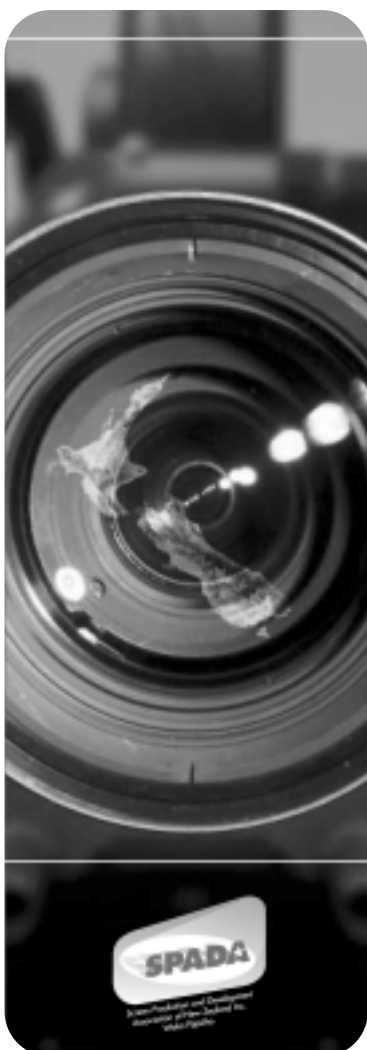


SPADA

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

SPADA NEWS

Issue 76, October 2004



Conference 2004 Seeing it in 3D

It's *Small Country, Big Picture* conference time again, so get yourself sorted. The theme is *Seeing It in 3D*, and SPADA invites everyone from the New Zealand film and television industry to come together for this special, once-a-year opportunity to listen, learn – and be inspired.

As ever, we are gathering together some fantastic international and local guest speakers. With the generous assistance of the New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and Investment New Zealand, we are delighted that US film financing wunderkind, John Sloss, and *The Station Agent*'s producers Kathryn Tucker and Mary Jane Skalski, among others, will attend.

Please turn to page 3-4 for a description of the conference's new format, and a sample of the sessions that are being planned as well as some of the other international film and television players who've agreed to speak.

Inside

- 3 Highlights of the upcoming conference
- 6 Dave Gibson on industry issues
- 8 Rise and rise of the documentary genre
- 11 Emerging filmmakers talk about training

Editorial

SPADA is working intensively on some key film and television industry issues on your behalf as we also put together the 2004 SPADA New Zealand Film and Television Conference, taking place next month in Auckland.

It's become very apparent in our discussions with networks, funders, government and investors that negotiation is a big issue for the industry. For successful and informed negotiation, producers need to exchange concrete information about means of financing, appropriate license fees and rights positions. So in October we're going to trial the first SPADA Chat Rooms. These will be open to working producer members only, and provide a vital forum to talk about the basics – and the tricky bits – in a Chatham House-rules environment over drinks and nibbles.

The interview with unstoppable SPADA President Dave Gibson (see page 6) is a snapshot view of months of negotiations SPADA has been involved with in finding a solution to the issue of appropriate license fees from networks for New Zealand On Air-supported television programmes. SPADA is now involved in discussions with TVNZ on the new territory of fully-funded Charter programmes, the first of which are providing an in-depth and long-overdue look at New Zealand's rich artistic talent.

With the conference less than two months away, we're pleased with our new format theme – *Seeing it in 3-D*. We're also really excited at the calibre of our key speakers, many of whom are North American independent producers working with new and successful business and creative models, and who will be actively looking to invest in New Zealand projects. We'll be taking a good look at what's going on with the international, large scale onshore, and



domestic parts of our industry – the issues, the synergies and the potential. Be there to get a head start on what's next for New Zealand's screen industry.

SPADA farewells Mhairéad Connor this month as she joins the New Zealand Screen Council as its new policy and communications analyst. Mhairéad has made a fantastic contribution to SPADA and to the industry in three years. While she will be missed by us at SPADA, the Screen Council will benefit from her industry knowledge, her take on key issues, commitment and contacts. Go well, Mhairéad!

See you at the SPADA conference at the Hyatt Regency from 18 to 20 November. Early Bird registrations close on 15 October. See our website www.spada.co.nz for a registration form. ■

Penelope Borland

Small Country, Big Picture

2004 conference highlights

18-20 November

The theme for the 2004 SPADA film and television conference is *Seeing it in 3-D*.

In the last few years, the New Zealand industry has experienced a rapidly changing environment, and now incorporates three main types of production:

- *Domestic production*: fully-funded television and small fully-funded feature film;
- *International production*: providing production services to international film and television projects; and finally (and most lucratively for New Zealand),
- *Large-scale domestically-generated projects*: *LOTR*, *Perfect Creature* and the rare, long-run international drama series.

These different parts of the industry rely on each other to survive but they also have some quite separate and particular requirements.

Of course, not all projects fit neatly into one camp – and some may not fit into any camp at all – but we're not trying to tell you what's what. *Small Country, Big Picture* is about the industry trying to figure things out together. This November, we would like to explore these interactions and interdependencies, and talk together and with our international guests, about how we continue to grow as a creative force in the world independent market.

Put it in your diary today: November 18-20, at the Hyatt Regency, in Auckland.

And, remember, the Early Bird registration deadline is 15 October.

The theme for this year's conference has led us to look for speakers who can both inspire delegates with stories of how they've created a new way of doing business, and those who have the prerogative to make things happen.



John Sloss

John Sloss is one such visionary. He is a founding member of Cinetic Media, a US-based consultancy that secures financing and distribution deals for films. The thinking behind Cinetic Media is that producers should not have to "reinvent the wheel" with every new international financing arrangement. John is also managing partner of Sloss Law Office, and has provided legal

advice for a plethora of indie films, including *Clerks*, *Waking Life*, *The Kid Stays in the Picture*, and *Super Size Me*.

In addition, John is a founding partner of InDigEnt (Independent Digital Entertainment). InDigEnt is inspired by Dogme 95 and filmmaker John Cassavetes, and is very strong in its commitment to exploratory digital filmmaking. InDigEnt's credits include Richard Linklater's *Tape* and Peter Hedges' *Pieces of April*.

Low-budget feature *The Station Agent* was a surprise favourite of 2003. It won awards at Sundance, and Independent Spirit as well as picking up a BAFTA for Best Original Screenplay. Producers **Kathryn Tucker** and **Mary Jane Skalski** will join us at conference to talk about the development process.



Kathryn Tucker

Kathryn Tucker works with SenArt Films, a company established in 2000 to create films that generate emotional connection with audiences. Kathryn was also associate producer of the critically acclaimed doco *Stevie*.



Mary Jane Skalski

Mary Jane Skalski is a US-based scout for Fortissimo Film Sales. Fortissimo is one of the world's leading art-house distributors, responsible for the distribution of films such as *Super Size Me*, *Coffee & Cigarettes*, *Spellbound* and Wong Kar-Wai's entire catalogue.



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Norm Bolen

Cable television continues to have a growing impact worldwide. **Norm Bolen** from Alliance Atlantis in Canada will head a session on global cable trends and how New Zealand programme makers can get on international screens. As executive VP of programming, Norm has overall programming responsibility for 12 Canadian specialty networks.

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As we examine how we can participate on a global scale while developing and supporting our domestic industry, it is useful to see how other countries approach this issue. **Brian Rosen** from the FFC in Australia will discuss the role of state funding in film and television. Brian became chief executive of the FFC in 2003. Prior to joining FFC, Brian worked in the business for more than 20 years and has extensive knowledge of financing, production and distribution.

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Also joining us this year is **Tim White** from Working Title Australia. Tim is currently involved in pre-production of Toa Fraser's script for *No. 2*, and offers an expat's view of the tripartite industry in New Zealand. Tim's credits include *Two Hands*, *Oscar & Lucinda*, *Ned Kelly* and *Map of the Human Heart*.

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Returning this year is the very popular John O'Shea memorial address. **Andrew Shaw**, head of production at Prime TV, will give the address this year. Andrew's reputation, both as an orator and as a senior member of the industry, will ensure the speech follows the precedent set by Dave Gibson at last year's conference.

.....



Andrew Shaw

At print deadline, SPADA was awaiting confirmation from **Stefan Arndt** (X Filme Creative Pool) and **Ashley Luke** (Fortissimo), and **Peter Black** (Lions Gate Films) . ■

A new format

This year, the *Small Country, Big Picture 2004* programme has been reformatted.

The three days will now cover a day each of television and film sessions, with workshops on the third. All sessions will be plenary, which means that delegates will not have to choose which ones to attend.

There will be four sessions a day, each with a running time of 90 minutes.

SPADA has decided to reduce the number of sessions and options so delegates can benefit from more in-depth discussion with the speakers. This streamlining also allows conference attendees to focus on the areas that are of most interest to them.

The film and television sessions will focus on three phases of the business, with one session on each: content creation, investment, and distribution. The last session of each day will be an "on-the-couch" slot with high-profile speakers.

On the alternate days (Thursday for the film stream, Friday for the television stream), conference delegates can attend round-tables with speakers and key industry personnel. These are non-pitching sessions, and bookings will be essential. The sessions will give film and television practitioners a rare opportunity to get face-to-face with commissioning editors from the major New Zealand television networks, film funding bodies and conference speakers.

The 2004 conference incorporates some new features. *The Insiders Guide to Small Country, Big Picture* will be hosted by incumbent SPADA President Dave Gibson. On the Friday and Saturday mornings, Dave will give a roundup of the sessions from the day before, summarising key points and highlights.

Additionally, SPADA will present the inaugural *Independent Producer of the Year Award* at the black-tie dinner, sponsored by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and complementing the SPADA/On Film Industry Champion and SPADA New Filmmaker of the Year Award.

For latest conference information on speakers and sessions, roundtable booking forms, and awards, see www.spada.co.nz ■

The animator's brain



Animation allows filmmaker Tom Reilly to explore the macabre worlds of his imagination and bring them to life on the screen.

As last year's SPADA *New Filmmaker of the Year* award winner, Tom is currently working to finish two short films using the facilities provided by the New Filmmaker prize.

The Ambassador's Brain is a claymation comedy about a chain-smoking human head in suspended animation. With the SPADA prize added to funding by the Screen Innovation Production Fund, it looks set to establish a new standard in New Zealand claymation.

Zombie Haiku is a live action drama set in post-apocalyptic Auckland. An ironic satire of the zombie genre, it will be an opportunity for Tom to showcase his skills as a director as he makes his first 'serious' foray into live action.

At the same time, Tom has been working on a TV commercial, and music videos. "I'm pretty busy," he comments.

Tom, now 26, started making stop-frame animation films in high school using a friend's family video camera. He kept it on as a hobby during the years he

spent at university, studying English literature. He travelled abroad, and spent a while playing in bands, in Ireland, and back home in Auckland.

For several years he worked as an extra on *Xena*, absorbing as much as he could of the ways the crews worked. "That was my film school," he remarks.

Inspired, he spent 10 months making his first animation short film, *Renfrew The Bold*, featuring a Nordic battle. This won him a job with Raconteur Productions in Christchurch working on a 60-part series of *Animation Station* for TV3.

While there, he completed his second animated short, *Man With Issues*, "a psychotic monologue by a character with a distorted sense of self-worth". This went on to win the 2003 Wellington Fringe Film Festival award. Then came the 2003 SPADA New Filmmaker award.

Next year he hopes to extend *Man With Issues* into his first animated feature. "There hasn't been an animated Kiwi feature since *Footrot Flats*. I intend to do something about that." He has several live action feature scripts in development too.

At the same time, he's determined to access foreign backing to add to his New Zealand funding, and has spent September in Britain courting UK production companies.

"While I'll always be talking from a New Zealand perspective, my main focus is telling stories about the human condition, about the challenges we all face: love, work, memory, sanity..."

"I'm fascinated with the complexity of human psychology and imagination. Animation has allowed me to pull some of these visions out of my mind and get them on screen."

Tom works from a studio in West Auckland where he spends his spare time roaming the hills and being a part-time father to his two-year-old son Jack. ■

SPADA New Film Maker of the Year 2004 Prize Package

(made possible by the generous support of award sponsors)

\$10,000 Park Road Post post-production services for the winner

\$2,000 Park Road Post post-production services for each runner-up

\$10,000 Panavision equipment rental for the winner

\$4,000 cash for the winner from CineFinance

\$2,500 of Kodak film stock for the winner

\$500 of Kodak film stock for each runner-up

Travel prize from Stage and Screen Travel: Two return domestic flights and two nights accommodation for the winner* and

Travel to Small Country, Big Picture 2004 for the winner and runners-up*

FREE registration to Small Country, Big Picture 2004 for finalists

*Conditions apply

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An industry update

SPADA President, Dave Gibson, talks to SPADA News about industry happenings over the last few months

“**T**he big surprise for this time of year is that normally a lot of effort is being put into the organisation of the conference – and it is – but there have been these other issues bubbling to the surface which have been very time-consuming.

“We’ve spent a lot of time recently on the question of the license fees the networks pay for New Zealand On Air-funded programmes. As you talk to me now, we’re about to have our second meeting with producers to report on where we’ve got. There is one meeting scheduled in Auckland, one in Wellington, and hopefully one in Christchurch.

“We will be reporting on what I think is quite a breakthrough, the creation of a set of guidelines. There have been a lot of problems in the last little while between NZOA and the networks about this issue. There have been a number of re-negotiations and it’s all been getting a bit messy. Things flared up quite heavily a couple of months ago where different people were taking different positions.

“I’m reasonably pleased with the way it’s turned out. SPADA has been able to help the situation genuinely for the producer. Sometimes it happens where funding bodies can get themselves into a bit of state with each other, and a producer organisation can play a useful mediating role. We can come in and go, ‘hang on a minute, we represent members and while you guys have your principles, we are trying to make shows so let’s try and work out a way that that can happen’.

“We’ve helped to create the SPADA-NZOA-Networks guidelines which will cover off the key issues [these are now on the members only section of the SPADA website]. They will be reviewed in early April next year to see how they’ve gone and then there will be an annual review.

“That’s been the big issue since I came on board mid-way through the year. Having a guideline document like that is an example of something that is good value for SPADA members. In a number of cases, people are going to get increased license fees for their programmes, and the process of negotiations will be cleaner, clearer and simpler for individual producers.

.....



Dave Gibson

“We’re now about to poll members about their views on the contracts they’ve been offered by TVNZ for fully-commissioned charter programmes.

“This is a new area of programming where TVNZ is starting to spend the Government Charter money. Rather than apply it to NZOA-funded programmes, they’ve decided to fully fund a number of programmes. For example, there are some arts documentaries being commissioned at the moment using Charter money.

“However, they are offering some contracts which include some very onerous rights clauses. We’ve had a lot of feedback from producers saying they’re not happy with it.

“We’ve had preliminary conversations with TVNZ, and they say they’re reasonably open to looking at this. So now we’re going to collect a bit more information from members, and I’m hoping we’ll have another document out within the next couple of weeks to help producers who are dealing with the networks on that.

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“There are some interesting issues as to where the Screen Council fits in comparison with SPADA right now. We are pretty clear that we are the body for producers’ rights, but I’m not 100 percent sure that the Screen Council knows what its job in life is. I may be being too hard, maybe they do know and they just haven’t communicated it to the rest of us. But I think that needs to be carefully monitored.

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“There is a bigger issue of information-sharing and networking that I think needs some attention. We need to share a bit more information with members, and members need to share a bit more information with us.

“We had this idea of instigating SPADA Chat Rooms where every now and then there’s a get-together on a casual basis in the main centres. I’m thinking of an after-work function, with no particular agenda. Everybody puts \$10 on the bar tab, and there’s just a chance to have a good chat with people.

“I think it would be a valuable opportunity to share information about what’s going on, and a good opportunity for newer producers to talk to the older hands. Issues could be things to do with contracts with the networks or funding bodies or they could be discussions about writers’ or actors’ contracts, or just the general business of being a producer.

“People want a bit more face to face. The younger producers especially enjoy listening to the more experienced producers – ‘I’m not the only poor bugger out here thinking about this stuff, and worrying about it’. “I’d definitely like to do one or two “Chat Rooms” before the conference, one each in the main centres.

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“Generally speaking, I’d like to say how pleased I am that SPADA is taken seriously as a player at the moment. Steve Maharey, for example, is coming to an executive meeting in Auckland in a few weeks. We’ve been invited to meet the board of the Film Commission. We’ve got reasonable access to the parliamentary and official level of government. These signs are good. I think SPADA is regarded as a leading advocate of the screen industry.

Thanks to Andrew Shaw

Former SPADA president Andrew Shaw resigned mid-way through the year because of a potential conflict of interest from taking on a new role as programmer for Prime TV.

The SPADA team would like to thank him for the sterling work he did on behalf of SPADA members in the time he was in the role, particularly his successful dealings with TVNZ about intellectual property and distribution rights issues. ■

“In the time we had Andrew as president, I think he did a great job. One of his key decisions was his involvement in the hiring of Penelope who has been a great success. Her political connections have been very helpful, and she’s very quick and got up to speed on knowledge of, and people in, the industry. The new SPADA staff have made a big difference. I think SPADA is in pretty good shape. Moving into town will be good – certainly good for the morale of staff, if nothing else. And hopefully it will make SPADA more accessible to members.” ■

The rise of the documentary

Once the preserve of art house cinemas and film festivals, documentaries have broken into the big time and can be seen at a multiplex near you.

The breakthrough point is generally considered to be 2002 with the remarkable financial success of Michael Moore's Oscar-winning *Bowling for Columbine*. This US\$3 million movie grossed US\$40 million worldwide, and suddenly documentaries were seen as potential money-spinners.

Since then, there have been many other fascinating, insightful and occasionally mordantly funny documentaries that have made it to the international multiplex circuit. They include *Fog of War*, *Spellbound*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Touching the Void*, *Winged Migration*, *Control Room* and, more recently, *Super Size Me* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. This latter doco has earned more than \$US100 million in the US alone.

While Sundance Film Festival has always had a strong documentary focus, this year's festival showcased 137 full-length films including 91 features and a record-setting 46 docos. And for the first time, a documentary opened Sundance. This was *Riding Giants*, Stacy Peralta's ode to surfing and the enduring hunt for the perfect wave.

Sundance founder Robert Redford was reported as saying that he and his team were bowled over by the quality and techniques of storytelling that the documentarians were using.

Bill Gosden says documentaries have always been popular with New Zealand festival audiences, since well before he joined. "I remember my very first festival guest in the early 80s was documentary maker Les Blank whose *Burden of Dreams* showed here before *Fitzcarraldo*."

He said in last year's festival, the doco *Travelling Birds* was the biggest hit, and this year *Touching the Void* was among the festival's top attractions, which has since gone on to general release.

Why documentaries and why now? There are apparently several reasons. For one thing, the public is now in the thrall of reality TV (for better or worse).

Another reason might be a change in the documentary's style – the best docos employ the narrative techniques of feature dramas.

They are driven by a compelling story, and use musical scores, crisper editing and better cinematography.

Gosden agrees. "People are using fiction techniques in telling factual stories – and vice versa. The lines are definitely blurring. And a lot of people are straddling that line...Michael Moore is a good example of someone who uses entertainment techniques to tell things his way. Audiences no longer insist on the BBC notion of impartiality."

Touching the Void is a good example of the sophisticated telling of a true story. It charts the fateful attempt of two British mountaineers to scale the treacherous west face of Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes. Director Kevin Macdonald uses dramatic reconstruction as well as one-on-one interviews to tell the separate fates of the men, one of whom breaks a leg and is left for dead high up on the mountain in storm conditions. As one local reviewer said: "This is a tenser, more heart-in-mouth ride than any fictional drama you'll have seen this year."

Another reason credited for the rise in popularity of documentaries is the paradigm shift in world politics brought on by the September 11 terrorism attacks. The subsequent 'war on terror' fought in Afghanistan and Iraq has made mainstream audiences more demanding of information they feel they can trust.

"[The world] is a much more serious place," Pat Fiske, co-head of documentary at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), told *ABC News* recently.

"There are issues of fear and safety in everyone's minds, people are starting to want more content and meaning in their lives and are more interested in what's going on in the world."

In part, too, those flocking to Michael Moore's films are registering a protest against the corporate media which, some might argue, acted as cheerleaders for the unprovoked attack on Iraq and are looking for alternatives to it.

Bill Gosden, for one, rejects this. He is sceptical of the idea that the mass media (at least in New Zealand) toes the political line decreed by the US government.

"There are numerous points of view readily available and easy to



Michael Moore

TV docos in NZ

Documentary making in New Zealand is principally a TV thing.

For the last few years, the New Zealand Film Commission has generally not funded the development of documentaries, except in rare cases.

Film Commission chief executive Ruth Harley confirmed that this was the case, and pointed to *Feathers of Peace*, *Punitive Damage* and *Kaikohe Demolition* as recent examples of docos they had helped to get made.

"If we think a documentary has theatrical potential, we'd look at it but not otherwise," she said.

Documentary-makers must turn instead to New Zealand On Air and the networks for funding. This is an issue because of the generally narrow range of documentaries that have shown on the main New Zealand channels over the past 10 years. Even TVNZ chief executive Ian Fraser told the *Listener* (1 February 2003) that too many documentaries were "at the tabloid end" in terms of the quality of their storytelling.

Such was the level of concern about the state of New Zealand

documentary making that last year NZOA sponsored a documentary symposium to look at how the industry might lift its game.

For Neil Cairns, Television Manager for New Zealand On Air, documentaries have turned the corner. Funding levels have lifted, and documentary makers were encouraged to explore more ambitious ideas and new storytelling techniques, he said.

"The level of ideas we are receiving now are several notches higher than a year or two ago," he said. "The bar has lifted and I think we can take some credit for that."

He gave the following list of documentaries currently in production as ones to look out for in the coming months:

- *Wrestling with The Angel*: a profile of author Janet Frame
- *The Kaipara Affair*: a look at the community of Tinopai on Kaipara Harbour against the backdrop of the foreshore and seabed debate
- *A Hooker's Lot*: a look at the decriminalisation of prostitution
- *Dawn Raids*: exploring a very sorry chapter in our past
- *Lifting the Makutu*: the story of an extended Maori family afflicted by a genetic disease, and the search for the gene responsible. ■

access if you're interested. There's no shortage of places where you can go for alternative sources of information."

He points to Robert Fisk, the Middle East correspondent for *The Independent*, whose coruscating column appears in many New Zealand's daily newspapers, the work of Australian crusading journalist John Pilger, and the plethora of alternative views available on the Internet.

Then again it could just be that the breakout docos are oddballs, films that exhibit a lot of personality. They offer a serious message or a unique insight into human endeavour but tickle one's fancy too.

Morgan Spurlock, a New York director of music videos and commercials,

debuted as the guinea pig in *Super Size Me*, in which he committed to eating nothing but McDonald's fare three meals a day for a month. During this junk-food-fest, Spurlock puked up a quarter-pounder with cheese, saw his cholesterol skyrocket, his liver clogged with saturated fats and his sex drive wilt. While funny, the doco clearly has a serious intent, and includes scenes of schoolkids stuffing down fries in lunchrooms, and the desperation of the clinically obese.

The question now is not if, but when, we might see a breakout Kiwi documentary at a multiplex near you. ■

Please see over for an interview with Lala Rolls, director of the documentary *Children of the Migration*, which screened at the 2004 Film Festival, and is due to screen on TV One shortly.

Children of the Migration

A local documentary that screened in the 2004 film festival was *Children of the Migration*, a celebration of the Pacific Island community in New Zealand.

Directed by Lala Rolls and produced by Michelle Turner and Chris Ellis, all of Wellington, the documentary focuses on the children of Pacific Islanders who migrated to New Zealand between the 1950s and 1980s. These now adult children look back at their parents' lives and experiences of work, community and family.

There is a rich layering of stories and the film possesses a joyful gravitas. As Bill Gosden says in the festival programme: "There's a casual formality to each interview, as though the participants approached their encounters with the filmmakers with a sense of occasion. The filmmakers have returned the compliment by posing and lighting each of them beautifully, as if for a portrait."

Lala is interested in telling the stories of the Pacific Island community because of her own experience growing up in Fiji, and arriving at Otago University in 1981 to severe culture shock.

"It was a huge cultural shift for me, and if I, a Fiji-born European, found it hard what was it like for other Pacific Islanders?" she said.

She also wanted to highlight the huge contribution that the Pacific Island community has made to New Zealand society and culture.

The documentary was very much a team effort, Lala emphasises. David Sa'ena, Vela Manusaute and Maurice Newport all helped refine the concept, and helped with research, and the finding of subjects. David and Vela also subtly guided the film's storytelling, and the whole team took part in the interviews.

Even the producing was a team effort, she said. "Michelle took care of the main body of the hands-on work and was there through production. Chris was key in the development and editing stages."

In all, they interviewed more than 40 people, including the

famous and not-so-famous, from Tana Umaga to David Sae'ena's father Lefau.

"It was actually a very Pacific Island process – often we would end up interviewing friends and relatives who had heard about what we were doing and felt it was so important that they wanted to make their own contribution," Lala recalls with a laugh.

Naturally this meant that the editing process was difficult. They amassed 52 hours of interview footage plus 10 hours of archival TV footage. Editor Owen Ferrier-Kerr spent eight weeks in the editing suite, and Lala spent a further five weeks.

"It was hell – what to leave out? Who to leave out? How to tell one whole story?"

The result is a multi-layered story that introduces new faces throughout the length of the 78-

minute film. There is much warmth and humour but an edge of hard reality too. There's the story of a young woman cast out by her family for her out-of-wedlock baby, and the adult son who breaks down at the memory of his acute embarrassment at his father's ignorance of New Zealand ways.

For the most part, though, it is a celebration.

"The quote that we end it with – 'we are not from small islands, we are from the largest ocean' – I think, nicely illustrates the key message we as documentary makers wanted to convey," says Lala.

Children of the Migration will be broadcast on TVOne at 9pm on a Saturday sometime between now and the end of October. ■



The Crew and Tana Umaga

Back Row: Chris Hiles (sound), Maurice Newport (research, camera assistant), Tana (interviewee), David Sa'ena (research/interviewer), Lala Rolls (director)
Front Row: Simon Baumfield (camera), Vela Manusaute (research/interviewer), Michelle Turner (co-producer/production manager)

Stories from the front line

Over the past few months, SPADA has worked closely with other organisations including the New Zealand Film Commission, to support, upskill and inspire our emerging filmmakers. Following the hugely successful Film Business School at Easter, classes, lectures, workshops and festival events for New Zealand filmmakers have ranged from the Arista workshops in Australia and the Accelerator programme at the Melbourne Film Festival to Kiwi filmmakers being sent to the Mauritz Binger Institute in Amsterdam. This issue we thought it would be interesting to hear from some of those who've been involved. In the next few pages, you will find some front-line stories about what some of our younger members have been up to recently.

"Stuffed" - and how the Aussies are dealing with it

by Mhairead Connor

SPAA '04, the Australian Film and Television conference took place in early August on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

More than 600 people attended, predominantly from Australia, but there was a strong international presence too. Thanks to the generosity of our Australian counterparts at SPAA, both Penelope Borland and I were part of the New Zealand contingent.

The mood of the conference was somewhat dampened by the problems facing the Australian industry. Australian films have had little impact with audiences in the last five years and local television production, particularly drama, has been steadily declining.

In his opening address, SPAA President Stephen Smith announced, rather spectacularly, that the Australian film industry was "stuffed".

He claimed one of the major impediments was the lack of money (and therefore time) available for project development. While this is not news and certainly not a problem exclusive to Australia, a positive aspect of the conference was the debate and presentation of solutions to this issue.

One of the more interesting initiatives proposed was the establishment of a Pooled Development Fund geared specifically towards producers and project development. PDF's are a pre-existing Australian tax scheme that allows several investors tax concessions in return for investments in small to medium-sized enterprises. The scheme is being spearheaded by SPAA with assistance from Australian financing company, Capital Content. (Further information is available on the SPAA website, www.spaa.org.au)

While the size of SPAA can make networking opportunities harder than our own more intimate *Small Country, Big Picture*,

one of the most enjoyable aspects is the calibre and scope of international speakers they are able to present. Two of our favourites were Jon Ploughman and Ted Hope.

Jon Ploughman is the head of comedy at BBC. He has been involved in such seminal British comedies as: *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Vicar of Dibley*, *French and Sanders*, and *The Office*. While Jon's session was predominantly about his fabulous career, one of his more interesting musings was on how good comedy was really all about being angry. This certainly makes it easier to understand why the British are so good at it.

Ted Hope is one of the founding partners of legendary New York production company Good Machine, and recently producer of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Ted's presence at SPAA was both inspiring and comforting. He made it clear that as an independent producer he shares many of the same problems as his peers everywhere. Some he mentioned were a lack of sufficient money for infrastructure and development, and having to give away back-end for production investment. Ted also talked about the importance of establishing networks with other producers, about the importance of sharing knowledge and infrastructure with your peers and how, at the end of the day, it's all about the quality of the material and the people you're working with.

SPAAMart, the premier Australasian feature film market, ran for the second time. New Zealand participants were Angela Littlejohn, Chloe Smith, Vanessa Sheldrick, Fiona Copland and Rachel Jean. The feedback from the New Zealand producers was fantastic, and all of them felt they made significant progress on their projects at the market.

Finally, as in New Zealand, some of the best parts of attending a film and television conference are the social events. The highlight of SPAA in this respect was the conference dinner, held at an infamous Gold Coast club and restaurant. The evening featured body painters, fire poi, trapeze artists and waiters in costumes that had to be seen to be believed. ■



Mhairead Connor

Survival of the fittest

by Igor de Borst

When I handed my film over for the afternoon's drama session, I wasn't nervous at all. Over the previous few weeks, the prospect of screening my film had nagged at me but not now. Maybe I'd run out of terrifying scenarios to imagine. Or maybe enduring a week of the annual Wellington Fringe Film Festival had de-sensitised me completely.

Seeing close to 150 short films over seven days is probably a form of sadism. But for those who attend the entire week's programme, it is an extraordinary experience. Films are screened one at a time, then the lights come on, and the director fields comments and criticisms from both the audience and invited industry mentors.

What makes the Fringe such a curious beast is that the programme isn't curated. Anyone can submit anything, and this is where you can experience additional drama.

There is the pain of poorly realised, unfocused and overlong work. The uncomfortable feeling when a director's labour of love is cut down by a theatre's response – or lack of it – and then is mercilessly taken apart by the mentors. Then there are the shock tacticians, directors who push the boundaries from within their own five-minute works, provoking debate all round, usually after the director's own dubious explanations.

And there are the usual clichés: guys running around with guns, kung fu, Matrix derivatives, deadly love triangles, drug deals gone awry, drug-induced reality, drug-induced camerawork... Yet somehow this is all worth it, because you never know what's next, sometimes even from within a film. There are moments of sheer originality and ingenuity and it is fantastic to see when a filmmaker exploits their resources effectively.

For a filmmaker, the whole experience is beneficial. You see what other people are doing. You see what works and what doesn't, and you learn. Admittedly there is a kind of perverse inspiration from failure. Both yours and someone else's makes you determined to do better next time.

So did this render me – a five-year Fringe veteran – impervious to pre-screening nerves? Absolutely...until the first film of my session; I don't even think I watched it. My film was next and all my concerns and insecurities came rolling back. Curse my unsympathetic generalisations about other filmmakers! This must be what it was like for the 120 or so who came before me.

"Maybe I should have re-edited? Is it too long? I'm sure it's too long..." Skipping my film through my head, I tried to second-guess what the mentors would say. They had eased into their criticism at first, patiently pointing out or passing over any flaws in people's work. But now, at the end of the week, impatience had got the better of



Igor de Borst

them. If they didn't like something, they'd let you know.

Then there it was. Suddenly an audience was watching my film, and I was watching them. Laughs in the right places have an effective way of de-emphasizing those flaws you know are there, and even after what surely felt like too-long, my apprehensions had disappeared. *'Bring it on'*, I thought. Bounding down the steps and into the spotlight, I was ready to confront my critics. But nothing came, well nothing really. A small criticism about light in a certain shot, but I already knew that.

Far then from the gladiatorial arena I'd somehow envisaged, the Fringe experience was a supportive and nurturing one. Is this how others had found it too? I hoped so, but somehow there was also a kind of disappointment. I'd wanted conflict. I'd wanted to fight for my film! So maybe next time, something contentious, something that'll get the better of them. Next time, I'll do better!

Igor de Borst is an emerging filmmaker with a handful of low-budget shorts under his belt. Here he recounts his experiences of screening his short "Envy" at the Wellington Fringe Festival. ■

Step on the Accelerator

by Florian Habicht

No, it's not an ASB savings account, Accelerator is a pilot programme run by the Melbourne Film Festival aimed at talented young Australian and New Zealand filmmakers, allowing them five days to talk to and be tutored by experienced directors, DOP's, writers and producers.

The diverse range of speakers had such strong personalities and energies that this alone was inspiring. Everyone had so much to give, and most spoke to us as fellow filmmakers rather than 'film students.'

Being in an intimate environment with these festival guests was a very different experience to sitting in a huge lecture theatre and trying to stay awake!

Through the course of the five days, it was revealed that the Accelerator participants were all very talented individuals as well. There was a very infectious, creative energy in the room, and I can't remember taking in so much information and inspiration in such a short period of time. I gained more from the intense three-hour session with Robert McGee at Accelerator than I did listening to him for 10 hours in Auckland in a university lecture theatre.

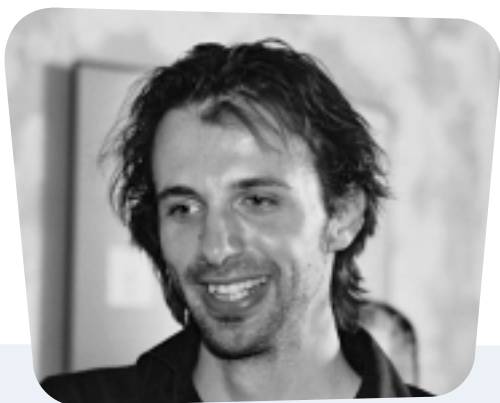
Michael Wrenn also had amazing knowledge and insights to share with everyone.

Celebrated eccentric/DOP Christopher Doyle not only gave his insights into being a DOP but also his philosophies of the film industry and life/art in general. His talk was very personal and intimate. He even bought us all drinks afterwards – what volunteer guest speaker buys alcohol for everyone else?

This level of generosity was characteristic of the Festival at all times. From taking care of lunches and dinners to bar tabs and taxi fares, the Melbourne Festival did everything to look after its guests. Nick Feik, James Hewison and Accelerator organizers Philippa Campey and Michael Wrenn, spent a lot of their time socializing and talking to us (from day time to the small hours) as well as coordinating/juggling the whole Melbourne International Film Festival. An impressive act.

As an 'emerging' filmmaker, I have often had the feeling at industry events that 'you're not important enough to talk to the 'important people'. This was never the case in Melbourne. I don't want to make this sound like Youth Camp '99 but Accelerator was truly fantastic. I urge any young filmmaker lucky enough to have the chance to attend Accelerator to take it.

Florian Habicht is an Auckland-based filmmaker whose films Woodenhead and Kaikohe Demolition have screened to much acclaim at festivals here and abroad. Florian attended Accelerator along with Taika Waititi, Ainsley Gardiner, Lisa Schultz, Gabriel Reid, Amanda Jenkins and David Ritter. ■



Florian Habicht

Learning about short film making

by VR Macbeth

The Masterclass Short Filmmaking Workshops were held in July, and presented by screenwriting tutor and script consultant Simon Van der Borgh (UK), and Kim Adelman (US), producer and writer of the book, *The Ultimate Filmmaker's Guide to Short Films – Making it BIG in Shorts*.

Beginning with a four-day workshop in Auckland, they travelled on to Wellington and Christchurch for two-day workshops at each centre.

The class content ranged from story structure through to creating a budget, and the presenters showed many short films to both instruct and inspire participants to the possibilities of making short films. Complementing the programme were speakers from the NZ Film Commission discussing The Film Fund and Creative NZ opportunities for funding.

Guest speakers in Wellington included writer/director Taika Waititi (*Two Cars, One Night*) describing the snowball effect his award-winning short film had on his burgeoning film career. Also present were writer/director Jason Stutter (*Tongan Ninja*) and Jesse Warn (*Nemesis Game*) who spoke candidly about the good and the (occasionally very) bad of the lengthy process of feature film making. A valuable aspect was that the guest speakers at each class were based in, and had concrete experience of, the film industry in that particular city.

The course appeared to be most well received by participants who had little to no film-making experience. Participants were mixed through age and gender, with several seasoned producers sitting side by side with aspiring filmmakers yet to make a film.

By focusing on structure and the emotional intensity of a film to move its audience, the presenters tried to give an accurate view of what makes a successful short film, and how that film will launch a feature film career.

Kate Kennedy of the Film Commission received positive feedback from participants and said these were close to sell-out attendances at all three centres – impressive when each class accommodated 100 people. Ms. Kennedy adds that one of the most valuable aspects for budding filmmakers was the networking opportunities the classes provided.

Although Simon Van der Borgh's '15 tips on dealing with Hollywood' that closed the programme might have been a little premature, the class was an excellent introduction and opportunity for budding film makers.

The workshops were sponsored by Fulbright New Zealand, British Council New Zealand and Montana Wines.

VR Macbeth is a young producer/director based in Wellington. She has a BA in film production from Hunter College, New York. ■

SPADA has moved

SPADA has moved its offices to larger space in a more central location in Wellington. As of early September, it has set up operations on Level 2, 170 Cuba Street, in a heritage building which houses the well-known Olive Café at ground floor level. SPADA's PO Box number, fax and telephone numbers all remain the same. ■

Exec needs you!

SPADA has been incredibly busy working for you this year – negotiating with broadcasters, and funding and government agencies, and advocating for an environment in which a robust and vital independent screen production industry can grow. We need all the help we can get.

If you have strong ideas about where the industry should be heading and the issues that SPADA should be tackling, please put yourself forward for the SPADA Executive.

The Executive meets every two months during the year, and is responsible for the governance of the organization as well as decisions on policy, funding and strategy. By being a SPADA Executive member, you can make a significant contribution.

Elections for the Executive will be held SPADA's Annual General Meeting in Auckland on Thursday 18th November. We will distribute nomination forms in October to all current financial members.

Please consider how you can make a difference and put yourself forward for election! ■

Goodbye from Mhairead

As this issue of SPADA NEWS is due out around the time of my departure, it seemed appropriate to say goodbye to you all now.

I'm leaving SPADA to work for the New Zealand Screen Council as their new policy and communications analyst.

In reality, I'm not going very far and will see most of you around the traps sooner or later. Nevertheless, leaving SPADA feels personally significant. Pre-SPADA, aside from [being involved in??] some really dodgy student films and seeing Vincent Ward in the Aro Street Video store a couple of times, my exposure to the industry had been non-existent. More than three years later, it feels like I've known some of you forever.

Working for SPADA has been a remarkable experience. After my initial shock at the pace at which the industry works subsided, my most lasting impression was – and still is – of the generosity and resilience of the New Zealand screen production industry.

SPADA members are faced with a range of challenges that would make most people hide under their beds and never come out. It is quite a unique person who can legitimately call themselves a producer. In fact, when I first joined SPADA someone told me that "you'd have to be mad to want to be a producer". After getting to know most of you over the last three years, I realise that's absolutely correct.

On the whole, you're a mad bunch – mad, passionate, generous and resilient – and it has been a very great pleasure working with all of you.

Mhairead Connor ■

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 products and services please contact, Grant Campbell, Manager Entertainment Imaging on 09 3028665 or 021 988431. e-mail: grant.campbell@kodak.com

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 9908

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@corpstraveller.co.nz

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- Heritage Auckland - Deluxe suite \$135 + GST
- CityLife Auckland A Heritage Hotel - Deluxe suite \$140 + GST
- CityLife Wellington A Heritage Hotel - Studio room \$158 + GST
- Rutherford Nelson A Heritage Hotel - Executive room \$140 + GST
- Heritage Queenstown Deluxe room \$158 plus GST OR try the new luxury 3 bedroom self contained villas \$446 + GST

Rates quoted are per night and valid at time of print.

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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