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BIG STORIES SMALL TOWNS - PART 1

From February 18 see www.bigstories.com.au

The Big Stories, Small Towns online documentary project is a true Australian first. Partly inspired by the National Film Board of Canada's Filmmaker in Residence model, Big Stories, Small Towns supports documentary makers to live in a country town to tell its stories through both the eyes of the filmmakers and through the eyes of its long-term residents.

From August to November 2008, documentary makers, Jeni Lee and Sieh Mchawala lived in Port Augusta, South Australia.

During their time in Pt Augusta, the filmmakers were drawn to themes around social and emotional wellbeing and focused on unsung heroes in the community. The resulting stories are told through a range of media – photos, video, audio and text. This mix of media range reflects the multiple modes of engagement used by the filmmakers with the community, allowing for the production of works from a wide range of perspectives.

In the background of the stories are a range of primary health care models such as Pt Augusta's Mens' Shed, the Males in Black young indigenous father's group and the indigenous flexible aged care home Wami Kata. However, it is the extraordinary people within these organisations who are the heart of this project.

An outcome of this project is the way the stories reveal what the community knows as its hidden truths. Not sensationalised tales of rural decline and dysfunction, rather, stories of a communality supporting people through life's stages, binding them together across age, race and economic fortune.

Ultimately, Big Stories, Small Towns is about extraordinary characters dedicated to caring for others and the importance of care driven and shaped by community needs.

Developed to be delivered entirely on the web (www.bigstories.com.au) the project will be launched internationally at the Adelaide Film Festival and the Australian International Documentary Conference in February 2009.

Filmmakers:
Jeni Lee
Sieh Mchawala

Producer:
Martin Potter

Online Producer:
Nick Crowther

Executive Producer
Anna Grieve



Local stories with global impact.

BIG STORIES SMALL TOWNS - PART 2

by Martin Potter



Heading north on Pt Wakefield Road I've left the boundaries of suburban Adelaide when I see the white mounds of drying salt just past the Salisbury highway.

For 6 months I've plowed this asphalt furrow. I long to hit fast forward past Globe Derby Park and Bolivar, past the St Kilda turnoff, Waterloo Corner, Virginia, Two Wells. But for 6 months they've been widening the road. So I crawl at 60 km/h, as I've done every week for the past 6 months.

Stage One of the Big Stories, Small Towns project is coming to an end. I'm travelling to help Jeni Lee and Sieh Mchawala pack up their house in Pt Augusta at the end of their filmmaking residency.

I roll through Dublin, only 50kms from Adelaide, past the roadside sculptures protesting a proposed landfill operation nearby in the late 90's. With their cheesy pop culture references - 2001: A Waste Odyssey, The Fly Who Shagged Me, Lost in Waste, their dated nod to former premier John Olsen and their grotesque forms these icons of the Adelaide Plains sustain me until I see the Loch - Eel, a monster of old tyres in the pink salt lake near Lochiel. It's a testament to regional creativity - alive and well and taking the piss.

I've avoided summer, watched the wheatfields on the road from Lochiel to Redhill grow; green; then golden. Harvesting has just finished and the stubble that remains will soon turn to dust.

From Redhill to Pt Pirie I'm stuck with Radio National and

a thrashed out CD collection. The city radio drops out. No phone reception. It's in these forty minutes or so that I hit the wall. I've tried everything - tuvan throat singing, car-obics, climate control, speeding. Driving at night I've taken long exposure photos as I drive, almost ending up in the back of a road train. Patience - watch the clock, watch the road.

From Pirie to Pt Augusta I'm on the home stretch. Harry's Shed near Port Germein offers quality quandong produce and pickled garlic which Nick Crowther, online producer of the project, has become addicted to.

The Flinders Ranges ripple out of the plains and take form in the right window. On the left, the Spencer Gulf narrows as the flat topped Baxter Ranges run interference between the Blanche Town shacks and El Alamein army base and the decaying Baxter detention centre.

The two mountain ranges come to a point in Pt Augusta.

Pt Augusta's service stops are emblazoned with blue and yellow signs "Pt Augusta: the Crossroads of Australia" - a perfect place to pass through.

The forty two or so indigenous groups that have a connection to this place have a lot of names for it - but the word Umeewarra keeps recurring.

The old mission established in 1930 was called Umeewarra, Umeewarra Media is the local indigenous radio station. I've been told Umeewarra means meeting place. It strikes a chord - a place where people connect on common ground. The crossroads sounds like a point that you sell your soul or make a decision about where to next. It's not a place to stop and look around.

Jeni and Sieh have stopped and looked around for a few months. They spent a while listening to the heartbeat of the town. At first they were a bit worried they were in some bizarre social experiment. Gradually they found their way - their natural skills as documentary makers and photographers coming to the fore and the chance to show their work back to people connecting them to the community. It wouldn't have worked if they weren't such decent people.

The people they made films with embraced them, trusted them. At the first launch of the work in progress I saw a few things - the depth of connection that Jeni and Sieh had established with the people who will be the heart of this project was one. I also saw the excitement of people seeing their own stories on screen presented in a way that will engage with a really wide audience, and most surprisingly I saw that many of these stories were unfamiliar to many of the people from Pt Augusta - places that they'd always wondered about (I wonder what goes on in there...) they could see, and then talk to in person the people in those places. They could see the amazing work that is being done in their own town and feel connected to these stories. It's been an inspiring journey so far. We all have our eyes on the February launch and we hope that we will truly be able to tell these local stories with a global impact.

SPAA FRINGE 2008

Screen Development Australia Pitch Competition

By Katherine Phelps

I have to admit that I'm dubious of public pitch competitions. Usually industry people agree to have themselves dragged onto stage once a year to be "supportive" of the conference. What is special about this competition is that when you win at the state level, you get to pitch your idea not only to the panel, but to a whole room full of producers. In some ways once you get to the national competition everyone wins, because you can still be approached by people other than ABC or SBS for production money.

This year's judges didn't pull their punches when it came to critiques after a pitch. So, it certainly wasn't an exercise for the faint of heart. On the panel were: Executive Head of Content Creation at ABC TV Courtney Gibson, Anna Mcleash Managing Director Warp Films Australia, John Godfrey Executive Producer Factual Commissioned Content SBS TV & Online, and someone who sat in Kerry O'Rourke's place and was a documentary film maker.

Part of the award for the winning pitch presenter was a place in the Holding Redlich Pitching Competition at the Brisbane SPAA conference. This puts pitchers in an awkward position. The judges clearly showed a preference for the sort of material they would commission. This is largely true of most pitch competitions. So, edgy TV series were most favoured. However, the Holding Redlich Pitching Competition favours feature films. Neither of these events are exclusive of TV and/or film, they just have their slants.

So the question pitchers have to grapple with is do they aim simply to win or to represent a cherished idea? Potentially, someone could work their way through both levels with a cherished idea. However, pitching directly to the panel's interests may be more effective. Given the panel that afternoon, I believe there was no question which pitch was going to win...and they certainly deserved it. I can also see how it lined up with the judges. Perhaps in the future people wanting to win for the opportunities it affords should be ready to pitch their idea such that it would work as a film, a TV series, and a computer game.

For those of you who did not win a place at the competition, they also had a wild card section to the event. If you were attending SPAA Fringe, you could raise your hand to pitch for a second set of prizes and acclaim. After the main event the audience seemed so intimidated that no one raised their hands until after much cajoling that a prize was on offer. In the end we had three people stand up and give it a go. Congratulations to those brave three.

Simply being at the event and able to attend sessions proved a significant prize, since it provided deep insight into television and film making. The session on the making of Spicks and Specks I found educational, since that show involves more editing and scripting than I had realised. Overall SPAA Fringe was a worthwhile learning experience.

Thank you Sarah Tooth and the MRC for the wonderful opportunity!

FILMMAKERS BOOTCAMP IS ON AGAIN AT THE MRC!

January 12th to 16th

Kids between the age of 13-16 will have fun while they write – shoot and direct their first short film. The films are to be made for kids by kids and there are plenty of opportunities for kids to get involved. It's a hands on course where kids work in groups of 5 to create, plan, execute and screen their first short film on the big screen in the Mercury Cinema. Participants will need to bring big ideas and bucket loads of enthusiasm.

Please call Carclew and book your place in the course on 8267 5111 or at the MRC on 84100979.

I CAN SEE QUEERLY NOW 6

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By Emily Brindal

Stills clockwise from top left: Come Away With Me, If the Shoe Fits, Talk Derby to Me, Couples Therapy.

A documentary, a comedy, a dark drama and an experimental dance piece... what a perfect cross-section of shorts to represent this year's Feast Festival theme – DiverseCITY.

If the Shoe Fits.

If the Shoe Fits is a gutsy move for first-time director Chris Scherer who also wrote, produced and acted in the film. In only several minutes the film takes you on a journey through many gay issues and as many emotions. Elements of colour, still images, words and dance merge together into one piece of art. Undoubtedly, as is the case with a piece of art, each time you view this film it will continue to evolve.

Talk Derby to Me.

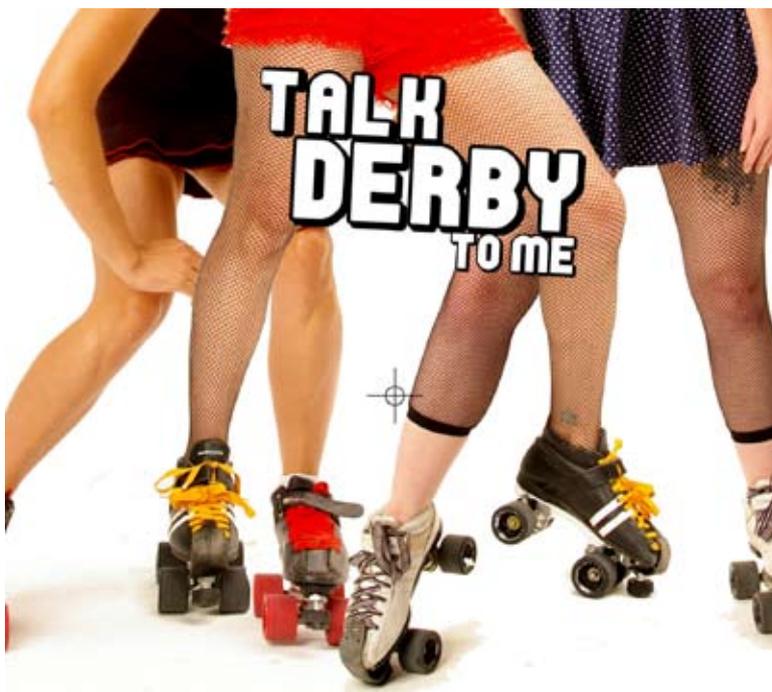
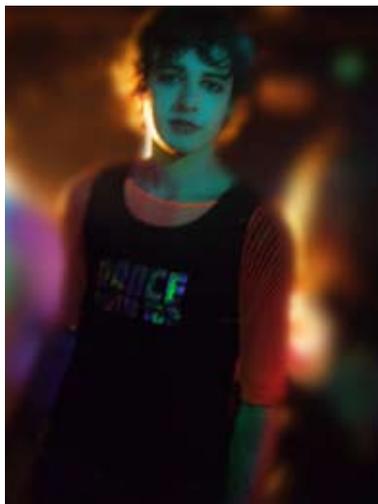
Using a back drop of competition and aggression this documentary reveals a community of close-knit (and interesting) women. It is surprising that a story about a sport full of scantily-clad women can leave such a feeling of empowerment in the audience. This is neo-feminism at its greatest. They are women and you don't need to hear them roar, you just need to get out of their way. Regardless of any interest you may or may not possess in sport, at the end of this film you are left wanting to know more about this unique niche of the Adelaide community. Excellent storytelling, great music and snazzy titles are a winning combination that does the derby sub-culture justice and will undoubtedly increase interest in this unique competition in the future.

Couples' Therapy.

Couples' Therapy is a simple comedy about two men seeking to improve their relationship through therapy. The film takes a while to warm up. The tight close-ups and thick letterboxing gives a sense of unease that seems inappropriate for its genre. At first, one could be forgiven for expecting a serious drama about couples counselling. As the pace improves the comedy elements shine through and the more technical aspects of the film are forgotten. The dialogue is cleverly written and will have you laughing out loud. The performance of the therapist is genuine and there are moments of great chemistry between the male leads. Overall, this film is a nice, short comedy that will entertain.

Come Away with Me.

Come Away with Me is a dark tale of love between two self-destructive gay men. While there is no rock 'n' roll, there is sex, drugs and self-harm. If there were a nice antonym for 'light-hearted', I would insert this word here. It is intense and unashamed in its intensity. The cinematography is beautiful and really engages the viewer in the story. It also adds tension which is at times lacking in the performances. Although overall the film is more serious than some may prefer, it achieves what it desires to – it confronts the viewer and asks them to consider the line between love and self-destruction.



SASA 2009

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Get your entries in!



Steve Callen on the set of "You Better Watch Out"

The Media Resource Centre (MRC) is calling for entries for South Australia's premier screen awards - the 2009 SA Screen Awards (SASAs).

Formerly the SA 'Short' Screen Awards - the event will retain its primary focus on short filmmaking but will now include a category for 'Best Feature' - to acknowledge and celebrate the work of South Australian creatives working in feature film.

We caught up with Steve Callen, winner of the Best Film Award in 2008 for his short film "You Better Watch Out".

How did Better Watch Out come to be made?

My background was in advertising, which, in a sense, was my film school. It was twenty years of working with the best directors, best crews, and best post houses in Australia. I wrote and made nearly 400 TV commercials for some of Australia's biggest brands and I spent all my time on set bugging people like Ray Lawrence and Kriv Stenders to find out what the main difference was between creating 'mini-stories' in advertising and creating a filmic story in features and short films. In the beginning of 2007 I decided to put what I had learned to the test.

I wasn't a big fan of short films because many seemed too obtuse, introspective and exclusive. I wanted to make a film that would get an audience jumping in their seats, laughing in the aisles and thinking on the way home. In short, just a bloody good ride for twenty minutes.

Immediately, entrepreneur and marketing guru David Minear jumped on board with a big fat cheque to make sure I didn't chicken out. This was quickly added to by another cheque from local movie producer Mike Green, and another from a group of investors in NZ who I had done some work for in recent years. We didn't approach the SAFC or the AFC for funding because we knew we were making the sort of film they don't normally fund. I don't think my style of writing or sense of humour is appreciated by funding bodies. But the SAFC were fantastic in providing us with studio space for the shoot. The majority of the budget was covered by taking

out a loan against our house. Sometimes it's easier to get forgiveness than permission.

One of the things we noticed when we first came back to live in South Australia was how all the film crews were bleeding and yet they were still being asked to cut their fees and do jobs for nothing. It was crazy. So we were determined to make a short film where every single person, except Jules and I, got paid at least award rate or whatever they needed to do a great job. Hey, we all have to eat.

Over the next few months we pulled together the A team of crew including Ernie Clark ACS, Leona Cichon, Jon Holmes, Graeme Shelton and Rob Kewley. Pete Best and Sean Timms were quick to jump on board. They were all friends and we had a long history together. Greg Apps in Sydney had cast most of Australia's best movies and a lot of our TV commercials so it was great to work with him in getting the right leads for the film. I flew to Sydney to have lunch with Chris Haywood and Dan Wyllie to show I wasn't a complete loony that would make them look bad in the film. I caught up with Stephen Curry in Melbourne for breakfast and talked to him about the role. They were fantastic people and felt a comfort knowing each of the others were involved. Ange Heesom matched the stellar leads with Caitlin MacDougall, Michael Habib, Nathan O'Keefe, and Bridget Walters. Alexis Stubbington won the role of the little girl after auditioning about fifty young girls.

We shot over two days in September in the city and at a house in Netherby. Then four days on set at the SAFC. We built the set because I wanted flyaway walls for camera movement. All went smoothly except for a camera malfunction that made us reshoot half a day of filming in the same day. All in all, we did an average of thirty set ups a day, 2 maybe 3 takes each shot, and we still finished ahead of time each day and within budget. That's why you work with the best.

We cut on set as we filmed as my editor plugged his laptop straight into the feed from the split. This gave us a head start in the edits which we did over two days in Melbourne. We then

did all the final post at Oasis. We've been working with Oasis right from their beginning days and even before when most of them were Network 8. Everything was wrapped by October 16 and we then took a month off to recuperate in Italy. We flew home in December to screen the final film to cast, crew and friends just before Christmas at the Palace Cinemas. We approached the charity group OARS (Offenders Aid & Rehabilitation Services) to see if we could help by tying our screening to their cause, since our subject matter was quite related.

Over 300 people turned up to the two screenings where many people brought presents for children to fill the sleigh in the theatre which then went to the families who had parents incarcerated at Christmas time. The after party kicked on to the wee small hours at a private function at Distill.

Why did you enter You Better Watch Out into SASSA 2008?

It was a South Australian film made by South Australians so it seemed like a good idea to enter the South Australian awards. It was important to me that all the people that worked on the film had the opportunity to see it screen in competition and to see how it would fare.

How did you feel about taking out the Best Film Award and what was the prize and how did you use it?

We were nominated for seven awards. Best Film, Best Comedy, Best Screenplay, Best Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Soundtrack and Best Production Design. I couldn't believe we won Best Film. We were up against some mighty competition, especially the AFI winner and the AFI runner up. I think we got very lucky. It was also great personally to win the Best Screenplay award as I know our script wasn't the usual short film. I won a couple of trophies, some much needed money and industry discounts/ subscriptions etc, all of which I put back into my writing by buying more supplies and attending conferences etc.

(PS. I think Ernie Clark was robbed when it came to the cinematography award. I had only ever shot on film before so HD was a new experience. Ernie made it look as good as film. Sensational DP).

What other awards has the film received since SASSA? It's been selected in over 25 film festivals now including the Oscar qualifying Palm Springs and the Foyle International Film Festival (which we had to pull out of as we couldn't afford a print). It's done better in America than most countries, which surprised me a little. Maybe the humour appeals to that Coen Bros sensibility and the blackness, which was inspired by FARGO anyway. It was wonderful to have the film screened in London thanks to the SHORTS Festival, which led to a few British Production companies writing to me to get my CV and reel etc. The international exposure has been great. In some of the festivals it has been placed in the comedy categories, the drama categories, and even the horror categories. That thrills me because I wanted the film to have different facets of appeal. And although we've received nominations for Best Film and Best Short Film in other festivals, the best awards were the audience awards like the IF Awards where our film was voted to be in the top three short films in Australia. We made the film for an audience and if they liked it, we'd done our job. Everything else is nice but irrelevant.

Entry forms and guidelines for the 2009 SA Screen Awards can be downloaded from the Media Resource Centre's website at www.mrc.org.au Forms are also available at the Media Resource Centre and Mercury Cinema (13 Morphett Street, Adelaide).

The entry deadline for the feature category was Wednesday 3 December, 2008.

The entry deadline for the short film categories is Monday 7 January, 2009.

ALL THE WAY TO 4K the Mercury's new projector

By Ryder Grindle

Were we looking the other way when the tipping point came? Suddenly "Standard Definition" had ceased to be "standard" and was "broken and old".

Suddenly everyone had an HDTV in their living room. Even people you would least expect. I visited my grandmother recently, only to hear her complain that, although her new HDTV's picture was much crisper than her old Rank Arena, she really wished she could have afforded something bigger.

Perhaps you haven't made the shift yet. Perhaps you are building a bunker for your VHS tapes. But the change has happened. There's no holding out.

The Mercury Cinema held out - but no longer. We're going right the way to 4K. What is "4K" and why have we chosen this emerging standard? Here's the short explanation:

Old TVs were "Standard Definition" and just over 0.5k. When TV arrived, Hollywood worried that the viewers would just stay at home. New cinema screen formats, such as CinemaScope were introduced to keep cinema's advantage over that increasingly ubiquitous box in the corner of people's living rooms.

The shiny new wide screen HDTV you either own now, or are about to buy, most likely supports the new standard of 1080p. This is what most people think of as high definition. In reality, it's a bit under 2K, but it is still enough to have Hollywood very scared. Let's face it, watching a movie at home on a new-era set with a surround sound home theatre system has a few advantages over lining up to see some big budget popcorn fodder along with a bunch of mannerless teenagers who won't stop talking on their cell phones or posting scene-by-scene reports of their reactions on Twitter.

This phenomenon, combined with the economic climate, is life-threatening to film distribution on celluloid. For many films, the cost of striking prints and shipping them around the world just does not make financial sense when most viewers will only ever see the film on a disc in their living room.

Things are changing, and faster than most of us expected.

Today, more and more films come to the Mercury on hard drives. Digital Cinema files have a resolution of 2K, slightly higher than that of your HDTV at home, but this is only a transitional format. All the cinemas which installed 2K systems at the behest of George Lucas in order to have the honour of screening his recent Star Wars prequels have been well stooged. 2K has only a couple of years left in it. Already some of the biggest of blockbusters are being shipped as 4K files.

A 4K picture can fit the image from your HDTV in each of its four quarters and still have pixels to spare. But, more importantly, these projectors are actual cinema projectors, like the ones we use to project 35mm film. They are not like the digital projectors used for PowerPoint displays in offices. They are bright as 35mm projectors and reproduce colour and shadow just like 35mm. When I was given a demo of this system recently, I was expecting to see an image that looked like video - really good video, but video nonetheless. What I saw was an image I would defy the majority of viewers to be able to discern from 35mm film.

But why does the Mercury need such a system?

In the past week alone, I have had to explain to three filmmakers why we can't project their film in the resolution they have finished it in. Believe it or not, the current video projector at the

Mercury can't even screen in the same resolution that the HDTV you probably have at home uses. Most of the material we screen digitally is in Standard Definition.

Ironically, the Iris cinema does support 1080 projection.

When asked to look into upgrading the digital projection system in the Mercury, my first instinct was to look into a 2K system, but I decided to speak to the local film industry before committing to any specific system. It was a good thing I did, as the industry spoke loud and clear about its need: "We're shooting on RED cameras and no one can project our films for us in the 4K resolution we're shooting in."

Further investigation revealed that, not only was a 2K system not going to be adequate for playback of films shot on the RED camera system, but 2K really didn't have long life expectancy. The next few years will see the migration from 2K to 4K as Hollywood, just as when TV first came along, wants to ensure that cinema has an advantage over the lounge room. Not only will the films be twice the resolution of home systems, but 4K also allows for playback of 3D cinema content.

For the first time since its opening, the Mercury Cinema will be a state-of-the-art facility, able to face the next fifteen years without fear of technical obsolescence.

But really, when you come and see a film projected in 4K, you'll realise the one thing that matters: it's a really good picture.

SILENT ReMASTERS ReSURGES

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By Toby Bramwell

The 2008 Adelaide Cinémathèque program ended on a high note with the popular Silent ReMasters program returning to the Mercury Cinema. With the continued generous support of APRA | AMCOS, who provided financial assistance, and Billy Hyde Music, who supplied much of the equipment used by the performers, this unique initiative from the Media Resource Centre provides South Australia's aspiring composers with the opportunity to create an original score to a classic silent film, which is then performed live to accompany the film's screening.

Two composers were selected from a competitive field of applications while a third spot was directly commissioned by the MRC. This year saw record attendances and a diverse range of musical styles ringing through the Mercury that ably complemented the diversity of the films screening over three nights.

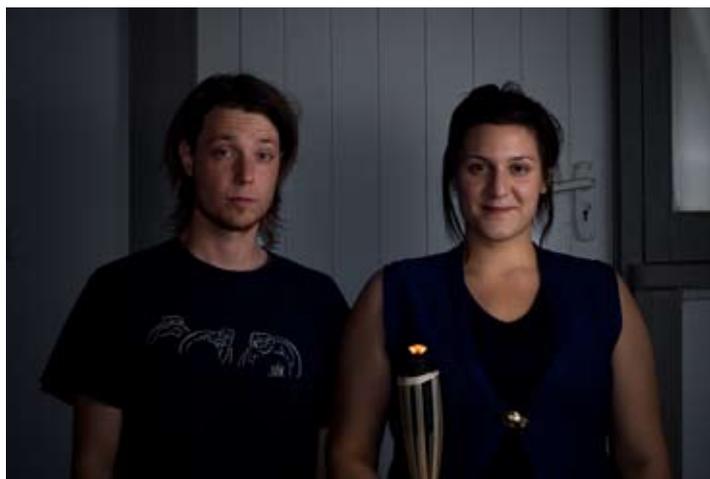
Daniel Varricchio devised a guitar driven score to accompany the German expressionistic film *Der Golem*, a telling of the Hebrew legend of a man created from clay to protect the Jews of Prague. Much like Frankenstein, this simulacrum loses control and rampages through the city. Heavy riffs evoked the leaden steps of *Der Golem*, while flourishes of Jewish folk music and violin strings played during scenes of traditional festivities.

Led by Stephen Whittington, the EMU Ensemble comprises of musicians from each discipline at the University of Adelaide Conservatorium. Combining their talents they largely improvised a free jazz soundtrack to Sergei Eisenstein's first feature film, *Strike*, incorporating keyboards, percussion, brass and even audio samples of grinding machinery and political statements to illustrate the changing fortunes of the modern labour movement. The final effect was, suitably, as avant-garde as Eisenstein's own revolutionary approach to film language.

Grand Narrative, comprising of Emily Davis and Luc Steinberg closed the program, playing to the biggest Cinémathèque audience this year. Their score to the first documentary feature ever made, *Nanook of the North*, employed clever sampling and live guitars. Much like the harsh and alien lifestyle lived by Nanook and his family, Grand Narrative delivered a score that shifted between light-hearted whimsy and the underlying threat of the unrelenting frozen landscape.

Now in it's third year, Silent ReMasters has successfully

consolidated its place as one of the highlights of the Mercury Cinema schedule. Audiences have responded enthusiastically with a continued demand for its return, even with an expanded program of performances. The possibilities are limitless and any aspiring composers are encouraged to keep a close eye out for the call for entry in 2009. Anybody who would like to find out more about the MRC's Silent ReMasters can contact the Exhibition Manager Toby Bramwell.



Above: Emily Davis & Luc Steinberg.
Right: Daniel Varricchio



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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by Gail Kovatseff

We have been very excited to hear in the last week that Screen Australia has re-committed to Raw Nerve for 2009. Raw Nerve is the foundation stone to the MRC's production initiative slate, providing an important opportunity for first time filmmakers to make their own film, following industry protocols and with the guidance of both a supervising producer and mentors.

These films can be an important leg up for practitioners, forming part of their post tertiary show reel. They can also lead to recognition of your creative capacity. No better exemplified than the recent news that the Raw Nerve Short documentary *Lessons from the Night* which will have its world premiere at Sundance. It was produced through Melbourne's Open Channel Raw Nerve program.

In the last week fortnight, the MRC has launched the films from three production initiatives: *I Can See Queerly Now*, *The Company* and the *Animation Production Initiative* films. All of these have given our member filmmakers additional opportunities to make films. With two of these, we are in partnership with other organisations extending opportunities to acting students from the *Helpmann Academy* with the *Company* and giving young gays the opportunity to tell their stories on the screen through *Feast's* partnership with us to deliver *ICSQN*. We also ran a games lab and the terrific *TradeFilm* project, encouraging emerging filmmakers to make moving image for aspiring exporters. This was an absolute success with Austrade talking to us about 2009 and some of the filmmakers continuing to work with the export companies. And from the companies end – one of them is undertaking their first trial shipment to the UK, which they believe to be the result of being able to show the buyers what they are on about through their new corporate video.

This fortnight has also seen some milestones with the *Mercury* with *Silent Remasters*, which assists contemporary musicians to write scores for silent movies for the big screen at the *Mercury*, receiving its best audiences ever with over 100 people per session, and the strongest overall scores so far. The *Hola Mexico* Film Festival sold out its opening night which included a great party. With this final success, the *Mercury* Screening Calendar has done its best ever business. This was also the year we really upgraded the *Mercury's* and *Cinematheque* calendars aesthetic to finally reflect the calibre of the program within. The *Seniors on Screen* program gave us our first regular program in the day time since the early 1990s and produced a number of great little films by over 50s to screen before the feature program. We received the best feedback I have ever seen for a project and I want to thank the entire team who worked on this.

Overall, 2008 has been a great year for the MRC most notably we undertook our biggest national project with the *Big Stories*, *Little Town* project which will be launched in February at the *AIDC* with the *AFF*. The first stage launch in *Port Augusta* was an amazing experience, with locals believing it to be the first time the real value of their community has ever been accurately represented, and I would like to thank

Jeni Lee and *Sieh Mcawala* for their great work on this. The *Austrade* discussions have a national component, which means the MRC is on the path to securing opportunities for its members with real national and, in the case of the *BSLT* project, global impact. It is also the year we secured the first money through the *SAFC's* support of the *Tropfest* initiative to give filmmakers the opportunity to make their second or third film with us, creating more of a career path and providing filmmakers with a sufficient track record to make them more viable applicants to larger short film funds through the *SAFC* and the *AFFIF*.

Through all of these projects the MRC became a much larger operation with our expenditure coming close to doubling since 2006 to around a 1.3 million annual turnover. The MRC board, led by *Joost den Hartog*, has supported and encouraged the MRC through all of this growth.

A number of our new opportunities are the result of the groundwork laid by *Martin Potter*, who will, after just over two years, leave the organisation in early 2009 to jungle pastures in Cambodia. We will miss his energy and vision very much and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him. Also leaving the MRC is *Antony Cirocco* who was a real star in the MRC's foray into filmmaker bootcamps for young people, which have become popular enough to be part of the MRC's on-going program of activities. There has been a terrific team at the MRC and *Mercury* in 2008 and I would like to thank all of them. I would like to thank all of our sponsors and funders including the *South Australian Film Corporation*, *Screen Australia*, the *South Australian Government* through *Arts SA*, the *Office for Community and Family Services*, *Austrade*, *Department of Premier and Cabinet*, *Barossa Brewing*, *James Haselgrove Wines*, *dB magazine* and others. Of these, we would particularly like to thank the *SA Government* for its provision of a \$130k grant to secure the MRC a 4k projector which will future proof our projection in the *Mercury* for a decade. I would also like to thank our publicists, *FosterHill* particularly *Skye Murtagh* who secured story after story in the media about the endeavours of the MRC and *Mercury Cinema* and graphic designer, *Amy Milhinch* who has given the MRC such a new fresh look.

2009 is going to be an impressive year. We begin the first quarter strongly with the launch of our new look, new website and new 4k project (date to be confirmed), *Tropfest* (Sunday 22 February in the Garden of Unearthly Delights), the *AIDC Fringe* (Feb 18-20), *AWG Screenwriters Fringe* (Feb 24-25) and the *SASAs*, hosted by *Jaimie Leonarder*, who I understand to have been a real hoot in 2007, (14-26 Feb), *AFF Forums* (21 Feb – 1 March) and numerous workshops. We look forward to seeing you at all of them. Don't forget to buy a *Cinematheque* pass at 2008 prices for a friend or relative for a Christmas present, this beloved screening program is a great experience and warrants the initiation of new people to its committed audience base.

NEW FILMS IN THE NEW YEAR

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by Toby Bramwell

The 2008 screening program has wrapped up at Mercury Cinema for the Christmas break having achieved record attendances and box-office sales. Highlights this year have included Adelaide premiere screenings of David Lynch's *Inland Empire*, Joy Division and Global Metal as well as the hugely popular programs for the Adelaide Festival of Arts, OzAsia Festival and Hola Mexico Film Festival.

But it won't be long before a new schedule of unique and original cinema begins again in 2009, with a diverse range of features, shorts and documentaries on offer in January. Adelaide Cinémathèque members won't have to change their routine while they wait for the popular film society to recommence in March, as there will be regular screenings running every Monday and Thursday night at 6:30pm.

The Mercury reopens with *Trans-Europa*, a season of original European cinema including several Adelaide premieres, starting with Lorna's *Silence* on January 8, the new film from the acclaimed Dardenne Brothers, whose *Palme d'Or* winning feature *The Child* also screened exclusively here. Other highlights include the genetic thriller *Jar City* from Iceland, the erotic and sexually daring drama *The Story of Richard O* starring Mathieu Amalric, *You the Living* a deadpan and bittersweet comedy gem from Sweden and Belgian film *Ben X* which explores the escapist world of internet gaming and sold out theatres at the Melbourne International Film Festival this year.

Mercury Cinema exclusives continue with two sessions of Wong Kar Wai's first English language film *My Blueberry Nights*, starting January 16, which stars Jude Law, Natalie Portman and jazz-blues singer Norah Jones. Other special events titles coming soon include the surf documentary *Bustin Down the Door* and tongue in cheek exposé of steroid abuse *Bigger, Stronger, Faster**.

Throughout February the Pan-America season showcases the diverse output from some of North America's most notable directors. Guy Maddin's fanciful ode to his hometown *My Winnipeg* is the first screening in the series, fans *The Saddest Music in the World* will be familiar with his idiosyncratic style. Outsiders and eccentrics populate many of the films in the season. High society, scandal and murder drive the story of the Baekeland family, wealthy inheritors of the Bakelite plastics fortune in Tom Kalin's *Savage Grace*, starring Julianne Moore. Infused with the Samurai codes of Akira Kurosawa's classic films, David Mamet's *Redbelt* delves into the gripping world of Mixed Martial Arts fighting. *Mister Lonely*, directed by Harmony Korine, follows a Michael Jackson impersonator working in Paris who might have found utopia with Marilyn Monroe and a commune of celebrity look-alikes.

There's plenty more planned for the Mercury Cinema over the next three months with The Best of SASA shorts and features, Flickerfest, World of Women Film Festival and *Beyond the Valley of the Spool Snatchers* (sequel to the outrageous *Invasion of the Spool Snatchers* Adelaide Fringe show) returning to our screens. For the full listing on the new Mercury Cinema screening calendar visit www.mercurycinema.org.au.



Stills from top: *Mister Lonely*, *My Winnipeg*