

A promotional image for a television series. On the right, a portrait of David Stratton, an older man with a beard, looking upwards. The background is a low-angle shot of a cinema marquee at night. The marquee has a grid of lights and the title 'DAVID STRATTON'S STORIES OF AUSTRALIAN CINEMA' in large, red, 3D block letters.

DAVID STRATTON'S STORIES OF AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

Starts Tuesday 6 June 8.30pm



iview ^{ABC}

David Stratton's **STORIES OF AUSTRALIAN CINEMA**

****David Stratton: A Cinematic Life (a feature version of this series) has been selected to screen at the 70th Cannes Film Festival which opens May 17.**

“When I started championing Australian cinema at the Sydney Film Festival I couldn’t have imagined the richness of movies that would follow,” says David. “These are the stories of the films that changed the way the world saw us and how we saw ourselves ... a story of how the films and those who made them broke through the status quo.”

Revered critic David Stratton tells the glorious story of Australian cinema, focusing in on the films that capture the nation’s true nature with candour, emotion and humour.

David is superbly qualified for this task. While he adapted to a new country and turned his passion for cinema into a profession as a film festival director and film critic, a growing band of courageous Australians turned their enthusiasm for storytelling into an extraordinary body of work.

“A nation found its identity through cinema and so did I; this is my journey through the movies that made our nation,” he says. Those movies are wildly diverse but strong themes echo throughout the body of work.



Photo credit: Mark Rogers

Screen Australia, The Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Screen NSW in association with the Adelaide Film Festival present A Stranger Than Fiction Production

- **Episode one: Game Changers (June 6)**
Filmmakers gained confidence with: the boldness of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Mad Max*; the global success of *Crocodile Dundee* and *Shine*; the flamboyance of *Strictly Ballroom*; the substance and style of *Samson & Delilah*.
- **Episode two: Outsiders (June 13)**
Australian cinema celebrates the endurance of outsiders: whether the newcomers in *They're a Weird Mob* and *Wake in Fright* or locals out of step with the mainstream in *Evil Angels*, *Muriel's Wedding* and *Priscilla*.
- **Episode three: Family (June 20)** All kinds of families are given a voice: *The Castle*'s nuclear family; the family of faith in *The Devil's Playground*; *Romper Stomper*'s neo-Nazis; the immigrants in *Head On*; and crime families like Ned Kelly's and *Animal Kingdom*'s.



Running through the whole series is an acknowledgement that Australian cinema has made a priceless contribution to a greater understanding of the impact of white colonization on Indigenous Australia – and just how wrong the actions of some governments have been. The films document the ongoing challenges and frustrations of Indigenous people but also celebrate their spirit, camaraderie and deadly sense of humour. Featured films include *Jedda* and *Walkabout*, *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *Bran Nue Dae*.

Some of Australia's movie greats help tell this story, including the actors Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Geoffrey Rush, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Sam Neill, Rachel Griffiths, Eric Bana and Jacki Weaver, and the directors Gillian Armstrong, George Miller, Fred Schepisi, Bruce Beresford, David Michôd, Rachel Perkins and Warwick Thornton.

They tell of their intentions at the time they made the films that are now part of Australia's history and culture. They also reflect on each other's work and discuss how the national cinema slate is shaped by Australia and also plays a part in shaping Australia.

David has played a pivotal role nurturing filmmakers and helping them find audiences for their films locally and internationally. Margaret Pomeranz was at his side for a lot of that time as his television co-host of 28 years, most recently on *At The Movies* on ABC.

Lovers of Australian cinema will adore this documentary series with its glimpses of the most moving moments, the most unforgettable scenes and the ones that caused us pain. The series also revisits some of those times when a line of dialogue was so repeated that it eventually entered the lexicon. 'You're terrible Muriel'.

Those who don't think of themselves as Australian film lovers will realise they absolutely are after watching *David Stratton's Stories of Australian Cinema*. Australian films matter because they tell Australia's stories. As David says at the end of the third and final episode: "Go on treat yourself: go and see an Australian film."

EPISODE ONE: GAME CHANGERS

IN BRIEF

Filmmakers gained confidence with: the boldness of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Mad Max*; the global success of *Crocodile Dundee* and *Shine*; the flamboyance of *Strictly Ballroom*; the substance and style of *Samson & Delilah*.

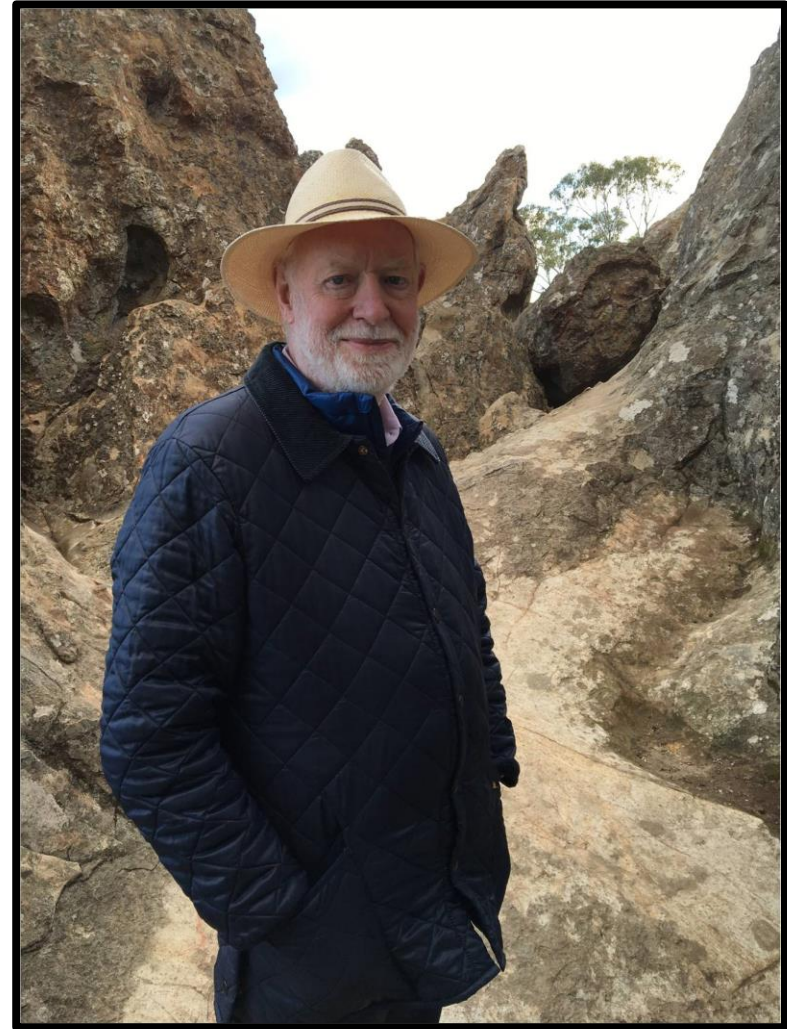
IN DETAIL

When David Stratton goes to Victoria's Hanging Rock for the first time he feels like he's been there before, so vivid is its presence in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). The arrival of the film was part of an explosion of filmmaking sparked by a government decision to fund local production. This new cash spawned many 'ocker' films but others too, including what David describes, even now, as "one of Australia's most influential films".

"(*Picnic*) was an assured foray into the arthouse genre that, until (director) Peter Weir, had eluded Australian filmmakers," he says. The mysterious story and beguiling atmosphere hooked him in – and audiences generally – and inspired a fledgling industry.

So too did *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), a very deliberate and successful attempt at appealing to mainstream America. It made Australia a go-to tourist destination, earned then television comedian Paul Hogan a Golden Globe and sold an extraordinary \$328 million worth of tickets.

"It proved that an Australian film could be as commercially successful as any Hollywood blockbuster," says David.



Mad Max (1979) revolutionized action filmmaking, kicked-off Australia's most successful returnable film brand and made a big profit. David's review of the film was one of more than 1,000 reviews he wrote for *Variety* – and the first he was paid for by the magazine. Director George Miller is pleased when he reads it all these years later because it recognises that the violence is more implied than seen. He tells David that audiences remember things that weren't actually on the screen.

Two decades after *Mad Max*, Warwick Thornton's visual storytelling style and the substance of his directorial debut *Samson & Delilah* (2009) floored everyone, including the judges at the Cannes Film Festival who awarded it the Caméra d'Or. The tough, beautiful teenage love story set in remote Australia speaks eloquently of the ongoing impact of colonization.

"The characters started dictating to me when I was writing what happens," says Warwick. "Well one of them should really die because they'd been through so much abuse, and I had these two characters Samson and Delilah going: 'We fought this hard, we fought this strong and we've, we've been through so much shit, how dare you try and kill us off, we're going to live'."

Films often say much about their makers and become turning points in their lives. The colourful, flamboyant, audacious *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) was all about rejecting tradition, just as its director Baz Luhrmann has in his impressive career. *Shine* (1996), the real-life comeback story of a musical prodigy, earned the then film unknown Geoffrey Rush a BAFTA, a Golden Globe, an Oscar and a huge career.

Interviewees for Episode 1: Sam Neill, Nicole Kidman, Bryan Brown, Geoffrey Rush, Eric Bana, Russell Crowe, Claudia Karvan, Judy Davis, Jacki Weaver, Sigrid Thornton, Anne-Louise Lambert, Michael Caton, Jack Thompson; Directors: George Miller, Gillian Armstrong, Jocelyn Moorhouse, Scott Hicks, Warwick Thornton, David Michôd, Rachel Perkins, Bruce Beresford, P.J Hogan, Screenwriter Louis Nowra, Producers: Margaret Fink, Al Clark; Cinematographer Russell Boyd, Actor/writer Leah Purcell.

EPISODE TWO: OUTSIDERS

IN BRIEF

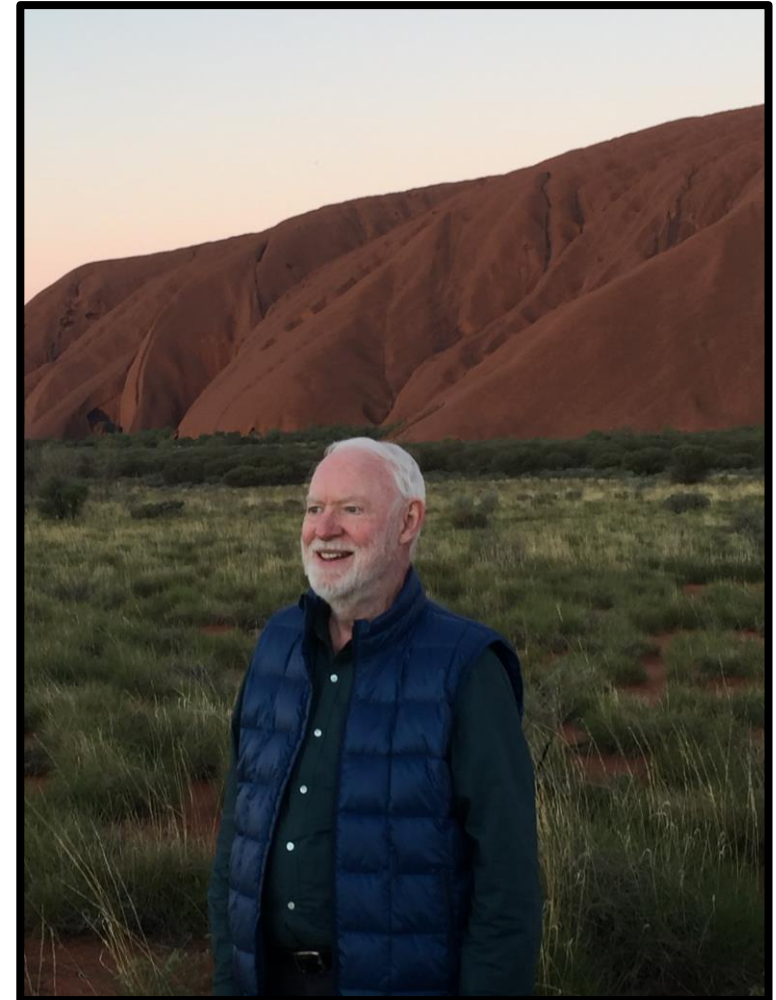
Australian cinema celebrates the endurance of outsiders: whether the newcomers in *They're a Weird Mob* and *Wake in Fright* or locals out of step with the mainstream in *Evil Angels*, *Muriel's Wedding* and '**Priscilla**'.

IN DETAIL

Stories of strangers, outsiders, people on the outer, have an enduring presence in Australian film, which was “practically dead” when David Stratton arrived.

It took *They're a Weird Mob* (1966), which dealt with the seismic shifts of immigration, to wake audiences up and make them realise they were hungry for local films. That film's main character came from abroad but others were already here: like Muriel in *Muriel's Wedding* (1994), who didn't feel she belonged until she understood “that her grotesque family and mocking peer group don't love her for who she really is”.

Lindy Chamberlain is also a local, played by Hollywood's Meryl Streep in *Evil Angels* (1988), and when she yelled “That dingo's got my baby” she was not believed. The film exposes the bigotry and intolerance that flowed from the fact that the Chamberlains were Seventh-day Adventists. It was an indictment of the public, the media and the legal system, says David, who was disappointed it didn't do well in cinemas. “Perhaps for Australians the mirror the film held up to our behaviour was too shameful and too raw to stomach,” he says.



Landscape, particularly the outback, plays a big part in Australian cinema. It added to the nightmarish atmosphere in *Wake in Fright* but was full of life and beauty in *Walkabout* (both 1971), the first film of the now renowned actor David Gulpilil. Jenny Agutter and Luc, the son of *Walkabout* director Nicholas Roeg, talk from the UK about the experience of playing two English school children lost in the desert.

The outback is also integral to the phobia smasher *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). Says star Hugo Weaving: "It's a great celebration of all sorts of things but deep down somehow speaks volumes about the big shift that was happening socially in this country." The experiences of the marginalized became mainstream in that film; suddenly Australia thought it was OK to be gay after all.

Many times film has also shown mainstream Australia how the traditional owners of the land are treated as outsiders – and also how culture has helped them survive. An example is Rachel Perkins' comedy road movie *Bran Nue Dae* (2009).

"Indigenous people in film and television have always just for many years been projected as these social problems ... and a lot of our films, you know beautiful films about us, are really depressing and ... tough," she says. "But Aboriginal life isn't all that ... Actually, being Aboriginal is a fabulous thing to be because of the humour and the camaraderie. There is a great spirit within Aboriginal people."

Interviewees for Episode 2: Hugo Weaving, Jenny Agutter, Sam Neill, Nicole Kidman, Bryan Brown, Geoffrey Rush, Russell Crowe, Jacki Weaver, Sigrid Thornton, Michael Caton, Rachel Griffiths, Jack Thompson, Claudia Karvan, Jeanie Drynan; Directors: George Miller, Fred Schepisi, Geoffrey Wright, Jocelyn Moorhouse, Greg McLean, Gillian Armstrong, Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton, David Michôd, Tony Ayres, Stephan Elliott, Ted Kotcheff; Producers: Al Clark, Sue Maslin; Writers: Andrew Bovell, Christos Tsolkias, Louis Nowra; Editor Jill Bilcock, David's brother Roger Stratton; Curator Sophie Jenson; Cinematographer Russell Boyd.

EPISODE THREE: FAMILY

IN BRIEF

All kinds of families are given a voice: *The Castle's* nuclear family; the family of faith in *The Devil's Playground*; **Romper Stomper's** neo-Nazis; the immigrants in *Head On*; and crime families like *Ned Kelly's* and *Animal Kingdom's*.

IN DETAIL

"Perhaps more than any other Australian film, *The Castle* (1997) encapsulates love in a nuclear family," says David Stratton. But when it was released he saw it as patronizing and full of caricature and gave it one and a half stars (out of five). Now he sees the affection that pervades the film and admires how Michael Caton plays Daryl Kerrigan with laconic humour. "I must admit if I reviewed *The Castle* today, I'd probably give it four stars," says David.

In *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) families were systematically torn apart against their will, exposing the shame of a nation: the creation of a "stolen generation" of children of Torres Strait and Aboriginal descent.

There's heart-breaking behind-the-scenes footage of the harrowing impact of filming the abductions; but also the joyful documentation of first-time actor Everlyn Sampi meeting screen legend David Gulpilil. "*Rabbit Proof Fence* helped galvanize momentum for an official apology that came six years later from (then Prime Minister) Kevin Rudd," says David.

Many films that fit the rich theme of family meet with David's approval: *The Devil's Playground* (1976) about a family of faith; the "brilliant" and "sophisticated" *Lantana* (2001) and its complex depictions of the realities of modern families; the emotionally intense and confronting *Head On* (1998), a window into the world of some second-generation immigrants that had not previously been seen on the big screen.



David can't stomach *Romper Stomper* (1992) and its family of neo-Nazis, however, and feared copycat violence towards Asian immigrants when it came out. "Ironically my non-score created free publicity, adding to the notoriety around the film".

David's take on what makes Australian crime films distinctive is that they're bedded in ordinary domesticity. Think *Chopper* (2000), *Animal Kingdom* (2010) and *Snowtown* (2011). "Lawbreakers are seen as part of the family unit," he says. "What makes these stories so powerful is that their underworlds feel close to home."

One of Australia's most famous real-life anti-heroes is Ned Kelly. Some flock to see his helmet; David goes to the National Film and Sound Archive to see *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), the first feature film made in the world. It "symbolizes the anti-authoritarian myth that forms a core of our (Australian) identity" and pre-dates Hollywood. David's favourite Australian film, *Newsfront* (1978), features one of two rival brothers selling out to Hollywood.

"Film projectors project so much more than stories," says David. "They beam our identity and values and ultimately our dreams."

Interviewees for Episode Three include:

Margaret Pomeranz (critic), Sam Neill, Sarah Snook, Nicole Kidman, Bryan Brown, Geoffrey Rush, Judy Davis, Eric Bana, Simon Burke, Michael Caton, Sigrid Thornton, Hugo Weaving, Russell Crowe, Jacki Weaver, Jeanie Drynan; Directors: Jocelyn Moorhouse, Warwick Thornton, Geoffrey Wright, Fred Schepisi, Gillian Armstrong, Ana Kokkinos, P.J. Hogan, Paul Cox, David Michôd, Tony Ayres, Brian Trenchard-Smit, David Elfick; Roger Stratton (David's brother), Cinematographer Mandy Walker, Writers: Louis Nowra, Christos Tsolkias, Leah Purcell, Andrew Bovell; Producer Jan Chapman; Editor Jill Bilcock.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – SALLY AITKEN – MARCH 2017

"I think of this project quite simply as a love letter to Australian cinema. There's no one better for that amorous missive than eminent critic, reviewer and film escapist David Stratton. An avid moviegoer since he was three in wartime England, seven decades on David Stratton still watches a new film every day. This is a man who lives and breathes film. So when I was first approached to do the project, I confess, the task of collaborating with such an expert about the rich canon of Australian moviemaking for the past 100+ years was daunting, to say the least. I knew this Kiwi-born director would quickly be found out.

What I swiftly came to realize is that David's appreciation of Australian movies runs deeper than knowledge. These films are emotional, personal and powerful – for all Australians. Because films can't help but reflect the place, time and people from which they've come. And in this way the project is a mirror to Australian hopes and dreams, fears and nightmares. And it's an every-changing picture.

Many people have said they find watching, emotional. I think this is time shift. There's a deep resonance revisiting movies across a kaleidoscope of decades. Because the films in this project are the iconic pictures of our collective memory, with a shifting ripple depending on one's age. *Evil Angels*, *Shine* and *The Castle* were in cinemas around the time people in their late teens and early 20s were born. The first *Mad Max* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* are now about 40 years old. Some of our most pioneering films, *The Sentimental Bloke* and *Those Who Love*, were made before any of us were born. Many people will have heard of but never seen these films; others will have intense relationships with them.

Whatever the audience's experience, we are inviting them to come with us on a great exploration of amazing film to be charmed and touched and moved. As the screenwriter Andrew Bovell says: "You want to find out who we are? Go back through our cinema".

David Stratton is the central guide of this work but it is also David as he's not been seen before. In reality the man behind the critic, behind the formal television persona, has a rather devilish sense of fun as well as an emotional vulnerability never seen before.

Here David has stepped out of the studio and is on the road, visiting such film locations as the Broken Hill of outback horror film *Wake in Fright*, which echoed through David's own experience as an uninitiated Australian, the ordinary Melbourne house that *The Castle* was filmed in and the desert where *Walkabout* and *Rabbit Proof Fence* tragedies and triumphs play out. Along the way David also meets an A-list cast of Australian directors, writers and actors (Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Geoffrey Rush, Rachel Griffiths, Eric Bana and Jacqui Weaver to name but a few) all of whom share their influences and swap behind-the-scenes anecdotes.

In short there was an embarrassment of riches to draw upon in telling the stories of Australian cinema. It's been a joy and a deep privilege to make. When interviewing all the great directors I was struck by how they are all students of the form, enthusiastic about how someone else has composed a shot or put together a scene. The audience will bring their own perspective and I can't wait to find out what their response will be.

Lastly I hope the project achieves David's goal: that watching this homage to home grown talent makes you want to sit down and watch all of the films again or for the first time and to seek out so many more."

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY

David Stratton

David Stratton was born in the UK in 1939 and educated in Britain. He migrated to Australia in 1963 and was appointed director of the Sydney Film Festival in 1966. He stayed on for 18 years, resigning in 1983.

During this period he was involved in the 1970s renaissance of Australian cinema. The festival screened the world premieres of the first short and feature work of several key directors including Peter Weir, Phillip Noyce, Fred Schepisi, Gillian Armstrong, Paul Cox, George Miller and others. His first book, *The Last New Wave*, about new Australian cinema, was published in 1980.

Also in 1980, David became feature film consultant to Australia's SBS, the then newly-established multi-cultural television network. There he selected and introduced on-air contemporary international feature films and cinema classics programs.

In 1986 he and Margaret Pomeranz started reviewing each week's new movies – mainstream and arthouse – on a new television program, *The Movie Show*. It also included interviews with filmmakers and actors. An instant success, it was broadcast in prime time. In 2004, the pair were invited to move from SBS to ABC TV. *The Movie Show* and *At the Movies* together had a record 28-year run, with the final broadcast in December 2014.

David has also worked as a film critic for *The Australian* from 1988 until the present, and for a range of other titles. Since 1983 he has reviewed films for the US-based trade newspaper *Variety*. He resigned in 2003.

A second book, *The Avocado Plantation*, about Australian cinema in the 1980s, was published in 1990 and David's autobiography, *I Peed on Fellini*, in 2008. He has been working on a book about the Australian films made since 1990. A publisher is not yet signed.

During his career David has: attended many international film festivals; served as a member of the international jury in Berlin (1982), Montreal (1982) and Venice (1994); chaired FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) juries in Cannes and Venice; and served on juries in Chicago, Hawaii, Karlovy Vary and Adelaide.

David has lectured on film history as part of the Continuing Education program at the University of Sydney since 1990.

David is a recipient of the Raymond Longford Award for services to Australian cinema, awarded by the Australian Film Institute, and the Charles Chauvel Award from the Brisbane International Film Festival. In the 2015 Australia Day Honours he was presented the award of Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia. He is an Honorary Doctor of Letters (University of Sydney and Macquarie University) and a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters (France).

CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Sally Aitken, writer/director

Sally Aitken is a show runner, director and writer with a 15-year track record making all genres of shows for broadcasters around the world. She says two programs most prepared her for this deep dig down into Australian cinema. *The Week the Women Went* is an ambitious eight-part social experiment that documented modern-day gender politics in Canada by removing all the women in an ordinary small town, leaving the men and children in charge for a week. *The Great Australian Race Riot* is a three-part examination of the violence that has bubbled up in modern multicultural Australia and the aftermath. Both required her to come to grips with very big subjects. "But I don't think anything prepares you for the layers of bureaucracy when sourcing footage from major US studios." Her most recent work for Australian television includes: *Streets of Your Town*, which unpacked Modernism and McMansionism in housing design; *Australia's Secret Heroes: Vietnam*, a first-hand reflection by both Australian and Vietnamese veterans in the context of a politically turbulent decade; and *Getting Frank Gehry*, about the famous architect.

Jo-anne McGowan, producer

How appropriate: Jo-anne's most recent producer credit was on *Between a Frock and a Hard Place*, a documentary that looked well beyond the history of the beloved Australian film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of The Desert* to the society from which it grew. She has made a range of documentaries on the creative industries and their connection to society and culture including: both series of *Art + Soul* (with Bridget Ikin), a compelling look at Indigenous art; an animated interstitial documentary series on how family heirlooms encapsulate memory; and, rather longer ago, *Barry Humphries' Flashbacks*. She produced *Troubled Waters*, about Australia's role in East Timor, and *Kabbarli*, about Daisy Bates. Like *A Cinematic Life*, (a feature length of this series), the latter was commissioned for the Adelaide Film Festival. Jo-anne has been a commissioner herself – at SBS – and a development executive at ABC-TV. She has also served as head of producing at the institution where she studied filmmaking, the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

Jennifer Peedom, producer

David Stratton's Stories of Australian Cinema includes a lot of interviews with some of the country's best known Australian directors, and in the last few years Jennifer Peedom has become exactly that, albeit with a focus on documentary. *Sherpa*, the feature documentary set on Mt Everest that she wrote and directed, received a slew of prizes and acknowledgements across the world, including the Grierson Award at the London Film Festival and a BAFTA nomination in 2016. It was released theatrically in the US and the UK, and is the third highest grossing Australian documentary in cinema history. Jen's style is to make gripping, intimate portraits of people in extreme circumstances. Her other credits include the series *Life at 7*, *Solo*, *Living The End* and *Miracle On Everest*. *Solo* was in Official Selection in several major documentary festivals including IDFA and Sheffield and won numerous awards. In 2010 she was the inaugural recipient of the David & Joan Williams Documentary Fellowship which recognizes and rewards creative ambition, intellectual rigour and innovation in documentary cinema. She is currently in production on the theatrical feature documentary *Mountain*, a cinematic and musical collaboration that involves the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and is also in development on a film about mountaineer Tenzing Norgay.

WRITER/DIRECTOR

Sally Aitken

PRODUCERS

Jo-anne McGowan

Jennifer Peedom

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Adrian Rostirolla

COMPOSER

Caitlin Yeo

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ABC

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Jodi Maddocks



Australian Government

