

Herald Sun**Reel professional.**

By ALISON BARCLAY.

627 words

28 May 2001

Herald-Sun

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English

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An old hand has some sage advice for novice filmmakers, writes ALISON BARCLAY **ANGIE Black** has just concocted a short film, though brevity has been anything but the soul of the process.

"We first started planning it in 1996," the young Melbourne director of Bowl Me Over says, "and we've only just had the prints back."

Five years for 15 minutes - that's three minutes of film a year. But at least Black knows exactly where her beautifully crafted comedy will make its first stop on what she hopes will be its long career - the St Kilda Film Festival.

Every year for 18 years, St Kilda has given Australian filmmakers a chance of big-screen exposure for their dramatic short stories.

It also gives cash to the best; this year the prize pool is \$23,000. The pick of this year's 155 short films will then tour nationally.

And industry experts - among them director Tim Burstall, ready to pour out his "confessions of a filmmaker" - will share their expertise.

In the early '70s, Stork made Burstall noteworthy, Alvin Purple made him notorious and piles of AFI awards have made him famous.

He, too, began with a short film.

In 1957, using a hired, beaten-up Eyemo camera that had done active service in World War II, he shot The Prize on his stud goat farm at Eltham. Sons Tom and Dan and their friends starred.

Exquisite though The Prize was, it seemed to have nowhere to go.

"In those days there was no industry much," Burstall recalls.

"My cameraman was a fashion photographer, the actors were local kids and my friends, and we just had to learn as we went.

"But I knew if the first (film) didn't work, that was the end of it. I had to get the picture on to the circuit, so it had to be good enough for that."

And lo, it was. With no local showcase, Burstall took his 30-minute film to Italy. There, at the 1960 Venice Film Festival, *The Prize* won a prize. Greater Union bought the film, as did Screen Gems, and suddenly the young dad from the bohemian fringe of Melbourne was an international director.

With no film-school course to straighten his path, Burstall was free to be inventive.

A Harkness Fellowship took him and his then wife, Betty, to New York and Hollywood in the '60s and, when they returned, Betty took over a ramshackle hidey-hole in Carlton and founded La Mama Theatre. It became the womb of Victoria's born-again film industry.

"I thought it would be two or three years before anything came up, but very soon after we came back (playwrights) Jack Hibberd, John Romeril and David Williamson emerged," Burstall says.

"I got on to David Williamson's play, *Stork*, and that became the first commercially successful film for 10 or 15 years."

Meanwhile, the next generation was taking note of what Dad did.

Dan is a freelance cameraman and Tom, who is married to SeaChange luminary Sigrid Thornton, became a director and producer. He now works as a film-completion guarantor, "the man who rolls up and tears pages out of the script if something goes wrong".

Burstall plans a new feature next year, but apart from saying it will be a comedy and that David Williamson is involved, he is coy.

"We in the film industry think it's bad luck to talk about something before we start shooting," he smiles.

St Kilda Film Festival, George and Palais cinemas, tomorrow-June 3. Tim Burstall speaks on June 3, 1.30pm, at the George. Forums are free; screenings range from \$12/\$9 (single) to \$66 (festival pass). Bookings: 9537 2444.

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