



"THE PIANO IS SO GOOD,

so moving, so original! One of the most
enchanting and erotic love stories to

be seen on the screen in years.

Exhilarating! Breathtaking!"

Vincent Canby, THE NEW YORK TIMES

PIANO

CIBY 2000 PRESENTS A JAN CHAPMAN PRODUCTION

RPT-3



HOLLY HUNTER HARVEY KEITEL SAM NEILL
A JANE CAMPION film

WITH ANNA PAQUIN KERRY WALKER GENEVIEVE LEMON COSTUME DESIGNER JANET PATTERSON SOUND DESIGNER
LEE SMITH MUSIC BY MICHAEL NYMAN EDITOR VERONIKA JENET PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANDREW McALPINE
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY STUART DRYBURGH ASSOCIATE PRODUCER MARK TURNBULL EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR CIBY 2000 ALAIN DEFARDIEU
PRODUCER JAN CHAPMAN WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JANE CAMPION DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF
THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION AND THE NEW SOUTH WALES FILM AND TELEVISION OFFICE
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE NOW ON VIRGIN RECORDS
© 1992 JAN CHAPMAN PRODUCTIONS AND CIBY 2000

Virgin

EVERARD
FILMS

NEW CURRENTS IN THE MAINSTREAM: THE 1990s

Ann Hardy

In the 1990s, with the emergence of a new generation of film makers, the New Zealand film industry displayed a new maturity and gained increasing recognition internationally as a fresh, lively source of English-language films.

As the decade developed, the commercial pressures already faced by a small industry became more acute, with changes in the political environment intensifying the move towards rightist economic policy and heightening the old tension between culture and commerce. Nonetheless, for local audiences this was a particularly successful period for culture-oriented or 'minority' films, in particular those that reflected the energies of Māori and women film makers. While the 1980s had begun to tap those new perspectives, the 1990s saw them gain in strength and diversity.

An alternative centre

A team rapidly accumulating a substantial body of work was the director Gaylene Preston (see page 213) and producer Robin Laing. In 1990, they released their second feature, *Ruby and Rata*, about power struggles between an elderly, proud widow, Ruby, and her tenant, Rata, a streetwise single mother. This film pleased New Zealand and Australian audiences with its humorous treatment of the mid-1980s transition to a market economy, where citizens were encouraged to see themselves as both consumers and commodities within that economy. 'I like to present characters and situations not normally accepted as topics for entertainment,' said Preston.



Italian publicity for *An Angel at My Table* (1990)



Jane Campion, c. 1994

Vanessa Rare as Rata (left), Lee Mete-Kingi as Willie and Yvonne Lawley as Ruby in *Ruby and Rata* (1990)

Kerry Fox as Janet Frame in *An Angel at My Table* (1990)

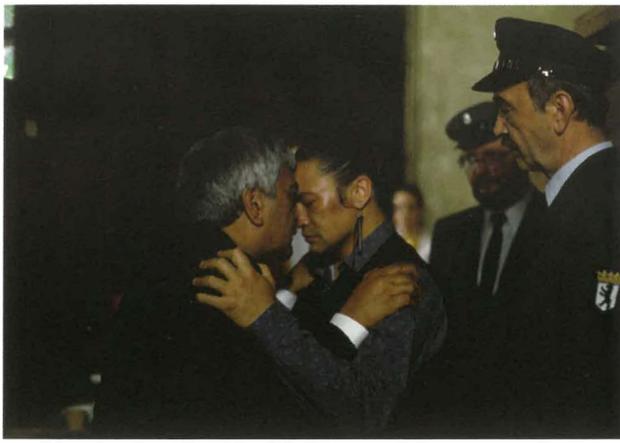
'In *Ruby and Rata* we present the young and dispossessed and the old and isolated but because our characters are all lying and manipulating one another the situations become funny.'¹

At the same time, director Jane Campion, working with a team including designer Grant Major and cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh, was enjoying international success with her film (and television) interpretation of writer Janet Frame's autobiography, *An Angel at My Table* (1990). The events of the first three decades of Frame's life reflected the growth of a rich creative consciousness vulnerable to the shock of family tragedies and the deep misunderstandings caused by Frame's shyness. The images in Campion's film possess a metaphorical resonance similar to Frame's prose but with a stylised, modern edge. A New Zealand–Australian co-production with additional funding from Britain's Channel 4, *An Angel at My Table* was appreciatively received in Europe, won seven awards at the Venice Film Festival that year and sold to more than forty-five countries. Locally, it took \$575,000 at the box office, a result that positioned it as the fifth-highest grossing New Zealand film to date.

Te Rua (1991), director Barry Barclay's second feature, depicted a group of young Māori determined to retrieve their alienated taonga from a museum in Berlin. Barclay (see page 225) was connected to a network of other left-wing film maker-activists, including Martyn Sanderson (who had just directed his first feature, an adaptation of Albert Wendt's tale about cultural dislocation in Samoa, *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree*, 1990). Buoyed by the appreciative reception for his debut feature, *Ngati* (1987), and by the financial backing of a German public film investment fund, Barclay made *Te Rua* to further his case that indigenous peoples had the right to protect their own artefacts, both material and symbolic, from control by majority cultures. Barclay saw control over the disposition of cultural property as core to a sense of cultural well-being and as providing the 'dignity of sovereignty' for Māori.² However, the finished film, criticised as fragmented and tendentious, was appreciated neither by its German backers nor by New Zealand audiences: it earned only \$30,000 at the local box office. Nevertheless, *Te Rua* is an important film because of its place in the sustained campaign that Barclay and others in the arts sector ran throughout the 1990s to gain greater control for indigenous artists.

For an example of how Māori sovereignty over image making might function, the community had only to look at *Mana Waka*, a feature-length documentary completed in 1990 for the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Under the auspices of the Tainui iwi, director





Wi Kuki Kaa as Rewi Marangai (left) and Peter Kaa as Peter Huaka in *Te Rua* (1991)



Jim Manley (top) on location filming the recently constructed waka taua Ngātokimatawhaorua for *Mana Waka* (1990)

Rena Owen as Beth, shadowed by Temuera Morrison as Jake in *Once Were Warriors* (1994)

Make-up artist Guy Moana applying a moko to gang extra Sam Masters during the filming of *Once Were Warriors* (1994)

Merata Mita (see page 225) and editor Annie Collins shaped the film from footage shot in the late 1930s by Pākehā photographer Jim Manley at the request of the revered Tainui leader, Te Puea Hērangi. The completed film is a stately, engaging record of the process of making waka taua (war canoes). While the New Zealand Film Archive looks after the print of *Mana Waka*, ownership of the film has remained with Tainui, and it may be screened only with their permission.

Once Were Warriors

In 1994 came *Once Were Warriors*, a Māori film of a radically different type. With a popularity that spread far beyond a minority audience, it became the highest-grossing film ever released in New Zealand up to that time. Made for \$2 million – with finance contributed by the New Zealand Film Commission, the production company Communicado, NZ On Air and Avalon Studios – the film was directed by Lee Tamahori using a script by Riwia Brown from Alan Duff's well-known novel about underclass, detribalised, Māori life in Rotorua. Brown's script shifted the focus from the violent senior male of the family, Jake Heke, to the transformation of his wife Beth. She moves from being collaborator to victim to enraged reformer, belatedly repulsed by their lifestyle as it damages or kills their children. The audiovisual texture of the film, on the other hand, alongside Temuera Morrison's intense performance, projects Jake as a magnetic figure, every muscle packed with aggression. Tamahori, who brought his award-winning advertising skills to the film's direction, was joined by cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh (*An Angel at My Table; The Piano*, 1993), while Michael Kane did the design.

Once Were Warriors was an exciting reservoir of paradoxes for audiences. Overseas viewers were fascinated to see New Zealand portrayed as a densely urban battle zone, where typically it had been presented to them as a fresh landscape with isolated vignettes of human activity.³ Local audiences debated the extent to which *Once Were Warriors* was a truthful, fair depiction of either a subgroup of Māori society or the reality of domestic violence.⁴ For a commentator such as Barclay the film was unwelcome evidence that the skills of Māori creative workers were being channelled by the forces of commercialism into conventional narrative patterns and a shallow stereotype of Māori as a 'warrior' people.⁵ Evidently, however, mainstream audiences found the film's mix of machismo and romanticism exhilarating: *Once Were Warriors* took more than \$6 million at the local box office, attracting one in three New Zealanders to see it. An equally large audience watched it on television.



"EXTRAORDINARILY POWERFUL...THE STORIES SHINE WITH HONESTY AND CANDOUR"

John Parker



A film by
Gaylene Preston

WAR STORIES

OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US

GAYLENE PRESTON PRODUCTIONS presents WAR STORIES

Featuring: PAMELA QUILL • FLO SMALL • TUI PRESTON • JEAN ANDREWS • RITA GRAHAM • NEVA CLARKE MCKENNA • MABEL WAITITI

Photographer: ALUN BOLLINGER • Editor: PAUL SUTORIUS • Music composed and arranged by: JONATHAN BESSER

Interviewer: JUDIITH FYFE • Executive Producer: ROBIN LAING • Produced and Directed by: GAYLENE PRESTON



Suitable for
General Audiences

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION AND NEW ZEALAND ON AIR
Distributed by FOOTPRINT FILMS Ltd



Revisions of history

After *Ruby and Rata*, Preston and Laing moved on to the four-part docudrama *Bread and Roses* (1993), recounting the young adult life and increasing politicisation of the left-wing activist, later Member of Parliament, Sonja Davies. A lively treatment of a topic that in other hands could have been weighed down by worthiness, it screened on television to commemorate the centenary of women's suffrage in New Zealand. *Bread and Roses* was also distributed in a cinematic version, as well as on video for the education market. Preston next developed her feature-length documentary *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us* (1995), in which seven women in their seventies talk about their experiences of the Second World War – farewelling men in the Maori Battalion, hosting American soldiers, the dangers of active service, the ignominy accorded to pacifists, the struggle to revive relationships with men returned from war – collectively representing the sufferings and achievements of thousands of other women. Described by a *Variety* reviewer as ‘profoundly moving’, the film struck a chord with audiences around the world.⁶

While Preston's preference was for exploring the significance of recent history, other film makers were turning back to colonial times as a basis for new styles of storytelling. Visually, nineteenth-century colonial life exists for most people as a series of still images, solemn black-and-white photographs of ancestors posed in a moment of respite from toil. But from the opening scene of the costume melodrama *Desperate Remedies* (1993), with the jewel-encrusted wheel of a buggy racing along to the whip-cracking pace set by a red-veiled woman, it is clear that the type of historical representation favoured by its co-directors, Stewart Main and Peter Wells, diverges from this sober norm. Rather, they fantasised the ‘settler’ past as a combat arena where the libidinal energies of sex and greed frequently breached a veneer of heterosexual social propriety. This camp aesthetic is beautifully embodied in Michael Kane's emblematic production design and costume designer Glenis Foster's oversized Victorian gowns, which sweep around like weapons in time to the Auckland Philharmonia's interpretation of Peter Scholes's orchestral score.⁷ While *Desperate Remedies* attracted a mainly niche audience at home, it sold well in arthouse markets internationally. Wells, who is an award-winning writer as well as a film director, was to have input into several other projects during the decade, earning screenplay credits on both of Garth Maxwell's features: *Jack Be Nimble* (1993), a gothic tale about abuse and retribution involving a psychically connected brother and sister, and the



Geneviève Picot as Sonja Davies in *Bread and Roses* (1993)



Jennifer Ward-Lealand as Dorothea Brook in *Desperate Remedies* (1993)

Publicity for *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us* (1995)



Publicity for *The Piano* (1993)

Holly Hunter as Ada (left) and Anna Paquin as Flora on Karekare Beach in *The Piano* (1993)

urban romance *When Love Comes* (1998). Moreover, Niki Caro's first feature, *Memory and Desire* (1998), is based on the adaptation of a short story by Wells.

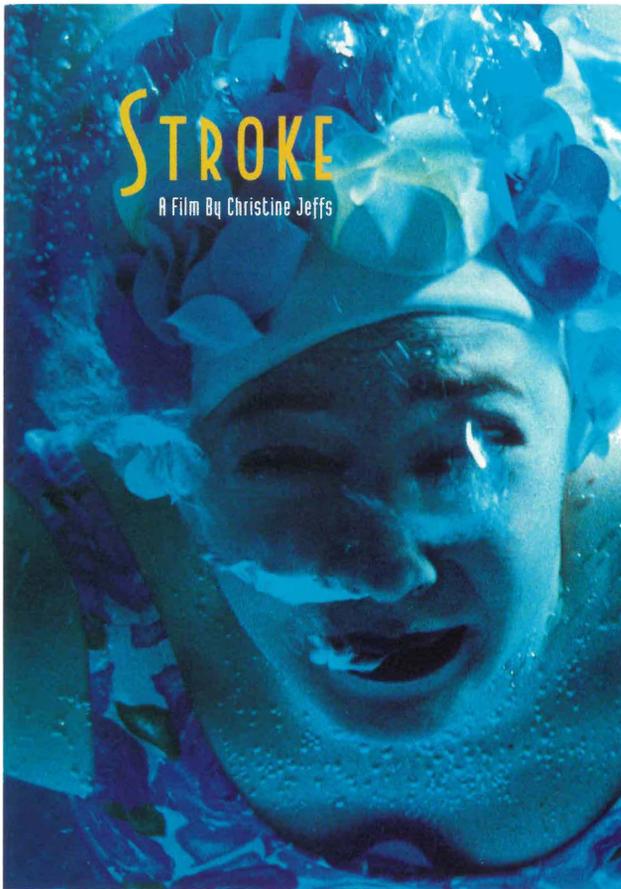
Just a month after the release of *Desperate Remedies*, a second film was launched that re-imagined an early stage of colonial enterprise in New Zealand: Jane Campion's *The Piano*. This story of a wilful young single mother's arrival in the country as the unwilling partner in an arranged marriage – and the disruptive consequences of her determination to control the disposition of her own sexuality – was produced in Australia and funded from France. Nevertheless, most commentators set aside these inconvenient facts and write about *The Piano* as one of the country's prime artistic achievements – especially after it shared the supreme prize, the Palme d'Or, with the Chinese film *Farewell My Concubine* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993 and also won Best Original Screenplay, Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress (for the child actor Anna Paquin) at the Academy Awards in 1994.

In *The Piano*, the directing skills that Campion had honed through a series of short films and features came together with design, production and post-production teams working at their highest levels. The camera crew had Dryburgh and Alun Bollinger collaborating; Janet Paterson designed the iconic costumes in a dark, graphic register; and Veronica Jenet's editing and Michael Nyman's romantic, propulsive score seduced the viewer into the narrative. *The Piano* was the arthouse hit of the year in both the United States and France, and it did well in New Zealand too, taking the number three position at the box office.⁸

The wider film culture

Short film retained its popularity during the 1990s, although the vicissitudes of production tracked those of the wider industry. The early years were prosperous, with director Grant Lahood winning a special mention at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival for his amusing film about taxidermy, *The Singing Trophy* (1992), and Nicky Marshall's *Mon Desir* (1991), a tale of suburban longing, which was also shown at Cannes that year. In 1994, the Film Commission's marketing manager Kathleen Drumm took thirteen shorts to the international industry market.⁹ The following year, two of them – *Stroke* (1994) by new director Christine Jeffs and *Eau de la Vie* (1994) by Simon Baré, both using conflicts set in watery locations to comment on feminist and socio-economic issues respectively – were selected in competition at Cannes, where Caro's *Sure to Rise* (1994) and Scott Reynolds' *A Game With No Rules* (1994) also attracted praise.





Publicity for *Stroke* (1994)



Wog Features (1990)

The Film Commission was not the only source of support for short film, however, with the Creative Film and Video Fund of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council having funded experimental or fine art film projects for a decade. In 1994, the organisation was renamed Creative New Zealand, and two years later, its film fund (which was jointly supported by the Commission) became known as the Screen Innovation Production Fund. Those who gained funding from this source did not always aspire to become part of the industry of mainstream film making and consequently had the freedom to create much interesting and unconventional work. In the 1990s, such experimental work, sometimes funded by private sources, came from Lisa Reihana (for example *Wog Features*, 1990), Philip Dadson, Peter Wells, Julianne Sumich and Merylyn Tweedie (among others). Also committed to experimental work, the Moving Image Centre in Auckland was established in August 1993 under the initial leadership of Keith Hill. With support from the Arts Council, it aimed to bring together previously compartmentalised parts of the moving image culture through exhibitions and by assisting the distribution of works that were otherwise hard to obtain.

Back in February 1979, Roger Horrocks had written in an editorial in *Alternative Cinema* magazine: ‘The basic ingredient of a healthy film culture is film-making...but other aspects are also very important: film archives, film teaching in schools and universities, practical training for film-makers, independent or non-commercial cinemas, festivals, competitions, informed film criticism, film co-operatives, various sources of finance, etc. Without this sort of backup...film-making will remain a minor activity in New Zealand, its products will lack sophistication and its audience will be small and indiscriminating.’¹⁰ At the time this was still largely a wish-list, but the 1990s would see this wider film culture reach a new level of maturity.

The high-culture film buffs’ event of the year, the New Zealand International Film Festival, programmed by Bill Gosden, continued to grow in size. The New Zealand Film Archive, another keystone of film culture, underwent significant change in the early 1990s by moving into new premises near the waterfront in Wellington. For the first time since the Film Archive was established in 1981, all of its collections were housed in one location, which also gave it space to offer greater public access.

Two talented women played an influential role in other areas of film culture. Dr Ruth Harley began at the Arts Council, worked as a programme commissioner at TVNZ, then became the inaugural chief executive of NZ On Air in

THE SCREEN INNOVATION PRODUCTION FUND

by Lawrence McDonald

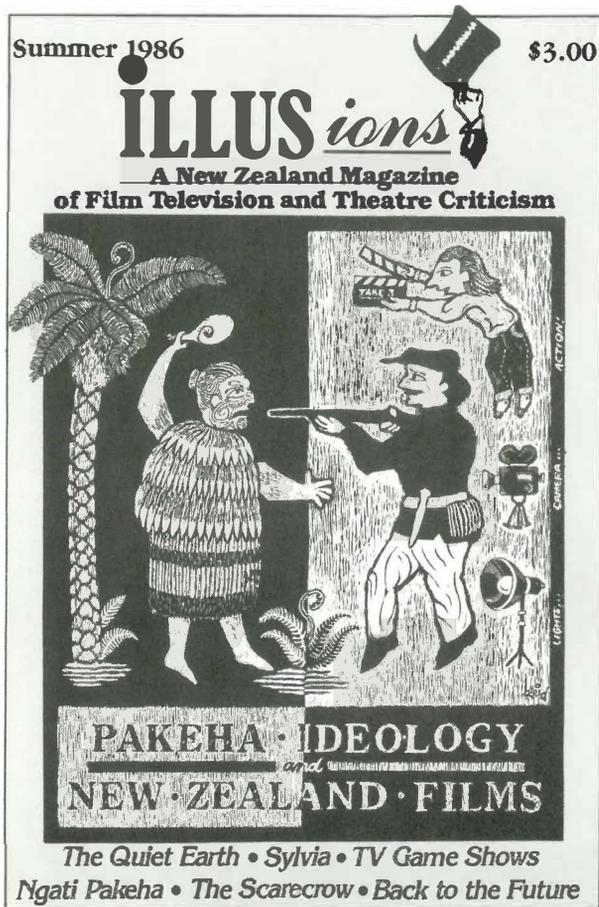


The Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF) was established in 1996 as a partnership between Creative New Zealand, where it was administered, and the New Zealand Film Commission. It succeeded the Creative Film and Video Fund (1984–96) and after its final round in April 2009 was replaced by the Independent Film Makers Fund.

SIPF operated during a period in which developments in digital video technology coincided with the expansion of options in film training. And for graduates of film-making courses who wished to move up the budgetary scale, SIPF was the only place to turn. SIPF's brief was specific: to fund projects that suggested new directions outside mainstream narrative film. But it was flexible enough to recognise outstanding projects of any kind, and to respond to trends such as the increasing demand for the funding of documentary projects in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In its thirteen-year existence, SIPF funded a large number of remarkable films and helped launch the careers of many emerging film makers, as well as helping to maintain or revive the careers of older film makers. Among the former are Patrick Gillies's *Kitty* (2003) and *Offensive Behaviour* (2004); Florian Habicht's *Woodenhead* (2003), *Kaikōhe Demolition* (2004) and *Land of the Long White Cloud* (2009); Colin Hodson's *.OFF.* (2002); Gregory King's *Christmas* (2003); Briar March's *Allie Eagle and Me* (2004) and *There Once Was an Island* (2010); Alex Monteith's *Clouds, Three and Me* (1999) and *Chapter & Verse* (2005); Tom Reilly's *The Ambassador's Brain* (2007) and *Gordonia* (2010); and Campbell Walker's *Uncomfortable Comfortable* (1999) and *Little Bits of Light* (2005). Among the latter are Alister Barry's *In a Land of Plenty* (2002) and *A Civilised Society* (2007); Kathy Duddings' *The Return* (2008); and Michael Heath's *A Small Life* (2000) and *Edith Collier: A Life Among Shadows* (2007).

Children pose after the demolition in *Kaikōhe Demolition* (2004)



First issue of *Illusions* magazine, Summer 1986

1990. She stayed there for six years during which NZ On Air had established itself as an important player in film as well as television. Then in 1997 she became chief executive of the Film Commission, a position she held until 2009. Jane Wrightson spent ten years at TVNZ in various management roles. She spent three years as chief film censor, five years as NZ On Air's television manager (helping to get some important feature films funded in that time), four years as chief executive of the Screen Production and Development Association (SPADA) and three years as chief executive of the Broadcasting Standards Authority. In 2006, she became chief executive of NZ On Air. During the 1990s, Harley and Wrightson between them did much to shape the infrastructure of the film industry.

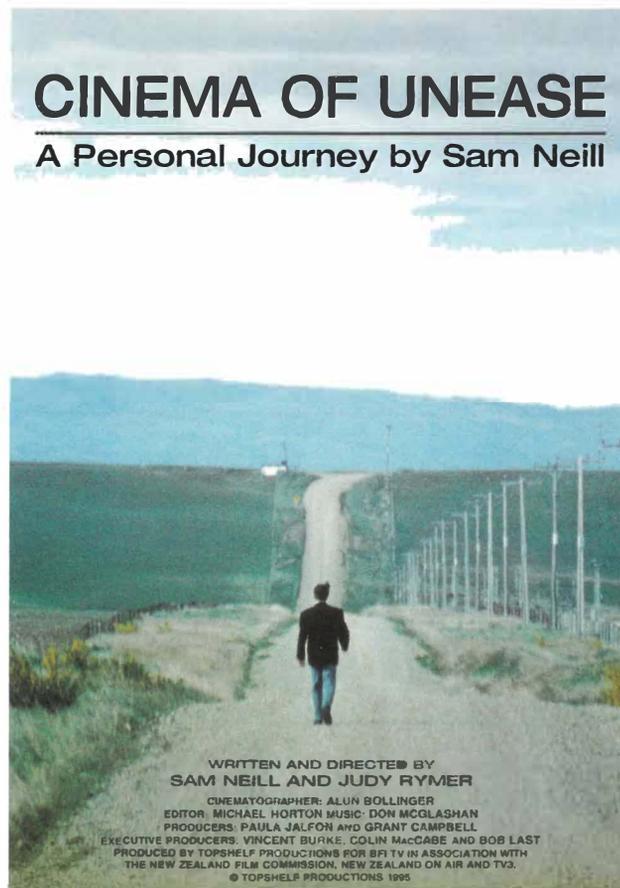
The 1990s was also a period in which the concept of 'New Zealand cinema' was strengthened by a public process of self-reflection carried out in books, journals, the documentary *Cinema of Unease*, the mockumentary *Forgotten Silver*, and university courses in film and media studies. Regular film publications included *Illusions* magazine, with analyses of local film and theatre, which had been published out of Victoria University of Wellington with the encouragement of film lecturer Russell Campbell since 1986.¹¹ In late 1993, *Illusions* was joined by the *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, issuing from Massey University. The argument for Māori involvement in image making, on Māori terms, was made by Barry Barclay in his monograph *Our Own Image*, published in 1990, while four years later the expatriate Martin Blythe released *Naming the Other: Images of the Maori in New Zealand film and television* (1994). Auckland-based media teacher Helen Martin was another writer who helped readers to see patterns in New Zealand film making. She put out analyses of seven New Zealand-made films in *Shadows on the Wall* (1994, co-written with Barbara Cairns) and then, in 1997, with Waikato academic Sam Edwards, published the reference work *New Zealand Film 1912-1996*. This book contains production details, a story synopsis and indications of public reception for each of the 162 New Zealand feature-length films released before the end of 1996.¹² These and other sources of writing about the local audiovisual industries in turn provided resources for courses on New Zealand film and television that had emerged in universities around the country in the 1990s (beginning with Russell Campbell at Victoria, Roger Horrocks and Tom Hutchins at Auckland and Maurice Askew at Canterbury).

A particularly important book on local cinema, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, was first published in June 1992.

Edited by Jonathan Dennis (founding director of the Film Archive) and Jan Bieringa (who had managed the Creative Film and Video Fund), the book features more than a dozen essays on topics associated with New Zealand film, from contributors who were variously film makers, critics and academics. The essays have become oft-quoted classics. For instance, the assertion in Merata Mita's essay 'The Soul and the Image' that the New Zealand film industry until that time had been 'a white, neurotic one'¹³ resonates with the themes of *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey by Sam Neill* (1995), made by Judy Rymer and Sam Neill (see page 245) as part of a British Film Institute-initiated international series to commemorate the centenary of film making. Interweaving movie-related events from Neill's early life in New Zealand with excerpts from the movies that he has found memorable, the documentary argues that, overall, New Zealand film is 'dark' in mood and obsessed with the consequences of the European settlers' geographical and cultural isolation (which include an ambivalence about the wildness of the natural landscape, a predilection for violence and a fear of madness). Widely seen in New Zealand and overseas, *Cinema of Unease* tended to reify these characteristics identified by Mita to construct a stereotype of New Zealand cinema that has only recently been effectively challenged.

Culture versus commerce

Was 'the New Zealand film industry' primarily a contribution to our cultural life, or was it primarily a commercial enterprise? Over the course of the 1990s, in step with changes in the political environment, there was increasing pressure on film production to become commercially more effective. A new National government replaced the fourth Labour government in 1990, and Maurice Williamson became responsible for broadcasting, intending to prepare at least some of the state broadcasting entities, such as TV2, for sale. The New Zealand Trade Development Board, TradeNZ, had also been enlisted to promote the movie business, aiming to market New Zealand as a source of labour and locations for productions from the United States. The chair of the Film Commission board, David Gascoigne, had been in his post since 1985, and his statements at this time evince tension between his view of film production as primarily of cultural value and the encroaching commercial model. In April 1992, Gascoigne noted that the industry was feeling the effects of a 74 per cent cut in government funding for film. But several months later, he argued that it was not a desirable response to try to follow an American model of film making simply



Publicity for *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey by Sam Neill* (1995)

because it was perceived to be more profitable.¹⁴ ‘Overseas,’ Gascoigne said, ‘people like New Zealand films because of their characteristic quirkiness. They look at the kinds of films we make and say they have an idiosyncrasy that makes them New Zealand.’¹⁵

Peter Jackson’s producer and former Commission head Jim Booth (see page 229) took a different line, arguing that a film industry that catered primarily to the small, local audience risked driving talented film makers overseas. He said, ‘At the moment New Zealand features are overwhelmingly, bloody-mindedly uncommercial. With some notable exceptions. The answer isn’t to copy other countries but to take our films further... We are not bold enough at being uncommercial. We have to be more extreme, make angrier dramas and more outrageous comedies. What we basically do are gentle art-films which we hope will be breakout films. It’s not good enough – our films need more meat.’¹⁶

In April 1993, Phillip Pryke, a senior partner from the accountancy firm Buttle Wilson, took over from Gascoigne as chair of the Commission. He declared that his aims included ‘making movies more market-driven and the industry less dependent on welfare’, claiming that ‘the industry can’t ignore recent box-office flops and should work towards financial self-sufficiency’.¹⁷ One of the Commission’s first decisions under Pryke was to grant co-production funding to a film written and directed by expatriate Kiwi Anna Campion (sister of Jane Campion), and set and filmed in London (*Bloody Weekend*, later renamed *Loaded*, 1994).¹⁸ This decision stretched the boundaries of what qualified as a ‘New Zealand film’ and, along with the drive to attract overseas producers to use New Zealand as a location, produced considerable nervousness among local film makers, with producers John Maynard and Robin Laing warning that Kiwis must not lose control of their own industry.¹⁹

Fears for the local film industry’s future in the hands of such a commercially oriented Commission proved exaggerated, however, thanks to the felicitous convergence of a number of other factors shaping the environment. First, many industry producers were already sourcing additional funding from overseas, in some cases from investors in Europe where independent distributors, then as now, sought sources of supply beyond American films. Second, the costs of providing the skills and services needed by the film industry did not fall on that industry alone. In the 1990s, the wider audiovisual production sector (including television and commercial production) also grew, with crew lists showing a constant crossover of personnel (including producers,

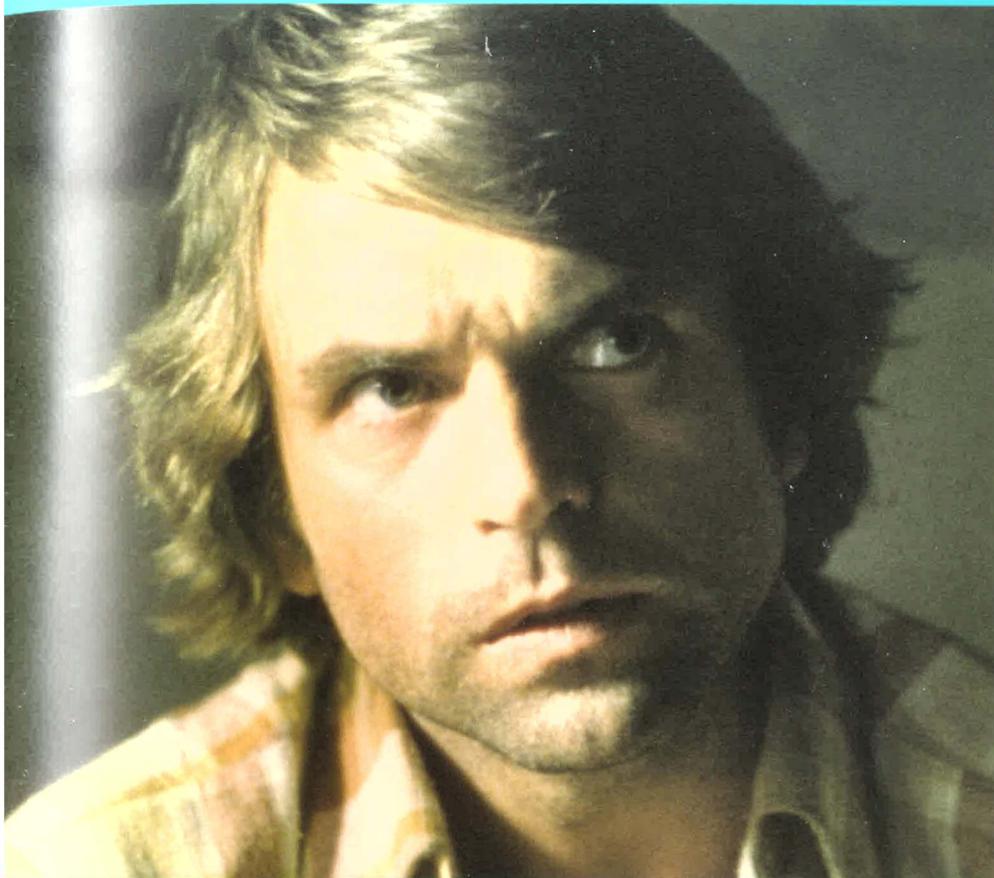
directors, designers, camera operators and editors) between television, advertising and film. For instance, directors such as Lee Tamahori, Garth Maxwell and, later, Christine Jeffs developed their film-making skills through directing big-budget commercials. Third, within New Zealand the state funding base for film making had already diversified beyond the Commission. The television funding agency NZ On Air had been established in early 1990 under Ruth Harley, and for the first half of the decade it invested in films that would later be re-screened on television – often in combination with broadcaster TVNZ or its spin-off facilities company Avalon Studios. *Chunuk Bair* (1991), *The Footstep Man* (1992), *Braindead* (1992), *Alex* (1992), *Absent Without Leave* (1993), *Desperate Remedies* and *Bread and Roses*, for example, all received funding from one or more of these additional state sources. Furthermore, television is the medium where many Kiwis get to see local films, months if not years after their theatrical release.²⁰

From 1994, there was a further boost to the production sector in New Zealand from the television projects in the *Hercules* series. Beginning with the telefeature *Hercules and the Lost Kingdom*, these productions reworked (and invented) incidents from the mythology of the Greek hero Hercules. Officially American productions, they were headed by producers Sam Raimi and Robert Tapert and filmed in studio space in Henderson and in rural land in the Waitākere area of Auckland. The majority of the technical jobs and many of the acting roles in the *Hercules* series and its sibling *Xena: Warrior Princess* were filled by New Zealanders, most notably providing international fame for actor Lucy Lawless in the title role of Xena. Special effects for the productions for were provided by the fledgling Wellington company Weta, formed by Peter Jackson, Richard Taylor and Jamie Selkirk in 1993. In a country that lacked a national film school, there is relevance to Tapert’s claims that later films (including the Tolkien trilogy) benefited from the experience gained by those who worked on these 1990s productions for the American Pacific Renaissance company.

The first half of the 1990s was also an excellent era for audience development. The advent of the multiplex – a grouping of several movie theatres in one location – reversed the decline in audience numbers of the previous decade. The first multiplex opened in Palmerston North in 1992, then Manukau, then Hamilton and then the six-screen Wairau Park centre on the North Shore.²¹ By February 1995, central Wellington had seventeen movie screens either open or near completion.²² The number of screens per capita in New

SAM NEILL

by Ann Hardy



The actor, director, winemaker and cultural commentator Nigel John Dermot Neill was born in 1947 in Northern Ireland where his father, Dermot, was serving with the Irish Guards (the family returned to New Zealand in 1954). Nigel began using the name 'Sam' at school, and his reminiscences of childhood – during which regular movie-going alleviated the boredom of provincial life – would surface in his and Judy Rymer's 1995 survey of New Zealand film making, *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey by Sam Neill*. After graduating with a degree in English literature, Neill worked as a director at the National Film Unit. His first film acting roles were in *Landfall* (1975) and as a young priest in *Ashes* (1975). His breakthrough role, however, was as the fugitive Smith in the dystopian political drama *Sleeping Dogs* (1977). Neill subsequently left both the Unit and New Zealand upon landing

a role in the Australian film *My Brilliant Career* (1979).

Since that time, Neill has appeared in starring roles in some twenty television series and fifty feature films, including *Omen III: The Final Conflict* (1981), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Jurassic Park III* (2001). In *The Piano* (1993), he played the diffident, conservative colonial bachelor, Stewart. His particular blend of attractiveness and vulnerability was also mobilised in Gaylene Preston's 2003 romantic thriller *Perfect Strangers*, where his nameless character kidnaps a woman and takes her to an isolated island, only to have her assume the upper hand. In recent years, Neill has been increasingly cast as authoritative, worldly and sometimes ruthless, even when playing ecclesiastical characters such as Cardinal Wolsey in the television series *The Tudors* (2007) or the eponymous dog appreciator in *Dean Spanley* (2008).

Sam Neill as Smith in *Sleeping Dogs* (1977)



Lucy Lawless in the title role in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, c. 1995



Clockwise from left: Biddu Hodson as Charlotte, Danny Cunningham as Lance, Catherine McCormack as Rose and Matthew Eggleton as Lionel in *Loaded* (1994)

Publicity for *Braindead* (1992)

Zealand was soon almost double the international average, with more than 255 of them by the end of 1995. In this largely pre-internet era, New Zealanders went regularly to the movies for their entertainment.²³ In 1993 there was a 50 per cent rise in admissions from the previous year, while over the seven years from 1991 to 1997 the average annual increase was 23 per cent.²⁴ This pace of growth only slackened off in 1998, by which time Tim Ord, spokesman for the Motion Pictures Distribution Agency, claimed that the multiplex market was 'mature' and that there would be little benefit from building any more.²⁵

However, while all of these factors supported the nation's broader production and distribution industries, none of them meant that New Zealanders would necessarily go to see, or enjoy, their own movies. For that to happen there had to be a run of compelling local releases, and, through a coincidence of circumstances, that is exactly what happened in the period 1992–94. The most popular films included *The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors* and two films by Peter Jackson.

From *Braindead* to *Heavenly Creatures*

Peter Jackson's third feature, *Braindead*, was launched at Cannes in May 1992, screened at the 1992 Wellington Fringe Festival and gained wider national release the following year. From the time of its Cannes debut, the film was hot property in overseas film markets: its genre-crossing mixture of young-adult romance with a gut-heaving depiction of the transformation of an overbearing mother into a 'murdering, sexually jealous, suffocating monster' somehow bridged the boundary between cult and critical appreciation.²⁶ *Onfilm* reported viewers 'rolling in the aisles' at packed screenings at Cannes on seeing this 'hilariously sick, technically accomplished black comedy horror spoof'.²⁷ Not everybody was so appreciative: it did poorly in the United States, despite having several minutes of the most extreme material excised;²⁸ and while it won Best Film and Best Director awards at the New Zealand Film and Television Awards in 1993, one judge voiced his opinion that the film was a 'crude horror that makes a mockery of serious film making in New Zealand'.²⁹

Jackson, producer Jim Booth and their company Wingnut Films already had investor interest from Europe in funding their next project. This was a 'human interest drama' that was later titled *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), a Jackson–Frances Walsh interpretation of an infamous matricide carried out by two teenage girls, Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, in Christchurch in 1954. There were two other scripts on the

from the director of **BAD TASTE** and **MEET THE FEEBLES**

BRAINDEAD

*'a hilarious
bout of carnage'*

TIME MAGAZINE

*'out zombies
all previous
zombie flicks'*

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

TIMOTHY BALME DIANA PEÑALVER ELIZABETH MOODY IAN WATKIN

PROSTHETICS DESIGN **BOB McCARRON** CREATURE & GORE EFFECTS **RICHARD TAYLOR** PRODUCTION DESIGN **KEVIN LEONARD-JONES**

MUSIC **PETER DASENT** DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **MURRAY MILNE** EDITOR **JAMIE SELKIRK**

SCREENPLAY **STEPHEN SINCLAIR FRANCES WALSH PETER JACKSON**

PRODUCER **JIM BOOTH** DIRECTOR **PETER JACKSON**

 **DOLBY STEREO**
IN SELECTED THEATRES



A WINGNUT FILMS PRODUCTION
in association with the
New Zealand Film Commission and Avalon/NFU Studios

R16 CONTENT
MAY
OFFEND



Kate Winslet as Juliet Hulme (left) and Melanie Lynskey as Pauline Parker in *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)



Argentinian publicity for *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)

same topic also in development,³⁰ but Wingnut's superior ability to attract external funding allowed them to begin production quickly.

Heavenly Creatures also drew on Jackson's interest in the violent dispatch of interfering mothers. It incorporated fantasy elements in its Weta-created enhancements of Alun Bollinger's luminous cinematography, recreating the lush worlds that the two passionate friends invented to reframe the troublesome elements of their lives. The film gathered awards at the upmarket Venice and Toronto festivals and from the London and Australian Film Critics' Circles, and it received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay.

Later feature film making

There had been a change of regime in early 1994 at the mainstream industry's centre, the Film Commission, with Queenslander Richard Stewart succeeding Judith McCann taking up the retitled post of chief executive. With his accession a new group of feature directors was making its bid for funding, but by April 1994 *Onfilm* was warning of a forthcoming gap in production, with Stewart predicting – accurately – that proposed projects were neither sufficiently commercial nor likely to win prizes.³¹

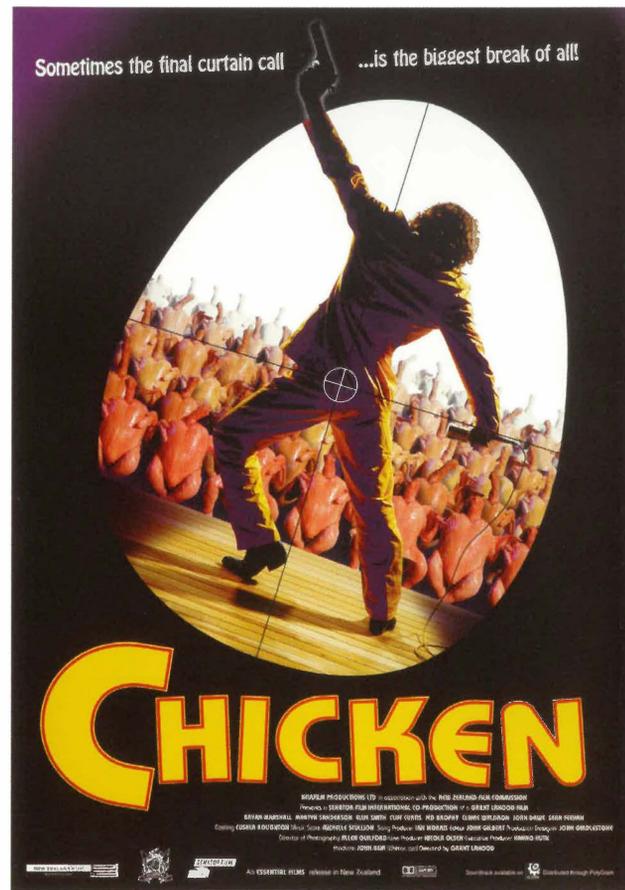
The industry reports for 1995 and 1996 reveal a sector that was spinning its wheels somewhat. Jackson was in production on his first film for the American Universal Studios, *The Frighteners* (1996), a light horror film starring comic actor Michael J Fox, shot and post-produced in New Zealand with a US\$29 million budget. But several other drama releases – *Loaded*, *Bonjour Timothy* (1995) and *The Offering* (1996) – were co-productions that appealed only to niche audiences, and *Jack Brown Genius* was a troubled production that lost visibility over a staggered series of releases and re-releases from 1994 to 1996. Then, in 1996, two projects that promised much did not live up to expectations.

There was fierce competition from overseas production and distribution companies to invest in *Chicken* (1996), the new movie from successful short film maker Grant Lahood about an ageing rock star who finds himself unemployable except by the advertising industry. The German company Senator prevailed with a reputed advance of \$2 million, but the film ultimately returned less than \$50,000 in box office receipts in New Zealand.³² Another supportive German company, Fritz Wagner Filmproduktion, invested in *Flight of the Albatross* (1996, directed by Werner Meyer), a story of an intercultural relationship between a teenage Māori boy and a German girl visiting her mother in New Zealand. The Film

Commission invested its profit from *Once Were Warriors* into this film and, as deputy chief executive Mladen Ivancic recalls, lost it all when the film did not work with audiences: 'We had three film hits in a row and then we made two bad films in a row – we financed *Chicken* and *Flight of the Albatross*. That brought us all back down to Earth again really quickly...we knew we were equally capable of picking failures as well as hits and we shouldn't start thinking we knew everything about feature film.'³³

The investigation of intercultural relationships would be more successful in a second feature from Communicado, directed by Gregor Nicholas and entitled *Broken English* (1996). This film drew on aspects of the look and feel of *Once Were Warriors* (the first Communicado feature) but transferred them to a less gruelling narrative about a Croatian family, resettled in Auckland after escaping ethnic conflict in their home town of Sarajevo. The patriarch of the family – played with conviction by the actor Rade Serbedzija – is again a bully. He is prepared to resort to violence to control his family, particularly his younger daughter Nina, who falls in love with a Māori chef at the restaurant where she works as a waitress. *Broken English* was moderately popular with audiences in local and international markets.

In 1997, the industry saw some interesting developments in cult movies and other types of low-budget production. *The Ugly*, directed by Scott Reynolds, was a look into the morbid mind of a serial killer under interrogation by a fatally naive female psychiatrist. It did not find a large audience in New Zealand but was surprisingly successful overseas, more than recouping the costs of its production with audiences who deemed its bloody, time-shifting narrative worthy of the sometimes lucrative 'cult' label. *Topless Women Talk About Their Lives* (1997), began as a series of brief late-night television episodes: an improvised soap opera about the loves and anxieties of a group of Aucklanders. It was so popular that director Harry Sinclair was encouraged to turn it into a feature. Relaxed and witty, the production featured, among others, the actors Danielle Cormack and Joel Tobeck, ushering in an era where the young Cormack – classically beautiful yet down-to-earth – seemed to feature in almost every new movie produced (*Channelling Baby*, 1998; *Via Satellite*, 1998 and *The Price of Milk*, 2000). Another low-budget film released in 1997, *Saving Grace*, was a first feature for Costa Botes, accomplished short film maker, film critic and sometime collaborator with Jackson since the days of *Bad Taste*. *Saving Grace* is based on a play of the same name by award-winning young playwright Duncan Sarkies. It is



Publicity for *Chicken* (1996)



Julia Brender as Sarah and Taungaroa Emile as Mako in *Flight of the Albatross* (1996)



Julian Arahanga as Eddie and Aleksandra Vujcic as Nina in *Broken English* (1996)



Joel Tobeck as Neil and Danielle Cormack as Liz in *Topless Women Talk About Their Lives* (1997)

Publicity for *Via Satellite* (1998)

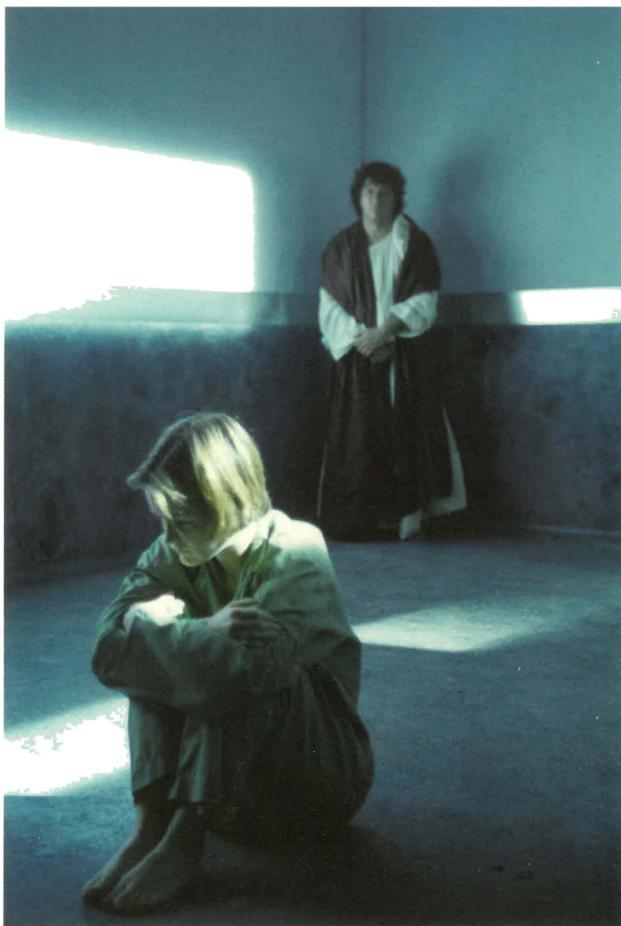
Foreground: Perry Piercy and Nicholas Eadie as Louise and Mickey Savage in *Savage Honeymoon* (2000)

about the relationship between the eponymous young female vagrant and Gerald (played by Jim Moriarty), an older man convinced he is Jesus. The play's genre- and reality-bending characteristics did not translate well to the screen, however, and the film did very poorly at the box office.

This mottled texture of moderate successes and several failures was such a contrast to the preceding period that by the beginning of 1997, the industry was riddled with dissatisfaction. John Keir, the producer of *Chicken*, said, 'We desperately need a success to get confidence back into the industry...It seems we are floundering and have a situation where the executive is blaming everyone else. The board says film makers are not getting it right and people are blaming the staff.'³⁴ There was one significant change, however: Film Commission chief executive Richard Stewart returned early to Australia and was replaced by Ruth Harley. Many in the industry expressed jubilation at this appointment. However, Harley – who later gave an interview revealing the very low rate of return that the Commission had received on some of its investments from this period³⁵ – soon also decided, for the time being, to focus the Commission's small annual investment budget of \$6–8 million on a high number of low-budget productions. 'There doesn't seem to be any correlation between the size of the budget and the size of the audience,' she explained, 'so it seems better to spread the risk and spread opportunity.'³⁶

These low-budget films, some of which did not receive production investment from the Commission, could not produce the technical and design quality of the critical successes of the mid-1990s, and in many cases their directors were inexperienced. Michael Thorp, first time director of *The Lunatics' Ball* (1999) – a film that is set, like *The Ugly*, in a psychiatric hospital but with a far less cynical tone – self-funded his film. Producer Liz Stephens and director Athina Tsoulis also raised private funding for *I'll Make You Happy* (1999), their feature about a teenage prostitute trying to get rich in order to help her friends. Despite such commitment, these films were not successful in box office terms; but then neither was Garth Maxwell's *When Love Comes* (1998), funded with \$1 million from the Commission. It took just \$15,666 at the box office.³⁷

A much more successful initiative, financially, was the ScreenVisioNZ scheme, which produced five low-budget features between 1998 and 2001. The funding involved more or less equal amounts from the Film Commission, NZ On Air, TVNZ and Portman Films (a British company that had been successful in backing quirky, low-budget Australian films).



Kirsty Hamilton as Grace and Jim Moriarty as Jesus Christ in *Saving Grace* (1997)



Dean O'Gorman as Mark (left) with Simon Prast as Stephen in *When Love Comes* (1998)

Publicity for *Scarflies* (1999)

The scheme began with *Via Satellite*, Antony McCarten's comedy about a dysfunctional family brought together by the pressure of being filmed for television. The film was not a hit but opened up some new territory. The theme of hapless, promiscuous, multi-generational working-class families was also the subject of Mark Beesley's *Savage Honeymoon* (2000), featuring a West Auckland family called the Savages. Beesley had been a prolific television director and he described his film as 'Cinema of Ease', showing that he had little time for the gloomy model of New Zealand cinema put forward by Sam Neill (see page 243). Describing the Savages, Beesley said, 'They drink, they smoke, they root, they don't wear seatbelts, they're courageous and passionate...I wanted to make something that would turn people on and send them home with love on their minds.'³⁸

Both *Via Satellite* and *Savage Honeymoon* took around \$250,000 at the box office. They were not disasters, but it would not be until the mid-2000s – with the development of the television series *Outrageous Fortune* (2005–10), featuring some of the actors from *Savage Honeymoon* as members of an extended family, now called the Wests – that this coarse but upbeat version of Pākehā life would find an enthusiastic mass audience.

Three other ScreenVisioNZ features followed: *Scarflies* (1999), *Stickmen* (2001) and *Snakeskin* (2001). *Scarflies* teamed the writer of *Saving Grace*, Duncan Sarkies, with his brother Robert as director, and young producer Lisa Chatfield. The film begins as a grimy but light comedy set in a Dunedin student hovel as flatmates are assembled for the new university term. However, a taut psychological experiment ensues as the flatmates discover a lucrative cache of drugs in their basement, and they all must individually decide to what lengths they are prepared to go (imprisonment? torture? murder?) in order to protect their own interests. *Scarflies* is rather pedestrian visually and strongly reminiscent of the British film *Shallow Grave* (1994). Nonetheless, its premise, performances and overall energy made it a hit with young audiences. Unfortunately, Portman Films and TVNZ dropped out of the ScreenVisioNZ scheme after the fifth film.

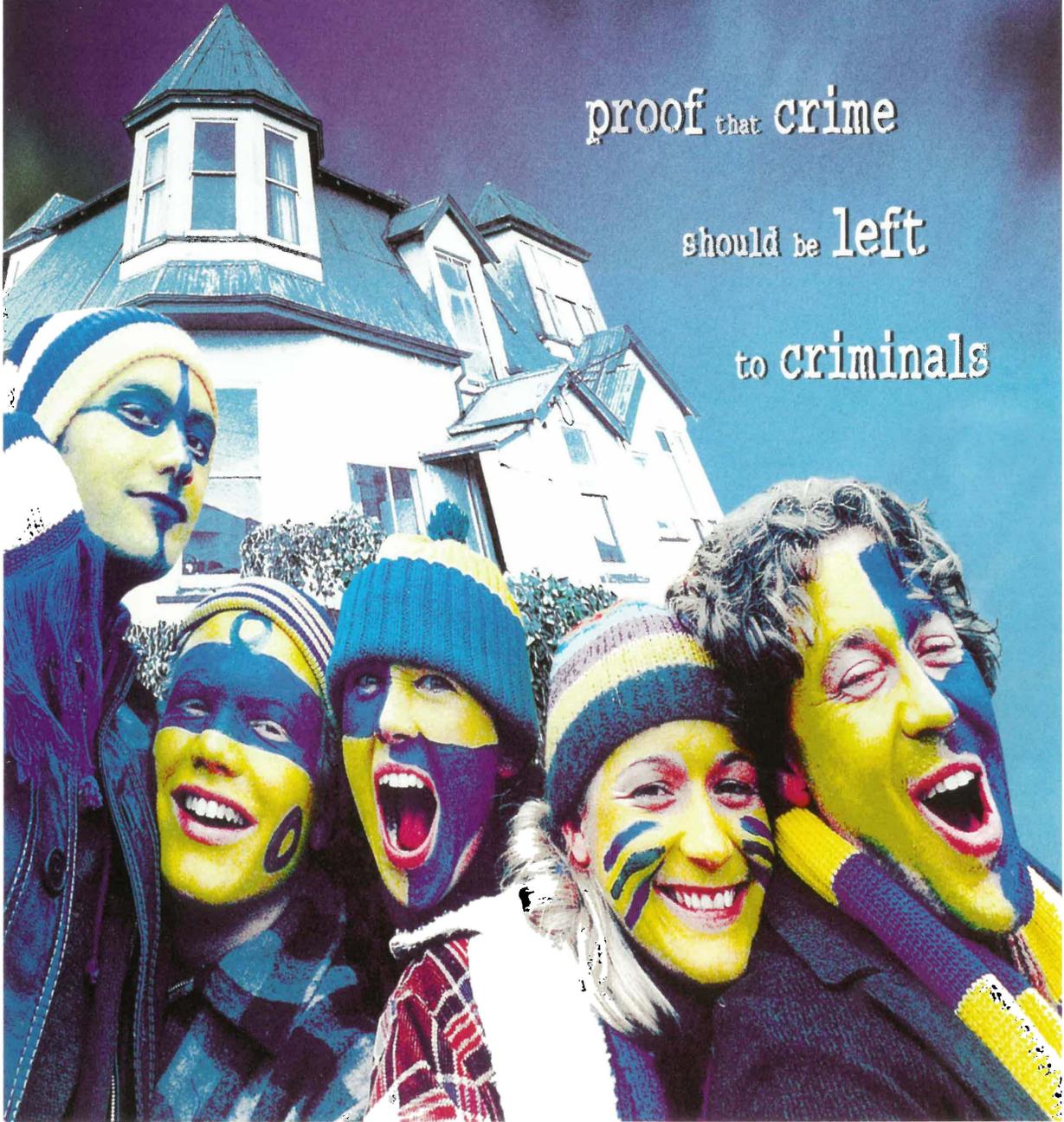
South Pacific Pictures – a spin-off company from TVNZ and until this point predominantly a producer of television material – saw opportunity in the hard-edged niche that Communicado had carved out with its two urban dramas, *Once Were Warriors* and *Broken English*. In 1999, they released a sequel to *Once Were Warriors*, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* Dealing with Jake's gradual realisation that his behaviour and attitudes had in fact destroyed his family,

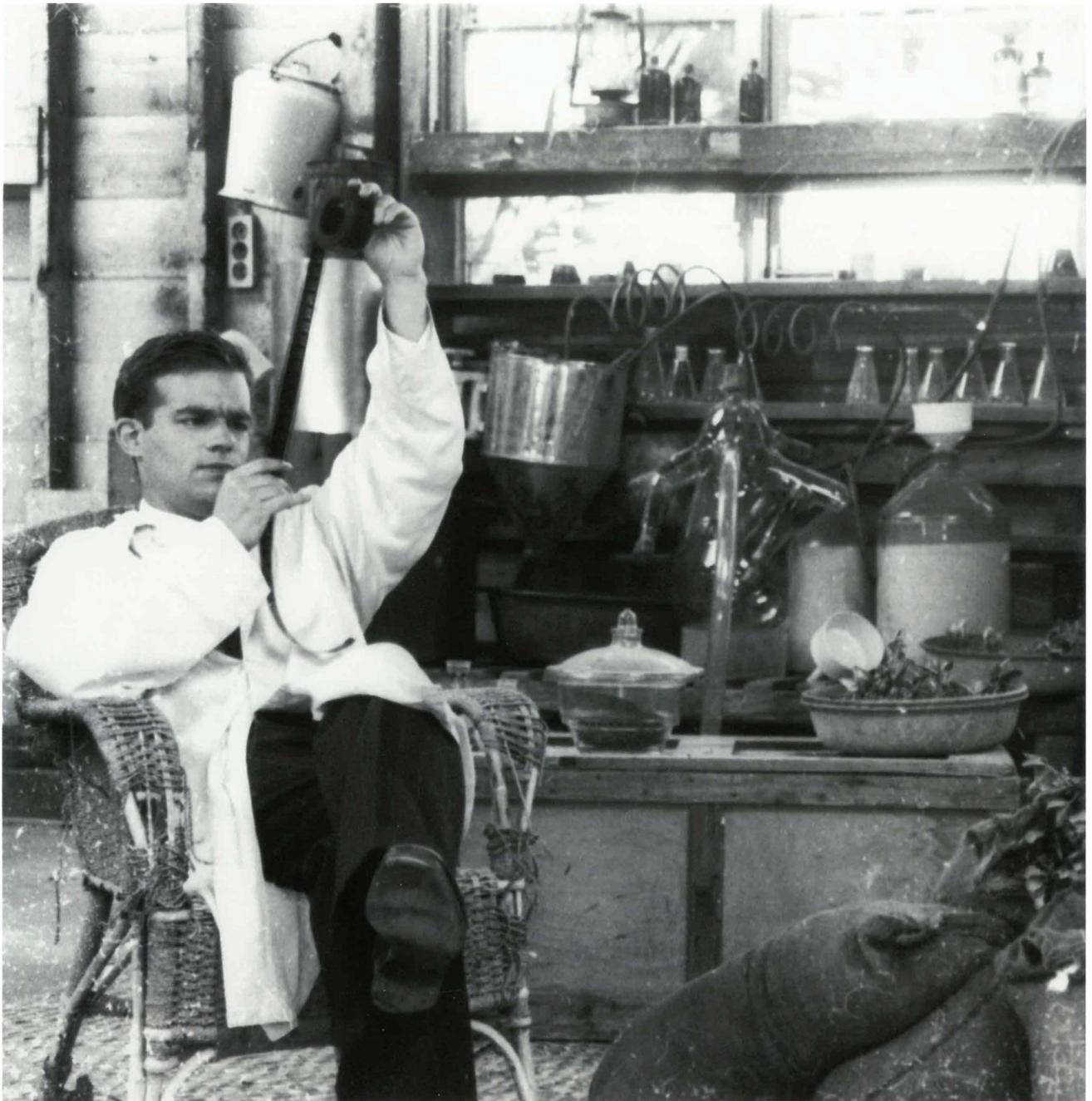
scarfies

proof that crime

should be left

to criminals





Thomas Robins as Colin McKenzie in *Forgotten Silver* (1995)

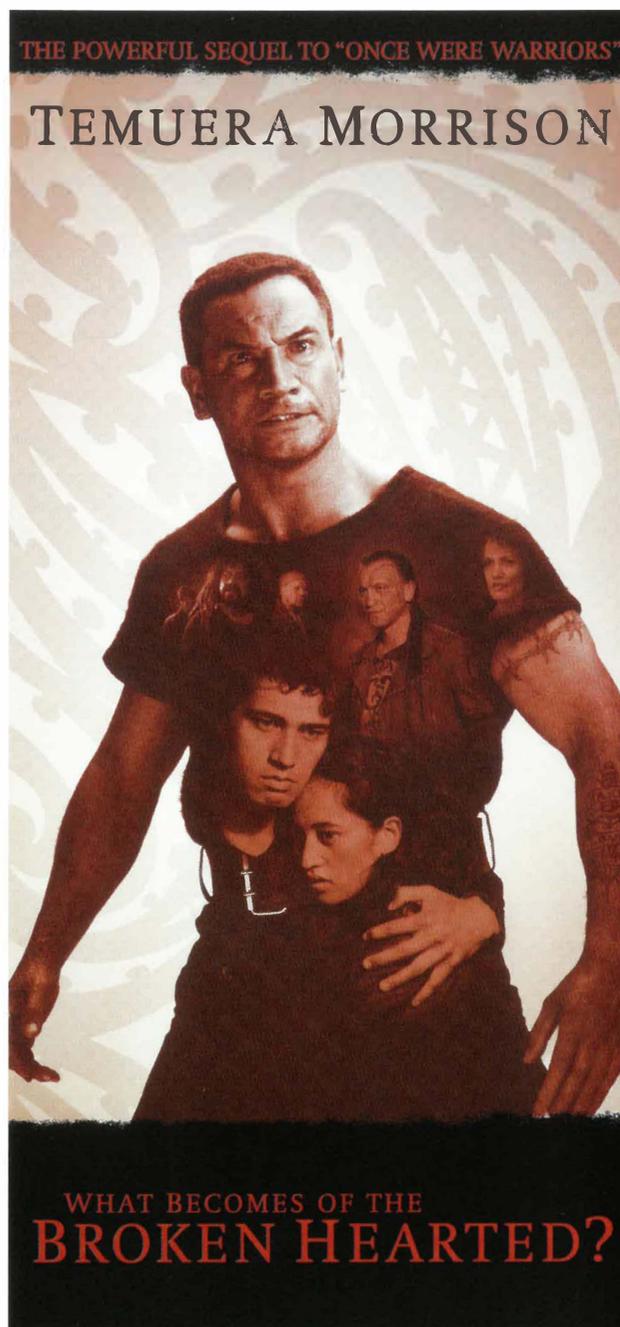
this film includes several actors from *Once Were Warriors*, including Temuera Morrison, Julian Arahanga and Rena Owen. Directed by Ian Mune from a script by Alan Duff, *Broken Hearted* went deeper into the culture of rival Māori gangs that were responsible for the death of the oldest of Jake's three sons, Nig, and threatened to destroy another, Sonny. Again, strong design elements and intense violence were entwined in the film's appeal. South Pacific's commercial instincts proved sound, with the sequel taking more than \$3 million at the local box office, bringing it within the top three most popular New Zealand films of the 1990s.

A fabricated history predicts the future

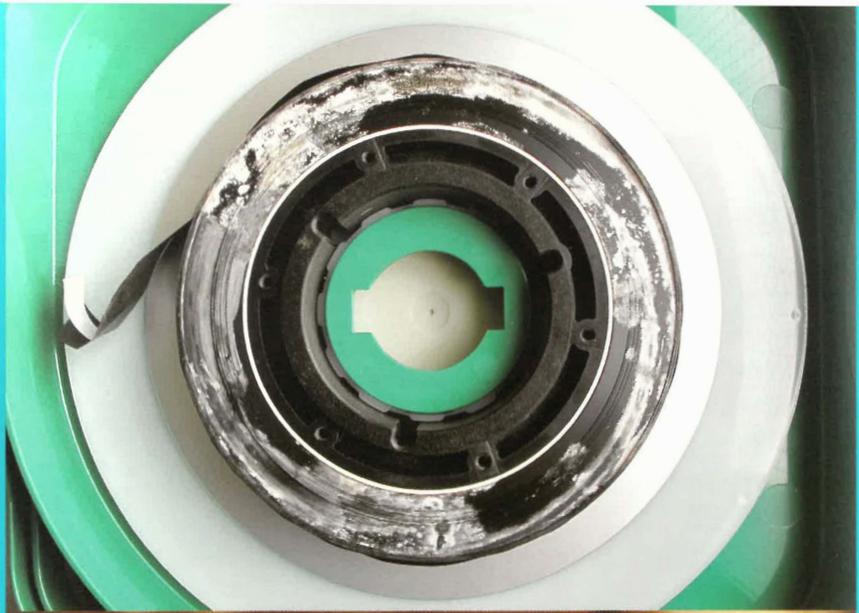
Forgotten Silver (1995), jointly developed by Peter Jackson and Costa Botes, was supposedly a biopic about the career of a previously undiscovered pioneer film maker, Colin McKenzie. It presented a convincing historical surface by using footage that looked as if it had come from a film archive and by employing one of the first actual local 'star' actresses (Ramai Hayward, in the role of McKenzie's second wife, Hannah), while also building shamelessly on New Zealanders' desire to be thought of as cultural and technological forerunners. The result was a fiction that was highly plausible, a 'mockumentary' that fooled many viewers on its debut in the television high-culture *Montana Sunday Theatre* slot.

Joke and con that it was, *Forgotten Silver* nevertheless in some ways predicted exciting future events in film making in the final years of the decade. From 1997 onwards there were reports that Jackson was planning to make a film version of JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). In September 1998, six months after Philip Wakefield announced in *Onfilm* that 'it's official, we [the film industry] are in recession',³⁹ that same industry was electrified by the news that in fact Jackson would be making a three-film version of the larger Tolkien work, *The Lord of the Rings*. 'King of the Rings!' trumpeted the story in *Onfilm*, declaring that 'Peter Jackson's LOTR trilogy is a fantasy come true for the New Zealand film industry'.⁴⁰ The extent to which fantasy became reality through the 'Jackson Effect' is discussed in the following chapter.

The growing commercialism of the 1990s, encouraged by successive governments, had made the work of the Film Commission more complex. Its old balancing act – which treated culture and commerce as equally important – was becoming increasingly difficult. In the coming decade, the Commission would continue to struggle with the dilemma of how to do justice to both concepts of the New Zealand film industry.



Publicity for *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* (1999)



Mould damage on a 1-inch Fuji H621E video tape

A reel of nitrate film from *The Birth of New Zealand* (1922) in the final stages of decomposition

A close-up of a reel of film showing the effects of advanced 'vinegar syndrome' with crystals beginning to form

Facing page: A frame of film showing irreversible mould damage where the picture information has been eaten away





All moving images on all formats are at risk from damage and decay, and preserving them is a complex business.

Until the 1950s, most professional productions in New Zealand were made on cellulose nitrate film. Nitrate is highly flammable, and unless stored in cool and dry conditions it decomposes easily, releasing nitrous gases and acids. The decomposing film first becomes sticky, then congeals and finally crumbles. After 1952, nitrate film was replaced by safety film on acetate stock. But it, too, is at risk. If kept in warm, humid conditions and/or poorly processed, colour acetate film can fade, ultimately leaving images pink. Poor storage also makes acetate film prone to 'vinegar syndrome', where the film breaks down and produces acetic acid. This makes the film twist, shrink and become brittle,

films must be isolated to prevent the problem spreading.

Videotape – introduced into New Zealand from the early 1960s and still in wide usage in various formats – runs the risk of mechanical damage to the tape and its casing as well as the risk of 'sticky shed' syndrome, which is caused by high humidity and results in the tape's image information layer flaking off. Humid storage conditions can also promote the growth of mould, allowing enzymes to attack the tape (or film) surface and obliterate the picture.

Since the mid-1990s, more and more moving image material has been born digital. However, even digital files are at risk of data corruption, software obsolescence and hard-drive failure. Contrary to popular belief, DVDs are a poor medium for the long-term survival of

damage
to daylig
informa
images
with the
environ
from old
conserv