A publication with a special focus on the local film industry and upcoming stars

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FILM CENTRAL

July 2022

Introducing

AWARD-WINNING ACTOR AND FILMMAKER

STEVE STANULIS

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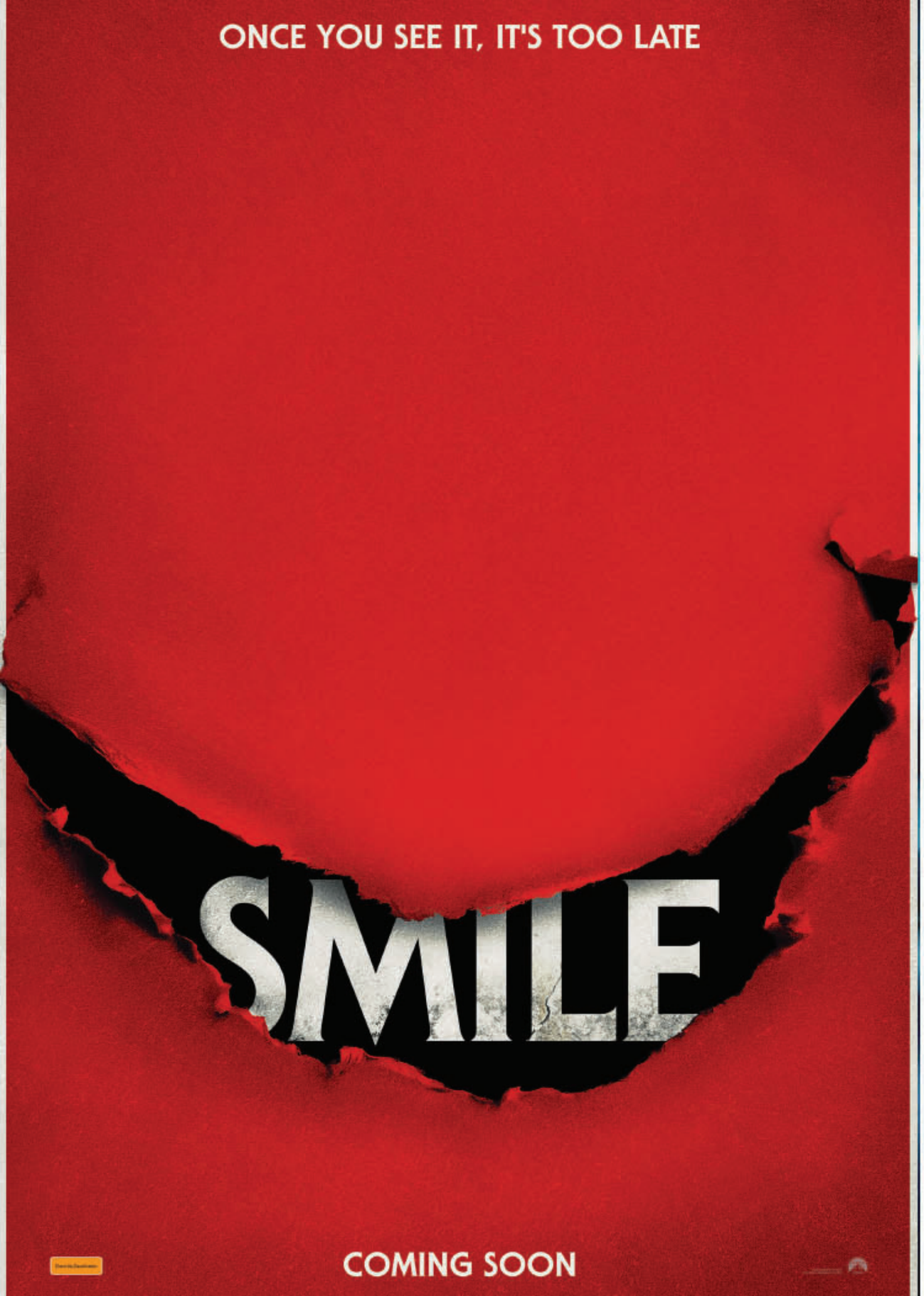

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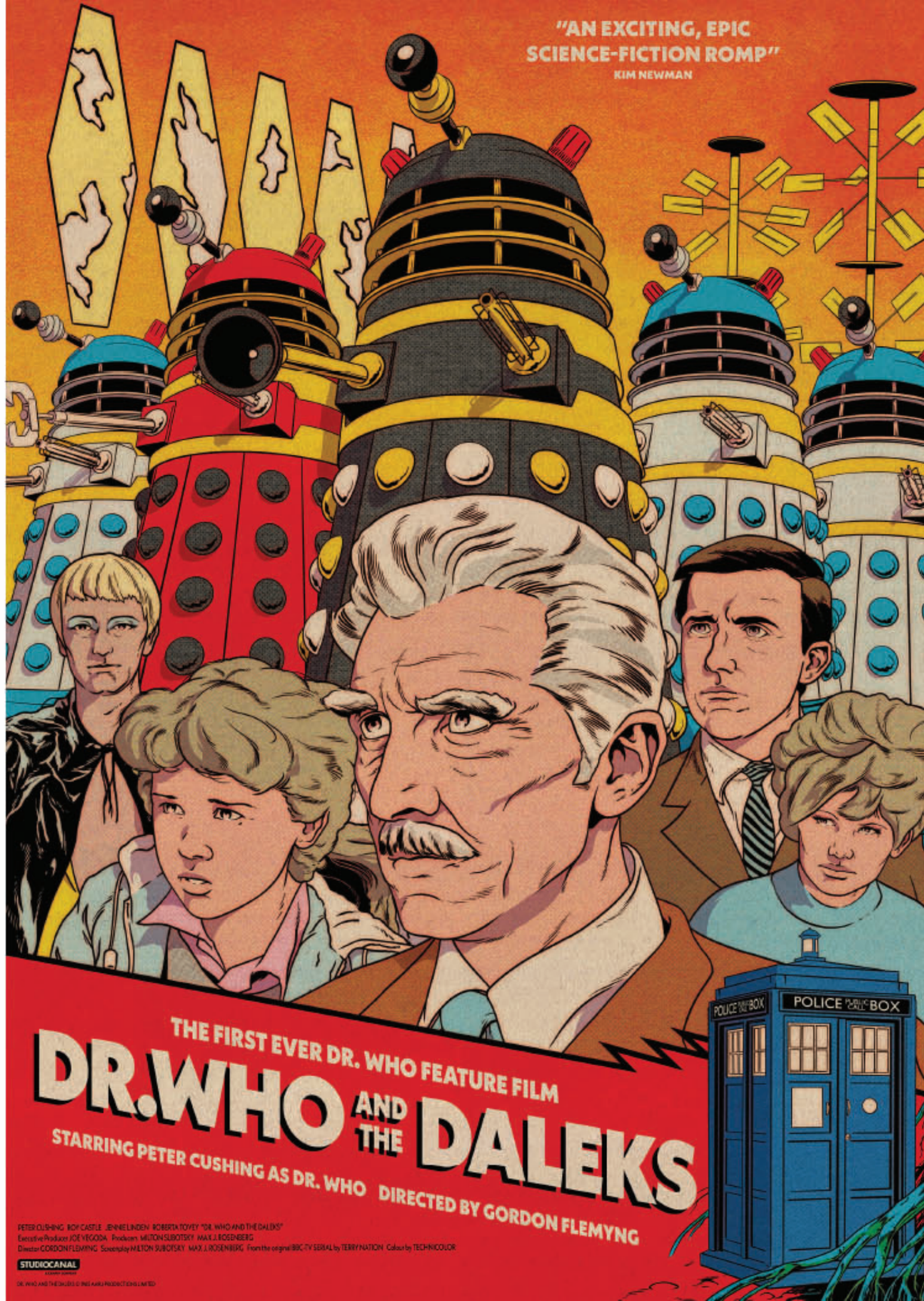

The Australian Feature Film Summit

AFFS

The Australian Feature Film Summit (AFFS) has recently unveiled the outcomes of its trilogy of events, with the forum attracting more than 1,000 delegates across its October virtual AFFS, May hybrid AFFS and AFFS Prism roundtable in June.

The recent AFFS Prism roundtable capped off a year of meetings and events aimed specifically at growing the success of the Australian feature film sector. Facilitated by Dr Simon Longstaff AO, Executive Director of The Ethics Centre, the outcome-driven, future-focused policy forum increased the audience and business case for Australian feature films by teasing out several 'What if' scenarios - interrogating new strategies in relation to the business models currently intersecting theatrical production, distribution and exhibition.

Summit Director, Sue Maslin said: "The Summit has been a game changer on a number of fronts. It brought all players involved in connecting screen ideas to theatrical audiences into the same room for the first time in many decades. It demonstrated that cinema still matters and that everyone benefits from great Australian film releases. We need more of these, not less – but 'good' is no longer enough. The films need to be 'great' to attract audiences to the theatrical space.

"It has closed the loop between exhibition and production and invited exhibitors to join distributors and screen agencies in playing a role in determining what is 'theatrical'."

Designed to drive change by turning principles into practice, suggestions into strategies and opinions into outcomes, the Summit provided detailed modelling of how audience data is currently used and more importantly, how the industry might more effectively use it going forward. It invited delegates to listen to each other's business challenges and opportunities and questioned every aspect of how the industry interrelates and might do things differently - from incentivising success; reforming marketing and release strategies and funding; the risk / award ratio for each industry sector and how this is reflected in terms; and ways that the streaming services could co-exist with theatrical releases.

"This is the beginning of a new era of cooperation and has been supported by all representative bodies of producers, exhibitors and distributors as well as screen agencies and filmmakers. The streamers have yet to fully engage in this conversation but will likewise have an important role to play in the future of Australian feature films," said Maslin.

Summit Convenor, Gino Munari further commented: "While it may be an understatement to say that there are many diverse perspectives on the solutions, everyone involved in the Australian Feature Film Summit can agree on the need for action to ensure the success of the Australian feature film industry going forward. And the Summit has demonstrated our willingness to work together to achieve it."

Specific outcomes from the three summit events include;

- The Road Test pitching forum, produced in partnership with Compton School, will become a regular calendar event to coincide with the Australian International Movie Convention and the ICA Conference.
- The top three Road Test pitch producers have been invited to participate at the upcoming MIFF 37 South Market.
- A range of forums both in person and online will continue to bring exhibitors together with filmmakers to increase producers' understanding of exhibition and cinema programming.
- A task force to scope an accessible national data base offering core insights on audiences has been established.
- Plans are underway to establish a marketing task force to review how the industry can work together more strategically to support Australian theatrical releases.
- The AFFG will contribute a submission to the National Cultural Policy.

For more information visit www.affsummit.com.au.

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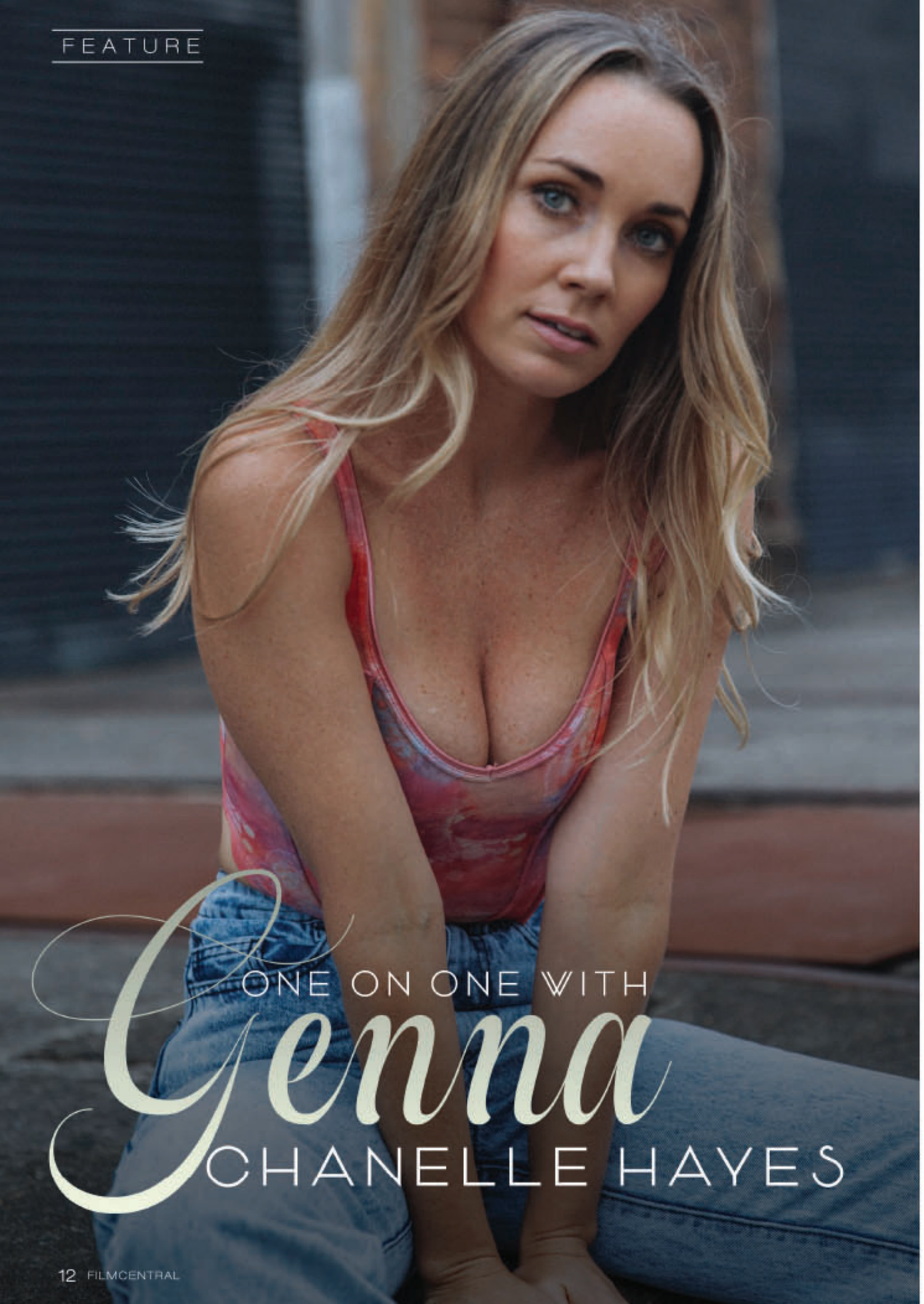

ONE ON ONE WITH Genna CHANELLE HAYES

Debut feature film "AKONI" from local filmmaker Genna Chanelle Hayes premiered during refugee week (19th – 25th June 2022), and FilmCentral's editor-in-chief Yolandi Franken was there to celebrate the occasion. We caught up with Genna to discuss her latest project, and here's what went down:

What is the synopsis of the film?

A homeless refugee (Kit Esuruoso) struggles to integrate into Australian society after escaping conflict in his homeland. While living on the streets and on the receiving end of racist taunts, a young woman (Genna Chanelle Hayes) comes to his aid. Struggling with her own feelings of grief and loneliness, she soon finds solace in her unlikely new companion as he opens her up to a world beyond modelling, parties, and social media.

Who are your Director and Producer?

The film was written, directed, and produced single-handedly by local filmmaker Genna Chanelle Hayes across Australia, Ghana, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom.

Who is your main cast?

Rising star of London's West End, Kit Esuruoso ("West Side Story," "TINA The Musical," "Show Boat") has the lead role for which he was recently nominated as "Best Actor" by the Australian Screen and Industry Network Awards. There's also Nigerian actress Jemima Osunde ("Shuga," "The Delivery Boy"), Mark Coles Smith ("Last Cab to Darwin," "Mystery Road"), Simon Elrahi and Pippa Grandison.

What inspired the story? How did it come about?

I fell in love with a Nigerian in London and began spending time with his family. I am very well-travelled, but I'd never been to West Africa, so this led me to begin researching Nigeria and as a journalist with a specific interest in conflict resolution, this led me to discover the depth of the Boko Conflict – which is an ongoing conflict that has displaced over 3 million people and let to around 8 million people living with food instability. Nigerians are now one of the largest displaced peoples on the planet. Women and girls continue to suffer and often bare the brunt of such conflicts, and so this research along with my unfolding real-life love affair led to the creation of AKONI.

What makes this story unique and why should people watch it?

There are over 100 million people now currently displaced globally. That is the high number of displaced people in recorded history. This means that there are over 100 million people looking for a safe place to settle, who are reliant on the compassion, kindness, empathy, understanding, and generosity of their fellow humans. Akoni is a vessel that can help build understanding around this, and contribute to healing and unifying our global society.

What was the production process like?

This film was created with a very small crew who experienced the coldest of winters on Sydney streets and the hottest of dry seasons in West Africa. It was an incredibly challenging and beyond ambitious task to create my beautiful and worthy debut feature film with limited financing across three continents with a skeleton crew and little to no resources. I honestly don't think it gets any more difficult than that for an independent first-time feature filmmaker. But we did it, and it's a beautiful film. The lessons I learned were very hard lessons to learn, and the toll it took on me financially, emotionally, physically, and mentally – I am still recovering from all of this. What I will say is that I am lucky enough to work with some of the best in the industry in Australia, Nigeria, Ghana, and the UK, and it is for that reason that our completed film is of the quality it is. Personal shout out to the hundreds of people who loved me along the way and contributed to the creation of this film alongside me.

What was the most challenging part of bringing the project to light?

The most challenging part of this process for me was producing it all myself while simultaneously taking on all the other roles I had to take on in order due to budget constraints and in order to ensure success. It took a lot out of me, and it stretched me far beyond my limits, though on the positive side it taught me invaluable lessons that I would not have learned otherwise, and it brought many beautiful people into my life.

Did anything funny or exceptional happen on set?

Everything, always. I believe the entire creation was exceptional, including all of the people I worked with who shared their exceptionally big hearts with AKONI. When you have a grand film and a limited budget, its success requires a lot from your team – and every member of my international team gave to this film in ways that were consistently above and beyond. And I am forever grateful.

What is the next step for the project?

We will be embarking upon our 'AKONI' Refugee Week Premiere Screenings Tour next week, and then releasing in select cinemas in Australia on June 30, New Zealand on July 14, and West Africa on August 11 alongside one of West Africa's biggest distributors, FilmOne. We will also be holding special fundraiser screenings along the way. A little later in the year, we will look to platform releases.

Has it won any awards or had any big achievements yet?

Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor Awards.

If you could redo anything in the process of the film itself, what would it be?

If I could redo anything…this is a difficult question because there's a part of me who would change everything and make sure we had all the things that we didn't have along the way, but then there's also a part of me that believes we are all destined to travel the journey we travel. And, the person I am today, with the strength, confidence, and solidified sense of self that I feel, I would not be this version of myself without the difficulties I have faced. So, I guess the answer is … I don't know, but as a woman and a female artist, I do love who I am becoming every day.

AKONI
AKONI
AKONI

Networking event held for female and non-binary filmmakers. Hosted by WIFT, Screen Vixens and Sydney Film Festival.

In Pictures: Sydney Film Festival 2022

The world's best new films came to Sydney this year for 12 days and nights from 8-19 June of inspiring and entertaining premieres, talks and parties. The festival took place at its flagship venue the State Theatre, as well as cinemas in the CBD, Newtown, Cremorne, Randwick, Western Sydney and more, screening films you won't usually find in the multiplex. 12 films were selected for the Official Competition, which celebrated "courageous, audacious and cutting-edge" cinema with a $60,000 cash prize. Sydney Film Festival also presented eight other cash awards over the course of the festival.

Akoni Premiere with Nicole Pastor

Screening of Elvis, with producer, David Hov

Red Carpet Rundown: "The Twelve" In Ritz Cinemas

Foxtel recently held a red carpet launch for the premiere of its new Australian drama series, The Twelve ahead of the show airing on June 21. Members of the cast joined Foxtel executives, media personalities, influencers, and journalists including our very own Yolandi Franken, Andy Trieu, and Genevieve Craig at Ritz Cinemas for the screening.

The 10-part courtroom drama starring Sam Neill (Jurassic World: Dominion, Thor: Love and Thunder, Palm Beach), Marta Dusseldorp (Wentworth, Stateless, A Place to Call Home), and Kate Mulvany (Fighting Season, Lambs of God, Hunters). It revolves around the story of 12 ordinary Aussies who are selected for jury duty in a murder trial, in which a woman stands accused of killing her teenage niece.

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GET TO KNOW STEVE Stanulis

Steve Stanulis, trailblazing actor, producer, and creative force behind Stanulis Productions Inc. and Chaos Production Inc. has appeared in several major studio movies such as 'The Interpreter' and 'I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry,' acclaimed indie films (Cupidity, Over the GW), and TV shows (The Sopranos, HBO series The Deuce). He also branched into production, starring in and producing the short films Dick & Jane and Because of You, and the award-winning feature The Invisible Life of Thomas Lynch.

Originally a decorated NYPD officer, Stanulis changed his career path when he got injured on the job. After studying at Manhattan's HB Studios, Stanulis pursued his long-standing love for films. His passion eventually led him to getting co-starring credits in Aftermath with Tony Danza and Anthony Michael Hall, Darkroom with Elizabeth Rohm, Sam, executive produced by Mel Brooks, and American Fango, winner of a dozen Best Feature awards. Stanulis also starred in and produced the comedy-drama The Networker, co-starring William Forsythe, Sean Young, and Stephen Baldwin, directed by indie icon and frequent Stanulis collaborator John Gallagher. It was released in September 2017 by Sony's The Orchard, making three consecutive films (Sam, American Fango, The Networker) acquired by Sony companies in less than a year, a truly unique achievement.

As a producer, Stanulis founded Stanulis Productions, Inc. in 2012, with the feature film Long Shot Louie, starring Jake Robinson (The Carrie Diaries), winning Best Drama at the Williamsburg Film Festival. In 2016, he produced and starred in Say Something, co-starring Marc John Jeffries, a cautionary anti-terror drama filmed in Times Square, receiving massive media exposure and also available on Amazon Prime. He directed the feature-length musical documentary Legends of Freestyle starring Lisa Lisa and C & C Music Factory and created the pilot for the TV series The Fifth Borough, starring Cathy Moriarty, Richard Grieco, Vincent Young, Vincent Pastore, and Joseph D'Onofrio. Stanulis recently created Chaos Production Inc. and announced his first project, the horror movie Clinton Road, which he will direct, starring Ice T, Vincent Pastore, Bo Dietl, Ace Young, and Fredro Starr.

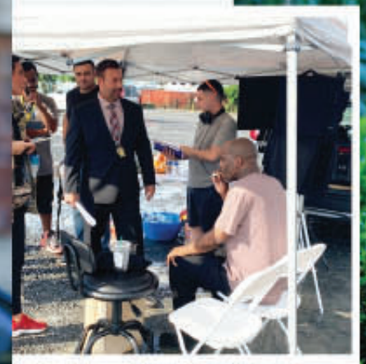
Stanulis' creativity is inspired by his experiences as a former NYPD policeman, Chippendales dancer, and bodyguard for several A-list celebrities, including Leonardo DiCaprio and Kanye West. FilmCentral magazine recently caught up with Steve to discuss his journey in the industry, and here's what went down:

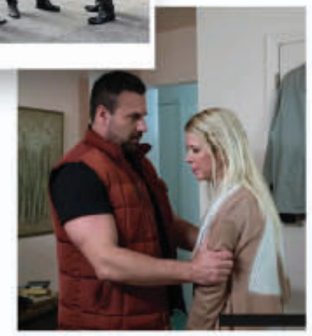
Can you describe your journey to becoming a producer?

I always believed when I broke into this business that you have to make yourself indispensable. The thought of waiting for my agent to call or putting my destiny into someone else's hands never sat right with me. So I decided to produce and make myself more valuable to the powers that be in the business.

What methods do you use to communicate effectively with directors, actors, crew members, and writers to discuss production details?

I always like a hands-on approach when discussing a new project I am producing. I want to share my visions with the writer, director, and most importantly, the actor. I love getting feedback on character development and like to give everyone the comfort to provide their creative input, which I believe is essential to making great content.





What do you think is the most important skill to have when producing something for television or for film?

The most important skill to have is no matter how big the production is; you're always going to run into issues, whether it be with the cast, a location, or a food allergy. No matter the issue, never let anyone see you get flustered, and always be prepared with a plan B. I think that usually comes with experience over time.

What do you think is the most difficult task of a producer when planning a production?

The most difficult task behind the scenes is ensuring all the proper funds are not only in place but allocated accordingly. The second equally important task is scheduling your DOODS with your "Anchor" actors in place within specific time frames that coincide with your main locations.

What is the first step you take when working to secure financing?

Dealing with a studio like Lionsgate, for example. Letting them know the budget and genre and who they deem means the most, both foreign and domestic actors, to properly set your budget to assess potential earnings while mitigating risk.

How do you go about establishing deadlines for a project, and what do you do to keep it on schedule?

I am very old school in the sense that once you set a hard date for something, it makes it real and gets everyone on the team in the mindset that it's go time!

Given the choice, would you prefer to miss a deadline to make a project perfect or meet a deadline but compromise the quality of the production?

Luckily I have never been in this situation. But if that were to happen, I would definitely miss the deadline and then compromise the integrity of the project.

Can you tell us about a time where you needed to change your style to accommodate the communication style of one of the critical members of the production team?

Every new project brings different people to the cast and crew. You are dealing with many personalities from different parts of the country. Some might not have the same mindset or do things differently. I always start off being the most professional I can be with everyone and try my best to read the room. Usually I assess from there but if you are professional treat everyone with respect at all times I feel it goes along way with the whole team.

What do you look for in a script when deciding whether you would like to join a project as the producer?

What I look for in a script is simple: does the genre and certain script have marketability and will it make money! Or is the topic of the script timely with what's going on in the world today.

How do you deal with unforeseen strains on the budget and/or timetable during a production?

Like I mentioned in a prior question, I have been absolutely blessed that I have yet to go over budget. I hope next time we speak I have the same exact answer (laughs).

What projects are you working on right now?

Right now we are about to release a film called "Monica" with Emily Browning at Patricia Clarkson fall of 2022. We are working on a tv show called "Great Kills" closely with Peacock. As well as a pretty controversial documentary called "15 days with Kanye." Those are the immediate ones n post production we are off to an amazing 2022!

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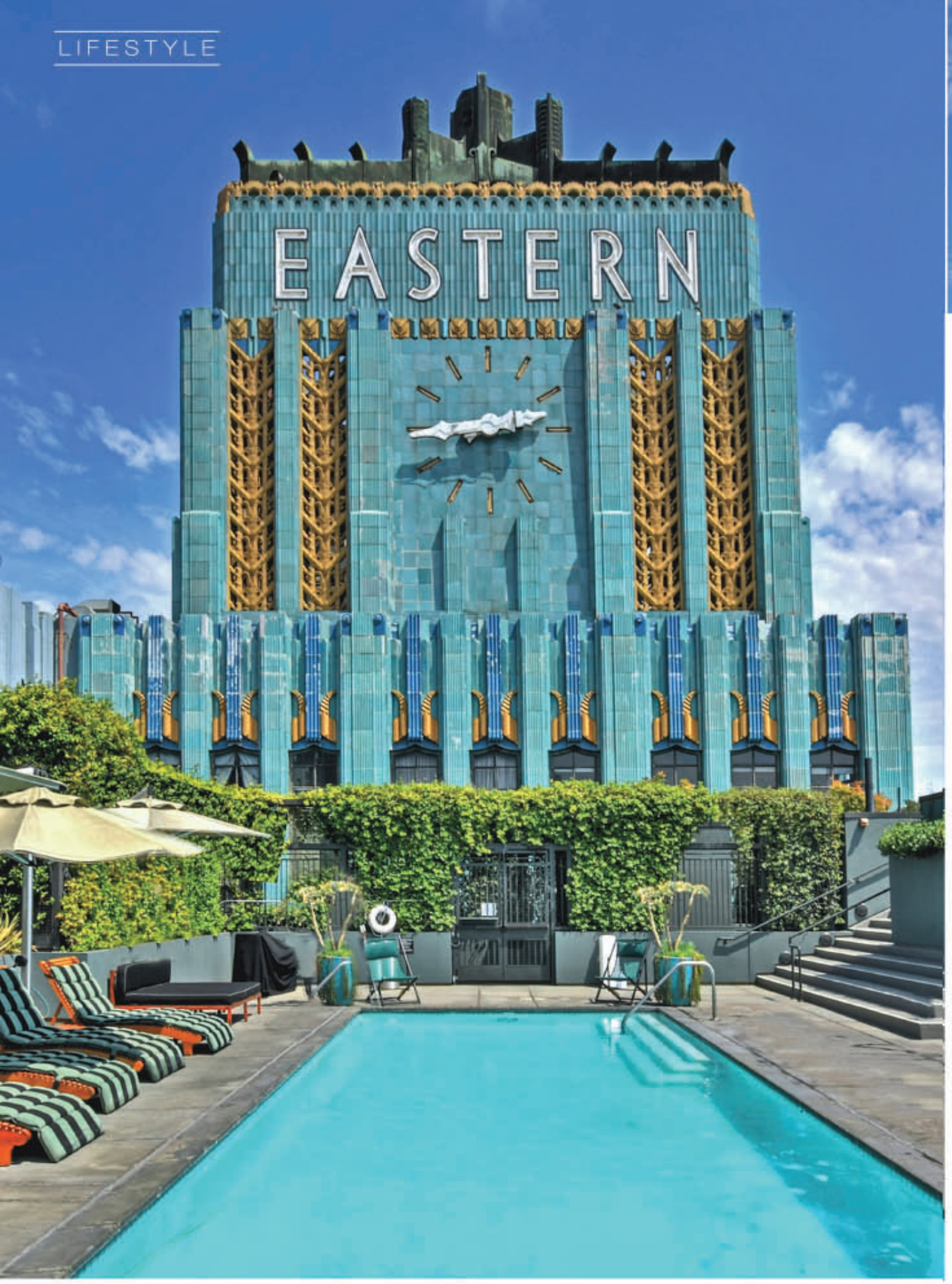

SNEAK PEEK: CELEBRITY HOMES UNLOCKED

Johnny & Amber's FORMER LOVE NEST

With all the notoriety Johnny Depp and Amber Heard attracted during their headline-making court case, what better time for a new owner to put the Depp-Heard former love nest on the market? Though only married for 15 months, the Los Angeles building was their home and, according to the listing agent, the one-bedroom penthouse was where they "spent a good amount of their time." Depp actually owned five of the penthouses atop Downtown LA's iconic Eastern Columbia Building. Following his 2016 divorce from Heard, he listed and sold all of them for a total of $12.78 million. Now, one of the apartments, the one-bedroom, two-bath penthouse, is again for sale - priced at $1.765 million.

Depp is well known for his acting in his many movies, including Edward ScissorHands and Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean series, but he is almost as well known for his penchant for owning eccentric real estate, which shows off the imagination that has proven to be a part of his fame. Johnny was one of the highest-paid actors in Hollywood and could afford to buy almost any attractive or unusual property he desired. And he did!

Depp, who was born in Owensboro, Kentucky, owns or has owned a 45-acre island in the Bahamas that caught his eye when he was filming Pirates of the Caribbean, a collection of expensive homes in the Hollywood Hills that he planned on connecting with a series of tunnels, a Kentucky horse farm that he bought for his mother, an entire French village near St. Tropez, and the five LA penthouses.

Johnny's love life has been about as interesting as his real estate holdings. In addition to the Amber Heard marriage, he was married to makeup artist Lori Anne Allison when he was just 20 years old. And a long line of engagements or serious dating, including Sherilyn Fenn, Jennifer Grey, Winona Ryder, Ellen Barkin, Kate Moss, and French singer-actress Vanessa Paradis.

Depp still has many close friends, both male and female. His kindness toward friends and family shows by how he handles his real estate. When he had the five penthouses, instead of renting them, he kept them for friends and family to visit in comfort. The same is true of the homes he owns in the Hollywood Hills.

The LA two-story, one-bedroom penthouse is located in one of the city's most historic buildings and features 1,780 square feet, soaring ceilings, and a cozy lounge area on the staircase landing. In addition to its great walkability to restaurants and shopping, the building's amenities include a rooftop saltwater pool, fitness studio, spa, sundeck, Zen garden, and 24/7 concierge service. The listing agents are Ernie Carswell and Rick Tyberg of Douglas Elliman, Beverly Hills.

Source: www.elliman.com

Photo By: Douglas Elliman Realty I Source: TopTenRealEstateDeals.com

MOVIE REVIEW: THE VERDICT ON

The Drover's Wife

For every Australian, the name Henry Lawson is a familiar fella. He was a renowned bush poet who penned the Drover's wife- a nine paged short story of a fierce and protective mother defending her homestead in the bush from an intruder. The short story was published in 1892 Australia, and it needs an overdue makeover and reimagining for mo 'dern audiences.

In comes Leah Purcell, who to Henry Lawson's Drover wife and reimagined in a post-colonial, indigenous feminist tale of Molly Johnson. Lawson's original short story stayed with Leah since she was a little girl.

"When I was five years old, my mother read the original 9-page Drover's wife story by Henry Lawson; I could imagine myself in the story as the little boy as the protector of the story," Purcell recalled when asked where she sourced her inspiration.

The 9-page classic resonated with her as she was from a droving family, and they lived on the outskirts of a small country town.

"My mother taught me how to split a log and stack a wood heat so the snakes wouldn't get under, and it was all stuff that reverberated to the original story of the Drover's wife. As a five-year-old, my imagination went wild, and I saw myself in the story."

The short story was so profound that she adapted her reimagined tale for the third time, from a book to play and now to a cinematic masterpiece that premiered at the Randwick Ritz last month.

The film centres around Molly Johson (Leah Purcell), the eponymous Drover's wife who is heavily pregnant, encounters an indigenous man, Yadaka (Rob Collins), who is on the run from police as he was a suspected murderer. At first, Molly Johnson was startled by the stranger. Then, however, she slowly unlocks her heritage's secrets through spending time with Yadaka. The central relationship between Yadaka and Molly was captivating. Originally, it refers to the "Stray black fellow" in the original and is described to be a "liar" and "cheat." Purcell restores humanity in her reiteration of the classic.

Initially, Molly was skeptical upon the arrival of Yadaka, warning the fugitive – "Cross me, and I'll kill you." However, she airs on the side of caution before helping him with his shackles once she witnesses that Yadaka teaches her eldest son, Danny (Malachi Dower-Roberts), how to use a spear properly.

Yadaka also was the person who opened Molly's eyes to her indigenous heritage and illuminated a part of her that was left dormant for years.

Yadaka later confides to Molly that the only crime he ever committed was "existing while Black." when questioned why he was on the run from the law – circling back to the ugly racial politics that colonial Australia built on still subtly exists in modern Australia.

The film continues to build on the legacy of unjust violence – not just against indigenous Australians but domestic violence. Later in the film, it implies that Molly was the prime suspect in her husband's disappearance. However, the film also implies that the Drover was violent and a cheater and inflicted alot of danger on her and her children. Yet, due to their fierce devotion to her children and her motivation to protect herself, she did the unthinkable.

Again, this resonates back to the MeToo movement where victims of sexual abuse and assault, who happen to be the majority of women, were never heard and how society sides with the perpetrators who happens to the majority of men.

The film is a cinematic tale of unrelenting feminist strength and highlights the legacy of violence that built colonial Australia. Interweaving elements of her indigenous roots and putting herself in a well-known Australian classic, Purcell has successfully "flipped the scripted" and turned it on its head.

Photographed By: Tony Palliser/Studio 49

MUST-SEE *the* BAMBOOZLE *Room*

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Located in the notoriously colourful and historic nightlife district of Kings Cross, the Bamboozle Room will transport you to another time and place for a taste of the risqué glamour of Sydney in a bygone era.

Bamboozle Room shows are performed by Sydney's most skilled and engaging dancers, comedians, and vaudeville entertainers. Tickets to public shows are available directly through the Bamboozle Room website (www.bamboozleroom.com).

The Bamboozle Room usually seats up to 70 people with table seating. This gives audiences a sophisticated cabaret experience that is safe, intimate, and as magical as ever. You'll enjoy the show and your meal from your own table while still being close to the action on stage. The food is delectable, and the cocktails are to die for.

They also create customised entertainment for private parties and corporate functions- at their place or yours.

Photo Credit: Tony Palliser/Studio 49

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ONE CONNECTION CHANGES EVERYTHING

'A modern-day love story, and a truly visceral account of the refugee journey.' — Human Rights For All

'Marks the arrival of a socially conscious Australian female filmmaker.' — Filmink

'Remarkable. A stunning debut aimed at healing our world.' — CinefestOZ

AKONI

A FILM BY **GENNA CHANELLE HAYES**

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