



Townsville Cinema Group

One of Australia's oldest film societies Established in 1962

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Screening at WARRINA CINEPLEX every second Thursday at 7.15 PM sharp
Sixteen double-feature programmes per year (plus bonus screenings)

Non-members \$12 per screening

1960's Australian Film Retrospective

As part of our 50th birthday celebrations, we will run a retrospective of Australian film, on our regular July 7th screening night.

The Townsville Cinema Group was born in October 1961 into the start of Australian film's true wilderness years. Film production in the preceding decades had been sustained almost single-handedly by Charles Chauvel, but his death in November 1959 marked the end of one era, with great uncertainty about when the next would start.

The 1960's saw limited production. Of 41 films made, 18 were documentaries, 6 were short films, one was a short feature, and there were 16 feature films, half of which were produced in 1969 alone. Of the other 8 features, three were specifically aimed at children and two were never given a cinema release.

The Townsville Cinema Group has a long history of screening retrospectives of notable films and on this, our 50th anniversary we thought it appropriate to screen a 1960's Australian film retrospective.

We wish to mark the decade of our birth by giving you an opportunity to see where Australian film was at the time. We feel it will also help to appreciate how far Australian film has come in that time, as well as how important it is for us to actively support film production in this country, whether as cinema goers, as voters, or as taxpayers.

They're a Weird Mob

Australia 1966 112 min [National Film & Sound Archive] G

Director: Michael Powell

Cast: Walter Chiari, Claire Dunne, Chips Rafferty, Ed Devereaux

Italian immigrant Nino arrives in Australia with the promise of a job as a journalist on his cousins magazine, only to find that when he gets here the magazine's folded, the cousins done a runner and the money his cousin sent for the fare was bor-



rowed from the daughter of the boss of a local construction firm ...

They're a Weird Mob has its origins in a popular comic novel written by John O'Grady under the pseudonym "Nino Culotta".

Prior to his literary success, O'Grady had worked as a pharmacist, a commercial traveller selling medical goods, a builder's labourer, a teacher of pharmacy for the NZ government in Samoa, and a fisherman. Undoubtedly his experiences provided much of the material for the novel. The book was published in 1957 and was immensely successful, selling over 130,000 copies in the first year.

The success of the novel projected Nino Culotta to fame and stardom. There were initial requests for biographical information and author interviews, and even an invitation

for Nino to appear at Melbourne's Moomba celebrations - all of which had to be rejected by O'Grady's publisher. Eventually, some two months after the novel's first release, it was strategically revealed that O'Grady was the author. Tiring of the fame that the Culotta persona was generating, O'Grady turned down an offer to write a regular column in Weekend magazine, stating: "Culotta does not write again until he is ready ... I have no interest in Culotta any more" and is reputed to have delivered Culotta's eulogy in 1960 in a pub in Toongabbie in the western suburbs of Sydney.

The popularity of the book no doubt encouraged filmmakers to bring the story to the big screen.

They're a Weird Mob was optioned a number of times by filmmakers, but none of them could come up with a workable screenplay until director Michael Powell brought in his long-time collaborator Emeric Pressburger, who wrote it under the pseudonym "Richard Imrie."

Notable cast members in the movie are: Walter Chiari as Nino Culotta, Chips Rafferty as Harry Kelly, Ed Devereaux as Joe Kennedy, John Meillon as Dennis, Anne Haddy as Barmaid, and Graham Kennedy as himself (cameo).

It is also worth noting that John O'Grady (the author) makes a cameo appearance as the grey-bearded drinker in the pub in the opening sequence of the film. Alida Chelli who plays Nino's Italian love interest was the girlfriend of Walter Chiari, but almost didn't get the part because she was thought to be too glamorous



and might have upstaged Clare Dunne, who would play Nino's Australian love interest.

The film was shot at a number of locations in the Sydney, most of which are significantly different today. In the closing sequence you will notice the Opera House under construction, a structure that is now synonymous with the city.

"*The House That Nino Built*" is located at 128 Greenacre Road in Greenacre, a suburb of Sydney. The actors dug trenches, poured concrete, laid bricks and so on. It was finished professionally and sold to raise funds for The Royal Life Saving Society. The stars' footprints were set in concrete slabs in the pathway.

They're a Weird Mob grossed \$2,417,000 at the box office in Australia, which is equivalent to roughly \$27 M in today's dollars.

The film was screened at the Wintergarden Theatre in Townsville from Nov 4th - 21st, 1966 and received a great deal of publicity in the Townsville Daily Bulletin.

Journey out of Darkness

Australia 1967 90 min [National Film & Sound Archive] NA

Director: James Trainor

Cast: Konrad Matthaei, Ed Devereaux, Kamahl

In 1901, a young trooper is sent to arrest an Arunta man responsible for a ritual killing in central Australia. When the trooper's black-tracker dies, he has to cross the desert alone with his captive ...

1967 was a pivotal year in Australia's history: Major events affecting us were the referendum, an increased involvement in the Vietnam War, and the disappearance and presumed death of our Prime Minister.

The referendum received a record YES vote of 91% and the changes to the constitution recognised Aborigines in the Census and made provision for them to be treated the same as all Australian citizens. Australia's troop commitment in Vietnam was increased to 8,000 in October 1967. And in December 1967, Harold Holt, our then Prime Minister, went for a swim at Cheviot Beach in rough weather and was lost, presumed drowned (one among many other fanciful theories).

Interestingly, **Journey out of Darkness** has a connection with all these events.



The film premiered on October 16th, 1967 at the Center Cinema in Canberra. Among the invited guests were Prime Minister Harold Holt, and David Stratton who was then the director of the Sydney Film Festival.

October was a busy Month for Holt, dealing with the VIP aircraft scandal, and the day after the World premiere of *Journey*, announcing that Australia was increasing its troop commitment in Vietnam by 30% at a time when the war was becoming increasingly unpopular. Despite those pressures, he attended the World Premiere and by all accounts enjoyed the night immensely.

Holt was a big supporter of the Arts, with a special interest in film. Through his legal practice he had represented many artists, his father had been a theatrical agent, and his stepmother was the daughter of film producer Frank Thring. Holt was a strong advocate for Government's support of Australian film through the establishment of Government film bodies and through the funding of a National Film School, changes that eventually came to pass.

Holt was a key force behind including the indigenous question in the 1967 referendum. Despite a climate of greater indigenous engagement, *Journey's* producers cast a man from Sri Lankan descent and a white man in 'black face' in the principal Aboriginal roles.

Indigenous actors were in short supply at the time, with the best known being Robert Tudawali, the lead actor in *Jedda*. By the time shooting began on *Journey* he was drinking heavily and regularly came under adverse notice by the authorities. In July 1967 he was involved in a drinking session at Bagot. He became involved in an altercation that resulted in him being thrown in a fire or a fire being lit around him while he lay drunk and ill on the ground. He died of severe burns and tuberculosis in Darwin Hospital, before *Journey* was complete.

It has been suggested that the casting of non-indigenous actors for the principal indigenous characters contributed to the film's poor performance at the box office.

Of interest to Townsville residents, the Ross River is one of the locations featured in the film.

Journey out of Darkness was screened at the Wintergarden Theatre from Jan 5th - 11th, 1968. It was the 2,488th film that David Stratton saw, but it does not feature among his favourites.



Text by Mark Enders
Design by Floris van der Leest