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## OPINION

### No dramas, sadly

If there's a time that Foxtel's marketing machine outdoes itself, it's when it comes to reveal its future year's programming. Last night Foxtel made the most of having its hands on the Sydney Opera House for the Australia's Next Top Model final and announced its plans for 2012 too.

It was a glitzy upfront, attended by media agencies and trade journalists, plus plenty of Foxtel personalities. But comparing it to last year's affair, the emphasis appears to have shifted away from local drama. [Read more »](#)

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### Want more Swamp People? Then drop the local content quota

The short-sighted idea of dropping TV networks' local content quota obligations was put back on the agenda today with ad agency CEO Matt Baxter claiming the safety net can now be removed, because we're all loving local content.

But Australian programs rating well, and the Australian TV industry thriving are completely different.

Despite the high ratings of *Packed to the Rafters* and *The X Factor*, what is the likelihood commercial programmes would keep investing in Australian shows? [Slim](#). [Read more »](#)

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### Fox Studios comes out of hibernation as the bustling screen hub we want to see

A few months back I visited Fox Studios in Sydney to view the filming of a commercial for Earth Hour.

The man thing that struck me (apart from the massively rude security guy on the gate) was how depressingly empty most of the place was.

It was desolate. It had the atmosphere of a business district on a Sunday afternoon rather than the film hub of one of the world's great cities. Today though, the feeling is

## The eye of the filmmaker: Fred Schepisi

*The Eye Of The Storm* recently won The Age Critics Award at MIFF. Director Fred Schepisi spoke with Alice Terlikowski about his return to Australian storytelling, upcoming projects and the industry at large.

Roxanne, *The Russia House* and *Six Degrees Of Separation*, to name a few, are all under the belt of Australian director Fred Schepisi but it's his latest work starring Geoffrey Rush and Judy Davis that holds a particular significance to the Australian industry.



The 71-year-old director told *Encore* he's been working on Australian stories for "quite a long time" but has always aimed to strike a balance between work in Hollywood and at home. *The Eye Of The Storm* is his first Australian film in 22 years, since *Evil Angels* – based on the story of Lindy Chamberlain.

"My generation grew up on very few Australian films. In most of the cinemas were American films but if you were really interested you joined a film society and went to festivals and got really engaged by European work. So while you want to work in your own culture and say things with your own country's voice, you also want to work in other cultures because that's what you've grown up with."

However, despite 22 years away from the Australian movie-making scene, Schepisi knows what should be done to make a good Aussie film – make it about Australians, in Australia, dealing with Australian issues.

"We need to make films that are about us and deal with our problems, our lives and our feelings. Sometimes that won't travel, sometimes it surprisingly will. The more specific into a culture something is, the more attractive it can be to people overseas. Are we going to make a lot of films that are going to make a fortune? No. Are we going to make a lot of films that matter to our community? Yes."

*The Eye Of The Storm*'s not be your typical Australian story in the way, say, *Red Dog*'s.

The film follows siblings Basil (Rush) and Dorothy (Davis) who return home to Sydney to the death bed of their fragile yet manipulative mother, played by Charlotte Rampling. Basil is a knighted actor famous in London while Dorothy married into French nobility. Both are desperate for their mother's inheritance, to which she is well aware and eager to drag out, if not for just staying alive, but to be cruel to her offspring. It scored The Age Critics' Award for best Australian feature at last month's Melbourne International Film Festival.

### Star power vs Story is king

Despite the big-name leads, Schepisi argues household names aren't essential for Australian films to be recognised.

"The stars help get you publicity and get noticed in your ads but honestly I always think it's the subject. If a film is full of stars and the subject, or the way it's been made, isn't so good then people pick up on that pretty quickly and don't come. First and foremost I think it's the material that matters and should be the prime consideration."

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The Hunter: Dafoe vs Tasmania

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Science Friction: The ups and downs of Terra Nova

## VIDEO

Rowland S Howard documentary Autoluminescent Directed by Lynn-Maree Milburn in collaboration with Richard Lowenstein for Ghost Pictures, Autoluminescent tells the story of Melbourne musician Rowland S Howard.



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#### If scripts could talk

This week the Screen Producers Association of Australia presented its list of seven projects that it will be putting in the shop window at its conference. But the SPAA's list omitted the names of the script writers. A member of the Australian Writers Guild offers this alternative version of events. Trouble is brewing over this year's SPAA conference, with the scripts selected for the feature film shop window staging a sit-in at SPAA head office.

Wake Up Dead, a particularly fat script, blocked the door of the SPAA luncheon just before lunch yesterday while other scripts phoned media outlets with a list of demands. Sci-fi thriller The Room was clearly angry, "I mean, we all wrote ourselves, didn't we?"

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#### The screen industry should root out ingenuity, not politics

Popcorn Taxi's Chris Murray suggests a taxi service and pie van could keep the industry moving – an industry that should be founded on ingenuity and creativity rather than politics.

It would seem, based on serial offenders to the numerous blogs in and around the Australian Film Industry, that as a generalisation, filmmakers have a lot of time on their hands.

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#### Local drama will make the difference for TV in 2012

It may only be September, but with Seven's 2012 upfronts launch on

Wednesday night and Ten's back in August, only Nine is yet to declare its hand for next year.

And it's already clear that

While I wouldn't comment on whether Rush (or Davis for that matter) took a pay cut to work on the \$15m film, he insists *The King's Speech* star and Oscar-winner was attracted to the story rather than the budget.

"Geoffrey's made a lot of Australian films, he cares about the material. He's got a wonderful balance of doing the commercial entertainment projects and peppering them with interesting projects in between. Plus, he's working on stage all the time and that seems to me to be a really good mix for his artistic soul. But not everybody is as serious about their craft as Geoffrey is, they just want to be stars."

Judy Morris, who also co-wrote and co-directed *Happy Feet* with George Miller, wrote the screenplay, an adaptation of the novel of the same name by Patrick White, who won the Nobel prize in 1973, the year *The Eye Of The Storm* was released.

Schepisi praised Morris, producers Antony Waddington and Gregory Read, and executive producers Jonathan Shtienman and Edward Simpson for their enthusiasm in the project – even if they did work a shorter day.

"Our crew on this film worked a shorter day, which worried me, but they got as much done, if not a little more. They were so thrilled to be working on something of substance that they considered to be intelligent and worth doing. So everyone of them pitched in to do whatever they could to make it be realised in the best possible way and that kind of enthusiasm and support is just terrific. That isn't the case all around the world."

#### Projects in the future

After more than 35 years making movies, the Melbourne-born director insists he has always demanded creative freedom from those he works with.

"Excepting in a few cases, I've always demanded it. If you're doing something complicated or different – like *Six Degrees of Separation* – not too many people in the financing side of the business really know how to 'help' you with that. Whereas if you do a romantic comedy, everybody thinks they're an expert. A lot of my films really have, even when they're in the studio, been independent."

In Australia, Schepisi said there's a "disease" for filmmakers to stick to small-budget films. "What you must have is the budget to produce the quality of film you want to produce. There's a disease to do only small budget films which means, in a way, you can only take on certain subjects or if you take on larger subjects then you cut corners and it shows. The trick is working out what the budget is before you take the project on."

While *The Eye Of The Storm's* international debut has been penned for this month's Toronto International Film Festival – one of six Aussie films to get the nod, joining Jonathan Teplitzky's *Burning Man* and Daniel Nettheim's *The Hunter*, Justin Kurzel's *Snowtown*, Tony Krawitz's *The Tall Man* and Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* – Schepisi has a string of Australian projects in the works.

His rumoured involvement in the adaptation of Robert Drewe's *The Drowner* is "being negotiated at the moment" (already signed on is producer Stephen Van Mill, scriptwriter John Colee and ICON Productions' Bruce Davey, Mel Gibson and Mark Gooder) and he is currently working on the screenplay of *Secret River* with Jan Sardi, to be produced with Mark Ruse and Stephen Luby. He also hopes to work with Rush again on the adaptation of musical Drowsy Chaperone.

"Every year I hear people say 'Oh, the Australian films aren't good this year.' Sometimes they make a lot more films than the previous couple of years but there seems to me to always be the same number of good films coming out from different filmmakers every year. Sometimes in an unfortunate way, the not-so-good ones swamp the good ones and give a wrong impression of our film community. There's always been a number of gems, some of which travel very well and some of which are important for us here."

*The Eye Of The Storm* is in cinemas 15 September.

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September 15th, 2011 at 12:28 pm

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## NEWS

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Emile Sherman's Shame nominated for Seven BIFAs

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LA's AusFilm Week: "Like speed dating without the alcohol"

TV Ratings: Celebrity Apprentice rates well-ish

AWG launch horror script competition

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