

LORD OF THE BUSH

Broome is a town in the remote North of Australia that boomed into existence on the trade in pearl shell. Come the bust, the pearling masters took their wealth, leaving behind the people that had been brought in to serve them: Malay, Filipinos, Chinese, and local Aborigines. A unique community with a distinctive cultural flavour that has been going its own, rather sleepy way.

Enter **Alistair McAlpine**, a larger than life romantic, one of the wealthiest men in Europe, and the Treasurer of Thatcher's Conservative Party. McAlpine has a dream, an urge to create a whole new civilization in Australia's North. Within hours of arriving in Broome he bought the cinema and the finest of the pearling master's villas. In a year he'd started a zoo, and then a luxury resort. Broome must cop McAlpine and his money.

Some have doubts ... but also hopes. **Stephen Pigram** is a songwriter with the band SCRAP METAL. He worries about the power McAlpine exercises over the town. But could the Lord's patronage be put to use as in promoting Broome's music?

Lord Alistair McAlpine is comfortable with power. He is he a landlord of a modern day fiefdom — a clever hunter mesmerising his prey, or should he be welcomed as the most sensitive developer this country has yet seen? There are no simple answers, and the film doesn't force conclusions. The audience must decide from the evidence before it.

For much of the year, Broome swelters in tropical heat. In this film we see strong-willed characters in a unique community as they push up the temperature. The stakes are high: the last great wilderness in Australia is up for sale.

Characters

Paddy Roe is an Aboriginal elder of the Yawaru tribe who wants to preserve the coastline from further development. He is opposed to more resorts and real estate subdivisions. Paddy wants McAlpine to help build a Heritage Trail for the benefit of future generations. The Heritage Trail runs into trouble when local developers, interested in the coastline for its real estate potential, oppose the move.

Stephen Pigram is an Aboriginal songwriter and a member of the band Scrap Metal. Broome has a rich music tradition and he wants to

keep it that way. He organises concerts featuring some older musicians who play songs like Rock around the Clock with a banjo and harmonica. Stevie's own songs comment on the side-effects of tourism: the suicide rate among Aboriginal people, the racist attitudes of the newcomers, the wet T-shirt competitions. His main concern is the power and influence McAlpine has over the town through the amount of land he owns. But perhaps the Lord's philanthropic motives can be put to good use, like promoting Broome's music!

Jimmy Chi is an Aboriginal songwriter and playwright whose musical *Bran Nue Dae*. is the culmination of 20 years work. Jimmy became a schizophrenic after a serious car accident in Perth in the early 70s. Unable to complete his engineering degree, Jimmy returned to Broome, and before long acquired the reputation as a creative writer of original songs. He collaborated with Stephen Pigram and others to produce music which draws on influences from folk, blues and religious hymns. It's this music which is the strength of *Bran Nue Dae* a blend of road movie, comedy, song, dance and romance. It draws heavily on Jimmy's early experience growing up in a mission school. The play went on to become a hit.

Elsta Foy is an Aboriginal-Filipina who remembers the days when the Sun Pictures, one of Australia's finest old open-air cinemas was segregated. "Blacks... in the back". She remembers Broome as a colonial society and thinks McAlpine is simply the modern version of the old pearling masters. She's concerned that people in the town are too frightened to speak out against development. A few people are making a lot of money in property deals, but at the expense of a whole lifestyle being destroyed.

Allan Griffiths is vice-president of the Broome Chamber of Commerce, a member of the local Shire Council and manages the local pub. He has ambitions to become a developer and is a staunch supporter of small business. He has been involved in organising the annual Shinju Matsuri festival, once a celebration of cultural diversity in Broome, now used as a money-making exercise. Griffiths views Paddy Roe's Heritage Trail as unnecessarily restrictive. It will hinder plans to subdivide some of the coastal beach front for 'prestigious' real estate development.