



Media Release

Lord of the Bush

An intriguing portrait of Lord Alistair McAlpine starts a limited season at the AFI Cinema Paddington on Friday 4 May. Made by prize-winning director Tom Zubrycki, *Lord of the Bush* reveals a unique and colourful entrepreneur taking an important position in the Australian real estate and tourist industries. And McAlpine's stated ambition is by no means modest:

"Basically, I'm interested in the whole top end of Australia"

McAlpine is a British peer, treasurer of the Conservative party, and one of Europe's richest men. He's also Primrose Dunlop's boss, a philanthropist and a self-proclaimed conservationist. He boasts ownership of the world's largest collection of Sidney Nolan paintings. He has investments in Broome (Cable Beach Club), Perth (St George Square), Sydney (Intercontinental Hotel), Exmouth, the Bahamas, Canada, the USA, Britain and France.

The film is set mainly in the lord's splendid new Australian domain - the former pearling town of Broome which is undergoing a rapid transformation under McAlpine's influence - and elicits his opinions on a wide range of topics, including Aboriginal land rights, conservation and Margaret Thatcher. One may swoon or shudder when he sweeps his hand over a map of northern Australia. And he works with breathtaking speed: within hours of his arrival in Broome ten years ago he'd bought the cinema and in a year he'd started a zoo.

But what makes this man so interesting is the charm and sophistication he brings to an industry not renowned for either. Is he to be regarded as the clever hunter mesmerising his prey, or should he be welcomed as the most sensitive and intelligent developer this country has yet encountered? There are no simple answers to these questions, and the film doesn't force conclusion, preferring to let McAlpine and his "subjects" offer a range of options.

Screenings of *Lord of the Bush* will be accompanied by a film directed by Tom Zubrycki and Gil Serine, *Strangers in Paradise*. Set mostly among a busload of American tourists on an excursion to the Australian centre, it's a biting satire on the way some entrepreneurs shamelessly exploit this country's heritage - especially the culture of the first Australians - for the sake of the tourist dollar.

For further information and preview tapes contact Libby Ellis on 332 2111.
Interviews can be arranged with Tom Zubrycki.

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Synopsis

Broome was once the centre of Australia's pearl shell industry, until the arrival of the plastic button prompted the pearling masters to take their wealth elsewhere, leaving behind the community that had been brought in to serve them. Malay, Filipinos, Melanesians, Chinese, and local Aborigines gave Broome a unique and distinctive cultural flavour, one that has been going its own rather sleepy way.

Ten years ago Alistair McAlpine, a larger-than-life romantic, arrived from England creating a whole new civilisation in Australia's North beginning with Broome. Within hours of arriving in Broome he bought the cinema, a year later he'd started a zoo and now a fancy resort. But what makes this man so interesting is the charm and sophistication he brings to an industry not renowned for either. Is he to be regarded as the clever hunter mesmerising his prey, or should he be welcomed as the most sensitive and intelligent developer this country has yet encountered? There are no simple answers to these questions, and the film doesn't force conclusions, preferring to let McAlpine and his "subjects" offer a range of options.

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 at the Perth Festival and will be touring the eastern states, including Sydney, early next year.

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.