

THE FURNACE

Screen Australia presents

in association with Screenwest and Lotterywest

and the West Australian Regional Film Fund

a Southern Light Films, Meaning Maker & The Koop production

in association with Arlight Films & Siamese

Running Time 116 mins (including credits)

**Language English
Plus Badimaya (Indigenous language),
Pashto, Punjabi (all subtitled in English)
and Cantonese**

Origin Australian

Year of Production 2020

LOGLINE

To escape the outback, a young Afghan cameleer falls in with a mysterious bushman on the run with stolen Crown gold.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

1897 Western Australia. To escape a harsh existence and return home, a young Afghan cameleer partners with a mysterious bushman on the run with two 400oz Crown-marked gold bars. Together the unlikely pair must outwit a zealous police sergeant and his troopers in a race to reach a secret furnace - the one place where they can safely reset the bars to remove the mark of the Crown.

The Furnace is an unlikely hero's tale, navigating greed and the search for identity in a new land. The film illuminates the forgotten history of Australia's 'Ghan' cameleers, predominantly Muslim and Sikh men from India, Afghanistan and Persia, who opened up the Nation's desert interior, thereby forming unique bonds with local Aboriginal people.

LONG SYNOPSIS

1897, Western Australia. After witnessing a white man kill his mentor, a young Muslim cameleer, HANIF, is determined to escape the outback and return home to Afghanistan. Questioning his faith, Hanif is penniless and adrift when he stumbles upon a bushman, MAL, who has been shot. Unable to leave a man to die, Hanif ferries Mal to the only people he can trust – an Aboriginal tribe, led by COOBERING.

As Mal heals, COOBERING invites Hanif to vanish into the desert as one of them... Until the tribe discovers that Mal is on the run with two 400oz bars of Crown-marked gold. Knowing how "this rock" drives white men mad, COOBERING accuses Hanif of putting them in danger for his own gain. The tribe leaves Hanif stranded with the mysterious outlaw and his gold.

Now truly alone, Hanif demands his share in return for saving Mal's life. Lost, weak and opium addicted, Mal agrees, but the gold is too dangerous while bearing The Crown's mark. They must journey across the desert to a town where Mal's partner, JIMMY, has a furnace to melt down and reset the bars anew.

Hanif soon learns that time is precious. A zealous sergeant, SHAW, and his TROOPERS are hunting down the gold thieves and will catch them at all costs. More frighteningly, the two OUTLAWS who shot Mal are also in pursuit of him.

Strategically, Hanif arranges for himself and Mal to fall in with some fellow cameleers, as a disguise on the road. However, things take a bad turn when a paranoid Mal shoots one of the cameleers, claiming the man was set to expose them. He forces Hanif on at gunpoint and further into a nightmare. Hanif accuses Mal of murder, but Mal reminds him, he signed up for this and a man owns his choices.

As a desperate hunt for water forces them together, Hanif sees that Mal is on the run from himself. This empathy dries up fast as Mal, taken by opium withdrawal, reveals Jimmy never was in the town they have been heading for... Hanif, driven by gold fever, follows Mal into a secret gorge towards Jimmy's hide out.

Jimmy is revealed to be Mal's opium supplier. As the gold is melted, Jimmy's men move to kill Hanif but Mal forfeits his share to spare him. At this moment, the Troopers descend and a shootout ignites. In their escape, Hanif grabs a newly set gold bar. Once safe, Mal reveals his wound has turned septicemic... He's dying.

Hanif carries Mal towards medical assistance, but Mal spies the two Outlaws he betrayed on the horizon. He forces Hanif to stop and rest up. As Hanif nods off, Mal draws the Outlaws away. At sunrise, Hanif finds Mal brutally murdered. Strangely the bond forged with Mal, the least likely of men, has given Hanif the courage to own his choices. Now seeing the gold as just "a rock", he buries it with Mal. Hanif walks back into the desert for the Aboriginals, vanishing into their world. Home at last.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a born and raised Western Australian and son of migrant cultural academics, I am fascinated by Australia's formational history, and believe film provides a powerful means to reflect on, or even recalibrate, long held notions of national identity.

In 2014, while researching Western Australia's 1890s gold rush, I stumbled upon the most unlikely of images: Afghan, Indian and Persian men in traditional garb, standing alongside a train of camels in the outback. It was staggering to learn that The Crown first imported these Islamic, Sikh and Hindu cameleers to Australia from the 1860s, with their numbers peaking in the thousands. For me, this was revelatory – like a painter discovering new colours to depict the otherwise tired colonial outback setting. So, I dove into researching *who* these mysterious men were and *why* they were here. I learned that the 'Ghans', as they were labelled, played a crucial role in the formation of not just Western Australia but also across the nation. They provided the main source of exploration and freight transport between colonies and inland settlements that sprung up around gold discoveries, yet they experienced much prejudice and were often coerced into indentured labour.

I was astonished to reflect on how Australians don't know of this important history and, given its inherently cinematic qualities, how it hadn't yet found its way to the big screen.

As my research continued, so too did the discoveries. Most notably, that the cameleers developed bonds with Aboriginal Australians – the oldest living culture on earth. They drew on Aboriginal knowledge to navigate the desert and their freight routes often followed Aboriginal 'song lines'. As evidence of this kinship, descendants of the cameleers still exist among desert Aboriginal communities today.

Although informed through extensive research, THE FURNACE is a fictional drama that coalesces this little-known history into a compelling story for an audience today. Given this era of the cameleers coincides with a semi-lawless gold rush frontier, the decision to draw on certain tropes from the 'Western' genre felt like an obvious fit, to give the story an accessible, involving structure.

Hanif's story is one of a Muslim migrant worker at the fringe of a racially charged colonial society, whose life is upended by a tragic and cold-blooded event, for which the perpetrators go unpunished by the law. The internal journey Hanif must go through in order to push past his trauma and his complex relationship with Mal – a mysterious white bushman on the run from himself – is at the very heart of THE FURNACE. Through Hanif and Mal's story, the film explores themes of faith, rite of passage, madness, owning the past, as well as one's quest to find home and family.

THE FURNACE is a new turn-of-the-century frontier mythology that weaves peoples of different cultural and religious backgrounds into the historic tapestry of Australia's outback. It is my hope that this film enacts a more inclusive sense of Australian identity.

Australia is a country that, to my mind, has only recently begun to willingly peer back into its past, warts and all, to better understand how it has arrived at the present. This is essential to walk with clarity and confidence, as one people, towards a better future.

- RODERICK MACKAY - Writer and Director

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The Furnace is produced by Timothy White (The Luminaries and I Am Mother) and Tenille Kennedy (H Is For Happiness). It is a Southern Light Films, Meaning Maker and The Koop production, made in association with Siamese. The film was funded with principal production investment from Screen Australia, in association with Screenwest and Lotterywest and the Western Australian Regional Film Fund.

The Furnace was filmed on location at Mount Magnet and Kalbarri, in Western Australia's mid-west region. Audiences will be spellbound by this rugged and spectacular landscape as well as its exploration of a rarely explored or understood period of Australia's colonial history, the cultural collisions of gold rush Australia, and the power of gold as an eternal force that has shaped the course of human history. The Western Australia's 1890s gold rush was one of the world's great gold rushes, with men and women flocking from across Australia and around the world, enduring unimaginable privations in the unforgiving environment.

Tim was first approached by Roderick in early 2016 with a script that was filled with promise and Tim was immediately captivated by a young cameleer in desperate circumstances drawn into a relationship with an enigmatic, dangerous man on the run. "Apart from the great dynamic of the central relationship and a clear and compelling narrative thread, the story also unearthed a little-known part of Australia's pioneering history" says Tim. "At a time when there was sustained, rather unreasonable debate about immigrants from the Islamic countries, I thought it was important to tell a story of how many of these young men from many cultures and nations made significant contributions to the growth of the nation in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, upon meeting Roderick those four years ago, I was drawn to his intense passion for the story and his yearning to tell it on a 'big canvas'...with an ambition to match Paul Thomas Anderson's visionary There Will Be Blood".

Tenille Kennedy joined The Furnace team in the later stages of development as the project was being set up to go into production and "like many I wasn't familiar with the role of the cameleers and I was really interested in the idea that we could potentially encourage empathy and understanding about the beginning of Australia's multicultural history" Tenille said. "I admire Roderick's ambitious vision and dedication to shining a light on this untold piece of Australian history and sharing this story from a minority perspective really appealed."

Although raised in Western Australia, writer/director Roderick MacKay was not familiar with this region before the film. Having stumbled upon the story of the Afghan, Indian and Persian cameleers brought to Australia to help open up its remote regions to European settlement and gold exploration and then writing the screenplay consciously incorporating tropes from the Western genre, he forensically scouted for locations for a year before making a final decision.

“Narratively, you’re always looking for locations that dramatize the journey of the characters, and keep the audience stimulated, while also being very mindful of filming logistics. So, there’s a dance that ensues between poetry and pragmatism that can be very difficult. I’m so grateful to have discovered the mid-west region, because it’s really stunning country,” Roderick says.

“Geologically, Western Australia is the oldest part of Australia, which is the most ancient land on earth and Aboriginal Australia is the oldest continuing culture on earth. No matter what location we were filming on in the Mid-west, be it Yamatji Badimia country in Mt Magnet or Yamatji Nanda country in Kalbarri, this very notion was always deeply inspiring.”

“It was also deeply fascinating, when filming in these rugged landscapes, to reflect on the hardships endured by the white prospectors, who for all intents and purposes, must have felt like they’d journeyed to Mars.”

Producer, Tenille Kennedy says, “It’s fantastic to be involved in a project that puts Western Australian history on a world stage. The Regional Film Fund was an integral part of our financing and certainly without it we could not have afforded the productions costs associated with shooting regionally. But what really made this film possible was the local support we received. The Mount Magnet community were so welcoming, helpful and accommodating of our weird, wonderful and sometimes last minute requests. Perhaps more importantly, we felt the community were aligned with our desire to show off the region and share a part of our history for Australian and International audiences to enjoy.”

Casting the film was always going to be challenging. The screenplay called for actors of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds – Indigenous, Anglo-Saxon, European, Indian, Chinese, Persian and Afghan, to name a few.

The character of Mal was specifically written for David Wenham by Roderick after they met at the 2015 CinfestOz film festival. Roderick pitched the idea of the film to David, who loved it, and then wrote the character of Mal, with David’s qualities as an actor informing the character’s development.

“It was an incredible opportunity to work with an actor of David’s experience and sheer natural instinct and I’m so grateful for his belief in me from so early on in the project’s life. I really believe his performance as Mal is one of his best and I hope audiences agree,” Roderick says.

Roderick came across Ahmed Malek, a highly regarded actor from Egypt, when searching the internet for Middle Eastern actors. He stumbled upon an Egyptian serial drama in which Malek stars: “Even though I couldn’t understand a word anyone was saying, I was totally glued to his performance and felt immediately that I’d found our Hanif. Luckily Malek adored the script and the character of Hanif really resonated with him, even mirroring dimensions in his own life. Malek’s commitment to authenticity and plumbing the intellectual and emotional depths of Hanif was truly staggering. Malek is a household name in his homeland of Egypt, and I think this will be the case across the western world very soon.”

Ahmed Malek was named a Rising Star at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival and The Furnace gave him an opportunity to showcase his talent in the international arena as well as the opportunity to travel to a part of the world he’d never imagined he would ever see.

“Filming in Western Australia was a unique experience for me. I’d never seen landscape like that in my life. There were moments when I’d just look around and feel so grateful,” he says.

Tim brought in his long-term collaborator, Nikki Barrett, Australia's preeminent casting director to find the diverse cast. "We set about searching throughout the country for Indigenous actors and actors with Indian, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Chinese backgrounds. It was an exhaustive process, but one that was so satisfying to see the cast come together, working so collaboratively, in the middle of a remote part of Western Australia" says Tim.

Roderick and the producers were very mindful of representation of the diverse cultures and languages in the film. Roderick reached out to Indigenous and immigrant cultural groups very early in development to seek the necessary permissions and to better understand the cultures he was depicting.

"I wanted the cultural community groups we were representing to have a real sense of emotional investment and accountability in this story, and the generous manner in which they embraced the project has been profoundly moving for me personally. Then working with such a talented and diverse cast during the shoot was a continuation of an incredible cultural exchange and I'm grateful beyond words that they were prepared to take a chance on me" Roderick says.

There are many scenes in the film where the Badimaya language of the local Indigenous people is spoken. Sadly, the last speaker of the Badimaya language passed away in 2018 and the language became known as a 'sleeping language'. While much of the language has been lost, the last speaker worked tirelessly to document as much of his language as possible with the Bundiyarra Irra Wanga Language Centre. The filmmakers worked closely with Bundiyarra and the Badimia community to draw on what shared knowledge remains to translate the script.

The film was shot during the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages. UNESCO's mission was to spotlight how languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory.

"So, it's deeply important that we preserve our indigenous languages, and in the case of 'sleeping languages', do what we can to wake them up again. I think film is a terrific means of doing this. And I must express my deep gratitude to Wesfarmers Arts, who funded specifically the Badimaya language component of the production," Roderick says.

"I remember the first time we shot a dialogue scene between the characters Hanif, Woorak and Jundah that was spoken entirely in the Badimaya language. Watching these characters from three different cultures communicate in an indigenous language, really made me realise we were doing something for the first time with this film, and that's an extremely exciting kind of affirmation to have. And to see tears in the eyes of our Badimaya language coach, Godfrey Simpson, was just completely overwhelming. I'll never forget it."

As well as speaking lines in Badimaya, Ahmed Malek needed to learn Pashto to play his character, Hanif, who is Afghan.

Malek says, "I felt a big responsibility as I'm an Arab speaker. I don't speak Pashto, which is the second most spoken language in Afghanistan. I had many scenes in Pashto as well as some in Dari, which is also spoken in Afghanistan, and it was my first time to act in English, so the whole language thing was a challenge for me."

David Wenham admires Malek's drive and commitment: "It's wonderful to work with a young actor who is so enthusiastic and interested about the craft of acting. While we were filming he was forever spending his time off set investigating and exploring other ways to either get into character or to enhance his craft. He was a delight."

Baykali Ganambarr plays the key role of Woorak, a Badimia man who befriends Hanif and Jundah. Baykali, who was previously seen in Jennifer Kent's *The Nightingale*, was born in Alice Springs in central Australia but lives in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Learning to speak Badimaya, a 'sleeping language' was one of the reasons he wanted to be part of the film.

"I read the script and thought 'wow, this is an amazing story' that's never been seen before. Woorak was really curious about the cameleers and they bonded so that they were like brothers and he teaches them his language. I just couldn't wait. I spoke to Roderick a lot and was really motivated to get the role of Woorak so that I could represent Badimia mob and so that audiences could see Badimaya language being spoken for the first time on the big screen," Baykali says.

Jay Ryan plays Sergeant Shaw, one of a group of troopers charged with upholding law and order on the frontier. Jay, originally from New Zealand, was unaware of the cameleer history in Australia.

"I was intrigued by the story. I read the script and I thought it was a really lovely melding of cultures from a time in Australia's history that not many people have heard about. We always hear about the pioneers and the prospectors coming from Europe but not about the cameleers and those of the Muslim faith who arrived at that time. And I'd always wanted to play a role set in this era and in this world so, having read the script, I was hungry to come on board," Jay says.

Erik Thomson, who plays Corporal Briggs, also had a long-held desire to appear in a Western.

"The Furnace is probably the closest I was ever going to get to a Western in the Australian context, and with its stories of Afghan cameleers and the Gold Squad of troopers trying to uphold the law for Queen Victoria, the script had a lovely kind of drama implicit in it. And then we got to film in the beautiful Western Australian desert – it's a bit of a boy's own adventure really!" Erik says

Cinematographer Mick McDermott was also captivated by the beauty of the locations and describes working with Roderick MacKay as a "very easy collaboration" due to Roderick's detailed planning and clarity of vision.

Roderick explains his process: "I shot-listed the entire film, which consisted of about 650 set ups, and designed over 200 corresponding floor plans, which I had practically memorised by the time we started doing technical location recces. All of this was to minimise wasting resources and time and most importantly, to make a film with a level of craft that felt cinematic and synced up with my long-held vision. The floor plans formed the blueprints for the sets that we built, in a way that aligned as precisely as possible with how I wanted to block character movement and shoot the film. For example, there's a sequence in the script that required us to build a town and ideally this town was of a certain scale and populated with life. It was essential that we knew exactly what we had to physically build vs. digitally bring to life in post, as well as how many extras to wrangle and clothe, to complement the blocking and coverage of our principal cast," he says.

"Staging the shootout in the Chinese camp was much the same. There were 11 key cast involved in that sequence, with gun play, so we had to be very strategic in planning the geography of all these players and how this connected action unfolded in parallel within the set. Sometimes I had to throw my plans away and we all had to think on our feet, but I know to the core of my soul we would have never survived this shoot without such rigorous planning."

The locations around Mount Magnet was a cinematographer's dream, with surprising diversity.

"There's a whole range of terrains from scrubby bush to dramatic escarpment - everywhere you look there's something beautiful to shoot. But alongside that inherent beauty, there are also environmental factors that can make shooting there very difficult. The ground is very uneven and the heat can be debilitating at times. It can be hard on equipment as well as on people," Mick McDermott says.

“Then there are the dust storms and the flies to contend with. But when we saw the beauty of the place and the performances that we were getting, we pushed all those environmental factors aside. It just looks amazing on camera so accept the challenges while you’re there and try to embrace the experience as much as you can.”

While the remote location, heat, dust and flies were challenging, the cast and crew also had to contend with working with multiple camels and horses. Working to creating a close bond with the camels is another example of how committed Ahmed Malek was to the authenticity of his performance.

“The trust has to be there in real life for there to be chemistry on the screen, it cannot just exist by saying ‘action’. It, it has to be built. So, it took me time. I did research about camels and then went to the farm where our camels were kept to camp with them and gain their trust. They are huge creatures and I needed to learn to trust myself with them and not be intimidated by them.”

Jay Ryan had previously worked with horses on films in New Zealand, such as *Lord of the Rings*. However, the stock rodeo horses from Western Australia required he learn a completely new way of riding, assisted by the on-set horse wranglers. He and his fellow Gold Squad members (Erik Thomson and Samson Coulter, who plays Trooper Sam) spent their first days in rehearsal at the Mount Magnet racecourse learning to ride together as a unit. Samson Coulter had only ever ridden a horse once before in his life.

“I wasn’t very good at it,” he laughs. “So, it was a great experience trying to learn a new skill and the horses that we worked with were amazing. I loved it.”

Making a period drama in a remote location was never going to be easy. Roderick MacKay says that shooting the film was “without doubt, the single most difficult undertaking of my life so far.”

“As debut feature films go, I didn’t make it easy for myself. I mean, it’s a period road movie set across a raft of very remote and rugged locations, some of which we built sets in, one of which was only accessible via helicopter. The temperature was 40 degrees most days, sometimes mid 50s, with dust and endless flies. There was an ensemble of 30 cross-cultural characters, with dialogue spoken in five different languages (four of which I don’t speak and one of those is a ‘sleeping language’). And finally, throw into the mix 11 cantankerous camels, eight horses, a dingo, gun battles, molten gold, and what could possibly go wrong? And amidst all of this you’re desperately trying to hold on to the story, which is such a delicate thing. So, suffice it to say, it was, pun-intended, a baptism of fire,” Roderick laughs.

The film, he hopes, will entertain and move audiences. While dark and confronting at times, it’s also cathartic and leaves audience feeling hopeful: “The loftier, socio-political goal of the film is to recalibrate audiences’ perceptions of Australia – to weave the stories of peoples from different cultural and religious backgrounds into the mythology of the ‘Outback’ frontier. Because the truth is, they were there and they played an important role in the formation of this country, going back over 150 years, and they’ve not been represented. Ultimately, through telling this story, I hope the film awakens more inclusive notions of Australian identity.”

David Wenham adds: “The more that we can acknowledge the true history of this country, the better we will be as a nation. I think we’re still only taking baby steps in that regard. So, if this film can help in any way with that, it would be no small achievement. And then for the rest of the world, it will be eye-opening for them to see a completely different angle on Australia which hasn’t really been explored before on screen.”

ABOUT THE CAST

AHMED MALEK as Hanif

Ahmed Malek began acting as a child. His first drama role was in the Egyptian TV series ***Ahlamna Al-Hilwa*** with director Ali Abdel-Khalek. He made his big screen debut with a small role in the film ***Mafish Fayda*** by Hatem Farid.

Malek went on to play the young Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the TV hit ***El-Gama'a*** (2010) and he also appeared in ***Al Shawarea Al Khalfeya (Back Streets)*** (2011), a TV series by Gamal Abdel Hamid, and the film ***Geddo Habibi (Dear Grandfather)*** (2012) by Ali Edries.

He then worked with Egyptian star Ghada Abdelrazek and director Mohamed Samy in two TV series; ***Ma'a Sabk El Esrar (Premeditated)*** (2012), for which he received the Dear Guest Award for Best Young Actor, and ***Hekayet Hayah*** (2013). His collaboration with director Mohamed Samy continued on to include the films ***Regata*** (2015) and ***Ahwak*** (2015). Then Malek was chosen for Sherif Arafa's smash hit ***El Gezira 2 (The Island 2)*** (2014) and the film ***Al-Geel al-Rabie (4G)*** (2015) by Ahmed Nader Galal.

Malek played Mans in the film ***Clash*** (2016), which opened the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival and starred in ***Hepta: The Last Lecture***, the highest-grossing romantic film in the history of Egyptian cinema with revenues that surpassed EGP 27 million.

In Ramadan 2017, Malek mesmerized the audience with his performance in the television series ***La Totfe' Al Shams***.

Malek's film ***Sheikh Jackson***, by Amr Salama, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and took part in the BFI London Film Festival and El Gouna Film Festival. The film was Egypt's official submission to the 2018 Academy Awards for Best Foreign-Language Film. For his role in the film, Malek received the Best Supporting Actor Award at the 44th Egyptian Film Association Festival. His film ***EXT. Night*** landed its world premiere at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival, where Malek was announced among Screen International's picks for the 5 Arab Stars of Tomorrow. ***EXT. Night*** made its Arab world premiere at the Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF), where he received wide critical acclaim and was described in the festival's newsletter as 'the new hope for Egyptian cinema'.

Malek was also selected in TIFF's 2018 Rising Stars programme.

His recent films roles include *The Guest*, *Gunshot*, *Ras El Sana*, *Anha (About Her)* and *Mousa*. Malek also appears in Canadian director Patricia Chica's new film *Montreal Girls*.

DAVID WENHAM as Mal

David Wenham has received critical acclaim for his diverse performances in film, theatre and television. He is one of Australia's most respected actors. David's film credits include *Lion*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Gettin' Square*, *Oranges and Sunshine*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Australia*, *300*, *Goldstone*, *The Bank*, *Molokai*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Peter Rabbit* and most recently *Dirt Music*. His recent television credits include Jane Campion's *Top of the Lake*, *The Code*, *Killing Time*, *Romper Stomper*, *Better Man*, *Banished*, and *Wake in Fright*.

In 2017 David wrote and directed his debut feature film, *Ellipsis*.

David's accolades include Best Actor Awards from Australian Film Institute (AFI), IF Awards, The Film Critics Circle of Australia (FCCA) and Screen Actors Guild.

David's numerous theatre credits include *Cyrano De Bergerac*, *The Crucible*, *True West* for Melbourne Theatre Company, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Cosi* for Belvoir and *Jerry Springer the Opera* for Sydney Opera House.

JAY RYAN as Sergeant Shaw

Jay Ryan's recent film credits include *It: Chapter Two* alongside Jessica Chastain and James McAvoy. He also appeared on Australian screens as the lead role in the limited TV series *Fighting Season*, for which he was nominated for a Most Outstanding Actor 'Logie' and on US screens in three seasons of hit drama *Mary Kills People*. Previously, Jay appeared in Jane Campion's Emmy-nominated mini-series *Top of the Lake*, co-directed by Garth Davis, and he also starred on the popular CW series *Beauty and the Beast* as Vincent Keller (The Beast). Other television credits include recurring characters in Network Ten's *Offspring* and the Fox series *Terra Nova*, executive produced by Steven Spielberg, as well as regular roles in the Nine Network's miniseries *Sea Patrol*, Network Ten's *Neighbours* and the acclaimed NZ series *Go Girls*.

Jay's other feature credits include *Lou* opposite John Hurt. He also appeared in the short film *Franswa Sharl*, which was awarded the Crystal Bear for Best Short Film at the Berlin International Film Festival and Best Australian Short Film at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Jay has appeared in numerous theatre productions including an international tour with John Cleese in *Seven Ways to Skin an Ocelot*. He also starred in *The Packer*, a one-man show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that went on to tour New Zealand, Australia and Los Angeles. *The Packer* was nominated for Best International Contribution to Los Angeles Theatre at the 2011 Hollywood Fringe Festival.

ERIK THOMSON as Corporal Briggs

Erik Thomson is one of Australia's most respected actors across film, television and theatre with recent credits including the feature *Coming Home in the Dark*, the limited series *The Luminaries* for the BBC in the role of Dick Mannering alongside Eve Hewson and Eva Green, and the horror feature *Awoken*. He

also featured in **Storm Boy** alongside Geoffrey Rush and Jai Courtney and the third and final season of the highly popular series **800 Words** for the Seven Network.

Erik's additional film credits include Scott Hicks' **The Boys Are Back** opposite Clive Owen, Cate Shortland's **Somersault** with Sam Worthington, **The Black Balloon** opposite Toni Collette, Wayne Hope's feature **Now Add Honey, Accidents Happen** with Geena Davis, **Beautiful** and **We're Here To Help**.

For his outstanding performance in **Somersault**, Erik was awarded the Australian Film Institute (AFI) Award for Best Supporting Actor in 2004 and was nominated for a Film Critics Circle of Australia. In 2008, Erik was again nominated for an AFI Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in the multi-award-winning film **The Black Balloon**. Erik was also nominated for Best Actor in a Feature Film for **We're Here to Help**, and Best Actor in a TV Drama for **The Million Dollar Conman** at the 2008 NZ Film Awards.

Erik was awarded the Silver Logie in 2016 for his performance as 'George Turner' in **800 Words** and in 2003 for his performance as 'Dr Mitch Stevens' in the television drama series **All Saints**. He has been nominated a further eight times for the Silver Logie for Most Popular Actor Award and in 2011 he was also nominated for the Silver Logie for Most Outstanding Actor. Erik is well known for his role as the head of the Rafter family in Australia's top rating TV drama **Packed to the Rafters** and his other television credits include the AACTA Award winning first series of **The Code**, Rowan Woods' miniseries **The Broken Shore** adapted from the Peter Temple novel, **The Alice, Blackjack: Dead Memory, MDA, Through My Eyes, The Million Dollar Conman, Wildside, 13 Gantry Road, Pacific Drive, Hercules** and **Xena: Warrior Princess**.

BAYKALI GANAMBARR as Woorak

Baykali Ganambarr is a proud Datiwuy and Yolngu Man from Galiwinku Community on Elcho Island, North East Arnhem Land. Baykali's career to dates spans 14 years, he travels extensively throughout Australia and the world performing at appearing at Festivals, corporate functions and high-profile events with internationally renowned Dance Company Djuki Mala. Baykali is a passionate dancer, and an accomplished actor in TV and film. Baykali has featured on **My Place** (ABC TV) and had a leading role in Jennifer Kent's feature film **The Nightingale**. This film saw Baykali win the Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best Young Actor at the 2019 Venice Film Festival. He also won the Australian Film Critics Association Award for Best Male Actor for **The Nightingale**.

TREVOR JAMIESON as Coobering

Trevor Jamieson is an accomplished indigenous actor who has worked both on stage and television for over 25 years. Stage highlights include **The Season** for Tasmania Performs Australian Tour, **The Secret River** for STC, Big hArt's **Namatjira** for the Malthouse Theatre and Southbank in London, **Storm Boy** for Barking Gecko and STC, and **Hipbone Sticking Out** for Big hArt. Film and television credits **include Les Norton, Cleverman, Storm Boy, The Bunker, Neomads, Lunacy, Thalu: Dreamtime is Now an Animated Film, Boys in the Trees, Around the Block, Bran Nu Dae, Lockie Leonard** and **Rabbit Proof Fence**.

Trevor is also a musician playing the guitar and digeridoo as well as a dancer and has performed in many shows and festivals both in Australia and overseas.

WAKARA GONDARRA as Mandu

Wakara Gondarra is a proud Gulumana and Yolngu Man from Galiwinku Community on Elcho Island, North East Arnhem Land. He spent three years attending school in Sydney.

Wakara's career to date spans 14 years. He travels extensively throughout Australia and internationally performing with Djuki Mala dance group appearing at Festivals, corporate functions and high-profile events. Wakara is a passionate dancer, and an accomplished actor in TV and film. Wakara has featured in ABC's *My Place*, Jennifer Kent's *The Nightingale*, Steven Johnson's *High Ground*, and was a host on NITV's award winning *Move it Mob Style*.

SAMSON COULTER as Trooper Sam

Samson Coulter made his feature film debut in the award-winning Australian film *Breath*. Directed by Simon Baker, he starred as Pikelet in the coming of age drama, based on the novel by Tim Winton. The film premiered at the 2017 Toronto Film Festival.

Alongside his on-screen work, Samson is also a professional surfer and competes in the World Surf League.

STEVE McCALL as Trooper Fergal

Steve originally hails from Glasgow, Scotland, but spent his formative years in Western Australia and New South Wales. He studied theatre at Curtin University and is a graduate of the WA Screen Academy (2008), as well as the NIDA Writing for Performance course (2013).

Steve has appeared in the feature films *Below* and *These Final Hours*, and the award-winning feature films, *The Actress* and *The Toll*, which he also co-wrote with director Zak Hilditch,. Steve also appeared in the television series *The Great Mint Swindle* and *Cloudstreet*. Steve has appeared in various short films including *Arrivals and Departures* (nominated for Best Actor 2010 WA Screen Awards).

Steve is an award-winning playwright with his theatre works having been performed in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

MAHESH JADU as Sadhu

Mahesh has most recently starred in the Netflix series *The Witcher* (based on the blockbuster video game & books) and was previously seen in Ben Elton's *Three Summers*. Mahesh is known for his series regular role of Ahmad on Netflix epic *Marco Polo* (2 seasons). His notable feature credits include supporting in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, Lakeshore's *I, Frankenstein* as Lead Support Ophir opposite Aaron Eckhart and *Time Traveller* opposite Josh Harnett. Mahesh's breakout role was Dr Doug Harris (274 eps) on the ever-popular *Neighbours*. Series credits include Fremantle Media's *Betterman* and the Seven Network's *Winners & Losers*.

OSAMAH SAMI as Majid

Osamah Sami is an actor, writer, and comedian, whose feature films include the hit romantic comedy *Ali's Wedding*, which earned him an AACTA and an Australian Writer's Guild Award for Best Screenplay. The film also won the Audience Award for Best Feature Film at the 2017 Sydney Film Festival and The Age Critics Prize at the Melbourne International Film Festival. Osamah's critically-acclaimed memoir *Good Muslim Boy* was the winner of the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award and was adapted for the stage for Malthouse Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre, enjoying sell-out seasons. Osamah is also recognised as a 'notable Australian Muslim' by the Commonwealth of

Australia. Other notable screen credits include Tony Ayres *Saved*, crime drama *Jack Irish* and SBS's *East West 101*.

KAUSHIK DAS as Jundah

Kaushik Das is an Indian Australian actor who works across both English and Indian cinema.

Kaushik went to Law School at the University of Queensland and eventually practiced as a Criminal Lawyer in Australia. Unable to detach himself emotionally from all the traumatic cases he was handling and after being followed home one night by some of the criminals he was prosecuting, Kaushik knew his time as a lawyer was up. He decided it was time to take the drama out of the courtroom and take it to the big screen instead. He went onto completing his actor training at the Actor's Conservatory and the Film and Television Studio.

Kaushik recently received a nomination for Best Performance in his heart wrenching performance of a Bangladeshi refugee in *ReFraction* at the Queensland Emerging Screen Talent awards held in conjunction with the Brisbane International Film Festival in 2018. He also produced *ReFraction* which won Best Short Film at Delhi Film Festival and also screened at the prestigious New York Indian Film Festival and the Kolkata International Film Festival.

Kaushik has continued to branch out into international cinema with his first bilingual Hindi-English film *Salt Bridge* having released in over 100 movie theatres across India. Here he joined a stellar cast including the likes of Rajeev Khandelwal, Usha Jadhav and Chelsie Preston Crayford.

MANSOOR NOOR as Adeeb

Mansoor Noor's screen credits include ABC's *Cleverman*, *Rake*, *Trip for Biscuits* and Channel 10's new drama *The Secrets She Keeps*. His indie feature films include *Project Eden Vol.1*, *Embedded* and *Risen*. He's also worked in over ten stage productions with highlights including *Stupid F\$@king Bird* (New Theatre) for which he was nominated for a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Male Actor in a Lead Role, *Comedy of Errors* (Riverside Theatre) and *Beirut Adrenaline* (Downstairs Belvoir).

As a content creator he has co-produced indie feature film *500 Miles*, through his company *Performance Pictures*, as well as written, produced and directed a number of shorts including *He's ISIS*, which has screened at over 10 festivals and recently won him 'Best Performance' at the *Reel Comedy Fest* in Chicago. He's recently been commissioned to write his series *Golden Boy* by Audible.

DAYAL SINGH as Rajan

Dayal Gian Singh works internationally across a wide range of areas as a producer, actor, singer, writer, filmmaker and corporate trainer. As a performer, he has toured with numerous plays and musicals across the globe, featuring in performances at the Royal Opera House (UK) to Marina Bay Sands (Singapore) in *The LKY Musical*. In Perth, Australia, he is linked closely with local production house The Penguin Empire, working on numerous award-winning projects over the years. Recently he was involved in a feature film that saw him taking part in the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. In Singapore, Dayal has worked with a number of companies such as the Singapore Repertory Theatre, Pangdemonium, Bellepoque, Stint On Stage, Centre Stage, I-Theatre and Mediacorp. As an educator, he has delivered multiple drama programmes for schools internationally, as well as contributing and writing drama education books for course curricula.

SEAN CHOOLBURRA as The Tracker

Sean Choolburra is one of the most versatile Aboriginal performers in Australia today. A proud Girramay, Kalkadoon, Pitta Pitta and Gugu Yalanji man who maintains and practices his cultural traditions.

Sean is a dancer who found his feet in stand-up comedy and has had a long 25+ year career in the entertainment industry. He was recently labelled the "Godfather" of Aboriginal Comedy. He is known for his wit, energetic delivery improvisations and non-stop dance moves.

Sean's recent work includes hosting his own TV series, **Express Yourself** on NITV, a special guest on ABC's **Play School** and keep an eye out for him in the upcoming ABC series **Black Comedy**.

GORAN D KLEUT as Yates

Goran D. Kleut, graduated from the Australian Academy of Dramatic Arts in Sydney and got his first break in film when he secured the role of Lampay Fay in **Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith**, directed By George Lucas, while still studying. He was then cast as Moloch in the film **Gabriel**, and shortly after as Vjek in **Sea Patrol**. He has built a reputation for being one of Australia's finest character actors. A talented and dedicated craftsman, versatile and compelling to watch, who can seamlessly slip into any role with ease.

Goran has since appeared in a range of famous, and award winning, film and television productions such as **The Great Gatsby**, directed by Baz Luhrmann, as Rekem in **I, Frankenstein**, directed by Stuart Beattie, and **Underbelly**, where he played bikie president Jasper Pengilly. He can also be seen in **Miss Fishers Murder Mysteries**, depicting European Gambler Karol Valenski. Goran Kleut starred as the god of the underworld; Anubis, in the blockbuster **Gods of Egypt**, directed by Alex Proyas, and portrayed, Andy 'Ghoul' Walker, a WWII soldier in the battle of Okinawa, in Mel Gibson's war epic **Hacksaw Ridge**. Goran stars in **Skinford** as Falkov, in **Out of the Shadows** as Baal and as a pirate in **Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Men Tell No Tales**.

He took on the roles of both NEOMORPH and XENOMORPH aliens in **Alien: Covenant**, directed by Ridley Scott, and he was recently cast as the character Lurch, in **Nekrotronic**. Watch out for Goran as Milton, in the upcoming US fantasy/thriller **Fantasy Island** by Blumhouse.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

RODERICK MACKAY – DIRECTOR/WRITER

Born in 1986, Roderick MacKay is a Western Australian writer/director with a BA in visual Arts. His brief filmography demonstrates a cinematic sophistication and knack for immersive world building. Often in the form of elevated genre, his stories feature complex characters, a multilayered tapestry of themes, and an undercurrent of socio-political commentary.

In 2009-10, Roderick co-directed, produced, wrote and edited the short film **Trigger** – a neo-noir/drama set in 1970s Italy, but made entirely in Western Australia. **Trigger** has received over 1.3M plays on Vimeo, where it was selected for 'Staff Picks' and 'Short of the Week'. In 2013-14, Roderick directed, wrote, produced and edited the highly ambitious short film **Factory293** – a drama/thriller set in 1940s blizzard-swept Russia and shot entirely in the outskirts of Perth in summer. **Factory293** achieved its convincing look through practical snow effects and over 200 digital-VFX shots. As an emergent writer/director, Roderick was selected for ScreenWest's 2015 'Script Development Track Program' and participated in the 2015 'eQuinox Europe' workshop.

THE FURNACE is Roderick's debut feature film as a writer, director and executive producer.

TIMOTHY WHITE – PRODUCER

Tim is one of Australia & New Zealand's most experienced producers.

Australian credits include: **Malcolm** (AFI Best Film 1986); Mark Joffe's **Spotswood**, starring Anthony Hopkins and Russell Crowe; **Cosi**, starring Ben Mendelsohn, Toni Collette and Rachel Griffiths; **Death in Brunswick**, starring Sam Neill; Michael Rymer's **Angel Baby** (Sundance Film Festival, AFI Best Film 1995), Gillian Armstrong's **Oscar & Lucinda**, starring Ralph Fiennes and Cate Blanchett; **Two Hands** (Sundance, AFI Best Film 1999), starring Heath Ledger, Bryan Brown and Rose Byrne; **Ned Kelly**, starring Heath Ledger, Naomi Watts and Geoffrey Rush; Scott Hicks' **The Boys are Back** (Toronto Film Festival), starring Clive Owen; Julia Leigh's **Sleeping Beauty** (Competition, Cannes Film Festival 2010), starring Emily Browning; and **Son of a Gun**, starring Ewan McGregor, Brenton Thwaites and Alicia Vikander.

New Zealand credits include: Toa Fraser's **No.2**, (Audience Prize, Sundance 2006); Robert Sarkies' **Out of the Blue** (Toronto, Best Film 2008 NZ Film Awards); Andrew Adamson's **Mr Pip** (Toronto), starring Hugh Laurie; **The Dark Horse** (Toronto, Best Film 2014 NZ Film Awards); Lee Tamahori's **The Patriarch** (Berlin Film Festival); and Roseanne Liang's **Do No Harm** (Sundance).

Tim produced the sci-fi thriller **I Am Mother**, starring Hilary Swank, Clara Ruugard and Rose Byrne (Sundance, acquired by Netflix). He recently completed a six-part miniseries for BBC One, an adaptation of Eleanor Catton's **The Luminaries**, starring Eva Green, Eve Hewson and Himesh Patel. Tim is currently in post-production on **Falling for Figaro**, directed by Ben Lewin and starring Danielle MacDonald and Joanna Lumley.

TENILLE KENNEDY – PRODUCER

Producer Tenille Kennedy's film projects have been selected for some of the world's most prestigious international festivals. She most recently produced the feature films *H is for Happiness*, selected for the 2019 Berlin Film Festival and recipient of the highly coveted 2018 Cinefest Oz Film Prize; and *Slam*, starring Adam Bakri. This Australian and French co-production premiered at the 2018 Tallin Black Nights Film Festival, where it was nominated for five awards. Tenille also produced *Bad Girl*, selected for the 2016 Busan International Film Festival.

Tenille co-produced not one, but three chapters of the compendium feature film *The Turning*, which was selected for the 2014 Berlin Film Festival. Based on the celebrated Tim Winton novel, Tenille co-produced the chapters *Fog*, *Aquifer*, directed by Robert Connolly (Paper Planes) and *Commission*, directed by David Wenham and starring Hugo Weaving. She was also an Associate Producer on ABC telemovie *An Accidental Soldier*, directed by Rachel Ward.

As a producer's assistant, Tenille completed projects across television and feature film including the acclaimed SBS television series *The Circuit* starring Aaron Pedersen, Richard Frankland's *Stone Bros* and the children's animation series *Dogstar*. She has worked as a Production Manager for films including Ben Elton's *Three Summers*, as a Post Production Supervisor and in development for Screenwest.

Tenille is the President of the West Australian chapter of Women in Film and Television.

MICK McDERMOTT – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael McDermott is a career Cinematographer based in Australia with more than twenty-five years industry experience.

He has filmed advertising campaigns for national and international brands including Coca Cola, McDonalds, Telstra, Commonwealth Bank, Toyota, KIA Automotive, Optus and Fosters, to name a few. Having lensed numerous short films and five feature films including international festival successes *Judas Collar* and *Hounds of Love*.

Michael's scope is focused on feature film production whilst continuing to work on select commercial and short film projects. Awarded by industry groups, his diverse and compelling body of work continues to grow as he concentrates his efforts on shooting long form narrative.

MERLIN EDEN – EDITOR

For two decades Merlin Eden has worked as an award-winning editor, designer, director and visual effects supervisor. Longer form dramatic editing work has included the features *Rattlesnake, 1922* (based on a Stephen King novella for Netflix), *Hounds of Love* (nominated for an AACTA in feature editing), *Last Train to Freo* and *Teesh & Trude*. Feature documentaries include *Kuru, The Science and the Sorcery, Girt By Sea, Yagan* and *Prison Songs*, many of which have been awarded and critically acclaimed. Merlin also received the 2004 Young Filmmaker of the Year award, has been nominated for four AACTA (AFI) awards for his editing work. Merlin is currently editing the latest adaptation of Stephen King's *Children of the Corn*. For editing, Merlin is represented by Siamese and worldwide by WPA (Worldwide Production Agency).

MARK BRADSHAW – COMPOSER

Mark Bradshaw composed the score for Jane Campion's *Top Of The Lake: China Girl* (2017). His work on the first series, *Top Of The Lake* (2013), earned him a BAFTA nomination. Previous collaborations with Campion include the BAFTA- and OSCAR-nominated feature film *Bright Star* (2009). Other feature film credits include

The Daughter (2015) and *Resistance* (2011). His work for stage includes *Eine Griechische Trilogie* (Berliner Ensemble, Berlin, 2018), *Against* (Almeida Theatre, London, 2017) and *Anatomy Of An Afternoon* (Southbank Centre, London, 2014).

CLAYTON JAUNCEY – PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Originally trained as a photographer, Clayton moved into Production Design almost 20 years ago and in that time has worked in many genres and styles of film and television production.

Clayton has built an extensive list of credits as a Production Designer including the feature films *Rams, Slam, Three Summers, Hounds of Love, Looking For Grace, Kill Me 3 Times*, starring Simon Pegg, *The Turning, Drift, Beneath Hill 60* (nominated for a 2010 AFI Award), *Blame, Last Train to Freo* and *Last Cab To Darwin* and *Paper Planes* (which both received nominations for Best Film at the 2016 AACTA Awards).

Television projects include 13 episodes of the SyFy series, *Hunters*, the series, *The Principal*, (nominated for Best Tele feature or Miniseries 2016 AACTA Awards) the telemovies, *An Accidental Soldier* (nominated for an AACTA Award 2013), *Panic at Rock Island, Three Acts of Murder* and *Rapture of The Deep* (Granada Germany) the critically acclaimed miniseries *The Shark Net*, and the AFI and Logie awarded television series *Lockie Leonard*.

In 2011 Clayton Jauncey was awarded the Australian Production Designers Guild award for design on a feature film for *Beneath Hill 60*.

JOEY CHARLTON – ART DIRECTOR

Joey Charlton is a Sydney Based art director who has worked all across Australia. She recently art directed feature film *Top End Wedding* for Goal Post and SBS's acclaimed TV show *The Hunting*. Her other art directing credits include ABC TV series *Hardball*, Stan series *The Other Guy* and ABC Mini serious *Fucking Adelaide*. Joey has been in the industry since 2012 working mainly in props and set dressing across Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney.

LISA GUNNING – COSTUME DESIGNER

Lisa Gunning has been Costume Designer on films and television series including *A Few Less Men, Below, The Gateway, Parallax, The Shark Net* and *Let's Get Skase*. She has also worked in the Costume and Wardrobe departments in other roles on productions such as *Itch, Noah's Ark, Moby Dick, Under the Lighthouse Dancing, Mr. Reliable* and *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie*.

NIKKI BARRETT – CASTING DIRECTOR

Nikki Barrett has been casting Australian and international film and television for over 20 years. Her work includes acclaimed features such as *Mad Max: Fury Road, Hacksaw Ridge, The Babadook, The Great Gatsby, I Am Mother, Peter Rabbit, Mao's Last Dancer, The Sapphires, Somersault, Holding The Man, Oranges and Sunshine, Ride Like A Girl, The Nightingale, The Railway Man* and *Candy*. Television work includes *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the *Jack Irish* series and the final season of HBO's *The Leftovers*. Among recent projects are *Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway* and Jane Campion's new film, *The Power of the Dog*. She is currently casting George Miller's feature, *3000 Years of Longing*.

KEY CREDITS

The Cast

David Wenham
Ahmed Malek
Jay Ryan
Erik Thomson
Baykali Ganambarr
Trevor Jamieson
Mahesh Jadu
Osamah Sami
Goran D. Kleut
Samson Coulter
Mansoor Noor
Kaushik Das
Wakara Gondarra
Dayal Singh
Sean Choolburra

Mal
Hanif
Sergeant Shaw
Corporal Briggs
Woorak
Coobering
Sadhu
Majid
Yates
Trooper Sam
Adeeb
Jundah
Mandu
Rajan
The Tracker

The Filmmakers

Director/Writer
Producers

Co-Producer
Associate Producer
Executive Producers

Director of Photography
Editor
Composer
Production Designer
Art Director
Costume Designer
Hair and Makeup Designer
Casting Director
Visual Effects Supervisor
Post Production Producer
Supervising Sound Editor
Sound Designer

Roderick MacKay
Timothy White
Tenille Kennedy
Georgia White
Gary (Curly) Bonney
Roderick MacKay
Brendon Grylls
Kelvin Munro
Grant Suptore
Bryce Menzies
Bill Beament
Jeff Harrison
Ari Harrison
Ying Ye
Michelle Krumm
David Wenham
Mick McDermott
Merlin Eden
Mark. Bradshaw
Clayton Jauncey
Joey Charlton
Lisa Gunning
Karen Sims
Nikki Barret
Wil Manning
Francesca Hope
David Raines
Nick Gallagher

