

**Speech to the 14<sup>th</sup> World of Women Film Festival**

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

**Given by The Honourable Penny Sharp, MLC**

**On behalf of**

**The Honourable Verity Firth MLA, Minister for Women**

**New South Wales Government**

I'd like to acknowledge that we are standing on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and to recognise them as the traditional custodians of this land.

Very few people know that in Australia, women and film-making go back a long way. They have a fascinating history, and it's one not enough people know about.

Most of you will be well aware of the work of the many talented female producers and directors who emerged during the Australasian film renaissance of the early 1970s – Gillian Armstrong, Jane Campion, and later, women such as Nadia Tass and Jocelyn Moorhouse.

Less people will have heard of Louise Lovely - who was given her name, which she hated, by executives at Universal Studios. Louise was the Cate Blanchett of Australia's early film industry.

Like Cate, she became a member of the so-called 'gum leaf mafia' – the group of Australian actors who have found success in the American film industry as well as their own.

She became a popular leading lady in America's silent film industry, starring in a series of successful westerns and melodramas.

Upon her return to Australia in 1920, she opened her own production studio, using the knowledge she gained in Hollywood to produce a documentary on the process of film-making, and eventually a feature-length film 'Jewelled Nights', which she wrote and directed.

Despite its success with audiences, the high cost of its production meant it did not recoup its costs. Like an estimated 90% of Australia's silent films, it is now lost.

It was Louise's final film. A woman with considerable talent and energy ended her days running the lolly shop at a Tasmanian cinema.

The history of women film-making in this country is marked with many triumphs, but also discontinuities, tragedies, and disappointments.

If few have heard of Louise Lovely, even fewer would be aware that Australia's most significant early film company was run entirely by women.

The McDonagh sisters were a remarkable trio, comprising actress Isobel, director and writer Paulette, and production designer Phyllis.

The McDonagh sisters were almost universally acknowledged, by both the public and their peers, as amongst the best and most polished artists of Australia's early film industry.

Isobel was particularly praised for her naturalistic acting style, and Paulette for her sophisticated and innovative scenarios.

You might be familiar with the McDonalds restaurant on George Street. In the days of the McDonagh sisters, this was a cinema.

It was here in 1928 that their film, 'The Far Paradise', broke the house record, previously held by the formidable double-bill of Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis' and Charlie Chaplin's 'The Gold Rush'.

Work and family were no easier to juggle then than they are today. After only four films, the production company disbanded when Isobel McDonagh married and moved to London.

Phyllis McDonagh also married, and moved to New Zealand, where she became editor of the New Zealand Truth.

Paulette McDonagh continued on her own, producing documentaries on Andrew 'Boy' Charlton and Phar Lap, as well as Donald Bradman's famous 'How I Play Cricket'.

Continuing another unfortunate tradition, she retained no copyright control over her work, and retained no copies. As a result, the majority of her work is now lost.

The McDonaghs made their final film in 1932. It was over twenty years before another woman, Joan Long, was to direct an Australian film.

It's no wonder that Joan named her own documentary on the history of Australian women film-makers 'Work Never Done'

I tell you these stories to demonstrate the way that the work of the Australian women film-makers of today are part of a bigger picture, and a wider history.

Sadly, it's a history marked by bright starts and sad endings, resulting not from any lack of talent, but lack of money, lack of support, and in some cases, the lack of a true local industry.

Since the 1970s, the situation has become far brighter, and in the ensuing years, it's hard to name a year in which at least one major Australian film was written or produced by a woman.

You here today continue this job that was started by the women pioneers of Australian film.

You face many of the same restraints as your predecessors. Yet you also share their drive, their vision, and their unique perspective.

The World of Women Film Festival is a wonderful way to promote your talents. I'm sure we'll hear more of the artists that will be showcased during the course of the festival.

The festival is proudly sponsored by the NSW Film and Television Office's Women In Film & Television initiative.

The NSW Government is also working hard on exploring ways to expand the \$1 billion dollar film industry in this state, and to make New South Wales a more attractive and rewarding location in which to film.

I'd like to congratulate all of you who will be showing films during the festival. I'd also like tot

Australia's national cinema is characterised by the variety of its voices.

The voices of Australian women are an essential part of our cinema. They must be heard, and thanks to your determination, they will be heard.

Thank you for coming tonight, and please enjoy `Climbers`.