

**HISTORY**  
**OF THE**  
**SYDNEY FILM**  
**FESTIVAL**  
**1954 - 1983**

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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a higher degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Production Note:

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*For John and David*

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## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABC</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>ACOFS</b>	Australian Council of Film Societies
<b>AFC</b>	Australian Film Commission
<b>AFI</b>	Australian Film Institute
<b>AFTRS</b>	Australian Film Television and radio School
<b>ASIO</b>	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
<b>CFU</b>	Commonwealth Film Unit
<b>DOI</b>	Department of Information, later Department of the Interior
<b>EFF</b>	Edinburgh Film Festival
<b>FIAPF</b>	Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films. Regulatory body governing the operations of international film festivals in their business dealings with film producers
<b>FUA</b>	Film Users' Association of New South Wales
<b>GU</b>	Greater Union Organisation
<b>IWFF</b>	International Women's Film Festival
<b>LFF</b>	London Film Festival
<b>MFF</b>	Melbourne Film Festival
<b>NFTA</b>	National Film Theatre of Australia
<b>SAFC</b>	South Australian Film Corporation
<b>SFF</b>	Sydney Film Festival
<b>SFIFF</b>	San Francisco International Film Festival
<b>SFS</b>	Sydney Film Society
<b>SMH</b>	Sydney Morning Herald
<b>SSFS</b>	Sydney Scientific Film Society
<b>SUFG</b>	Sydney University Film Group
<b>SUFS</b>	Sydney University Film Society
<b>SWFG</b>	Sydney Women's Film Group
<b>TFF</b>	Travelling Film Festival
<b>WEA</b>	Workers' Education Association
<b>WWFFU</b>	Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit

# CHRONOLOGY

**1 1954, June 11-14, University of Sydney**  
**Chairman A.K. Stout, Director David Donaldson**  
Premier screening of *The Back of Beyond* (John Heyer)

**2 1955, June 10-13**  
**Chairman A.K. Stout, Director David Donaldson**  
Japanese feature *Gate of Hell* (Teinosuke Kinugasa) makes huge impact  
*The Hungry Miles* (WWFFU) and *The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford) amongst Australian films screened. SFF neglects to invite Longford to screening

**3 1956, June 1- 6**  
**President Frank Bellingham, Director David Donaldson**  
Television comes to Australia  
*Three In One* (Cecil Holmes) rejected by Film Selection Sub-Committee  
*The Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa) screens

**4 1957, October 4-7**  
**President Frank Bellingham, Director David Donaldson**  
Erwin Rado becomes Director of MFF

**5 1958, October 3- 6**  
**President Frank Bellingham, Director Valwyn Wishart**  
1350 subscribers  
Valwyn Wishart takes over Directorship. Donaldson continues as a programming consultant  
Festival registered as a company limited by guarantee  
First overseas guest Paul Rotha, sponsored by UNESCO  
Introduction of advertising in Festival catalogue  
*Dust in the Sun* (Lee Robinson) screens with star Chips Rafferty in attendance

**6 1959, June 12-28**  
**President Frank Bellingham, Directors Sylvia Lawson and Robert Connell**  
Festival reverts to June and expands to 17 days

**7 1960, June 10-26**  
**President Frank Bellingham, Director Lois Hunter**  
2095 subscribers. 97 films  
Many sell out events  
Receives accreditation from FIAPF  
Charles Chauvel Retrospective  
Introduction of Opening Night feature film and party. Inaugural opener is *Black Orpheus* (Marcel Camus)  
Short films by Tim Burstall and Bruce Beresford

**8 1961, June 9- 25**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director Patricia Moore**

Tribute to Frank Hurley which he attends

**9 1962, June 1-14**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director Ian Klava**

Ian Klava appointed first full-time director

Tribute to cinematographer Arthur Higgins, which he attends

**10 1963, June 7- 20**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director Ian Klava**

Vincent Report tabled

International guest Madame Kawakita of the Japanese Film Foundation

**11 1964, June 5-15**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director Ian Klava**

SFF acquires first full-time office space at 53 Liverpool Street

*Dr Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick) big success

Tribute to Damien Parer

**12 1965, June 4-14**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director Ian Klava**

24 feature films and 59 shorts including amateur program

Modesta Gentile becomes first full-time Assistant to the Director

Tribute to Ken G. Hall

Screening of innovative CFU documentary *From the Tropics to the Snow*

David Stratton joins SFF committee. Ignites debate about censorship

SFF administration relocates to 40 King Street

**13 1966, June 1-13**

**President Frank Bellingham, Director David Stratton**

David Stratton becomes Director and makes first overseas visit to select films

Amateur Film program dropped

Censorship difficulties over *A Blonde in Love* (Milos Forman)

Formation of Film Censorship Sub-Committee

**14 1967, May 31 – June 12, Wintergarden, Cremorne Orpheum**

**President Dugmore Merry, Director David Stratton**

Cremorne Orpheum and Wintergarden added to University theatres and Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown as screening venues

*Forgotten Cinema* (Tony Buckley), a documentary about Australia's cinema past, screens three times to rapturous reception



**15 1968, May 29-June 6, Wintergarden****President Ian McPherson, Director David Stratton**

Political events in Europe have fall-out effect. Strikes and riots at Cannes Film Festival which is abandoned. FIAPF boycotts Venice FF. Festivals in Montreal and Vancouver both cancelled.

Rado stranded in Warsaw by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

SFF moves to Wintergarden Theatre, Rose Bay and office premises at 52 Erskine St

Director given autonomy over film selection. Film Selection Sub-Committee becomes Advisory Panel only

Satyajit Ray is a Festival guest

**16 1969, June 6-16****President Ian McPherson, Director David Stratton**

2,300 subscribers

*I Love You Love* (Stig Borkman) is banned by the Chief Censor while its director is in Australia as a guest of the SFF

First major SFF sponsor Fiat Motors

*2000 Weeks* (Tim Burstall) screens and is booed by audience

Stratton visits the San Francisco Film Festival and decides it is the model he will use to develop SFF

Petition signed by 64 film culture and industry figures raising concerns about Stratton's direction is presented to SFF

**17 1970, June 3-15****President Ian McPherson, Director David Stratton**

Introduction of Benson & Hedges Award for Australian Short Films

Features *A Married Couple* and *Like Night and Day* banned by censor

**18 1971, June 1-14****President Ian McPherson, Director David Stratton**

Jorn Donner, Jerzy Skolimowski and Akira Kurosawa invited as Festival delegates. Kurosawa drops out at last moment because of illness

R-Certificate is introduced. Film festivals are granted exemption from censorship

**19 1972, May 30- June 12****President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton**

Purchase of Festival premises at 405 Glebe Point Road

Albie Thoms arranges experimental program (The Films of Bruce Baillie)

Four Australian features programmed under "New Developments in Australian Cinema" banner

*Violence in the Cinema Part 1* (George Miller, Byron Kennedy) screens in main Festival after missing out on selection for Short Film Awards

**20 1973, May 29- June 11****President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton**

Introduction of first Green Series

Two Australian - produced ethnographic films about New Guinea given prominence; *Towards Baruya Manhood* (Ian Dunlop), *Tidikawa and Friends* (Jef & Su Doring)

WD&HO Wills withdraw sponsorship of Short Film Awards

### **21 1974, June 2-17, State Theatre**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF David Stratton**

Entire Festival relocates to State Theatre. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam opens the event

Greater Union takes over sponsorship of Short Film Awards

Introduction of Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Film (selected from finalists in Short Film Awards) First winner Phillip Noyce for *Castor and Pollux*

Australian features screened include *The Cars that Ate Paris* (Peter Weir) and *27a* (Esben Storm).

Guest of honour Rouben Mamoulian, around whom a retrospective has been programmed

Launch of Travelling Film Festival funded by Australia Council for the Arts

### **22 1975, June 1-16**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Carol Hughes**

David Stratton's tenth Festival

For the first time, the SFF opens with an Australian feature film, *Sunday Too Far Away* (Ken Hannam)

Retrospective of almost seventy selected excerpts and full feature film screenings programmed under title *Salute to Australian Film*. Twenty-page booklet produced to accompany it.

Warren Beatty, Dusan Makavejev, Basil Wright, and King Hu amongst international delegates

Introduction of National Nights. Germany and France

The Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG) organises the International Women's Film Festival (IWFF) in part in protest at poor representation of women filmmakers in SFF

### **23 1976, May 30-June 14**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Carol Hughes**

Program of contemporary Italian cinema, *Salute to Italian Cinema*, arranged by Gideon Bachmann. *Seven Beauties* (Lina Wertmuller) is extremely well received as Opening Night film.

International guests include Michelangelo Antonioni, Giancarlo Giannini

*The Devil's Playground* (Fred Schepisi) arrives as a late entry and is voted most popular feature *The Singer and the Dancer* (Gillian Armstrong) is a Short Film Award finalist

### **24 1977, May 29- June 13**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Antonia Barnard**

Introduction of Film Forums

Festival hosts sixteen international delegates from seven countries, including Peter Watkins.

*Backroads* (Phillip Noyce) screens

*In the Realm of the Senses* (Nagisa Oshima) refreshes concerns about censorship

Departure of Modesta Gentile

### **25 1978, June 2-17**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Ian McPherson**

Opening Night film *The Night the Prowler* with screenwriter Patrick White in attendance

Twenty-fifth anniversary celebrated with publication of commemorative booklet

International guests include Shyam Benegal, David Mercer, Keith Carradine

### **26 1979, June 15-30**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Louisa Wright**

Pressure from FIAPF forces end of sharing arrangement with MFF

International guests include Lino Brocka, Jiri Menzel, Albert Johnson, Derek Malcolm

**27 1980, June 13- 28**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Julie Stone**

Launch of Network 0/28 (later the Special Broadcasting Service). Stratton becomes feature film consultant for the television network and hosts Movie of the Week and Cinema Classics  
Death of Ian McPherson

**28 1981, June 5-21**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Kathy Turbott**

Inaugural Ian McPherson Memorial Lecture delivered by John Gillett. The lecture series sponsored by Ron Adair

Guests include Tony Rayns, Peter Wollen, Connie Field, Feliks Falk, Veronica Soul, Michael Raeburn and John Lowenthal

Alternative Cinema program introduced. Curated by Glenys Rowe and others from Sydney Filmmakers' Co-op

**29 1982, June 11- 27**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Kathy Turbott**

Friends of the Festival inaugurated.

Re-introduction of Green Series

Chief Censor bans *Pixote*. Decision overturned by Review Board

Lindsay Anderson delivers Ian McPherson Memorial Lecture

**30 1983, June 10- 26**

**President Ross Tzannes, Director David Stratton, TFF Victoria Brien**

David Stratton's eighteenth and final Festival

Festival has six staff members, an Honorary Auditor and an Honorary Solicitor. The Board of Directors comprises eleven people, five of whom are women.

*The Draughtsman's Contract* (Peter Greenaway) is Opening Night film

Jane Campion wins Rouben Mamoulian Award for *A Girl's Own Story*.

Joseph Skrzynski, CEO of AFC, delivers Ian McPherson Memorial Lecture

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is intended to provide a record of the founding and development of one of Australia's oldest and longest surviving film festivals and to determine the nature and impact of the Festival in its engagement with other cultural, social, and political institutions over the thirty years from 1954 to 1983.

I have taken my research from a variety of sources, primarily the archive of Sydney Film Festival papers and ephemera lodged at Mitchell Library, Sydney. I have utilized a number of publications from the period, including daily newspapers, trade papers and specialist film and art journals. These give some indication of the Festival's influence and impact within the wider community and help position it in terms of predominant cultural and social values.

I conclude that the Sydney Film Festival has played a significant, and so far somewhat underestimated, role in the development of Australian film culture and industry, and has influenced the nature and reception of films in commercial distribution within the country. In a pedagogical sense, it has influenced contemporary understanding of film and film history, in part by privileging particular movements and filmmakers over others and in part by creating a communal and interactive environment in which films, filmmaking and other aspects of film culture can be discussed, analysed and celebrated.

This is a history of an organisation whose membership included some of the major figures in Australian film and related media and I have been committed to bringing a human element to the events and issues explored. To this end, I have utilized the extensive Oral History archive created in 1992 by the Sydney Film Festival in order to commemorate its fortieth anniversary. As is often the case with historical research, some of these personal memories are in conflict with one another and with the documentary record. By a process of referencing and cross referencing, I hope I have arrived at an approximation of a truth about a moment in the life of an Australian cultural icon.