

David Caesar

Ray Argall interviewed David Caesar for australianscreen on 23 June 2009

So let's just warm up - what are we driving here David?

David 01A/01:21 Um, it's - we're driving a Volkswagen - a new combi. I don't know what they're called. Transporter? Is that what they're called? Yeah. Dunno. We're driving through the outer suburbs of Sydney. I've no idea where we are because I've never been on this road, but I think the next turnoff is Cow Pasture Road, to Green Valley, which is where we shot most of, um, *Idiot Box*, many years ago. I'd like to say I had hair then, but I didn't have hair then either.

And you've been through the clips on australianscreen.

David 01A/02:12 I have, I have. No I don't know them intimately. I know them a bit.

Are there any particular bits that you remember?

David 01A/02:24 Um, not off the top of my head. I should have probably gone through - done my homework last night, but I couldn't get on the internet last night. So ...

So we're heading out to - no we're not.

David 01A/02:42 See this is a turnoff here to Green Valley. Cow Pasture

Road. This was one of our locations.

What did you shoot here?

David 01A/02:54 Uh, we shot *Idiot Box* out here, and no, I don't recognise it, because this road's all new. Uh, feeling old. But it's just up here, I think, is where we had that - the young men romping around in the opening sequence - I think.

Why did you film out here?

David 01A/03:21 Well, I liked it out here because at the time there was all these new houses, and there were no trees. And I liked the, sort of, the - that, sort of, quality of - the sort of bare hills, with the new houses on them, and, like, most of the houses were kind of interchangeable, and they're sort of blond brick style. And I just liked the look of it. And I thought it was sort of iconic in that suburban way, for that period, for the characters, so ... sort of urban wasteland a bit. And, you know, there was just all these little houses, side by side, that were all very cramped up and - with - and isolated too. There was a sense of isolation about it, because there was no sort of public transport or - if you didn't have a car you were kind of knackered. Which is quite a part of the narrative, you know, so I wanted to reflect that in the whole look of the film. It's weird, because this used to be the edge of Sydney, and there's all these suburbs out there. So we were out on the fringes of Sydney when we filmed it, but there's all these new places now - around here.

And what do you think - placing your characters in these environments? Is that a consistent theme?

David 01A/04:45 Well, I'm - I just kind of am interested in people that lead -

that live in - for what, I think, most Australians, is an ordinary world. And I think that this is an ordinary world in the sense that, you know, most people live in the suburbs. Most people live - not in the inner Sydney, or in the outback, or whatever. I mean, I - I'm not uninterested in those people. It's just - I just think one of the things I've tried to do with a lot of my films is tell stories about - what is essentially an understandable world for the audience, but to say that dramatic things happen here as well. You know, like, they're not just happening somewhere else. And I think there's just always been this sort of thing with the whole Australian self image, which has been based on the idea that exciting stuff, or cultural stuff, or things that really matter happen somewhere else - happen overseas, or - or in Europe or in America or in New York, or whatever, you know, that - that - that this is - just checking the speed limit - that this is - that nothing really happens here, and I actually don't think that's true. I actually think that - that the lives, people's lives are sort of consistently equally exciting. You know, and I think it's - and I wanted to have that in the film. In my films - I want to talk about that and - you know, I mean they're exaggerated - they sort of take things and make them bigger. I'm going to turn right, because this is kind of up into that world - where we were doing a lot more stuff. But none of these houses were here when we were out here.

David 01A/06:36 This is where we did cars spinning, and all that. Um, yeah, so I've always been interested in that idea of the whole Australian cultural thing of - the exciting things - life happens somewhere else. I mean I felt that when I was growing up. I felt that if only I was in the middle of Sydney, or overseas, or something, that it would be much more exciting, and - and in my life, as I've gone to places like that, I go well this is kind of - just the same. Just there's more people, and there's - stuff. But I never found that it was more exciting or that life was more important - it was just a different place. So I've always been interested in sort of exploring that in terms of the films. You know, like, to try and make the intimate dramas dramatic - people's experience dramatic.

David 01A/07:36 Um, in terms of normal - well, I was - I sort of think that there's - that --- I think that most people's lives are ordinary. I think that it doesn't matter where you are - you end up with the same problems. You end up with the same issues - you end up sort of struggling for - to find meaning. You struggle to, sort of, like, communicate with your kids. You struggle to make sure you've got enough money to pay the mortgage, you know. I don't think that massively changes, you know. I think that where you are -- I think it's - I end up with the same issues whether you're in the Kalahari Desert or whether you're in a loft space in New York. I think that the human experience is pretty consistent, I suspect. Not that I've lived in the Kalahari Desert, or a loft space in New York, but I doubt that it's massively different, you know. Yeah, I'm just trying to work out where we are, because all these new houses, so how could that be? 14 years later. All these new houses.

David 01A/08:47 But this is sort of the area we were filming in. I think we were just in there somewhere. Just trying to work out where I am.

Do you think that's a class thing? Is there ...

David 01A/08:59 Oh, I think - I think that I've been lucky in that I've come from - I don't know, what used to be called working class. I don't even know what that means any more. I think people assume that when you're talking about working class, that you actually mean underclass, which I think is a different thing. Like, my parents always worked, and we never had much money, but they always worked and we always had enough food and we always - and they, and they didn't - they weren't on drugs or alcoholics or whatever, you know. Not that that's got anything to do - specifically with the underclass, but - oops - I do think that there's this sort of notion of, um, of um - yeah, I

mean, I think the idea of class is that when you actually come from, say a working class background, and you sort of live in a middle class world, which is what I do, I think you actually have a better understanding of what class is because you've seen it from all the different sides. And I don't think that the worlds are massively different. I don't think that - I just think that you're more aware of it if you come from not having money, you know, if you know what I mean. Yeah, so, from my point of view - I think I know where I am now - now I'm going to turn right here, and then left. And then left again.

Did you do a lot of recess around here?

David 01A/10:26 Yes we did. But I mostly did them by myself, because we're actually - I don't - well, we actually - were outside - they didn't want me - originally the - the production manager didn't want me to film out here because we were outside the - I don't know - some bloody, um, distance from Sydney - from the CBD, that you were allowed to - oh, that's someone's house. Um, where am I - turn right here, that'll do. Uh --- yeah, so - I don't know what - it's all different - they keep changing these. I don't ___ (unclear). Yeah, and they didn't want us to film out here, because there was a - there's some sort of financial disincentive. And so I kept driving around trying to find places within the - within a certain amount of distance to Sydney, but I could never find the exact look I wanted, and so I'd come out here by myself and just drive around and drive around and drive around, until - and I thought, well, this is actually what I want - the sort of world I wanted to film in, and it was - it's sort of a very - I think for a lot of Australians, a very normal, ordinary world. I mean, that being said, I think the characters in - in *Idiot Box* are underclass characters. I mean, like, they come from that sort of - from essentially underprivileged background in terms of, you know, dysfunctional families and unemployed and, you know, out of - you know, like, a very financially poor background, and - uh, yeah, so I was kind of interested in all that, in the sense - there's coppers up here - you

might want to be a bit - some - some event. It's the right sort of set up here - some sort of domestic dispute I would say. Oh, it's a car accident.

David 01A/12:44 Yeah, but this is the sort of world we're in. I can't remember exactly which street we were on, but there was none of these trees out here. There was just all these funny little faux, what are they called? - Federation houses, and it was all very - yeah. It was good - it was what I wanted. So, I was very - very clear about - the sort of look I was after - in terms of trying to - sort of, make it sort of iconic for that - for the characters. You know, I wanted to make sure that it was - that we were, you know - yeah, I - so, I guess, all my films have - I've tried to do that. When I did that film *Greenkeeping*, I was - I had this sort of idea in my head that the bowling green itself was sort of in an abstract way Australia. It was like this island. And I wanted to have that sort of idea of - that all this dramatic stuff happening in this - you know, island that was dying because they weren't looking after it - the environment. Though that wasn't really an issue, I have to say. And, yeah, so I was - I've always been interested in, sort of, world - the locations and stuff being metaphoric, you know, not just, you know - I don't think I'm a massively naturalistic filmmaker, I mean - a lot of people have put me in that category, but I don't actually see my films that way. I don't see them as being naturalism or - social realism really. I see them as actually trying to go beyond that, and I do put symbolism and I do put other stuff into them that - I mean, I, you know, I mean, like, the whole thing of *Dirty Deeds* for me was actually a complete - like a complete metaphor for sort of - the whole idea of unilateralism - the idea of these sort of Americans coming into, you know, well - sort of, people from a powerful culture going to another culture and thinking they were actually helping them, without asking what the people - locals wanted, you know, just - and that's why we had it against a background of Vietnam War and, you know, it was all done after the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and I just thought that that naivety of - of sort of, you know, and I didn't want to paint the Americans as being bad, I mean I tried to make

the main - the John Goodman character actually a likeable character, but just didn't get it. Just going to pull over here, and let some of these cars go past. But, he kind of just didn't get it, and I think that's kind of the way, you know, a lot of the sort of the West works, is that it's these sort of people out - that we, you know, I think we have to be conscious of that, that you can't just go into other people's back yards and - without getting your nose bloodied, you know, in an arrogant way.

So, are you interested in how that relates to your documentary work and working with real people?

David 01A/16:04 Yeah. I mean, one of the big things for me, with the documentaries, was, I was really interested in the actual - the idea of storytelling. I was interested in the idea of people telling stories, and I was interested in the idea of the artifice of making the documentaries, so we constructed this elaborate machine, well it wasn't an elaborate - it was just a sort of - sort of a half box thing with a half frosted mirror - ah, half reflective mirror on it. We filmed through the mirror, and the people who I was interviewing could see me, on that thing, so it was like they were talking into the camera. So I had this sort of idea that - that what would happen is that the people - is that the people being interviewed - it would seem like they were actually looking through the lens to the person in the audience. So there was a much more intimate sort of relationship. So, it was like someone telling you a story. And I tried to structure them in a way that they were very much about the idea of ordinary people telling stories. It was very important to me that it felt like - we're sort of - that intimate, you know, like you meet someone and they go like, ah yeah I was in a car accident, or, yeah, I work in the funeral industry - this is what I do. And I was very conscious of that. And I wanted to sort of capture that. But I also wanted to make sure that the people that were in the films were always 100% aware of the technology. That they wouldn't ever sort of go, oh, I'm going to let my guard down,

because I wanted it to be that they were presenting a face to the audience, a public face, not an intimate, private face, because I think that often, for me, what happens in a lot of documentaries, is I think that people can let their guard down, and they can present part of themselves they don't actually want to be public. Which can make really good cinema, but I don't think it's fair to them as the subject. So, it's something I've always felt uncomfortable about in documentaries - is, sort of putting something private up on the screen, which, you know, I iron - you know, is the ironically the - the thing that makes them the most successful thing for the audience, is they want that intimacy - they want that - that, that sort of relationship, so I - it's one of the reasons why I haven't done any documentaries for a while because I felt uncomfortable about it.

David 01A/18:48 I mean, the last sort of big documentary I did was *Carcrash*, and I actually - a lot of the people in that were actors, and I interviewed people - real people, and then we transcribed that into a script, and then I had actors playing the real people. Um, and I was kind of interested in that as a - on a whole lot of levels, but I do - but it - you know, the ABC didn't like it, because they said well technically it's not a documentary, it's drama. Blah blah blah blah. And I thought, oh, I think what I want to do, and the doc - the whole documentary world - we aren't compatible. So, I sort of went, OK, well, I'll just concentrate on drama, you know, and call it drama. And in an ideal world, you know, I'd like to continue to do some of that stuff, but it's - it's hard to sort of - I don't know. It - for me it's interesting, in the sense that so many of the aspects of what you would call traditional documentary, become part of drama in terms of trying to make the situation real, and just capturing it. You know, the whole idea of sort of improvising and uh and then you sort of capture that. But that's something I don't - I don't like as a filmmaker. I kind of - I find it interesting, but - I didn't even look - but I do think that it's completely - it's a completely different way of working - it's the way I like to work. And I mean when I did *Wildside*, I found when the actors started improvising, I just found it - just chaotic, and I

think it's interesting to do - to try and find characters and move - move on and everything, but I do - I do think that there's a whole - I don't know, I think you lose the centre of your story, and I have to say I'm quite - I have a very classic - what I would call classic, and other people might call it conservative idea of the way stories work. I do fundamentally believe in the idea of beginnings, middles and ends. And I prefer watching films that have strong beginnings, middles and ends, and I think - and I do think there is something about the notion of, um, a transformative character arc, and I think that if you don't have a transformative character arc, then I'm unsure as to the point of making it - a film - a feature film as opposed to a short film, because if there's no change, then there's no real difference because the beginning and the end, and I think that that is sort of a weird pointless experience for the audience, because you don't get that sense of the transformative qualities of storytelling.

David 01A/21:50 And I think that, you know, if that's a conservative way of looking at it or whatever, well so be it, because I think it's just the nature of it. I think that stories work best, and I think that again and again and again, you know, it's been proven that, you know, audiences prefer that sort of sense of - that sort of classic storytelling model. I mean, I'm not to say that other films aren't interesting, that, that, that muck around with that and consciously don't do that, or whatever, and there's been plenty of successful films that do that, but I think in general, that sort of transformative thing ... And I think - anyway, getting back to where I started from - uh, the whole idea of documentaries and that thing of not being in control of it, I mean, it's something that I - I often struggle with - struggle with, and so I used to have a very clear script when I used to make the documentaries - I mean it was like a - just a normal script. It had what they're going to say, and what I want them to say, and when I was interviewing them, I was very conscious of sort of, um - somewhere in here's where we had the house for *Idiot Box* - but anyway, but I was very - I was always very conscious of the structure of the story I was trying to tell,

and what I wanted from people, so I would often ask people - the people in the - I'm not sure, that may be the house there - no maybe not, slightly different - anyway, it felt like it was around - it was around here somewhere.

David 01A/23:39 Yeah, no I was very conscious of what I wanted the people to actually say, so I would often say - I would ask the question, and if they didn't say what I wanted them to say in the interview, then I would often let it go and move forward, and then come back to a rephrased version of the same question, and I'd often do that four or five times, and I mean, up to the point where I remember - I was interviewing something - somebody, and they said, look, did I say it the right way? this time? you know, after they answered the question for the fourth time. And so they were obviously aware of what I was doing - trying to do, you know. But from my point of view, I - I do find - yeah, I did find - I was kind of interested in that, and I was interested in exploring that further than - that way of storytelling, um, and I would have liked to have done more with that, but it's very hard, um - it's very hard to get the money to do - make films that way too, because you have to - oh dear, what's going on here? - oh dear. I don't think you should film that. (Laughs.) We just filmed a big drug bust, which was exciting. Out in the suburbs. I thought it was fake for a minute. (Laughs.) Oh dear, someone's about to go to jail for 20 years. Oh dear. Yeah, it was around here somewhere where we had the houses for *Idiot Box*, and I don't - and none of these obviously none of these trees were here 14 years ago. There'll all new. And these houses were all, sort of, fairly new. And they're very tiny inside, that's the bizarre thing about them.

What's that?

David 01A/25:24 These houses - they're all just tiny inside. Small little rooms. Surprised the coppers didn't react to us going past then. Anyway, so I don't know if I've

answered your question - the way you wanted me to there.

I'm just interested in the car and truck culture in your films.

David 01A/26:39 Well, I grew up - I used to drive trucks for a living before I went to film school for a while, and - but I grew up - in the world I grew up in, like, it was sort of that era where people used to get old EH Holdens and hot them up, and it was sort of the end of the whole sort of panel van with murals on them era, you know. I mean, I quite liked that - all that stuff, and the Australian muscle cars, and V8s and - I like it sort of more on a cultural and aesthetic sort of point of view than the actual cars. I did have a HG GTS Monaro for a while, which would be worth an absolute fortune now, but anyway. No point worrying about that. Um, and so I did like all that car stuff, but more from an aesthetic idea and - and the culture that went with that, but it was sort of - and part of that was that it actually was my culture. You know, I actually felt like it was my unique culture in the sense that I owned it, and um - fucked if I know where I am now - um - so I liked that I - you know, like, talking about that culture. But I also think that cars and machines in general, and film, just are a natural fit. I think they - they made absolute sense. We were actually going north, and I thought we were going south, so that means we'll have to go round - well, we'll go back around the block. But yeah, no, I think cars and film are a natural fit, and it's my goal in life to make the perfect car chase in a film. I have a fairly big car towing a caravan and truck chase in *Prime Mover*, which I enjoyed very much. But that's sort of a homage to the end of *Mad Max 2*, um, but I do think that there's something about big machines moving fast that cameras like, and - yeah, I just like the aesthetics of that, and I like that as a - as, you know, colour - the colour and movement of that in terms of - and, in filmmaking terms. And - yeah, I'm just - I'm interested in - I have this sort of fantasy idea about the idea of pure cinema. And it was interesting - I went and saw *Samson and Delilah* yesterday, and that comes very close to that, you know, in the sense

that it's not about - you kind of could watch it and - without subtitles, and not speak any of the language, and you'd know what it was about. You know, you'd know what the story was about because so much of it was about what people do, not what they say. And I'm very interested in that conceptually, you know, like that idea that you make films and they - no-one talks in them.

David 01A/29:43 I mean, there's some - some Hong Kong - not Hong Kong, Korean filmmakers who I really think are really interesting who - a guy called Kim Ki-duk in particular, whose characters just don't talk. And I find that interesting, you know, because it's kind of really pure storytelling - really getting back to the way people look at things, and, I mean, still using sound design and still using all the tricks of the trade, but - just trying to work out the best way to get back to where I was, uh just try this one - try this one - let's live dangerously - and - but the cars and everything, I just - just think that that they're - they make great, um, film subjects and I also think that the whole car culture, the road movie, and everything - it's - I think there's not many people who've grown up in Australia where the whole influence of cars - whether it's a, you know, like a Suzuki Swift, or whether it's a muscle car, hasn't had a large bearing on their life, the fact that our cities are designed for cars, people tend to go on holidays where they go on long road trips, so a big part of your experience of being in a family's been stuck in the back seat of a car bickering with your siblings, or parents, or whatever, you know, it's a big part of our identity as, I think, Australians, and I mean obviously things like that are, you know, finite in terms of what happens with the environment, but, yeah, so I think cars are really important. And I also think that - that the thing about cars is that they are fashion things in a way - in the sense that you can kind of, you know, like people talk about shoes or whatever that you can tell a lot about a person by the shoes they wear or whatever, but basically you can tell a huge amount about - I could - about a person from the car they drive. I think you can sort of go, oh well, they're interested in practicality or they're

interested in what other people think of them. They're interested in, um, you know, whatever - they're interested - their status. Yeah, all those sort of things are really important to people, and I think that's really interesting that - that the sort of coding of cars. I think they're one of the - they're a huge definition of - of who you are as a person, in a very public, public way.

David 01A/32:15 And I also think that the way someone drives a car says a lot about their personality because you kind of can't hide it, with cars. I mean, this was a big thing for me in, you know, when I was doing that film, *Carcrash*, was that I actually think that you can't - when you're driving a car, your true personality comes out, you know, whether you're impatient or whether you - you can't make a decision, or - all these sort of things about - are very evident in the way a person drives a car. So, I find them interesting. I just still do.

<crew talks.>

Do you think it's a masculine thing?

David 01A/33:06 I think that it's as a sort of - a culture in inverted commas it's a masculine thing, but - it's not in terms of people's lives, because like, women own and drive cars, and they need them for, essentially, independence. I remember - and it's not - I met - when I made *Shoppingtown*, there was this girl in it - there's this really sad girl, and she would have been young at the time, she would have been a teenager or something, and she - she said something like - I don't know, I said what - I was asking all the characters in that film what was happiness, that was the only question I asked them - and this girl said getting a car, you know, because then you could go anywhere, and then you'd be free. So, the whole idea of freedom and escape is so much part of how we see the world. Um, that

hill there, was a main location for *Idiot Box* - I can't remember what for, but there was a big sequence walking through that. That service station was a location - looked quite different in the day.

And, I know that there was this other clip on the website called This Woman is not a Car. Have you seen that?

David 01A/34:39 Yeah, I have seen that. I remember that. That was quite a good - there's this woman who's obsessed about cars, and she used to make these beautiful, um, sculptures of old Holdens - beautiful, beautiful things. But, then she made that film, and I think it's the only film she's ever made. Now I think I know where I am now. I think I know where I am now. Now, I think it's just over there, so I'll keep doing that. I'm in Europe. Um, yeah, so I do think - I don't think that they - as - in that sort of hotrod culture, I think it's sort of a very masculine thing, and I think that that's sort of, you know, the car as an extension of your penis, blah blah blah, how you define yourself, you know, like, with your aggression and stuff, but, you know, I have to say I see a lot of young girls, and this is me being cranky old man time, driving very very aggressively. I remember, where I live, I take my kids to school, and there was this girl who's - I don't know, she's got green P-plates, so she's under 21, and she drives about 6 inches from the back of your car at 100 kilometres an hour, and the other day, I saw her - she was putting mascara on, while she was driving 6 inches from my bumper bar, and I just thought - I don't know. And there was this sort of - all this sort of - uh stuff because I wasn't going fast - I was going the speed limit - and all this carry on, you know, all this sort of performance - in the mirror, I could see her doing it. You know, like, she was getting frustrated at my lack of urgency, you know, so I think there's this sort of - the overall, you know, sense of urgency that our car culture provides, I think, is - is non-gender specific.

<crew talks>

David 01A/36:41 I did have a Monaro, which - which I loved, and because of my name, and because it was metallic purple, people called it the chariot. And we used to have, like, six fairly large teenagers in it, I mean I bought it for like \$400, and, you know, the surf boards on top, it was quite funny.

And what do you drive now?

David 01A/37:07 I drive a Nissan Pulsar - about 10 years old. Gets me there. I have to say, I think that our whole life is fairly - I think that fantasy about the car culture and what it means, in terms of freedom and so on, I think very much is - is a fantasy. I think that when you live in the inner city and you can walk most places and you can, you know, it's just a better lifestyle for human beings, I think, you know. But where I live in the country, it is impossible to go anywhere without the car, because I live miles from bloody anywhere. And I - but I do like that idea of just being in a big city where you're nearby - things are nearby, you know, there's a cinema or there's whatever, and it's public transport, and I think it makes - it's very civilised. Now, because of all these sort of windy windy ...

<Street driving shot>

David 01A/38:50 Here's Kestrel here, so we will see if this is the ... where we are. Now, I'm not sure, but for some reason this feels like the area where we were. In here somewhere.

David 01A/39:41 You know, like, what's that *Searching for Fidel?*, was that

was it was called? Yeah, that was a famous documentary. Uh, well it wasn't that street. Bugger. That's where I thought it was. But it's definitely here somewhere. Let me just try this little fellow - Pelican - let's have a look in Pelican - Pelican Place. Oh no, it's just a place. See. Oh, it's around here somewhere.

David 01A/40:54 Now, I won't go up another place, because it's no good to us.

David 01A/40:58 Well they say a really good boom swinger's hard to find these days. I don't know if I - oh, Stevie? Yeah, I've worked with him. I worked with him on the first thing I ever did. Oh, actually, I worked with him a few years ago on something in Melbourne. What was that called? *Crash Burn*. Yeah. Yeah, he was good, Stevie. I liked him.

Alrighty, now I just - just to start off with, ___ (unclear) to talk about the moment when you decided on this career path.

David 01A/41:30 Um, the moment I decided - well, I decided pretty early, actually, when I was about 13 or 14. I used to actually be a bit obsessed about comics, and I used to draw my own comics from when I was quite young, but people used to sort of make up their own voices and stuff for the characters and things, and things like that, and I felt like, well, that's not the voice I imagined, so I thought, well, I'd better actually do the whole lot, you know. So when I was about 14 or 15, I used to work at a car yard as - selling spare parts on the weekend, and in the holidays, and detailing cars as well, and I saved up and got a Super 8 camera, and I started making little animated films on Super 8 when I was about 15. Pretty bad, because I had no concept of most of the principles of filmmaking. I just - I used to make these little films, and then, I'd look at them and I'd go,

oh, that's too long. That bit's too long, and I didn't know that you could just cut that little extra bit off, so I'd go back and reanimate the whole thing. But, anyway, you live and learn.

David 01A/43:00 Well, the whole idea of film school was really early on because I grew up in the country from a sort of fairly working class background and I just assumed that the way you got into things was you went to a school and they taught you and you got a job. You know, I thought that was just the way things worked. And so, I applied to film school when I was 15, and they sort of said, go away, and you're not old enough, and da da da. Uh, and I think I'd done one short film - one little animated film at that point. And then, I kept on applying, and I got in when I was 19, so I applied 4 times. Year after year, I just kept on applying until they let me in. I think they let me in basically because they figured this guy would just keep coming back - just let him in and, you know, so, yeah. But I had done a 16mm short drama when I was 19, so that obviously helped me get in.

David 01A/43:57 Yeah, that start -- I - because I came to Sydney before - I'd been driving trucks for a while, and that ended badly, like with a bad accident, and I nearly killed someone, and - long, weird story. Um, and I thought well - and all the money I'd saved, like, to do - make a short film to get into film school, I lost because of legal fees and stuff, you know. This bizarre court case that went on for about two years. And so I just moved to Sydney, and I slept on my - stayed at an aunt's place for a while, and then I found this place called Metro Television, and it was this sort of community TV place, and I worked there as a volunteer basically. And then I got on to a whole lot of corporate video things, just as paid jobs, and rock videos, and - it was sort of the start of the real - when rock videos became a really big force in filmmaking in Australia. And so I actually - I ended up making a couple as well, back then. And one of the people that was there was

this other young guy called Mark Perry, and he was - he had all these visions of making these big science films and stuff, and I wrote a science fiction half hour thing for him that we made there, like we built these sets out of bits of old polystyrene that we sprayed silver and stuff and, you know. Because there's a funny little studio there. It was really handy. So - and they let us do that, and they let us use the equipment there, and we made this sort of weird science fiction film called *Shiner 1*. We had all our friends acting in it and all that.

David 01A/45:40 But anyway, we both applied to the film school at the same time. We both got in at the same time, and off we went. North Ryde.

And you're still working together?

David 01A/45:50 Yes, he's um - he's edited pretty much all my films since then - since film school. Um, yeah, we're still good friends, and, you know, he just edited *Prime Mover* for me and it's good. Because the thing I like about it is that we could just be really honest with each other, and he understands what I'm trying to do and the thing I like is when I'm filming, he'll ring up and he'll say well I think you've got to watch such and such's performance - I think it might be hard to cut, or he might say, you know, I think that you're not getting enough shots of this, or I reckon you might want to pick up a close up of something - certain things to help a scene go together, and it's really useful to have that someone who can be honest with you because I often find that people - when you've sort of been around a while, people often are worried about, sort of, criticising what you're doing. You know, they think that you don't want them to have an opinion, but it's - I always want it. You know, you want - I mean, for better or worse, it's a collaborative process, and you want people to have input, you know.

How about producers?

David 01A/ Well, I've worked with a bunch of producers over the years. I worked with Glenys for a long time - we started - she ... Glenys Rowe, sorry. And Glenys saw my short film, *Shoppingtown* from film school and really liked it. It won some awards, and on the basis of that, she asked me to make a film called *Bodywork*, a film about the funeral industry that I wasn't involved in developing - it was sort of all together at the time. And, yeah, and that - we made that together and that did pretty well. And then we did a film - my first feature - a film called *Greenkeeping* back in '92 I think. And then we did a few other documentaries together - *Carcrash* and *Fences* - and then we did *Idiot Box* in '95 / '96. And that was all good. Um, but, you know, like, and then I was - had been also friends with a guy called Vincent Sheehan, and we'd been developing a film called *Mullet* together, and I also - I'd met Bryan Brown because he liked *Idiot Box* and had this idea for a, sort of, a gangster picture that become *Dirty Deeds*, so I approached him at a film festival, at Toronto I think it was - I was there with *Idiot Box*, and he was there with *Dead Heart*, and I sort of said, well I've got this idea for a film - are you interested, you know. And he said yeah, sounds good. Let's do something. And we did, which was good, and I'm still working with Bryan developing stuff now, on other projects, and I just did *Prime Mover* with Vincent, so, you know, it's an ongoing - ongoing relationship.

David 01A/48:46 But I met Vincent - he came into Metro TV later, so I met him through Metro as well, so it's been quite a fertile place for me.

What's good about the work - why have you been able to continue working with these people, what's been the positive?

David 01A/49:05 Well, I like continuing working with people because I think that I enjoy the collaborative nature of filmmaking. I enjoy sort of having sort of ongoing

experiences with people. I mean there's something - I mean, everything about the process of filmmaking I actually like. I actually like all the recess and the planning and the all the early stuff. I enjoy all that, and - and it's kind of like my - I mean, I sort of understand that more than I do sort of real life in a lot of ways. I actually understand what you're supposed to do when you're on a recce or when you're making a film or, you know, it's very clear what everyone's role is, and I find it really enjoyable in a way, but I find real life a little bit confusing. But - so I have this sort of - so I like the ongoing relationships. I enjoy it because we share the same interest in film and television and telling stories and books and stuff and we talk a lot about that and it's just, you know, I enjoy all of that.

What is it about telling stories in the community?

David 01A/50:19 Well, the thing I like about telling stories in the community is - in a larger sense, a larger, sort of like national community, um, as well as a small one, is that, it's just about being part of - it's actually being part of the community. I actually think storytelling's really important to a community. It's about how you define yourselves. I think that there are - what's that? happy dog? - um, and I think that that's - it's essential for society to tell their stories. I think that's what societies are based on, is their myths and their stories. And I just think that, you know, occasionally we find that, you know, whether it be television shows or a character or a - or a movie or whatever, that we do find where collectively, as a country, or, you know, small group of people, that we, sort of, it brings people together as some sort of shared experience, and I think that, you know, whether - I mean I think that it's interesting what's happening with the way TV shows are evolving now - I think that's particularly interesting in the sort of short series format and the way people watch them, not broadcast, but off DVD, often as a group of people watching them together on a Sunday, like they watch 5 or 6 episodes together. It's interesting how that is evolving as a sort of social thing.

Who do you make films for?

David 01A/51:44 I - I'm very much - I feel very audience oriented as a storyteller. I'm very interested in having an audience that sees them, and I'm very conscious of that when I make them. I'm not one of those people that goes, oh well, I have this really strong personal view that I want to impart to the world, it's more like, I think there should be - I think that - that'd be an interesting story to tell, but I also think that would be something that people would be interested in seeing, you know. And, um, part of that's just because I think I'd be interested in seeing it, um, but also I think that, you know, you have to try and find an audience - you have to sort of have an imagined group of people that you're trying to talk to, you know, I mean otherwise I think that you can disappear up your own bum pretty quickly and ...

But, I mean, which audience do you think that you're making your films for?

David 01A/52:43 Well, it's hard to know. I mean, like, when we were out here, out in this - these streets making *Idiot Box*, I always thought it was for the people out here. But the thing that - that's always happened with my films is that - that film was really popular in the inner city, but it became really popular out here on video and DVD, and so it's a weird thing the way - I mean, my films have often been more successful on DVD or - after the cinematic release. They have - tend to have a long - what do they call it? a long tail - and, yeah, people sort of - so they don't, you know, like, I mean, *Dirty Deeds* did pretty good business at the cinema, but it's done really well on DVD and so it's strange the way it's - that, that experience is evolving, you know, you sort of have this idea of this - people in a darkened theatre and stuff, but that's kind of becoming less common I think,

and so - yeah, it's - I don't know. It's a hard one.

How do you prefer to watch films?

David 01A/54:09 Well, I prefer to watch films in a real cinema, but it's just not practical with a family and everything, and most of the time. So I - I usually watch them on DVD in an old shed out the back of my place I've turned into a home cinema. It's - I've got a cheap DVD - a video projector, and an old couch - I used to have a couple of Jason recliner rockers there, and go out there and - bottle of wine, and watch a - once the lights are out, you know ...

Yeah. And with the digital era, how do you see yourself?

David 01A/54:58 Well, I find the digital era easier to understand than the chemical era I have to say. I have to say I have no romance about film at all. I mean, I find when video splits became really common, I just found it a godsend. I started it - but I started - like I say, I started out at Metro TV, and that was all on video, and we had these big huge portapac things, and - and the quality wasn't very good, and - but that - that was, sort of, the technology I understood, and film, I find a little bit more sort of mysterious, and sort of like, has this sort of alchemy quality to it, whereas the thing I like about the video, digital thing is that what you see is what you get. And I also like that you can sort of - I mean, we spent I don't know how many weeks grading *Prime Mover*, where we could go, oh well we'll just replace the sky. Oh, OK. We'll replace the sky. Fantastic. And all the things that you sort of go - that I look at my other films - I always imagined that day to be sunny, you know. I imagined the blue sky and to be sunny and da da da, but, you know, with the schedules it wasn't, and we, you know, shot it the way we shot it. But now you go, well, oh we'll make it sunny. Oh we'll put in a blue sky and I'll adjust the contrast, and

I'll da da da - so I love that. I love that aspect of it. I mean, the problem is that - I think the problem is that people - because that technology is expensive, you don't have a lot of time to - to do all that in, whereas where you had an old Steenbeck, you could spend a long time with the whole post production process, but now, all those bits are really fast, and can work fast, so people think it should be fast. That's the only problem I have really with the digital age, is that people expect stuff to just happen, and it can just happen, but those thought processes and the evolution of ideas that can happen over time, I think you lose that, and I think that's a shame.

David 01A/56:59 I mean, I'd love to be able to have the digital technology with the analogue, um, schedule.

David 01A/57:20 Well, the it's - the way it's changed is that, when we were sort of, say we were editing *Greenkeeping*, back in the early '90's, when - the way it would often work was because of the actual process of editing, was just so time consuming, it was all these trim bins and all this stuff - that what would happen is I'd say, well you know how we've got the wide shot first, and the closeup, can we have a look at the closeup first and then the wide shot, and they'd go, yeah, we can, but I have to take them out and refile them and find the trims, da da da, and put it in. And if you want to do that, it's going to take most of the day to redo that. And so, whenever we did anything, it was, like, I'd say, oh these are the things I'd like to try, and then I'd leave for a few days, and then come back. But now, you go, I want to try that and he'd go tsht tsht, yeah, well what do you think? And it'd be there, you know, like, in front of you. And you'd go, oh, I don't know what I think because it's like, sort of like right there. So it's the immediate response of it, um, which, you know, I do miss the sort of being able to step away a bit more from it, because I think that's healthy as a storyteller, I think it's really good to, as a director - you don't want to micromanage everything. You want to sort of have a - a bigger picture on it,

I think. And I think that the problem with the digital stuff and the immediacy of it and the fact that you can say something and you can get exactly that, instead of this sort of - I don't know - interpretation of that, which might be better than your - do you know what I mean? So there's - I just think that's a shame, that - that's the other thing I think, that - that you have to be very aware of - is that you have to be - because it can just happen, it's not necessarily the best thing, and I try and factor in, now, spaces, into post production. And, like, it's, like, sometimes, if you can have a two week break and just go away and not look at it and not have anything to do with it. I mean, I never look at rushes anymore, because - rushes used to be great, because - you weren't looking through the camera, and then you see it. But when you've got a split and everything, you're actually seeing exactly what's going down.

.... How about working with actors?

David 02A/01:14 Well, I have a sort of a - ongoing relationship with Ben Mendelsohn. That's probably my ongoing relationship. And he was in a short film - a short drama I did in, uh, just after I came out of film school, about 1989. And he must have been only 17 or something at the time. Um - yeah, so - and we've ended up working a lot together. He was the lead in *Idiot Box*, and the lead in *Mullet*, and one of the main characters in *Prime Mover*, and I'm developing another couple of projects with him specifically in mind for the leads now. And - yeah, I like - I don't know, it's just - it's the same sort of thing, I just - I like his quality on screen and I like working with him. A lot of people - I mean I tend to be good at working with people - actors - that a lot of people think are difficult, because I just sort of - don't muck about. I just sort of say, this is what I want you to do. No I don't like that. Do this. And that's good, do that. And I think there's this sort of idea that you treat - some people have a sort of idea that you treat people like children, and often I think that you - if you treat people like children then they act like

children, and then - and they - and then people get this idea that they're difficult to work with so they treat them more like children, and the more they do that, the more they act like that, and I think it's this vicious, vicious circle that they sort of put themselves into. And so, but I, no, I've never had any problems working with him, and I really enjoy working with him, and - and we have these quite deep, philosophical discussions about the character and the film and the story and every ... and the idea of what we do as well, and I enjoy all that, and I'd like to - yeah, I fully intend to keep working with Ben and hopefully ...

How long has that been going now?

David 02A/03:00 20 years, we've been working together. So ...

David 02A/03:16 No, I've been working with a character - sorry. I've been working with an actor called Ben Mendelsohn for about 20 years now. We go back a long way, and I hope to keep doing that for a long time.

What's special about that relationship?

David 02A/03:31 Well, he's just - he is a really brave actor in that he'll go anywhere. He'll always push it, and I enjoy that. But I also find that we have a shorthand in terms of communicating with each other. Like I can just sort of look at him and - and he'll get it, you know, and he knows what I want and we just don't have to play any games with each other and I - I prefer that. I prefer that we just do it - that you just do it, that, like, you know, you talk about it and you want something different, you say I want it different, and there isn't sort of this sort of weird psychological game going on or manipulation or whatever. I - yeah, I don't really - I don't subscribe to any of that stuff.

OK, so with the casting - OK just talk us through the process.

David 02A/04:25 Uh, I don't have a very clear process of casting, you know, like, when for, say, *Prime Mover*, the film I just did, I saw this girl called Emily Barclay in a film - a New Zealand film called *In My Father's Den*, and I liked her, and I said - I asked her if she wanted to do the film and she said yeah, and we signed her up. But that was years ago, and she was still quite young when we did that. And since then, she went on and did *Suburban Mayhem* - people thought, oh, we got her because of that, but I really liked her in *In My Father's Den*, so there's that - that's one aspect of the way I cast. I'll just sort of like someone, I'll ask them if they'll do it. And then the other aspect'll often be seeing 30, 40, 50 people and, you know, and struggling to work out who is it - who's the right person, so I actually prefer it if I sort of have a person in mind, and I just say, do it. I want you to do it. And - and it's - they never do it the way I expect them or necessarily want them to do it, but it can often be better than the original idea, you know, so ... I enjoy that aspect of - I like that style of casting. I mean I think - I'm very suspicious of the non-actor thing, I have to say. I don't - I'm very, sort of, craft orientated. I like people who've got a craft, and I like, you know, a - and a system of working. I don't - the whole, sort of, magic, art thing, I find - I don't understand it.

<Crew talk>

So just talking about the casting, are you looking - is there something you're looking for (unclear) ... two girls that are in *Mullet* ... don't always see a lot of them.

David 02A/06:28 Yeah, I - there's this sort of - I don't know, it's a stupid word to use in relation to filmmaking, but it's the only word I can think of, but - I kind of - there's a truth that I like in - in some actors. I think there's a truth to them, you know. And

it's a quality that - I mean, Belinda McClory's an actress I really like, and I think she's really underused in this country, and I - I think it's a - you know, criminal shame, really, because I think she's really strong. And Susie, she's great. She gets - she works all the time, so - she's a good actress. And she was in - I enjoy working with the same actors, over and over again. I mean, when I did *Idiot Box*, that was the first time I worked with Susie, but worked with her on - I worked with her on *Wildside* and I worked with her in *Mullet*, and then I worked with her in a TV series I did called *RAN*, and I really like working with the same people. I mean, I like to have a sort of - in an ideal world, I'd have sort of like a little troupe of actors that I'd use again and again and again. I mean, in *Mullet*, I worked with Ben and I worked with, um, Andrew Gilbert who I really like, who was in *Idiot Box* and in *Mullet* and - and *Dirty Deeds* as well. And, yeah, I just - I like - I just like working with the same people, and if I could, I would, you know. And I don't see any reason not to do that, you know. I don't - I'm not - I'm not massively into the idea of discovering people. I think - I know a lot of directors that really like discovering people. I'm not massively into that.

Peta Brady directed two (unclear).

David 02A/08:10 Yeah, Peta Brady was fabulous. And I had no idea when we cast her in - in *Mullet*, I hadn't - everyone said, oh, she's sort of a well-known actress from *Neighbours* and I - I thought she was some westie chick that they brought in for the day, because she was so fantastic and when we did the, um, did the casting of it, but I worked with her again in *RAN* as well. I mean, brought her up to the Torres Strait for that because, I don't know, if someone - for me, if someone's got the craft skills and they've got sort of a truthful quality, I - and you can work with them in terms of actually developing a character and stuff, I find that much more interesting than the idea of, sort of, just getting a new actor each time. I just think it's interesting to - to evolve with them, and

find new ways of communicating that stuff.

Yeah, yeah. When you move with a bigger budget, like started on low budget, what's it like ...

David 02A/09:17 Well, my experience working with bigger budgets is usually that you end up having a lot more people around and a lot more trucks and a lot of time parking trucks - a lot of time is spent parking trucks, so - um, you don't necessarily - it's not, you know, like, I did *Mullet* and *Dirty Deeds* pretty much back to back and one had 10 times the budget of the other. And there are elements of the filming of, um, *Dirty Deeds* that had planes and car chases and shootouts and stuff that were expensive - they were just expensive, just for the logistics of it. But a lot of it, the expense was just eaten up in stuff that doesn't end up on the screen. It was eaten up in terms of having all these vehicles that had to be parked, and time that was used in that instead of actually filming. And all these extra crew and all this extra other stuff, and - I don't know - I find - I kind of have this romantic idea of going out with a few people and a camera and a couple of actors and just doing it. I mean, it has to be horses for courses, because I mean ...

Is there an example of when you've done that?

David 02A/10:27 Well, *Mullet's* the closest to that. It was a fairly small crew. It was under 20 people on set, and that worked really well. We shot that on 35mm and shot it fairly quickly and it certainly wasn't an issue. Um, but, because I tend to write stuff that involves cars and trucks and chases and stuff in the films, that stuff requires - just logistics, just to be safe, and I think there's no reason why filmmaking shouldn't be safe. I mean, I think I couldn't live with the idea of someone being hurt just to make up a story.

No, absolutely. You were judge on *Race Around the World*. Do you want to talk about that?

David 02A/11:33 Yeah, I have to say I've always regretted being a judge on *Race Around the World*. I mean, I had this sort of idea, because there's always been this - whole - well, I suppose since the '90's, there's been this, sort of, like, the director as celebrity thing happening. You know, like, whether it's Quentin Tarantino or whoever, you know, and often people have a - there's a thing that, you know, often they're young and attractive or whatever, and I never had any of that going on. And I thought, well, you know, if I'm just - so, I sort of - when I was asked to do that, I was sort of - I, you know, made the mistake, to some extent, of just saying what I thought when they said, well, what do you think of these films? I said what I thought. And it became this huge thing, that I said what I thought, and there's all this stuff in the media, and there was this supposedly this feud going on with me and this other guy - guy that was on the show contesting called John Safran, and there was all this stuff, and people were writing articles about it and ringing me up and asking this about it, and people were stopping me in supermarkets and talking about it, and it was very weird. But I thought I could sort of parlay this sort of, like, you know, this, sort of, tough, director - you know, all this sort of stuff. But it sort of - a lot of people have these very strong opinions about me, and a lot of people I know, I've found out, didn't want to work with me because they just thought I was an asshole. You know, and ...

... just talking about *Race Around the World* and how it affected your public profile.

David 02A/13:12 Yeah, well it gave me sort of a quite a negative public profile, and a lot of people thought I was just this asshole, and a lot of people I knew - found out

later - much later, that didn't want to work with me because they thought I was just this arsehole, and - yeah, no, I think it was a bit of a mistake, really. I just - I mean, and all the other people - I remember I was on there with John Polson and stuff, and I was sort of giving people scores that I thought were appropriate and right for the films they'd made, and - and they were going, gee, you're brave. And I'm going, well, that's what I think, and they ... But I do think there's this sort of - I don't think people really want to know what you think, and I think I've often made the mistake and - of telling people when they ask me what I think of - saying what I think. I actually think there's this sort of myth in Australia that people really want to - that we're straight talkers, and I don't think that's true at all. I think that's - yeah, I don't think we are. I think that in Australia we tend to gild the lily a bit.

<Crew talk.>

Do you think that your cinema, your storytelling, has changed and evolved?

David 02A/14:24 Yeah, I think it's massively changed, and I think that I used to be much more - I used to think that I had a - I was probably a lot less conservative, I think. And I think that I've become more interested in - I mean, like - but that was partly to do with knowledge. I mean, I mean, people talking about three-act structures, and I'd sort of go I don't do three-act structures, and da da da da and all this sort of stuff. But I actually didn't even know what one was properly. And then when I found out what one was and how it worked, I thought, well, actually, that's not a bad idea really. It kind of makes sense, you know, it's not some great conspiracy from Hollywood, it's just - kind of - idea that you have a beginning, a middle and an end. Well, that's kind of logical. You know, it's like, just all this stuff, and you go, oh well that actually makes sense, you know. You - so, I think some people think that's conservative. I know that, in sort of film - levels

of film criticism and sort of film festival circles, your idea of not having a resolved narrative and the idea of, you know, all these unanswered questions and all this sort of unexplained stuff, is kind of seen as a good thing. But I kind of don't know what the point of it is, really. And, like, there's this level of - the thing that people'd say - all this stuff, like, oh, let the audience, you know, work it out for themselves, but it's kind of like, well, you're the storyteller, I think. And you're being paid the big bucks to do it, so I think it's your job to actually explain it. And the theory - for me, it's not like, you leave stuff open-ended, but you have a really, really good ending that resolves and - and - is - the summation of all of those things as opposed to sort of putting stuff out there and then people work it out for themselves. I mean, life's like that. I don't think most people want to go to the cinema to work it out for themselves. I mean, I think you can do that in your own life, you know. I think they want to have a story and - but they want it to be bloody clever.

Have you found that audiences, and I'm probably thinking of festival audiences, respected that?

David 02A/16:30 Yeah, I think - I just know, and it's still a thing now, that if you have success at festivals, and with critics, and awards and stuff, that's seen kind of as being more important than actually connecting with an audience, I think. Well, a mainstream audience, or a cinema going audience. And I think that's a real shame, because I think our films have evolved towards that, and I remember speaking to a younger director, um, about his film, and he was quite openly saying, well I'm making it for critics and film festivals. And I thought, well, that was - I thought that was a really odd thing to do. I didn't really understand the point of that, and - I haven't really ever tried to do that. I haven't - I've always tried to make them with an audience in mind, whether that be a smaller art house cinema audience, or a - tried to make it a more mainstream audience with *Dirty Deeds*. I've always tried to make them to reach people. Or, if they find the audience on DVD, I - yeah,

I've always been conscious of trying to find an audience which isn't, sort of, separate to the main society, in a way.

Where have you been with the film, like other territories?

David 02A/17:45 What do you mean?

Like ... international audiences.

David 02A/17:49 Well, I mean, like, you know, like, *Mullet* did well at the Shanghai Film Festival, which was weird, but they didn't really show films at the Shanghai Festival - it was very odd. Yeah, I went there - it was a great time, but - it wasn't really about watching films or anything. I found it really weird. But, anyway ... The jury obviously liked the film because they gave it the Best Director Award, but, you know, hey. Um, yeah, no, but - but I've been to the Toronto Film Festival a few times, and London Film Festival, and Stockholm and Hamburg and - most of my films have travelled to a lot of film festivals, and done fairly well out of them.

Just interested in that experience of when you take an Australian film to an international audience ...

David 02A/18:36 Yeah, it's weird. I mean, I remember when I was travelling around with *Greenkeeping*, we went to a bunch of film festivals - Korea and Stockholm and stuff - and I just thought - and I remember having this Q&A after it one time - I can't remember which country it is - was in - and they said, well, why are all these nurses on the lawn? Because it was women in white uniforms playing lawn bowls, and they said - they wondered - couldn't understand what the nurses were doing. And I thought, gee their

experiences of films - sounds like a really interesting film. And it was kind of - I wish I'd made that film, about the nurses on the lawn there, in a way, but - yeah, so it's sort of all this stuff that you take for granted, that other people don't get. And I find - I kind of like that - the fact that there are elements about society which are exotic to them - on an international level - which aren't just all those - that aren't the same for everyone. You know, I like the difference. I like being part of a society that's a bit different, that isn't just homogenised and globalised and ... I think that's changing, but anyway.

Yeah. I wanted to ask about the music in your films and how important that it is, or if - at what point ...

David 02A/19:49 I have to say the music - the music in my films is very important, and I listen to music when I'm writing, and, um, a lot of elements of the film are sort of like, designed in my head, as music, around the way music works. The problem that you have in Australia is that a lot of those songs you listen to you can't afford to have in the film, so - then it works in other ways. But - but, yeah, like, I've become more and more interested in the idea of the way musical elements, as in, you know, Busby Berkeley, sort of things work. And when I did, um, you know, *Mullet*, to an extent, I've been interested in the way people sing, and interested in how that can work on a sort of, like a sub textural way, like you can talk about themes and you can talk about people's inner lives in song, in a way that's really - I don't know - just doesn't work for me when people do it in normal dialogue, you know. This is how I feel and da da da da da. I just don't think people tend to do that. I think people tend to talk around what they're feeling and talk around what they mean. Whereas I think that people can often sing a song that means exactly what they mean.

... Like that scene in *Mullet*?

David 02A/21:13 Yeah, well it's sort of, like, you know, I was very interested in how that can work in terms of real life, that a person can actually be singing something that's completely explicit ...

... Can you explain the scene?

David 02A/21:28 Well, there - there's, like a, in *Mullet*, there's a sequence where Susie Porter's character Tully - she's standing in the room while her husband, who's a cop, is getting ready to go to work, and there's this whole friction in their life, and she starts singing an old Australian song by a band called Dragon, well New Zealand-Australian band, called 'I'm Still In Love with You'. And it's - and the lyrics go something like, um "It don't matter what you do, I'm still in love with you. It doesn't matter what you say, you can have me any way." And she's singing in this sort of really sad, unmelodic way, and it kind of, for me, I mean, like that's kind of - getting, in a lot of ways, towards pure cinema for me, and the sort of thing I'm trying to get to where you get the sense of where someone is emotionally, but it's not explicit, and, you know ... Yeah, no, it's something I've tried to do a lot more in my most recent film, *Prime Mover*, and I've actually got some dance sequences as well, so ... But - but that being said, I - it's really important to me that the actual singing is done live, that it's not done to playback and done in the studio. It's actually done, and that I'm always fighting with people - they go, oh, but they're singing a bit out of tune, or they're - someone's talking - said that they're singing the wrong key. I'm going, but it sounds good. And they go, yeah, but it's the wrong key. And I'm going, yeah, but it sounds good. I have these huge arguments, because it's like technically not right, but - but it sounds right, to me, and that's - that's the gist of it, I guess, in the way I work. Actually, technical imperfections I don't care about. I just - it's just how it feels, you know. I think - I think the thing about film is that - is that ultimately it's

an emotional medium, and it's about how it feels. And how you feel as an audience, and I think if you feel more in the experience of watching a film, the more you feel, the more satisfying the experience of watching the film is. And that - that feeling can be just fear in a thriller or it can be, you know, warm and fuzzy, you know, in a love story, or it can be outrage in a more political film, or it can be a mixture of all those things, and I think that, if you can make the emotional stuff really work, and connect with an audience, I think that's when you're firing on all cylinders and it - just - works, you know.

Is sound ...?

David 02A/24:05 I think - look, I feel pretty good about the sound in all my films. I mean, I've been very conscious of that. And I'm always amazed that most of them get overlooked for the sound stuff - sound awards, because I do think that they've been very - they've been very - like the sound guy I always - who's someone I've always worked with - a guy called Liam Egan. And I think there's a lot of work that's gone into the films. I remember when we were doing *Bodywork*, we layered up all this layers of moist - there's no images of death in the film, but we found, like, 50 different types of wet sounds, and so we had this sort of - there's this moistness to the film, like that you just feel when you're watching it. There's - we got - they're all sorts of sounds. We had the sound of this pig drinking in a trough, and we got that sound and we slowed it down 20 times, and we just had this - these sort of sub textural bass orientated thing, but there's something about these sounds, because they're wet sounds, it gives you this slightly clammy feel when you're watching the film, and you don't notice it, but - in an explicit way, but you kind of feel it. And I think that affects the way you're watching the film. And I wanted people to feel a bit uncomfortable. I mean, it's about dead bodies, and - but I didn't want to show dead bodies, so I wanted to have that. And it was - that was really effective, I think. But most of those sounds - and then there's sounds of water going through old rusty pipes

and stuff, so they're not explicitly splashing sounds, or waterfall sounds, or waves crashing, but they are wet sounds, and - and there's something about that. You kind of - you don't think, oh well, that is a wet sound, but you kind of know instinctively, and I think that affects the way when you watch the film. And that's something that I've always tried to do in all the films, is trying to find a sort of thematic sound device that - that we can sort of have layered in there. But ... you know, I mean ...

Question (unclear)

David 02A/26:07 Not necessarily. Not necessarily. It can be completely - completely different. I mean, it can be - when we were doing *Prime Mover*, we were very - I was very conscious of - the sort of - about trying to have - different - a different sound quality to when the guy - the main character was in - his dream world, you know, driving trucks, this sort of fantasy world he had for his life, and his real world. Trying to sort of differentiate the two layers. Um, and one was about the way the bass sounds worked, you know, and trying to make it really, sort of, primal, and we had some animal sounds in there - some really deep, bassy, oomphy sounds. Um, and the other sound of the more natural world was more brittle and sharper. So, it's just about trying to use - I think it's about sort of like if you have a toolbox when you're a filmmaker, and they're all tools that you can use, like the sound, and the characters, and the music and the - and the - if you don't use them, you're sort of like limiting your ability to tell the story.

I wanted to know what you do when you're not making films.

David 02A/28:14 I watch films. No, I live on a farm, and a huge amount of my time is spent fixing up the bloody road. I've got this road, that goes on forever, and it rains all the time, where I live, even though most of Australia's in drought. It just keeps flooding

where I live, and I just spend all of my time shovelling bloody dirt on this road. It's not dirt - it's gravel. Roadbase, actually. And I spend a huge percentage of my life actually doing that. Uh, what else do I do? I read a lot of books, a huge amount of books actually. About 3 or 4 books a week. And I watch a lot of DVDs, and, um, one of the main things I do is I buy TV shows, and tend to watch, like a whole series of a TV show over a couple of days. Um, and that's good. I enjoy that. It's one of the great things about all this technology - it's just one of those things I sort of just wish it had happened a bit earlier, that, being able to watch movies and stuff, because I have like all these like Kurosawa films and stuff, and I really like watching them, and - so I can just watch them, but you know, that's a very new thing, to be able to do that. And - what else - I don't do much else, really. I mean, looking after kids is a big part of life. Looking after kids is a big part of life, and it's a time vacuum, and that's sort of really been a big issue in the last few years, having to - um, childcare. Um, but, you know, you do what you do, and - yeah, no, the whole family thing sort of completely changes - I mean, it's a cliché, but the whole family thing completely changes what you - how you live your life. Um, you don't ever have spare time anymore. You used to have all this spare time when you'd think about things, or you'd watch movies, or you whatever, and, you know, you just don't have that time anymore. So you have to sort of manage your time much better, which is, you know, you're not on your ... But the flip side of that is it also changes the way you perceive what you do, and you know, one of my kids is - has, you know - is, uh, disabled, and she needs a lot of care, and it really changes the way you think about the way films and television works in society when it changes from being an intellectual process to being a - I suppose, for want of a better word, an escapism, you know, like, you dive into a TV show or a movie to escape from what's happening in your life, as a, you know, break from it. And it didn't exist in my life like that before, it was much more - the process of watching was very different. So, it affects the way I think a lot about what I do - that idea of the experience of it. So, that's probably - for better or worse, affected the sort of scripts that I'm writing now, you know.

Um, yeah.

David 02A/32:09 The other thing that's happened, I guess, in the last few years, has been - I've become much more interested in the idea of actually working with other writers, and most of the things that I'm developing at the moment, I'm developing with another writer. Um, mostly as a co-writer, um, just because I think that, um, the sort of films that I aspire to make, I think, are really rich, and I think that the more layers you can put into them, you know, the more you can add to them, the better. And I think that, by working with other writers, if - if you can sort of leave your ego out of it, you can sort of be aware when you sort of, you know, you know the sort of scene that has to exist, and if the other person has better ideas for it, and you can sort of realise that, then you end up with a better scene than you would have if you'd written yourself. So I do think that, I mean, from my point of view as a storyteller, I'm interested in that level of collaboration, working with other people, and, um, you know, hopefully making better films. Um, I just think it's, um, you know, it's - I think there's the sort of idea of the auteur, um, but I do think that the collaborative process is something I'm more interested in pursuing now as I get older, I guess.

Is there a particular personality trait that you have that, I guess, makes you good at what you do?

David 02A/33:48 Um, there's something about my, um - I'm not sure what it is, but I feel really - I find it really easy to sort of exude a level of confidence, and I think that when you're on set, the sense that if people think, even if you are really worried, and really concerned about time, and really concerned about, um, someone's performance, or concerned about getting enough shots to cut the scene together, if you're there, but you feel like - and people are - everyone else feels like you're on top of it, and that you're confident,

then people tend to just get it done - quicker than if you're panicking and trying to micromanage everything that they do. Um, and I - it's something that I find easy to do that, and I don't even know why I find it easy to do that. But I do find that I can - I can do that - on set - and I also, um, I think there's another, you know, aspect of my personality or brain makeup or whatever it is - I find it very hard to - I think most people, when they're with someone else or they're talking with someone else in a crowded space, they can just focus on what that person's saying, but I can't not hear what everyone else is saying around. And I sort of take it all in. I mean, sometimes I find it really, like, overwhelming and frustrating. But other times I think, gee, that's interesting what that person just said. I'll use that, sort of stuff happening in my brain, you know. And I think people think that - when I - you know, often - interpret that as I'm just sort of distant and arrogant and whatever else, but it's just the fact that I can't not sort of listen to that stuff - it just happens - my brain just works in the way that takes it all in, you know, and I have to process it, you know. Yeah, it's weird.

Is there somebody that's been like a mentor, or somebody that ...

David 02A/36:00 I've - had a lot of people who've been really, you know, helpful over - to me over the years. And I mean, that've been really supportive. I mean, Glenys was very supportive for a long time, and uh, a television guy called John Edwards has been really supportive to me. I've found working with some - Bryan Brown's been - he's been really supportive, and yeah - but I haven't had - there wasn't like a teacher at school, or anything who was sort of, you know, like a Robin Williams character or something. But, um, yeah, no, I've - yeah, no, I haven't had that person to fall back on I guess. But, um, no, haven't really had a mentor in that way.

Thinking about young people now, any advice you could give them

...?

David 02A/36:52 Well the thing ... well the thing about my - my - the thing I wish I'd been able to sort of take on board a bit better when I was younger was just how, I don't know, I just wish I'd learnt more, earlier. I mean, I've learned a lot, but I've learned it over my whole career, and I wish I'd sort of, like, really studied, say, traditional storytelling, even if I wanted to break those rules, I wish I really understood instead of going I'm not interested in that. I wish I'd done more, sort of, analysis of other directors' work, you know, like, in a really systematic way, you know. Um, because, I don't think - I think there are some people who come, sort of, you know, like virgin births into the world, and then they have a way of looking at the world, and they can sort of deliver this intrinsically fresh and interesting way of doing things, and I'm not - I'm not that. I'm much more of a craftsman, and I wish I had learned a lot of the crafts up earlier. I mean, I know most of it - a lot of the stuff now, and I know how much more I have to learn, which is a huge amount. Um, but I wish I'd - I'd studied that stuff because I didn't think I needed to know it, and that was just the arrogance of youth, really. And I think that, um, for me, I think there's sort of this huge amount of stuff that you can garner, like I've just read this book that was written by John Huston, who's one of my favourite directors, about his own directing career. And it's just really interesting, understanding how he approached stuff, and the things that he did, which I - you know, like, that I from my own experience think, oh well, that was a mistake, but other stuff that he does, yeah, well, hey that's a good idea, you know, and I think that there's all this stuff out there and in the internet and, you know, like, yeah, I think - I think it's just - it's there for the taking, you know. And I think - and that's the other thing, I guess that, I mean, I've just been looking up all this stuff about theories about writing, and finding it on the net, like I didn't know anything about those sort of - like, the - the - a lot of those Greek theories of uh, tragedy and comedy, you know, in the basic principles of drama, you know. But, you know, you look it up on the net, and

you just find it and download it and read it, you know. And it's just so much easier to access that stuff now, just because of the way the internet works. And I think it's really an - you know, the amount I've learned just by doing that, I think, and the amount that's helped my work because of that, I think it's really interesting. I think that the - yeah, I mean, I mean, I guess that's the thing, it's - I just sort of feel like - and it's sort of like a waste of time saying it in a way, but it's like to try and not be so caught up in you own ego, that you can't learn from other people that are experienced. I mean, I just think that I've wasted things - wasted opportunities because, ah, of my own, what's the word, hubris - is that the word?

David 02A/40:21 Yeah, so, you know, you grow up, and you learn this stuff, but, you know, that's part of the process too.

That's fantastic, David. Really good.

END OF INTERVIEW

David Caesar interviewed by
Ray Argall, 23 June 2009, for
australianscreen online